ART and POLITICS

The History of the National Arts Centre

Sarah Jennings

Second Edition

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To Hamish

and my family

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PRELUDE

Canada's National Arts Centre (NAC) opened its doors to the world on Monday, June 2, 1969. It was unique. Built both to produce and to present music, opera, dance, and theatre, it was also bilingual, designed to reflect Canada's linguistic duality—the first, and still the only, arts centre in the world with such a complex mandate. A fortuitous crossing of the stars had brought it about. While rooted in the modest hopes of Ottawa's local citizens to build a good concert hall in their city, the project had expanded, thanks to Canada's 1967 Centennial, into a magnificent edifice. The building of the National Arts Centre had been the right project at the right time for Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, who had wanted something special for Canada's capital to mark the country's 100th birthday celebration. In G. Hamilton Southam, the man who was now its first director general, the Arts Centre had the right executive, one with the vision, background, and connections to ensure its creation. But even as this glittering first night unfolded, a new constellation of stars was moving into place in Ottawa—men who would bring new ideas and objectives to the development of Canada's arts and culture.

After a weekend of splendid weather, the opening night was rainy and windswept. The mood, however, was exuberant. *Time,* America's most popular news magazine and the sponsor of the night's live CBC English-network television broadcast, declared: "Not since Expo 67's shimmering debut has an opening night stirred such an exhilarating sense of grand occasion." A First Nights Committee had struggled for months to cut back the guest list of nearly three thousand names of Ottawa's "notables" to fit the 2,100-seat capacity of the Opera hall. A third of the audience was to be government officials; another third, "artistic people"; and the rest, members of the general public. With the possible exception of the governor general, everybody was supposedly paying for their own tickets, yet *tout Ottawa* wanted to be part of this evening.

There were no speeches. The organizers had decided that, in each of the centre's three beautiful new halls, the curtain rising on the first performance would mark its opening. The formalities had taken place two days before at a ceremony filled with politicians and dignitaries. Standing before the tall, embossed bronze doors of the Salon, with a children's choir serenading the proceedings, newly minted Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau had handed over control of the site to NAC chairman Lawrence Freiman. All

through that sunny Saturday musical groups ranging from bagpipers to rock bands, stationed on the building's multi-levelled outside terraces, had entertained the forty thousand citizens who had poured into downtown Ottawa to scramble around the brand-new building. Its final cost, a cool $46.1 million, had titillated, outraged, and bemused politicians and the public alike for more than six years.

At the outset, in 1963, the price tag had been set at $9 million, but that first estimate had spiralled rapidly upwards to what was now, to many, an astronomical sum. Throughout construction, and in the face of devastating attacks from political opponents and the press, Pearson had resolutely backed the Arts Centre. On this opening day there was no doubt, at least in the minds of its organizers and builders, that "the Canadian public had got a first-class building at a bargain price."[1]

Trudeau's new minister for cultural affairs, Secretary of State Gérard Pelletier, did not agree. Shortly after his appointment, he had made it clear that if he had been in office at the time the NAC was proposed, he "wouldn't have built it … at least not at the cost." He had also added that he did not want the place to be "snobbish."[2] Pelletier's remark had little effect on Southam, who ensured that the opening night was a grand social occasion. The handsome and sophisticated scion of a blue-blooded Ottawa family, he favoured full-blown elegance when the event called for it—and this triumphant evening was one of those occasions. As the rain poured down, chauffeur-driven cars rolled up to the main entrance to deposit their distinguished passengers—the men striking in white tie and tails; the women gowned and bejewelled with a glamour rare in Ottawa.

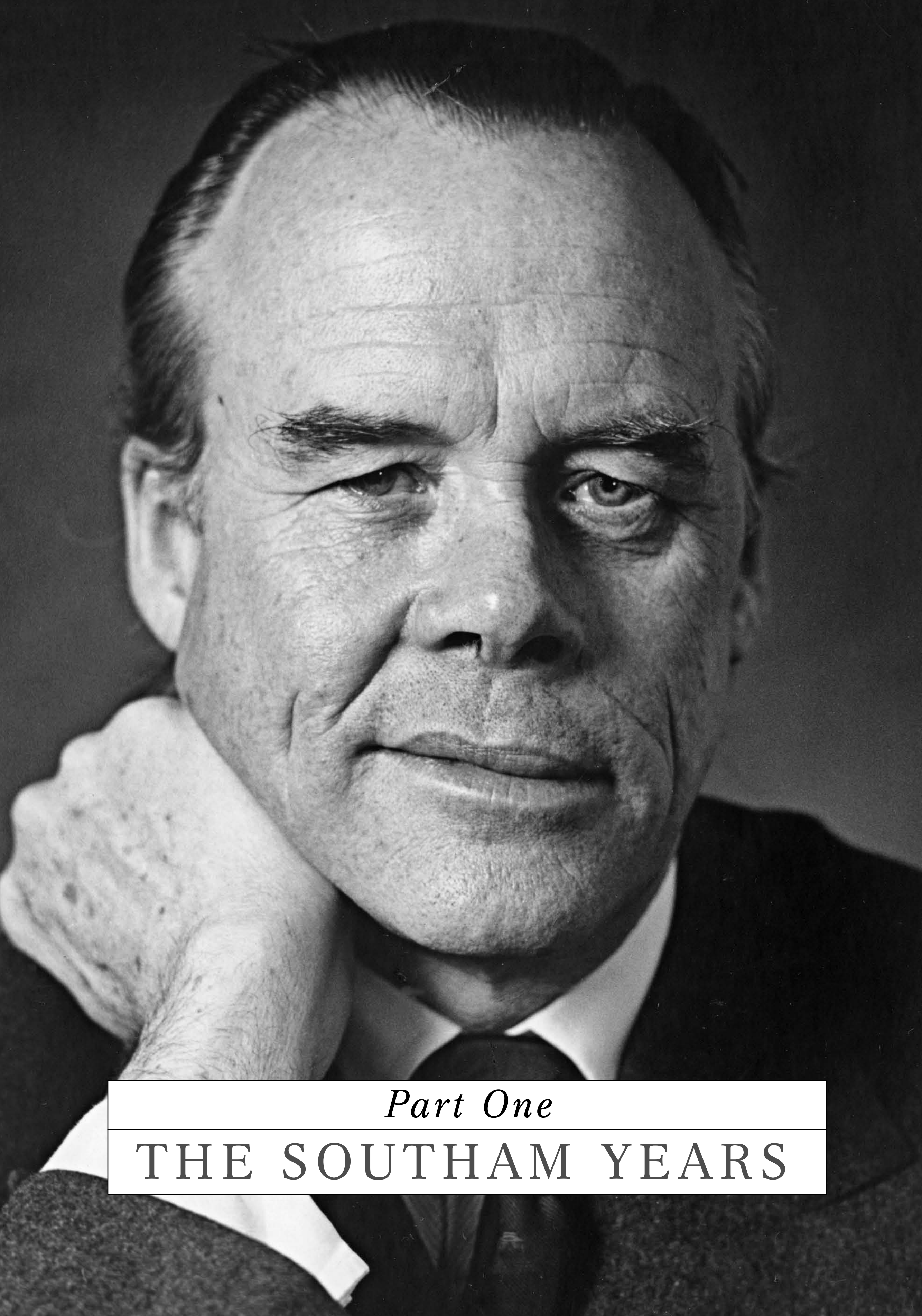
Nothing stirred more excitement than the arrival of Pierre Trudeau and his entourage, which included Pelletier and his beautiful and cultured wife, Alex. Trudeau looked resplendent in white tie, the usual rose in his lapel, and on his arm Madeleine Gobeil, by day a lecturer in French literature at Carleton University but tonight dazzling in a lime-green lace minidress and tumbling blond tresses. Their photo would dominate the country's front pages the following day. Gobeil, a long-time Trudeau friend, had already been appointed a member of the first NAC Board of Trustees.

Though not yet detectable, a pivotal moment was occurring in Canadian cultural affairs. The old *lèse-majesté* way of doing things was about to give way to a more proactive, practical use of the arts in the country's political and cultural struggles, especially in Quebec. The concepts of "democratization and decentralization" in cultural policy that Pelletier was about to introduce would be different from the traditional kind of government support which had led to the building of "arm's-length" cultural institutions and organizations such as the NAC, the Canada Council, and the CBC. Over the long term, the new policies would change irrevocably the place of the arts in national life in Canada and the way that national institutions operated.

The arrival of the "French fact" in Ottawa also ensured that a new set of "notables" would take over, changing the established practices of the generally anglophone (though

often bilingual) elites that had run cultural affairs to that point. The old guard, many of whom had been educated abroad and had travelled widely, generally held an international perspective on the arts. The new voices coming on the scene would focus more intensely on Canada's own experiences and history and insist that the broader world view should be secondary.

The civil and outward-looking perspective of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, with its proposals for a bilingual, bicultural Canadian society, was about to be overtaken and changed by the narrow nationalism surging in Quebec and the struggle within the Quebec family between Quebec federalists and separatists. Arts and culture would become just another tool in the long dispute between these opposing views. While the NAC had been forged and created in the older context, the environment would quickly change as decentralized interests took power away from the centre of the country. In the years to come the Arts Centre would have to fight to justify its existence and, by the early nineties, would reach almost total collapse. Only by recasting itself, particularly in terms of its financial model, has it recently begun to regain a place at the centre of Canada's national artistic life.



Part One

THE SOUTHAM YEARS

Previous Page:
G. Hamilton Southam,
founding director
general of the
National Arts Centre.
Photo © Yousuf Karsh.

GENESIS OF THE DREAM

On November 8, 1963, G. Hamilton Southam, president of Ottawa's National Capital Arts Alliance, drafted a careful letter to Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. It contained a formal request written in the most concise terms: "For consideration by the government … the idea of the creation of a performing arts centre in Ottawa … and complementary to it … a festival of the arts in Ottawa each year."[1]

The genesis of this idea in Ottawa went back decades—indeed, it was partially rooted in the dreams of Southam's own family. His father and uncle had initiated plans for a similar centre in the 1920s and had even paid to have blueprints drawn to sketch out a proposal. But although major orchestras and theatre troupes continued to tour through Ottawa during the thirties and the war years, no further concrete action on the idea of building a performance hall had occurred until now.

In 1952 Vincent Massey, the first Canadian governor general and a great patron of the arts, gave cultural matters in the city a significant push. In a Canadian Club luncheon speech to Ottawans at the Château Laurier Hotel, he urged "an eminent festival"[2] for the capital along the lines of the newly created Edinburgh Festival. The idea of artistic festivals was flourishing everywhere in the postwar period, but in Ottawa it was clear that any such festival would need a place in which to perform, and Ottawa still lacked a significant facility. Many prominent citizens at that lunch took note. Now, ten years later and barely a year since Southam had agreed to head a civic committee in search of a performing arts centre, a plan was ready.

His carefully worded letter to Pearson, an old Southam family friend, was a prelude to a formal meeting later that afternoon. His proposal to the prime minister was that the construction of a performing arts centre be Ottawa's project to mark Canada's Centennial.[3] Pearson was actively looking for something special for the capital, and the

idea came at just the right moment. Within days of the meeting, he wrote back to Southam's group fully embracing the idea and advising them that he had instructed his officials to prepare a memorandum for cabinet approval. It was the culmination of a whirlwind eight months of research and preparation. For Southam personally, it was the first step in what would turn out to be his central focus for the rest of his professional career: a life in, and for, the arts. It was also the prelude to an enterprise that would shift and elevate the performing arts in Canada in a way that would alter its artistic landscape permanently.

G. Hamilton Southam was the privileged son of an Ottawa establishment family. His Scottish great-grandfather had come to Canada as a stonemason and had initiated the family fortune by buying a printing company. In due course, this business expanded into the Southam publishing empire, the source of the family's wealth. By the time Hamilton Southam was born on December 19, 1916, the youngest of six siblings, the Southams were fully established members of Canada's gentry class. With that came their sense of leadership and of responsibility to give back to the community—a common attitude among late Victorian families at the top of the social ladder. Throughout his life, Southam ascribed to the *noblesse oblige* that wealth, good looks, and a privileged upbringing bestow. He also possessed a genuine openness and a love of all things artistic, particularly for opera and music. The arts were a civilizing force, he thought, and they should be acquired, practised, and supported.

This sensibility had been instilled in Southam from childhood, especially by his Aunt Lilias, his Uncle Harry Southam's wife, who lived next door. They had converted an indoor squash court in their house into a music room, where they installed both a piano and an organ. There he listened to his aunt as well as more famous musicians play. When the concert pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff came to town, he happily accepted an invitation from the Harry Southams. Wilson Southam, Hamilton's father, had "a wonderful Victrola," which he allowed his son to wind up for summer concerts on the veranda. Ultimately, Hamilton Southam developed a keen appreciation for music, rather than the ability to play himself, and that led to his unstinting support for music and opera at the newly created National Arts Centre.

In the 1930s, the Southams made frequent visits to London and Paris, where Hamilton discovered opera—"a romantic form of music … I fed on," he said. They also visited well-connected family and friends in the English shires or the French countryside. There in the summer of 1938 he met Jacqueline Lambert-David, the daughter of a distinguished French family. Hamilton, always chivalrous and with an abiding affection for women, was invited to visit her family home, the beautiful Château de Ferney in the village of Ferney-Voltaire on the Swiss-French border, where Voltaire

A member of a well-connected family, young Hamilton Southam was a page to the governor general, the Marquess of Willingdon, in Ottawa. Photo © Southam.

had lived for nearly thirty years before its purchase by the Lambert-Davids. The following summer Jacqueline and her sister Claude, in the rituals of such families, came to Canada to stay at the Southam summer home in the Rideau Lakes near Ottawa. When they sailed back to England, Hamilton accompanied them, travelling on up to Oxford for the fall term at his chosen college, Christ Church. He had hardly arrived there before war broke out. He immediately enlisted in the army, and was at Aldershot for training by Christmas. He and Jacqueline would marry in London in April 1940.

He served first with a British regiment, then transferred into the 40th Battery of Hamilton, a Canadian militia unit that had been raised by his uncle Gordon Southam in the years before 1914. By 1943 he was "becoming bored" in England, so he leapt at the chance of taking part in an exchange of officers which had been arranged with the Canadian army fighting in Italy. Joining the forces just before the Battle of Ortona, he moved up the rest of Italy "liberating opera house after opera house" as they passed through cities and towns and "enjoying the opera—or at least the idea of it—in each of them." He also found himself working closely with professional soldiers under fire. "The core of the regiment was the non-commissioned officers," he recalled, and he got along well with them and their troops and learned from their experience—qualities he would exhibit in later years at the NAC where, despite his sometimes lordly manner, he had good relations with the stagehands and the other backstage crews.

Demobilized in 1945, he joined the London *Times* and did a short stint as an editorial writer before returning to Ottawa with his bride. There he joined the family newspaper, the *Ottawa Citizen,* again to write editorials. But it was not a task suited to his temperament. Assigned a topic, he would disappear into the library for a week to research a piece, while a quick 200-word comment written in a day was what his editors wanted. In 1947 he wrote the exam for the Department of External Affairs and,

two years later, left on his first assignment abroad, to Sweden. His career as a diplomat would take him in and out of Canada over the next few years before his penultimate posting in Poland, where he first served as chargé d'affaires. There he helped to expedite the return of the Polish Treasures from Canada, where they had been stored for safekeeping during the war, and finally became an ambassador. He also began an affair with Marion Tantot, the vivacious and intelligent young French wife of a junior colleague in the embassy, Pierre Charpentier. Their tempestuous relations would continue on two continents for decades before she became his third and last wife nearly forty years later.

In the summer of 1962 Southam was reassigned to Ottawa as director of the Communications Division in the Department of External Affairs. "Not the most prestigious division," he said, "but the largest and one of the busiest." He soon reconnected with friends, family, and colleagues in the upper reaches of the capital's society and settled in to what he thought would be a diplomat's home posting.

Shortly after starting his new job, on October 4, 1962, Southam received an unusual visitor at his new office in the Langevin Block, a federal government building at the corner of Ottawa's Wellington Street and Confederation Square. His well-dressed guest was a local society woman, Faye Loeb, the lively wife of a local Jewish grocery tycoon. Mrs. Loeb came as spokesperson for a loose collection of civic interest groups that were determined to do something for culture and the arts in the capital.

The early sixties was a time of rising optimism in Canada. In Ottawa, various citizens, spurred on by the seeds planted by Vincent Massey less than ten years before, had been ruminating on the future of the city's cultural life. At least two local impresarios were kept busy bringing performances in music, theatre, and ballet to the city, but frustration was growing that the only venues in which to play were either high school gyms or a downtown movie house, the Capitol Theatre. Ottawa by now had an active Philharmonic Orchestra of its own, and both the Montreal and the Toronto Symphony would come to town every year to fill out the concert season. Arts festivals had also become the rage during the booming postwar period, but there was no way Ottawa could contemplate a festival without a performing arts centre. And so it was that several groups went to work, independently of each other. Even the owner of the local football team, Sam Berger, thought it was time to have a place for the arts.[4]

When Faye Loeb called on Southam that October day, she asked him if he would spearhead the quest for a concert hall. At first he demurred, saying he was "far too busy" to take on the task and requesting three weeks to find someone else. However, he was intrigued and, as soon as Mrs. Loeb left his office, he began to consult several of his high-level friends, including Arnold Heeney, a former top diplomat and public

servant; I. Norman Smith, editor of the *Ottawa Journal;* and Louis Audette, a former naval officer who ran the Canadian Club and was president of the Ottawa Philharmonic. Clearly, the idea appealed to Southam enormously from the beginning—the dream that he had inherited from his parents. When no one else agreed to take the project on, he decided he would do it himself.

Southam knew exactly what to do. By early December, he had established the Preparatory Committee for an Arts Alliance,[5] seconding his colleague Pierre Charpentier, who had also returned from Poland, to be his volunteer secretary. His small but heavyweight working group was filled with his friends—deputy ministers, prominent socialites, and well-connected individuals on the Ottawa scene. The immediate order of business was to develop a feasibility study. With Southam at the helm, and the times encouraging, all the portents were right for what happened next. Southam knew everyone worth knowing, including Prime Minister Lester Pearson, who, as a young man, had courted one of Southam's sisters and frequently visited the family home. Charming and fluently bilingual, Southam's work was beginning at the very moment when the idea of bilingualism and biculturalism was blossoming in Canada. Centennial Year was looming on the horizon, a scant four years away, and Canadians were starting to prepare for a celebratory mood. The fast-approaching anniversary would unleash funds and creativity on a scale never before seen in the country. The arts were burgeoning and were clearly accepted as a sign of any maturing society.

In the postwar period, Canada had modelled its cultural agencies on their British counterparts. The Canada Council had been created by the Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent some eight years before, and its grants to artists and arts groups were already beginning to bear fruit. Above all, Ottawa's leading citizens wanted to take advantage of this mood and were increasingly eager to put their city, the capital of the country, on the map.

From the moment Southam agreed to lead the campaign, it took off. Working from his home at 267 Buena Vista Road in Ottawa's upper-crust Rockcliffe Park, he threw himself into the task with passion and advanced on a vast range of fronts. He used every social occasion, from lunches at the prestigious Rideau Club to small dinners and other social gatherings, to press the case. He also undertook a vast letter-writing campaign to every interested arts party in the city.

On February 14, 1963, scarcely two months after setting up his first committee, Southam announced the creation of a new organization: the National Capital Arts Alliance.[6] It was made up of fifty-five local arts groups ranging from the fully professional and established Ottawa Philharmonic to the amateur but long-standing theatre company, the Ottawa Little Theatre. His diplomat's approach—charming, interested, flattering, and positive—worked magic and, with a politician's instincts, he made sure no group was neglected. Besides the Jewish faction in the city, he enlisted prominent local French Canadians, among them member of Parliament Oswald Parent, the Queen's

printer Roger Duhamel, the powerful developer Robert Campeau (who was already changing the face of Ottawa with his high-rise office buildings), and other more modest figures such as Jean-Paul Desjardins, the city's leading pharmacist among the francophone community. By May there were few in the city with whom Southam and his team had not made contact, with one significant exception. That holdout was Ottawa's mayor, the fractious Charlotte Whitton, who had not responded to any of his letters and made it clear she was "not yet ready to receive the Alliance."[7]

Nevertheless, by the first week in May, the Arts Alliance was ready to put the feasibility study to tender, and donors were sought to pay for its estimated $12,000 to $20,000 cost. Supporters for what would become known as the Brown Book reflected Ottawa society of the day. Among Southam's friends was his cousin-in-law, lawyer (later Senator) Duncan MacTavish, who was not only active in politics as president of the federal Liberal Party, but had strong connections with the city's banks and trust companies. MacTavish had no hesitation in rustling money from them and also using them to network through the important local business community, including industrial interests such as the E.B. Eddy Company. Southam drew on his high-placed diplomatic contacts, asking the French ambassador to obtain details about similar complexes that were being built in Le Havre and in Caen. And he made sure that Sam Berger, who had his own Development Committee for a Performing Arts Centre, and Lawrence Freiman, another prominent Jewish businessman who was working towards a Centennial Festival, merged their interests with those of the Arts Alliance. He even wrote to Vincent Massey, who was summering at his country retreat, Batterwood, near Port Hope. Although the former governor general declined to make a donation, he sent moral support and advice: the committee should be sure to choose a good name for the new complex, he said, "something that will be hard to get rid of."[8] Naming would be a perplexing and much-discussed issue in the years to come.

Harking on the theme of the centre's national importance in the capital, Southam sent requests to Dr. Albert Trueman, the director at the Canada Council, and to Dennis Coolican, the chair of the National Capital Commission, soliciting $5,000 from each of them to help pay for the study. Clearly he was confident of success: on May 24 the contract was let to Dominion Consultants for a projected cost of $20,000. Within a few short months this group would produce the Brown Book, the tool that went on to secure federal government approval and became the conceptual blueprint for the National Arts Centre itself—the basis for the architectural drawings and other planning on which the centre would be built.

All through that summer of 1963, the lobbying process and the discussions surrounding the project continued. Peter Dwyer, the assistant director of the Canada

Council and a former British intelligence agent, played devil's advocate at informal dinners and drinks with Southam. Erudite and deeply intelligent, Dwyer, although a keen supporter of the new centre, felt compelled in a personal letter to Southam to set out his concerns that Canada should perhaps focus on assisting artists to develop their work before constructing a massive emporium in which to house them.[9] Despite this questioning, however, the growing momentum behind the project mounted. In late August, Southam had a "sympathetic" meeting with Maurice Lamontagne, the federal minister in charge of culture. Lamontagne, a suave and courtly French Canadian, had broad political influence as the Quebec lieutenant in Pearson's cabinet. Also at the meeting was John Fisher, a former broadcaster known for his boosterism as "Mr. Canada" and the man assigned to run Canada's Centennial Commission. By the end of the month, so much enthusiasm had been generated that Southam and Heeney were already contemplating possible appointments for the new centre's board of directors.

Word of the proposed centre quickly spread through the small Canadian arts community. The enterprising Toronto-based conductor and musician Niki Goldschmidt heard the gossip and checked in by letter from Europe. Southam responded by asking him to collect some material at the Edinburgh Festival while he was there and to pay a call on its director, Lord Harewood, an old Southam friend who was also the Queen's cousin. Meanwhile, the networking through the social salons of Ottawa continued. Yousuf Karsh, the international society photographer who would live with his second wife in a residential suite at the Château Laurier, was among those who entertained guests in order to support the idea.

In early September, Mayor Charlotte Whitton telephoned at last. She mischievously told Southam that she favoured the old Union Station as a site for the new centre because "it has an exact replica of 'the Baths of Caracalla' in it and would be perfect for staging Greek dramas."[10] More seriously, she warned Southam off the Nepean Point location that was being considered because "there are caves under part of the land which could collapse and the rest is solid rock which would be very expensive to excavate." She related to him "the shocking cost" to the city of having to run a sewer pipe under similar conditions into the French Embassy just down the street. What Whitton really wanted was to choose the site—and she had one in mind. Eventually she offered him a parcel of land at the heart of the city on Confederation Square, just diagonally across from Southam's own office in the Langevin Block. He was delighted.

The volunteer activities of these senior diplomats, Southam and Charpentier, had been noticed by their political boss, External Affairs Minister Paul Martin. When he nervously queried his deputy minister Norman Robertson about what these two were up to, Robertson replied in a wry memo that yes, they were busy outside office hours "in the cause of the arts," but, he added, "I am sure they will not embarrass us."[11]

The site selected for the centre was at the heart of the capital. Photo © NAC.

On October 24 the Brown Book, the feasibility study put together by Dominion Consultants, was delivered to the National Capital Arts Alliance. Southam made sure that copies were swiftly circulated to all the key figures who could influence the final decision. Pearson and George McIlraith, the minister of public works and so-called Ottawa minister in cabinet, received copies, as did civil servant Robert Bryce, the deputy-secretary to the Treasury Board, and John MacDonald, the deputy minister of public works. C.M. "Bud" Drury, now head of the National Capital Commission, was on the list, along with Governor General Georges Vanier. A copy was deposited at the Ottawa Public Library for the benefit of the local citizenry, but the frugal organizers insisted that anyone else wanting copies had to pay $4.50 each for them.[12] Five days later, the Arts Alliance organized a lunch in the Parliamentary Restaurant for all the region's parliamentarians.

Southam and his group were determined to lay the groundwork carefully for the moment when the plan would come before the government: they not only worked directly with the politicians but also solicited letters from high-powered individuals in banking, industry, and the arts world. In addition, a small nucleus of brilliant senior civil servants who knew the ways of government assisted Southam in preparing for his government dealings. They included Jack Harrison at Forestry and David Golden at Defence, who, after moving on to be the first head of Telesat Canada, would later become a feisty NAC trustee. Their arguments were persuasive: "The building will complete the Capital in a spiritual as well as physical sense," they said. "It will help recruitment to the public service in both languages." And, they added naively, "the initial price tag seems nominal at a mere $9 million."[13]

Peter Dwyer was the lone naysayer. Although he supported Southam, he continued to think, as someone associated with the Canada Council, that a massive subsidy of the arts should precede a costly building. He accurately pinpointed the fact that, in his opinion, "Ottawa has nothing of quality to offer" and that "the future would better lie in touring companies and attracting ballet, opera and orchestras from Toronto and Montreal where pre-paid expenses would assist costs."[14] Southam ignored the advice and continued to work with Golden and others towards the design of future operations, which would "include a small board … to protect the government from artistic matters." He kept up a persistent and thorough correspondence with anyone who could affect the final decision, and he collected a dossier of courteous and optimistic replies, including letters from the opposition party leaders—John Diefenbaker of the Progressive Conservatives, Tommy Douglas of the NDP, and Robert Thompson of the Social Credit—as well as from prominent figures in Canada's arts world.

The preparation was impeccable, and when the invitation came from the Prime Minister's Office to meet with the Arts Alliance group in early November, Southam

National Capital Arts Alliance members David Golden, Hamilton Southam, and Louis Audette after their November 1963 meeting with Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, which had the "happy result" of his full support for the arts centre project. Photo © Ottawa Citizen/*UPI. Reprinted by permission.*

wrote an enthusiastic note to its secretary, Jack Harrison, that "a ground swell of public opinion should carry us irresistibly through the Prime Minister's door." That moment came on November 8, 1963, when Southam and a small delegation were asked to make their way up to Parliament Hill late in the afternoon to meet with Mr. Pearson in his office.

Less than a week later, the members of the National Capital Arts Alliance were informed that the meeting had gone well. Pearson wrote back to Southam confirming his support and advising that the matter would go before Cabinet within days. In the Prime Minister's Office, Gordon Robertson, clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the cabinet, prepared the minute for Pearson to present to Cabinet, and, over at External Affairs, Deputy Minister Norman Robertson briefed his minister, Paul Martin, suggesting that he be supportive in Cabinet when the matter came up.[15] From the Senate, the Conservative Gratton O'Leary sent Southam a handwritten note assuring him that he had taken care of the matter with Diefenbaker. A momentary flurry in the preparations occurred when the Canadian Legion confused the Ottawa plan with a similar project intended as a war memorial that was under construction in San Francisco. Once Southam replied to their letter, politely disabusing them of this notion, they too came firmly on side.

Word of the project ignited interest everywhere, and letters started to trickle in to Southam's office from theatre and arts professionals who were interested in a future at the new complex. One of the first résumés received was from David Haber, who was then engaged, along with several other future NAC staffers, in planning the six-month artistic extravaganza that would run at Expo 67 in Centennial Year. Haber would join the NAC as soon as his Expo duties were over and become its brilliant one-man programming department during its first several years.

Southam was at a social reception at the National Gallery on December 11 when he picked up gossip that the proposal for the National Arts Centre had been approved by Cabinet a few days before. On December 23 the Ottawa project was formally announced. The plan had gone from enthusiastic suggestion to formal approval in just nine months, and Southam recorded this "most excellent" Christmas gift in his diary. Immediately, he was inundated with congratulatory messages, but there was no time to lose and, on December 30, the first meeting of a government-sponsored Interdepartmental Committee convened to start work on the future complex. Southam handed over a variety of letters he had received from architects and others interested in working on the project. With Gordon Robertson in the chair, the new arts centre was now officially designated a "work in progress."

THE REAL TASK BEGINS

In an effusive letter written January 1, 1964, from his family's home in Belgium where he was spending Christmas, Niki Goldschmidt, the man who would become known as "Mr. Festival" in Canada, was among the first to send Southam congratulations. He also, characteristically, offered himself as artistic director for the new enterprise and, if that didn't work out, as director of the national festival that was being proposed. Closer to home, Southam had discreetly suggested to the prime minister that someone should be appointed to run the project. There was no question in Pearson's mind who that man should be, and he offered Southam the job. Within a month, Southam had given notice to the Department of External Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office had announced his appointment, and he had moved into new offices at the Victoria Building on Wellington Street, across the street from Parliament.

Southam's new minister was the secretary of state, Maurice Lamontagne, a sophisticated Quebecer with a long interest in the arts and an earlier influential role in the creation of the Canada Council. Southam, assisted by his able secretary, Verna Dollimore, who accompanied him from External, plunged into the same whirlwind of activity that had launched the project in the first place. His imposing new letterhead and cards read "Office of the Co-ordinator—the National Centre for the Performing Arts." In reality, he would become the mastermind for all that ensued.

The document setting out the duties of the coordinator might have been written, and perhaps was, by Southam himself.[1] Silent but friendly advisers in the Prime Minister's and the Secretary of State's offices, such as Henry Hindley, Lamontagne's assistant secretary, who would eventually draft the NAC legislation, lent an elegant hand to the writing of the specifications for the oncoming work. The government approval had been twofold: to create a physical centre for the performing arts in Ottawa and, in addition,

an annual national arts festival to occupy it during the summer months. This idea had grown directly from Vincent Massey's suggestion in his Canadian Club "festival" speech ten years before where he'd stressed that, without a building, there could be no festival. The plan now called for the first performance to be presented in Centennial Year, 1967. The position of the coordinator was to be the linchpin in planning. He would coordinate all the meetings through his office and receive and disseminate all the pertinent information. Southam was pleased to find himself as the benevolent ringmaster at the core of the proceedings.

The first decision Southam made was that he needed advice. He turned to his friend Peter Dwyer at the Canada Council and asked him to create a series of arts advisory panels comprised of leading figures from the Canadian arts world. They settled on four panels in all, one each for operations, theatre, the visual arts, and the combined interests of music, opera, and ballet. The visual arts panel resulted from a felicitous development in government policies at the time which called for any federal building project to spend at least 1 percent of its capital cost on art to embellish the structure. Southam was determined that the new performing arts centre would take full advantage of this initiative.

Advisory arts committee members were the leading artists working in Canada. From (left to right) theatre directors Tyrone Guthrie, John Hirsch, CBC's Robert Allen, conductor Nicholas Goldschmidt, NFB's James Domville, Jean Gascon, the COC's Herman Geiger-Torel, (unidentified man), and Interdepartmental Steering Committee chair Gordon Robertson. Photo © NAC.

The leading arts professionals that Dwyer selected were a roll call of who was who in Canada's arts world at the time. At the invitation of the Canada Council, they were asked "to advise the organizers how their art form should be accommodated in this new building,"[2] in both the physical design of the centre and the way in which it would be put to use. Many were already acting as advisers to Expo, where cultural activities were to have a leading role, and they all believed they were contributing to something unique and special in the growing cultural life of Canada. Their collegiality and pride in what they were about to do is recorded in the careful notes kept of their meetings. Renowned theatre director Jean Gascon set the tone for all the discussions when he declared at the outset, "The Centre must have a heart that beats." In short, the new building must not be just a roadhouse for travelling shows but a place where real artistic activity was created. This goal became the guiding creed for the work that followed.

Gascon took charge of the Theatre Advisory Committee, which included Michael Langham and Douglas Campbell, his colleagues from Stratford, Leon Major from Halifax's Neptune Theatre, and the talented and strong-willed genius John Hirsch from Winnipeg's Manitoba Theatre Centre. Quebec theatre was represented by Gascon himself and Yvette Brind'amour, the director of Théâtre Rideau Vert. Old hands including Toronto's Mavor Moore were also on the committee. For the Music, Opera, and Ballet Committee, the multitalented Louis Applebaum took the chair, with the distinguished and austere Dr. Arnold Walter of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music to assist him. Also tapped were Jean-Marie Beaudet from the CBC, Dr. Frederick Karam from Ottawa University, Zubin Mehta as conductor of the Montreal Symphony, and Gilles Lefebvre as head of Les Jeunesses Musicales. Herman Geiger-Torel, the ebullient general director of Canada's only professional opera troupe, the Canadian Opera Company, saw future potential for his company in the centre and became a keen and active supporter. From the ballet world, Celia Franca of the National Ballet and Ludmilla Chiriaeff of Montreal's Grands Ballets Canadiens were selected, and they met for the first time on this committee. Southam ensured that a technical adviser was also present to record the discussions. He hired Wallace Russell, the expert from Dominion Consultants who had written the Brown Book, as the secretary to each of the committees, with responsibility for reporting back the technical implications of any ideas that emerged.

A flurry of meetings was held through early 1964 as the work of these advisory committees got under way. From the beginning, there was a noticeably different character and mood in the groups for music and for theatre.

In the Music Committee, Applebaum insisted from the outset that "they needed to create a program for the community" and that it would be useless "to have a large structure without roots in the community."[3] This philosophy guided the thinking of the music advisers in the kind of orchestra they would recommend and the outreach that

the NAC would have, especially into regional schools and Ottawa's two universities. When the new orchestra was finally created, the solid connections it already had with interested people and organizations in Ottawa served as a foundation for its work and was critical in providing its audience. The question of building up a loyal audience was certainly worrying, but Southam had reassured the group that at least two independent private impresarios (Tremblay Concerts and Treble Clef) had made their living in Ottawa bringing in classical music. These private companies were about to be put out of business by the new NAC, but they had proved that there was an appetite for good music and performance in Ottawa.

In the Theatre Committee, in contrast, members found common ground only when they were discussing the physical needs for their particular art form. Without question, they agreed, the new theatre in the complex should be a "voice room" designed specifically to serve the spoken word. But right from the beginning they worried about the subsidies that would be needed to produce theatre in Ottawa and fretted that this cost would draw money away from the regional theatre groups across the country. John Hirsch, although he would soon join the new centre and be its theatre adviser for a time, was particularly vociferous on this point. On other matters, too, committee members were often divided: they debated whether the company should have a base in Toronto, from which it would extend to Ottawa, or even have its home in Montreal. Some thought that the Stratford Festival could form the core of the English-speaking company, but there was no agreement over what it could do with this mandate or where it should locate. Meanwhile, Stratford's director, Michael Langham, opposed any move to Ottawa, believing that his company's winter home should be in Montreal, where it would have ready access to the National Theatre School. Altogether, this committee mirrored the splits in Canada's theatre world in general: the simmering

The three theatre men (left to right), John Hirsch, Leon Major, and Jean Gascon, examine the model for the "voice room"—the NAC's proposed 900-seat Theatre. Photo © Capital Press Photographers/NAC.

rivalries among the various groups that were trying to establish theatres in all areas of the country. As a consequence, while the creation of an orchestra forged ahead, little progress was made in planning a resident theatre at the Arts Centre.

The Operations Advisory Committee included managers of the best performing houses and established organizations in Canada: Hugh Walker from the O'Keefe Centre and Walter Homberger from the Toronto Symphony.[4] It was chaired by Ottawa businessman Bertram Loeb, the senior brother and "brain" in the Loeb family (which included the founding organizer Mrs. Faye Loeb), one of the richest Jewish clans in Ottawa. Southam diplomatically placed a local citizen on each of the committees: Gilles Provost, a rising young francophone director, for theatre, and Lyla Rasminsky, the wife of Louis Rasminsky, the governor of the Bank of Canada, for music. Whether they were there to offer solid advice or merely to be used as "window-dressing" was a moot point.

Southam recognized the limits of his own knowledge, and he had no hesitation in hiring the best people he could find to fill the gaps. Soon into the planning process, he persuaded Bruce Corder, an experienced theatre manager who had worked for years at Covent Garden in London before coming to Toronto to run the O'Keefe Centre, to join the small team in the Coordinator's Office. Corder was suave and well-spoken, yet tough minded and determined. He would be the ideal colleague for Southam—the skilful manager of operations and enforcer of difficult decisions who enabled his boss to stay above the fray. Their partnership in the years to come would ensure that, through Southam's good connections, the Arts Centre was supported at the highest levels, while, thanks to Corder's wide knowledge and experience, the systems and operations practices laid down for the day-to-day running of the building were of an equally high quality. The excellence with which these two men built their "artistic ship" enabled it to continue sailing in later years, even though its masts, sails, and rigging, and much of its key personnel, would be blown away by government budget cuts and poor leadership throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Similarly, the strength of the original systems made its recovery possible when the NAC again changed direction in the mid-1990s.

Southam gave considerable thought to the fundamental management principles he should follow: whether the future festival should be run by the centre, how various levels of government should be involved, and how the new centre should relate to the Canada Council for the long-term benefit of the performing arts. He had clear ideas about what he should do, and he made every effort to ensure that the structure of the planning system and the future organization would come firmly under his control during the development process. And there he met very little opposition.

Southam thought they should not delay construction of the Arts Centre by having an

architectural competition, so he went again to see the prime minister. Pearson concurred that there was no time to lose and told him to "go out and find an architect."[5] At the time, few Canadian architectural firms had any experience in building theatres. The only one that had two to its credit was the Montreal-based firm ARCOP, whose clever design partners were doing some of the best public projects in Canada. Among them, ARCOP had designed and built the Confederation Centre in Charlottetown and was currently working on both Place des Arts in Montreal and the Queen Elizabeth Theatre in Vancouver. Soon after being named coordinator, Southam picked up the phone and invited the ARCOP architects to come to Ottawa to talk about the new Arts Centre.

The firm was generally run on an egalitarian basis among the partners, with projects divided up among them. After the proposed performing Arts Centre was discussed in-house, Fred Lebensold was assigned as the architect on the job. He was a strong-willed, opinionated Polish Jew with a well-known stubborn streak when it came to his work.

The Department of Public Works was the formal client for the development, and the man in charge of its building projects was the chief architect, James Langford. He had applied for and won the job in Ottawa just a few months before and, by all appearances, was an even-tempered, unassuming, self-described "Prairie boy." After a brief stint playing professional football with the Calgary Stampeders, he had started with a small architectural practice in Saskatchewan and then served as the province's deputy minister for public works. The job in Ottawa was a big step up, but he was talented and knew his way around the Canadian architectural world. At thirty-seven, he was now responsible for all the Canadian government's building projects, supervising a staff of more than 180 architects and engineers and taking care of such important and prestigious undertakings as Canada's controversial new embassy in Australia. He took his responsibilities as a public servant and his role to protect the Canadian taxpayer seriously.

Scarcely a few months into his new job, the proposal for the National Arts Centre landed on his desk. Langford knew the architects at ARCOP and liked the way they worked, meeting among themselves every week to criticize each other's projects. In an unusual move for a rank-and-file civil servant, he was called in to meet personally with the prime minister to affirm Southam's choice of architect. He had no hesitation in supporting ARCOP's suitability for the job, although he didn't discuss with Pearson that day what he was really worried about—the $9 million price tag that had been attached to the proposal. Langford believed that this cost estimate was far too small, and he was equally dubious that the complex could be built in time for the Centennial celebrations. He "knew for a fact," he told others, that Toronto's O'Keefe Centre, "while it had been built privately by a brewery company and the real costs swept under the carpet," had cost far more to build than what was being projected for the Ottawa building, yet the Toronto complex was only a third of the size of what was being proposed for the capital. No one at the Arts Centre office paid any attention to

Architect Fred Lebensold conferred frequently with the patient chief architect for the Department of Public Works, James Langford (centre), examining the building model with Hamilton Southam. Langford ran interference with the politicians as building costs rose. Photo © NAC.

Langford's observations, particularly not Hamilton Southam. Later, Langford would be called on the carpet at parliamentary committees to defend his departmental bosses from complaints about delays and rising costs, although it had been clear to him from the outset that this was going to be a difficult job where "regular procedures were not to be precisely followed."[6]

From Southam's viewpoint, cost was a secondary matter. Although he believed that "no public servant should think of money as a detail," he was convinced that he was "doing the right thing" and that cost was not the prime concern. He had a clear vision of the complex, one that was already set out in the Brown Book. After an early meeting with the American impresario Sol Hurok, he had discarded the notion of a 3,000-seat opera/concert hall that would accommodate the travelling road shows of hugely successful American impresarios. He had sternly informed Hurok that "we are not in this for profit."[7] Instead, Southam favoured the European style of opera houses and theatres, with their intimate auditoria and superb acoustics. There was no model in North America for what he wanted, so, shortly after becoming coordinator, he sought and received Maurice Lamontagne's blessing to go to Europe to research ideas.

On April 17, 1964, the core design team of Hamilton Southam, Wallace Russell, Fred Lebensold, and Jim Langford left Canada for what would be a whirlwind, month-long trip across the continent. Langford, who had not visited Europe before, remembers a "fabulous trip" as they "went everywhere," visiting twenty-five different theatres and

halls, seeing performances, and studying technical facilities from Prague to Munich to Copenhagen. While Russell, Langford, and Lebensold stayed in small hotels and pensions, Southam, at his own expense, booked into grander hotels and met with equally grand friends that he seemed to know in every city. Nevertheless, they experienced an enormous amount together—and Southam ensured that they saw the best. The memory of seeing Maria Callas singing at La Scala still lingered in Langford's memory over forty years later. Southam already knew Milan and Florence well, having "liberated" the opera houses as part of the Allied Forces during the war, although he never boasted to his companions about these experiences. As a Jew, Lebensold balked when it came to going into Germany so soon after the war, but he rejoined the group in Paris before returning home.

Russell meticulously documented their technical observations of each facility, recording everything from a hall's mechanical equipment to styles of seating and crowd control. Southam noted that Vienna's Staatsoper had the best orchestra pit in Europe, and he made sure that they obtained the exact dimensions to guide the NAC's architect. The Austrians tried to sell them mechanical stage equipment, which they rejected as being "too complex," but this exposure helped them later to find better and easier solutions in Ottawa. Europe's experience became their model: "good acoustics" were key and "everything was to be top drawer." Years later, Southam would often tease Langford whether Canadian taxpayers had received good value from their trip. Langford, who wrestled many times with Southam over costs and scheduling, would ruefully always admit that this excursion had been well worth the money.

On June 1, 1964, back in Ottawa, Southam was "exhilarated" as he fed the details of the advisory committee meetings to Lebensold, who then single-handedly worked up the design concept for the building. He did not take the advice of the advisory committees lightly. Like Southam, he attended many of their meetings and listened, although perhaps not as carefully. The intrepid Russell, as secretary, continued to record the technical implications of each group's discussion and provided them to Lebensold. There were long debates among the artistic advisers on the Music, Opera, and Ballet Committee over such matters as acoustics and the size of the backstage required for large-scale ballets, while on the Theatre Committee the advisers focused on the size and shape of the stage—the virtues of "thrust" versus "proscenium" stages—sight-lines, and other theatrical necessities. All the participants took their duties extremely seriously: they were working together on something new that they believed would be good for Canada.

Langford saw Southam and Lebensold as two of a kind—both single-minded, strong-willed men. Once Lebensold had settled on an idea, he was "unmovable." Even Southam found him hard to handle, but he enjoyed his company and went along with his suggestions. Langford found the development of the architectural process engrossing and, even though he was there to defend the client's interest, he was frequently included

in the weekly meetings and debates at ARCOP's offices in Montreal. Southam didn't like conflict. Rather, he would "wine and dine" his way through problems, Langford said, often leaving the clever but less-sophisticated Public Works architect feeling like a "bumpkin" in awe of the coordinator's skills at "manipulating" people.

Langford had to review the project for his department and arrange the contracts and tendering, all the while trying to ensure that Canadian taxpayers got their money's worth. It was a tough task at times, often conflicting with Southam's grand and glorious ideas. When the first prices came in, as Langford had feared, they were far beyond the original estimates. Yet, in the minds of the organizers, there was no question of cutting back. They were aiming for the best—and that was going to be expensive. It fell to Langford to devise the solution that would allow them to proceed. Although previously unheard of in government circles, and against his better judgment, he broke down the total work into three separate contracts. Ensuring that "the tendering process was all handled correctly,"[8] the first phase would excavate the massive hole in the ground. Next would come the foundations and the garage, while the final contract would be the rest of the building. The first two would eventually come in roughly on budget, but the last contract would spiral well beyond estimates. Langford took the gamble that, by then, the job would be too far along to turn back. Eventually, he would be proved right, though not without gut-wrenching struggles along the way. Going into construction, the price had already risen to $16 million, and it would continue to rise, higher and higher, along with the political clamour around it.

From the start, the change of site from Nepean Point to Confederation Square presented huge additional costs and problems. The designers were determined to avoid the mistakes of Montreal's Place des Arts, where a single exit kept visitors sitting in their cars among exhaust fumes waiting to leave. The garage in Ottawa was to open in several directions; an exit on Slater Street, a block away from the centre, required a concrete tunnel for several hundred yards. Its excavation brought furious complaints about dust from the British High Commission, located directly overhead on Elgin Street. As the plans worked their way through various government departments in the traditional approval process, Dr. R.F. Legget, the National Research Council's building research director and a soils expert, warned that if the design team wanted an underground garage alongside the Rideau Canal, they were sure to have water problems. He was right, and the design for the 900-car garage required special shoring, which was prohibitively expensive. Lebensold also determined that having the building's main entrance open to the world, facing Confederation Square, would create massive traffic jams. Despite objections, he made the controversial decision to turn the back of his building to the city and to lead people down a long curving ramp to the front door facing the canal. The basic hexagonal shape of the building was taken, Lebensold claimed, from the shape of the site—and he made it the dominant motif throughout the rambling structure.

Southam was "so convinced we were doing the right thing"[9] that cost remained a

To kick-start the project, James Langford broke the job down into three separate contracts. The first was for the enormous excavation of the site. Photo © Ottawa Citizen/ *UPI. Reprinted by permission.*

secondary issue in his thinking. His relationship with Langford could be "abrasive" at times, as the two of them struggled to keep the project under control. Despite these efforts, costs began to jump upward in leaps and bounds.

The building was to be "an architectural and engineering marvel," well beyond anything that had been built in the city since before the war. The change in location from the more distant Nepean Point to the site along Confederation Square opened up possibilities for a cultural hub to the city which had been partially foreseen. On the land immediately adjacent to the south of the hexagonal NAC site on Elgin Street, the previous Diefenbaker government had already proposed a large museum. The working drawings by Vancouver architect Ned Pratt had been prepared for tender, and the old Roxborough Apartments on the corner of Laurier and Elgin streets, where former Prime Minister Mackenzie King had made his Ottawa home, had already been torn down in preparation for future construction. When Langford arrived in town as the new chief architect, he saw immediately that the two cultural buildings could be complementary to each other, and he set about trying to have Pratt and Lebensold talk to each other. Before he could make much headway, however, the museum project was cancelled by the new Liberal government. The land where it was to be built sits empty to this day.

As more construction problems cropped up, the price tag of the Arts Centre accelerated, moving rapidly from $16 million to $21 million and then to over $26 million. Each time Southam called on the prime minister to break the bad news, Pearson would say, usually after a reflective moment, "We shall do it all the same"[10]—and so inform his finance minister, Mitchell Sharp. As the price went up, there were cries of outrage in the House of Commons, and Pearson was called upon on several occasions to issue reassuring statements and progress reports to the parliamentarians. Later, Sharp

would explain that, in Cabinet, "the Prime Minister was so for it that we did not feel it appropriate to oppose it."[11] Southam concurred: "We felt unassailable really. It was the right thing to do and the right time to do it."

For the independently wealthy Southam, the times were exciting: his parents had had a similar dream, and "now here we were given the opportunity." He was in his element. But for others involved in the job, it was not so easy. Langford's bosses railed at him for not controlling the development better, and at one point after the site had been excavated and the foundations put in, serious consideration was given to filling the hole in again or filling it up with water, to make it into a lagoon in the summer and a skating rink in winter. Langford worried constantly, but Southam remained calm. He had his personal pipeline to the prime minister and, through his own shrewd organization, he also had the best artistic people in the country behind the development. "We had enormous impetus," he recalled. "There were a lot of talented people behind it. This gave me the energy to meet with the prime minister."[12] In Canada, in the early 1960s, these connections were enough to get the job done.

Besides car fumes, dust, and water problems, the project presented a fascinating array of structural issues. Engineer John Adjeleian, one of Canada's leading structural engineers with Toronto's SkyDome later to his credit, became architect Lebensold's alter ego, taking the architect's concepts and translating them into structural reality. The lively and intelligent American-trained Adjeleian was of Armenian origin, and he meshed well with the headstrong Lebensold. The two wrestled constantly with the rising costs, as Lebensold called on the resourceful Adjeleian to come up with economical solutions to his artistic vision.

Good acoustics were a priority, and the mechanical-electrical systems would have to run silently to accommodate both music and the spoken word. Although not a theatre person, Adjeleian became fascinated with the paraphernalia involved in theatres and concerts halls: screens, pulleys, and backstage equipment, the sound baffles and special music shells that had to be planned for and incorporated into the building. The requirements for the elaborate curtain being created for the opera hall by artist Micheline Beauchemin—how it would be hung, where it would rise and fall—opened a new world to him. His most important engineering achievement was to create the column-free spaces that Lebensold wanted throughout the building. The three tiers of balconies in the opera hall cantilevered out seventy feet over the auditorium, and Adjeleian marvelled years later that "you could look up and not see a column anywhere. You could see three balconies of people without a supporting column! How," he asked, "did we do that?"[13]

He also saved money. One initiative, after much heated discussion among the con-

sultants, called for the use of moulded fibreglass in the ceiling tiles, then an architectural precedent. Another of his more interesting challenges was the creation of the box seats, and especially the Royal (State) Box, a nicety that the protocol-conscious Southam had insisted upon. That particular conundrum was how to cantilever the box without having another box hanging over it in the tier above, as happened in the classic European opera houses. This thorny question occupied Adjeleian for weeks.

The hexagonal grid that dominated the building design deviated entirely from traditional right-angled solutions. Some critics would later say the building suffered from "hexagonitis," but this shape was a popular innovation in modern architecture. The most repeated form in nature, used by bees in constructing honeycombs, it had recently been applied in Canada by Buckminster Fuller in his design for the U.S. Pavilion at Expo 67. Everything was triangular, "more mathematical than material," Adjeleian recalled, and this shaping required "thousands upon thousands of calculations."[14] Computer-aided design was not yet in common use in architecture, and all the work was done the old-fashioned way with a slide rule.

Similarly, the use of concrete for the building, which "enabled the marriage of architecture and structure," was at the cutting edge during the sixties. The style would later become known as "brutalist," but it was considered then as "an expression of the time." Outside the building, an entire city street was rerouted to accommodate the construction.

Adjeleian, despite his later triumphs, always maintained that the National Arts Centre remained his favourite building. "They were fun times," he recalled. For Langford, despite his troubles, it was the same, and although it was against regulations, he would often ride up in the construction bucket on a Saturday morning to take photographs of the site as the building rose up out of the ground. Colleagues on this massive undertaking became friends for life and, like old war veterans, they continue to hold an annual reunion and golf tournament, known as the "Disaster Open."

One of the remarkable innovations dreamed up by Jim Langford and his deputy architect in Public Works called for 1 to 3 percent of the capital cost of any project to be spent on "artistic embellishment of the building." They made sure that the policy was imposed on federal construction projects, and Langford got a lot of flack for it, especially from his staff in regional offices across the country. The result, however, was that a lot of art ("not all of it good") was placed in new federal government buildings.

It did not take long for Southam and his associates to spot the new policy, and they immediately struck an artistic advisory committee of some of the most distinguished people in Canada's visual arts community to take it in hand. With the new building's budget standing at $12.8 million in July 1964, nearly $390,000 was earmarked to

buy art for the new centre. Southam's family had always been strong supporters of the National Gallery of Canada, and this aspect of the work was close to his heart. He had convened the first meeting of the Advisory Committee on Visual Arts at his home in April of the previous year, and Donald Buchanan, the director of the National Gallery, who was also organizing the arts exhibitions for Expo, accepted the chair. Other members of the committee included Montreal's Andrée Paradis, an attractive "belle-laide" of a woman who was editor of the avant-garde Montreal magazine *Vie des Arts*, and Eric Arthur, a top architectural consultant from Toronto.

When the group agreed that "art and architecture should be married on this project,"[15] that basic principle meant that architect Fred Lebensold would play a controlling role in the selection of artworks for the building. Their first meeting set out some ideals, several of which would hastily be discarded, including the stipulation that all the art should be Canadian. These artistic proposals were to be channelled through Hamilton Southam, who would convey them to the Department of Public Works to foot the bill. Lebensold and one of his partners, Guy Desbarats (who would later become deputy minister at Public Works), attended the first meeting and agreed to provide the committee, within the month, with crucial information regarding the "spirit of the building." In the meantime, committee members would draw up a list of artists for potential commissions.

True to his promise, Lebensold soon returned to a meeting of the advisory committee, where he outlined the interior spaces for them. Four main inside units—the Salon, Theatre, Studio, and Opera—would need art. The "jewel of the entire place" was the Salon, which would also serve as a VIP room. The Theatre, he proposed, should be subdued, with interest focused on the performance. Lighting would be a major source of decoration there, and he had the lighting expert to do it. The Studio should be "bare and naked," and the artwork placed in it would be "its only decorative element." The Opera was to be different from all the rest. It would be subdued during performances, but at other times would "spill over with light, colour and luxury," lending a special atmosphere before performances and during intervals. The intricate opera house lighting, by designer Bob Harrison, gave a gorgeous elegance to the hall, but its thousands of individual light bulbs also imposed a lifetime of special equipment and maintenance costs on the centre. Skilfully sweet-talking the committee, Lebensold kept full control of the overall interior design of the building to fit his architectural vision. "The Architect's opinion was to have major consideration in *any* decision," read the minutes, a fact that was tersely reported to the government's Interdepartmental Committee, which was "steering" the project.

Lebensold soon returned to the visual arts group with a shopping list of "decorative requirements," setting them out in a detailed memo that called for a tapestry ($25,000) and tall sculpted doors ($15,000) for the Salon, and stage curtains for the Opera and the Theatre ($50,000 and $25,000, respectively), among other things. Names of lead-

ing artists swirled about—Jean-Paul Riopelle for the Main Lobby, and Alfred Pellan or Harold Town for a mural in the Studio lobby. (William Ronald would eventually get this job on Lebensold's say-so after the architect paid a visit to the artist's studio.) Southam had his own tastes and preferences and, on his European research trip, he had already visited the studio of sculptor Ossip Zadkine in Paris. He immediately "gave in to one of his desires" and ordered an exquisite bronze free-standing sculpture of *The Three Graces* to stand in the new centre's lobby. Southam liked the work so much that, later, he ordered a similar sculpture for his own home. As building costs rose, Treasury Board eventually set a ceiling of $500,000 on the visual arts budget—a colossal sum for the day. Among the better acquisitions was an exquisite tapestry by French artist Alfred Manessier, inspired, he said, by the light he had experienced during a visit to Southam's beautiful cottage on the Rideau Lakes. He would not be the only artist to claim inspiration from Southam's idyllic summer surroundings, but his commission came with a special Canada Council grant that permitted him to travel from Paris to Canada to install his wall hanging.

Canadian artists were not forgotten. There was the magnificent Beauchemin curtain for the Opera, a piece so large that no loom in Canada could weave it. On a commission that would rise to $75,000, the artist went to Japan for a year to create it. Sculptor Charles Daudelin won the competition for an enormous free-standing exterior work, which still adorns a major outside terrace and casts an elegant high shadow against the back wall of the building. In one of the foyers, artist Jean Hébert devised a glass and metal *Tree Fountain* designed to filter light through its colourful segments. He struggled with the colours and special moulds, and when Canada's glass companies could not meet his demands, he asked for additional monies for a special kiln to fire the glass tiles himself. His contract rose from $15,000 to $25,000 as the committee justified its decision on the basis that it was advancing technical knowledge for Canada's glass producers.

From the start, the visual arts were to play a big part in the NAC building. In Paris, Hamilton Southam visited the studio of the artist Ossip Zadkine and couldn't resist purchasing The Three Graces *for the NAC foyer. Later he picked up another version of the piece for his own house. Photo © NAC.*

By this time the Visual Arts Committee was in full cry and ready to propose another $300,000 worth of items to the Public Works Department, but, in an unusual move, Southam felt it prudent to draw the line. The beleaguered Langford struggled in vain to maintain the budgets, but Southam generally took the artists' side when issues arose and, with his wily diplomatic skills, usually got the commissions through. When the *National Arts Centre Act* was finally passed and a Board of Trustees was created to replace the Steering Committee, the visual arts team would be the only advisory committee retained by the board until the building was finished. Such was the importance placed on the visual and plastic arts in this period.

Southam and his colleagues had anticipated "the threat of gifts of art," and, from the start, they were determined to resist. In practice, they employed "a lot of smoke and screens to avoid gifts," and they accepted nothing without the Visual Arts Committee's approval.[16] Somehow, Southam managed to circumnavigate this policy on at least two occasions, accepting an Orrefors glass chandelier from the Swedish government for the Salon and a bust of Chopin from the Poles. "After all," he reminisced later, "I had served in both countries." The new National Arts Centre was becoming ever more "his house," which perhaps it had always been. In 1972, when the NAC was finally in full operation, an unexpected $30,000 turned up in the Visual Arts budget. Southam wasted no time in commissioning a puckish mural of football-playing owls from Vancouver artist Jack Shadbolt and orchestrating a grand celebration for its installation in the Restaurant during a popular run by the Vancouver Playhouse in the Theatre.

While his artistic advisory committees buckled down to work, Southam occupied himself with the fundamental issue of how the Arts Centre would function. A raft of files crossed his desk, ranging from questions on how the new centre would attract audiences ("good halls and theatres generate their own audiences," he claimed confidently) to how best to acquire a fine organ for the concert hall. Southam lost no opportunity to talk up his centre with the public, and his daily diary was crammed with speaking engagements ranging from the music teachers in the Ottawa area to Canadian Clubs all across the country. He maintained a huge correspondence as he sought support everywhere for the project.

His former colleagues in External Affairs kept him abreast of cultural affairs internationally. Ambassador Arnold Smith, wiring from Paris, reported lengthy conversations with the French culture minister, André Malraux, whom Southam would meet on his European tour.[17] The French already had a plan to retain their Expo pavilion after the world's fair so they could pursue their cultural interests in Canada. They wanted to turn it into a *maison de culture* for Quebec, which the federal government resisted as being "too local." There was also intelligence on Charles de Gaulle's forthcoming

visit to Montreal for the Centennial celebrations. Federal concern over the growing nationalism in Quebec and the potential role of the French government is evident in these official telegrams.

But for Southam and his colleagues, the Arts Centre they were designing was to showcase a cooperative Canada, an ideal reflected in the work of the recently appointed Bilingual and Bicultural Commission. There was never any doubt that the new centre, like its new director general, would be completely bilingual and bicultural. Two issues were central to Southam's planning. The first was his decision that the organization would be "national" in character and scope. The local consortium, the National Capital Arts Alliance, had helped to secure the government's approval and, although the local organizations did not yet know it, Southam had bigger plans for his Arts Centre that would leave little room for them. He proposed that the new centre be "more than a complex of theatres in Ottawa" and also "address its activities to be truly national and even international in scope." Local developer William Teron, the president of the NCAA after Southam left the post to become full-time coordinator of the new project, later expressed bitterness and shock at the manner in which local arts groups had been frozen out.[18] When the music groups complained about their lack of real local representation on the arts advisory groups, Southam told them firmly that "this is national."

Second, Southam, along with a team of public servants in his minister's office, had to devise a management model for the new Arts Centre. Their negotiations were initially cooperative rather than adversarial. At the time, a small coterie of individuals, many of them with similar backgrounds (if not always socially, then in terms of their education), was at the core of government policy-making in Ottawa. Together they refined the design of the managerial structure of the organization and began work on funding models. These memoranda, usually intimate and informal in tone, formed the basis of the legislation that would officially create the new organization. Not surprisingly, Southam favoured from the outset a managerial model that placed an administrator in full control at the top, assisted by an advisory board of trustees appointed from across the country. In later years, as delays developed and costs soared, Southam was increasingly required to defend the organizational structure to his political masters and their officials.

By mid-1964 Southam and his team favoured the "Brussels" managerial model, based on the Palais des Beaux Arts that had been built in the Belgian capital in the early 1920s.[19] It called for tenant organizations in the building, including an independent orchestra and theatre companies in both languages, which would be subject to an overall artistic policy set by the centre's trustees and management. These arts organizations would have their own charters and boards of directors, raise their own funds, and pay fees to the centre for their use of the facilities. The attraction of this approach to Southam was that the new Arts Centre's board would not be required to

"find the large amounts of money nor take the considerable risks involved in artistic productions or the presentation of artistic groups." Those risks would, rather, be "courted by companies resident or visiting the centre." The centre's activities would be confined to "the efficient management and financial maintenance of the Centre" in accordance with a defined set of artistic principles: "encouraging performances of the highest standard in music, opera in any language, dance, drama and poetry readings in English and French … whether they were authored by Canadians or not." The centre would also arrange appearances of the best professional performing groups in Canada and encourage the development of a resident orchestra and resident English- and French-language repertory theatre companies.

A "national festival organization" would run the annual festival—the second part of the government's original commitment. Because the festival was to "grow out of the centre's activities," Southam wanted to run it as well.

Southam envisaged the future Arts Centre as the hub of artistic activity on the national scene. It would encourage the development of performing arts schools in the national capital area and also provide offices and administrative arrangements for the headquarters of a national performing arts organization, establishing a library and museum and providing other services that might prove useful for the performing arts in Canada. In addition, the early working papers contain several references to the place of film and the role of radio and television in the new centre's activities.

By October 1964 the artistic working groups were hurrying to complete their tasks, but the debate continued in government circles over the operational model the new organization should adopt. Southam's preference for the Brussels concept was resisted by officials both at the Secretary of State's Department and in the Privy Council Office who favoured some sort of hybrid arrangement that combined Southam's model with the arts-producing example of the Stratford Festival. Just how "national" the place should be was also under discussion, as was the question of where the money for the centre would come from. In January 1965 a seminal meeting organized by the Canadian Conference of the Arts at St-Adèle, Quebec, brought Maurice Lamontagne together with representatives from all the key cultural organizations in the country.[20] The objective was to discuss the broad picture of arts financing in Canada, but the organizers also used the occasion to obtain comments on the new arts centre before the government finalized the legislation that would create the NAC.

While the organizers hoped to have this new act mentioned in the government's next Speech from the Throne, it was not likely to be introduced into the House until the following September. In the meantime, the Interdepartmental Steering Committee would continue to deal with problems on behalf of the future Board of Trustees. Among these issues was resistance from the still feisty but now outgoing Ottawa mayor, Charlotte Whitton, who was refusing to let the city hand over the deed to the site so construction could start. The committee recommended expropriation, but, after

Secretary of State Maurice Lamontagne (centre), flanked by Fred Lebensold and Hamilton Southam, presented the NAC project to his parliamentary colleagues. Lamontagne, Lester Pearson's "Quebec lieutenant," was an elegant and erudite supporter and left Southam to his own devices. Photo © NAC.

Don Reid, a new and friendlier mayor, took office, it was able to negotiate a ninety-nine-year land lease with the city. Just to be sure, Prime Minister Pearson wrote personally to the mayor, reminding him that a deed to the property was still required so that work on the excavation could at last get under way. With Centennial Year only two years off, time was pressing.

With the excavation contract in place and the shovel finally in the ground, the Department of Public Works pushed vigorously ahead with tendering the next two phases. Southam and his colleagues were already discussing an opening festival at the new centre for 1967, but, early into the work, Jim Langford warned that this date would be all but impossible.

By the fall of 1964, as the artistic advisory committees were finishing most of their work, the Operations Advisory Committee was coming into its own. Under Bertram Loeb, a new name was added to the list of experienced theatre managers already in the group: François Mercier, a well-known Montreal litigation lawyer with strong Liberal ties and also chairman of Montreal's Place des Arts. (He was destined to become more closely tied to the NAC later, when he was appointed the second chair of the Board of Trustees.) The job for this committee was to supervise the legal and operational practicalities and to target and solve pending problems. There was, for instance, a shortage of trained stage staff in Canada, so most touring companies brought in their own teams.[21] It was no accident, then, that Joseph Mackenzie of the Canadian Labour Congress was on the committee as the group assessed future needs, ensuring that the NAC would be a union house.

The organ lobbyists were also pressing, contacting government MPs and insisting

that they have a formal hearing during the planning process. It fell to the Operations Committee to resist a grand organ on the grounds that it would have little use or appeal to Ottawa audiences. They pushed back the proposal by saying there was nothing in the budget for it and that Public Works would have to find other monies to pay for it. The idea for an organ was dropped—until it materialized much later in a gift from the Dutch people in memory of Canada's service in Holland during the war.

Southam tracked all these particulars closely, with a masterful breadth of attention and eye for detail. After the 1965 election had again failed to produce a majority for Lester Pearson, his long-time Quebec colleague and friend Maurice Lamontagne was cut from the Cabinet, and the feisty Niagara MP Judy LaMarsh took over to manage culture. Lamontagne's competent undersecretary, Ernest Steele, stayed on under LaMarsh.

There was bad news on the construction front—completion would be delayed well past 1967, most likely until 1969. Southam also warned Steele that the budget ceiling, now at $26 million, was about to be exceeded. Despite Pearson's steady support, the runaway costs were causing a Cabinet revolt. A report reached Southam that one solution about to receive serious consideration was the postponement of phase three—the construction of the building itself. In the interim, the garage would be roofed over and the site on Confederation Square covered with sod. Langford later confirmed that plans and drawings had been prepared in case this option was accepted.

Southam fought back eloquently, stressing that this was "the Government's only centennial project in Ottawa." He was sure that the government, "for the $25 million already spent, would not want a silent, grass-covered slope covering the empty tomb of its own centennial project," and he argued that the new centre, "more than any other Federal Government project, was doing more to quicken interest in Ottawa among members of the small but influential group of creative Canadians scattered from Halifax to Vancouver." He stated that the centre was useful in "refurbishing Ottawa's image in the rest of the country" and urged Steele to inform the Cabinet that the new centre had attracted the interest of all the country's leading arts organizations and was perceived "as an important factor in developing theatrical and musical life of the country at the highest level." In a passionate conclusion, he said that "the Centre is more than a building," that any postponement would be "a victory for the forces of provincialism," and that the group of "creative Canadians" now supporting the project would "melt away." Because of the centre's site on Confederation Square, "this unhappy development would be exposed to the world's gaze."[22] Fortunately, Southam had allies in Cabinet, among them the Ottawa-based public works minister, George McIlraith. In the end, the project was spared the proposed delay, although the construction cost ceiling was fixed once again, this time at $31 million.

While the logistics of construction and future operations were being thrashed out, Southam was soon writing again to Ernie Steele, laying the groundwork for the centre's artistic life. He had hired a Canadian-born arts administrator, Henry Wrong, a nephew

Despite all the problems, the construction went steadily ahead. Photo © Ottawa Citizen*/UPI. Reprinted by permission.*

of his old External Affairs colleague, Hume Wrong, as his overall programming consultant. Wrong had been working in New York as an assistant to Sir Rudolf Bing at the Metropolitan Opera. Also engaged was John Hirsch (as a theatre consultant), Jean Beaudet from the CBC, and Louis Applebaum, as an adviser on music. Strenuous efforts continued for the development of an orchestra as well as English and French resident theatre, although Southam still thought of these groups as independent companies and tenants of the NAC.

For now, the chairmanships of these possible future companies were entrusted to three local volunteers: Louis Audette, the president of the Ottawa Philharmonic; F.R. "Budge" Crawley, for theatre; and Lawrence Freiman, who was heading a group trying to create a Canadian Festival of the Arts. Their task was to push the planning forward on programming, but, in Southam's words, "progress was slow." What Southam wanted from Steele were official appointments to head the Music, Theatre, and Programming departments, including the Festival. Either Beaudet or Applebaum would suit the first, he thought, Gascon or Hirsch the second, and he nominated Wrong to head overall programming and direct the Festival. No time should be lost, Southam urged, in appointing Bruce Corder as head of the administrative branch looking after the new house, box office, technical departments, and, of course, accounts. Detailed outlines of the duties of these officers, as well as a carefully worked out management chart, accompanied Southam's request. He wanted these individuals in place before a newly formed board become active. The consistent and methodical fashion in which Southam planned and implemented the many facets of this complicated new federal government institution ensured that it would have the correct support and proper structures for the important national role that lay ahead.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

By early 1965 the boisterous Judy LaMarsh had taken over the culture portfolio from the refined Maurice Lamontagne. She would stay in this job until the end of Prime Minister Pearson's tenure. A down-to-earth populist in style and heart, LaMarsh seized the NAC file and gave it her full support, guiding the legislation effectively through the House of Commons. Wags who had worried about the new Arts Centre being too elitist joked that if LaMarsh liked it, it must be good. On July 14, 1966, having cleared the hurdles of both the House of Commons and the Senate, the *National Arts Centre Act* received Royal Assent.

LaMarsh wasted no time in appointing the new Board of Trustees. Lawrence Freiman, a friend of LaMarsh and George McIlraith, the minister of public works and the "Ottawa minister" in the Cabinet, was made chair. A mercurial, intense man who ran the family department-store business, Freiman loved the arts, served on the Stratford Festival Board, and favoured big symphonies and grand theatres. Both he and Southam were Ottawa-born and wanted the best for their city, but their tastes were different and, for much of the time they worked together at the Arts Centre, they would be at odds with one another.

The Honourable Judy LaMarsh, Maurice Lamontagne's successor as secretary of state in Lester Pearson's Cabinet.

The other eight trustees were a broad cross-section of people with experience in the arts and business in Canada. The heads of important federal cultural agencies such as the CBC, the Canada Council, and the National Film Board were given ex-officio status on the board, as were the mayors of Ottawa and Hull. This was the first time that representatives of these other agencies were placed on the board of a sister organization, and these linkages would prove useful in the years ahead.

It was several months before the new board met for the first time, on March 8, 1967, in the Orange Room of Ottawa's Château Laurier Hotel, just across the street from the building site. In the interim, Freiman had set about developing his own vision of how the centre should be organized. He had many friends in theatre, including the English director Tyrone Guthrie, who had helped launch the Stratford Festival. Freiman consulted him about the appointment of an overall director for the National Arts Centre. An ad hoc committee that included writer Robertson Davies and Dr. Arnold Walter had already considered this question and concluded that the obvious choice was Southam. Although reluctant, Freiman was eventually persuaded by these "distinguished Canadian figures" to accept Southam as the new director general. Once the polite preliminaries were over, the first motion by the new board was to transform Coordinator Hamilton Southam into the NAC's first director general. Bruce Corder was also confirmed as Southam's second-in-command and would soon become his "right hand" in running the place.[1]

Southam prepared well for these first meetings, and a series of motions that he and his team had developed clicked effortlessly through the proceedings. At the heart of his message was Jean Gascon's idea that, "without resident companies, the building would be misbegotten."[2] He sketched out carefully the plans that had been developed with the help of the advisory groups for both theatre and music. While there were no plans yet for resident dance or opera, Southam already had his eye on the Summer Festival and recommended that the board ask the government for a separate $1 million per year to pay for it. He had hired the Canadian-born arts administrator Henry Wrong as his future director of programming. Wrong, the designated head of the future Festival as well, had been the special assistant to Sir Rudolf Bing at New York's Metropolitan Opera and, not surprisingly, was a man with big ideas. His suggestions for the Festival already included visits by European companies such as the Salzburg Opera, which, he said, "could drop by Ottawa on its way to Japan in 1970." The immediate task, however, was to persuade Cabinet to approve approximately $2.5 million for the Arts Centre's general operations. Judy LaMarsh, primed by Lawrence Freiman, readily lent her political support.

A big item on the first meeting's agenda was an upcoming visit by the Queen, a prospect almost as exciting to the trustees as the new centre itself. A $5,000 budget was allocated for this celebration, and an invitation sent to actor Christopher Plummer to host the ceremonies at the building site. On July 5, 1964, Queen Elizabeth II arrived in

First NAC chairman Lawrence Freiman with Lester Pearson and Queen Elizabeth II on July 5, 1964, at an unveiling ceremony of a plaque marking the Queen's visit to the unfinished site. Photo © John Evans.

Ottawa on her way back to England after attending a conference in Quebec City. It was a first big public moment for the National Arts Centre: on this sunny summer morning, the Queen took an hour out of a crammed schedule on Parliament Hill to come over to the chaotic construction site to unveil a plaque. A crowd of spectators enjoyed the brief but lively outdoor artistic show that was presented on a temporary wooden stage erected the previous night on a patch of green sod hurriedly laid down in the middle of the muddy grounds. A special fanfare for the occasion had been composed by Louis Applebaum, and a proclamation written by author Robertson Davies. The lines were to be delivered by Plummer in English and by renowned Quebec actress Denise Pelletier in French, although there were many arguments over the translation of Davies's words into the language of Molière. At the last moment Plummer cancelled, and another Canadian actor, Robert Whitehead, stepped in to replace him. Freiman was in his element showing the Queen around the half-built site to the cheers of the blue-helmeted construction workers. Dozens of dignitaries were also on hand to celebrate. As the excitement subsided and the July board meetings continued the trustees expressed relief that the visit was over and that thinking could turn once again to more practical matters.

Considerable debate was devoted at the first meeting to the organizational model. Freiman opposed Southam's preference for the decentralized "Brussels" concept, describing its associated independent companies as "too expensive and duplicating responsibility."[3] With LaMarsh supporting his position, the new trustees swiftly voted to adopt the "Stratford" approach, in which they, through the centre's own staff, would have responsibility for all the artistic work presented there. Southam, who had promoted the Brussels model for nearly three years, acquiesced without a murmur. Decades later, when hard times hit the Arts Centre, this early choice would be revisited and thought given again to separating the orchestra into an independent if

resident company. This fragmentation did not occur and, so far, the original decision has been maintained.

Henry Wrong initiated plans for the programming of the Opening Festival, now tentatively scheduled for June 1969. The first regular seasons would not commence until the fall. The inaugural event was to be "Canadian, bi-cultural and artistically interesting." Southam nevertheless continued to travel widely in Europe, forming alliances and viewing performances that might be brought to Ottawa in due course. One trip took him to Prague, where he first saw the work of the great Czech designer Josef Svoboda. The regular annual Festival was targeted to begin in the summer of 1970 under the aegis of the Arts Centre. Wrong had been thinking big—hugely, in fact—about this event. Besides the visit from the Salzburg Opera, there were plans for four different opera productions in a two-week season, complete with soloists from the Vienna Staatsoper. Even a Parisian haute couture fashion show was mentioned. Unfortunately, a personal tiff between Wrong and Southam would mean that the programming director would not be around to see any of these plans to completion. Although Wrong had already moved to Ottawa and settled his family into a new house in anticipation of his position at the centre, he was shortly to be fired.

The trouble was triggered by malicious gossip instigated by one of the artists now making their way to the Arts Centre in anticipation of future work. Something unpleasant was reported to Southam about Wrong and, instead of checking his facts, Southam took it at face value. When he confronted Wrong, the latter made an angry comment about the breakdown of Southam's marriage to his first wife, Jacqueline. In the midst of his busy work life, Southam's personal affairs had taken a tempestuous turn, and his long-standing attraction to women had reasserted itself. Southam was furious and, in a rare pugilistic moment, threatened to strike Wrong if he did not take back his hurtful words. Wrong declined, and Southam responded by "boxing his ears,"[4] resulting in the threat of a messy lawsuit. To avoid any further embarrassment to the NAC, Southam made a financial settlement with Wrong and the two arts administrators parted ways. Years later Southam mused that perhaps he had not been fair to Wrong, but the scandal had an immediate effect on planning at the centre as Wrong's initial grand ideas for the 1970 Festival were dropped with his departure.[5]

Fortunately for Southam, David Haber, the phenomenally successful impresario for the cultural festival at Expo 67, was waiting in the wings. Although he could not join the Arts Centre until his work in Montreal was completed, he came to Ottawa, met with Southam, and agreed to join the staff in March 1968 for an annual salary of $20,000. His arrival brought the centre an invaluable asset. With a tiny staff of one assistant and a secretary, he functioned, with the exception of the Music Department, as a one-man programming department for the next five years.

As 1967 unfolded, newly appointed NAC staff members assisted the busy Centennial Commission with its artistic activities, helping it to tour shows across the country. They arranged some of the popular programming, including tours by the Quebec singers Louise Forrestier, Pierre Ferland, and Ginette Reno, who were seen only rarely outside Quebec, in other parts of the country. They also organized European tours for the Quebec dance company Les Feux Follets and for the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. Their success and expertise in moving artists around the country and overseas gave Haber an idea that he delivered to Southam shortly after he arrived in Ottawa: the Arts Centre could develop a National Booking Office, which would serve arts groups all over Canada. Southam immediately grasped that this initiative could contribute to the centre's national role. Around the same time, the board realized that it must begin implanting the idea of the National Arts Centre in the general public's mind. It authorized management to hire a public-relations director, Laurent Duval, and allotted him a $100,000 budget for a campaign to start putting the word out.

Most of the trustees' thinking in those early days was wide-ranging and ambitious. Lawrence Freiman had by now resigned from the Stratford Festival Board, but he was still keen to devise a plan that would make the Stratford Festival company the resident English theatre company at the National Arts Centre. He dreamed of having it tour the country under the NAC's aegis and initiated a voluminous correspondence with Floyd Chalmers, the chair of the Stratford board, who shared his thinking. Characterized by their intimate "Dear Larry/Dear Floyd" salutations, the two embarked on what would be a lengthy, sometimes tortuous, exploration to make Stratford part of the NAC. It was left to Southam to work out the prospects for French theatre—a decision that would soon lead to trouble after he willingly took the advice of the francophone theatrical community,

There were non-artistic matters to deal with as well. Southam had discovered during his time in Sweden that the best restaurant in Stockholm was at the Swedish Opera. Good dining and good theatre had always gone hand in hand in his mind, and he firmly believed that "more things were wrought by a good lunch than others dreamed of."[6] The local property developer William Teron had experience building hotels in Ottawa. He had helped Southam out by taking over the National Capital Arts Alliance when Southam had no further use for the organization, and by way of thanks Southam had assisted his appointment to the new board of the NAC. Teron was considered the "house" expert in restaurants and given the job of exploring the catering requirements for the centre. Here, again, Southam knew what he wanted. After a particularly delightful dinner at the famous Paris restaurant Chez Maxim's—an august operation that had also been part of the French Pavilion at Expo 67—he had fleetingly toyed with the idea of inviting this establishment to come to Ottawa to look after catering at the Arts Centre. Although the idea came to nothing, his ambitious thinking would lead to the inclusion of a grand restaurant at the centre. Unfortunately, provincial Ottawans would

take a long time to develop the habit of dining at expensive restaurants, and the food service at the NAC became a millstone that dragged down the NAC's bottom line through the early years.

Another extravagant plan dreamed up in this first year and indicative of the trustees' eagerness to plunge into some artistic endeavour was the creation of a mobile theatre, a travelling truck known as Le Portage, which would tour through the Ottawa region. Modelled after the trailer-trucks that were touring Canada with Centennial exhibitions, this project would eventually turn into an expensive folly and end its days in a cornfield a hundred miles east of Ottawa. The problem was the ingenious but costly design that called for the side of the truck to fold down and become a theatre stage. Before the trustees could learn enough about costs, the price for designing and building this concept had run away with them. Still, during the year or two that it functioned, it toured theatre throughout the Ottawa Valley on both sides of the river, heralding the art that was coming soon to the permanent new stages.*

Towards this goal, the Arts Centre continued to hire talented staff, including some of the best and most experienced theatre people in the country. Many were ready to embrace a grand new initiative after their work on the hugely successful cultural festival at Expo, which, as it drew to a close, was generally agreed to be one of the greatest collections of artistic excellence presented anywhere in the world. In addition to David Haber, staff joining the NAC included Andis Celms, Expo's talented technical administrator, now hired to manage technical affairs in the NAC's theatres. Celms would stay on for the next thirty years, rising to become head of the Theatre Department and, finally, if briefly, senior artistic director. Box-office expert Ted Demetre, a quiet-spoken but front-of-house wizard, also signed on. He had saved the day at Expo when the fancy electronic ticket machines had broken down at the beginning of the festival, and he had doled out thousands of tickets by hand to ensure that people got into the early performances. He too would have a remarkable career at the Arts Centre, putting

Le Portage, the mobile theatre that was the new board's first venture into the actual arts, proved an expensive venture. Photo © John Evans.

*Later, the truck was lent out to some other provincial ventures before it was mothballed.

his talents to work for many years in the Variety and Dance Department, a consistent money-maker for the NAC coffers which helped subsidize the more esoteric art forms. Both men would spend the bulk of their careers at the Arts Centre, becoming indispensable team players.

Behind all the dreams and plans, vigorous efforts were ongoing to get the NAC's financial house in order and to make long-term arrangements to secure the necessary financial support from the government. Southam used his contacts at the cultural agencies and at senior levels of the Treasury Board to work on the budget, while, in-house, Bruce Corder wrestled with schemes to make both the parking garage and the commercial space allocated for shops along Elgin Street into sources of funds for the new centre. Southam and his board estimated that they would need at least $2.5 million from the government for each of the first two years' operations, plus an additional $1 million for the Festival, which they hoped to launch in the summer of 1970.

At the September 1967 meeting, board members finally settled on the official name for the centre. After three years of discussion, they rejected Southam's romantic notion of calling the place "Les Rideaux"—a name that evoked for him his summer estate in the Rideau Lakes—choosing instead the National Arts Centre. The name translated nicely, although Southam grumbled that it had "a dull, institutional ring." At the same time, the board threw out the potentially contentious idea of naming the various halls after famous Canadians, opting instead for the generic labels of "Opera," "Theatre," "Salon," "Studio," and even "Le Restaurant" and "Le Café"—names that would stick almost all the way through the NAC's first thirty-five years. In 2000, Southam "succumbed to the temptation" to allow the Opera to be named after him and it has since been known as Southam Hall.[7]

While government officials worked on the structure and organization of the new centre, other supporters were preoccupied with arranging its artistic content. It is impossible today to imagine a small group of citizens agreeing to work together to establish an arts centre of the scope and complexity of the National Arts Centre, and then to go on to build the orchestra, theatre, and opera that would perform in it. Yet, incredibly, that is what Southam and his colleagues set out to accomplish.

Nothing was more carefully thought out or pursued than the creation of the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO). Credit for this achievement must go to a handful of dedicated music professionals who mostly had their careers at the CBC, the National Film Board, or a university. These men were determined to improve the place of music in Canada, and in the postwar period their ideas were allowed to flourish.

For almost two decades, there had been a reasonably well-functioning symphony orchestra in Ottawa, most recently under the leadership of concertmaster Eugene

Kash, then married to the exuberant mezzo-soprano Maureen Forrester. In the late forties and fifties, the Ottawa Philharmonic had been the first orchestra in Canada to introduce a series of children's concerts, but the orchestra had foundered in 1960 over problems with the musicians' union. The resulting musical gap in the capital had been filled by seasonal visits from both the Toronto Symphony and the Montreal Symphony orchestras. As the National Capital Arts Alliance prepared its study on a possible future performing arts centre in the city, it presented little hope for a new symphony orchestra in the region. Perhaps "after the Centre was built and Ottawa's population increased,"[8] it mused, a new orchestra would stand a chance. In the meantime, the visiting orchestras could fill the gap.

This kind of thinking changed dramatically once the Arts Centre planners were ignited by Jean Gascon's early statement that "the new centre must have a heart that beats."[9] Although it was an audacious move in the eyes of the country's established musical community, the members of the music committee quickly decided that there must be a new orchestra. With Louis Applebaum in the chair of this stellar group, Southam was receiving advice from some of the country's most notable musical thinkers. The gregarious Applebaum had been a moving force in Canadian music from the early fifties, working extensively at the CBC and the National Film Board, composing music for productions at both organizations, and developing a broad and rich music program at the Stratford Festival. (Eventually he would even become a senior arts bureaucrat.) Now, in his May 1965 report for a music program at the new Arts Centre, he wrote: "A good orchestra is called for. A superb one would be more to the point."

The idea for a small chamber-sized orchestra had been initially suggested a year earlier by the CBC's Jean-Marie Beaudet—another consultant to the Arts Centre and ex-officio member of the music advisory committee. He played a crucial role in figuring out the practical details and, by October 1964, his thoughts had crystallized into a carefully thought-out proposal for a mid-sized ensemble. The plan called for an orchestra

Jean-Marie Beaudet came from the CBC to be the NAC's first director of music. Photo © John Evans.

that would "give year-round concerts, provide the musical backbone for a summer festival, serve as a pit orchestra for visiting ballet and opera companies and play an educational role in the community as well as, possibly, offering its service to the CBC."[10] There was also the possibility of "national touring." The speed with which these ideas emerged was remarkable, and the real task soon became how best to put them into effect.

Beaudet's contribution to the creation of the NAC orchestra would be hard to overestimate. This balding, slightly foppish, late-marrying bachelor, who smoked cigarettes from an ebony holder and peered out beneath a deeply furrowed brow through dark horn-rimmed glasses, gave all his support to the creation of this new all-Canadian orchestra. Like Applebaum, he was completely dedicated to the growth and development of the Canadian musical scene. With his excellent experience in managing musical programs and their budgets at the CBC, he had, by October 1964, laid out the preliminary budget for a conductor and expenses for a forty-piece orchestra operating for a forty-eight-week season. Although the CBC had made no commitment as yet, Beaudet suggested that the corporation could contribute to the budget by taking weekly one-hour broadcasts from the new orchestra for the radio network, and he pointed to the potential for television work as well. When the Arts Centre later got down to real budgeting, Beaudet's numbers were found to be close to the mark. His vision for the orchestra read like a recipe for making a cake: "10 first violins … 8 second … 6 violas … 4 cellos … 3 bass … etc."[11] He also presented sound advice on contentious issues such as salaries, the role of the powerful musicians' union, and what should happen when the orchestra needed to hire local musicians to augment itself for larger works. Beaudet's "masterplan" memo became an invaluable tool for Southam for use with everyone—from the government's Interdepartmental Steering Committee to members of the local musical community. It provided the groundwork for future discussions on musical life in Ottawa.

Throughout the fall of 1964, Beaudet continued to pour out ideas to his committee colleagues. Writing in both English and French, he pointed out to Southam the cost problems of a big symphonic orchestra, the role of the National Youth Orchestra as a source of musicians, and the importance of professional experience to music students still pursuing their studies. When Dr. Frederick Karam mentioned that he was thinking about establishing a music school at the University of Ottawa, Beaudet wrote to Southam that the whole enterprise engendered a "spirit of hope" in him.

Faced with this enthusiasm, Southam followed the advice of another committee member, Dr. Arnold Walter, and wrote to Professor Ezra Schabas at the University of Toronto's School of Music, asking for his comments on Beaudet's ideas. Schabas not only backed up Beaudet's proposals but expanded on them.[12] As a former general manager of the National Youth Orchestra, Schabas was sensitive to Beaudet's suggestion of integrating young musicians into the new orchestra, and he wrote a long and