

Opera is the most limited of the performing arts in its sphere of influence, but this most lavish and expensive of the arts is attracting growing numbers of devotees.

Regional picture. Activity in the performing arts is characterized by regional differences, influenced by Canadian geography and demography. The widest support is in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. In the other provinces, except for theatre in Prince Edward Island and dance and music in Manitoba, attendance is below the national average. Distribution of the population determines where performing arts companies establish themselves. Large cities offer the sustaining market as well as the creative climate, training ground and community of artists that foster development. But Canada's handful of large cities are strewn unevenly across the country.

If population concentrations are not sufficient to support performing arts organizations, those companies must seek out audiences. This means touring. In 1978 one in four theatre performances was given on tour, in music one in 10, in dance one in two, and in opera one in four.

Another dimension underlies touring. At the level of national policy, this first received formal recognition in 1968 with a federal government statement of support for democratization of cultural opportunities and decentralization of cultural resources. The aim of this policy was to ensure that as many Canadians as possible would have access to the performing arts. The touring office of the Canada Council was founded and has since helped many arts groups perform across Canada, often in quite remote communities.

One of the cultural roles of touring is to help different regions become more aware of each other, thereby reinforcing a sense of the Canadian community.

Canadian content. Flowering of the arts has occurred simultaneously with a creative outburst by Canadian playwrights, choreographers and composers and an enthusiastic willingness by companies to perform their works. Canadian works are now performed by the larger organizations, and in theatre in particular have become the bread and butter of many small experimental groups; the percentage of Canadian plays among performances has grown from about 28% in 1971 to about 55% in 1978. About 55% of dance performances in 1978 were Canadian, while 50% of music concerts included a Canadian composition. Only opera was well below the mark of the other performing arts, presenting Canadian work in 8% of performances.

More than 97% of Canadian households have television and the average Canadian spends much more time watching television than in any other leisure activity. In the last 20 years there has also been a general surge of interest in the performing arts, especially theatre.

Table 17.3 gives summary statistics on the performing arts in 1978. This was the first year that average attendance at Canadian performances exceeded attendance at those that were non-Canadian particularly in theatre. In the other performing arts Canadian content has been slower in achieving popularity but there are signs that the Canadian public is gradually being won over.

Formerly there was a tendency for companies with access to larger halls and larger markets to perform non-Canadian works. It was economically safer with works of proven box-office popularity and this generally meant non-Canadian.

In an effort to consolidate the hard won gains in Canadian theatre, the Canada Council in March 1979 for the first time endorsed the principle of assigning priority to Canadian plays and Canadian artists, and hiring Canadians for senior artistic and administrative positions in publicly funded theatres.

Economic picture. The performing arts cannot earn enough money even to come close to meeting expenses and depend on massive financial transfusions in grants and subsidies. This leaves them vulnerable to changing economic winds. Historically in