

April 30, 2019

Royal Theatre Policies Updated to Provide Equitable Access to the Theatre

The Royal and McPherson Theatres Society (RMTS) is charged with managing the Royal Theatre and the McPherson Playhouse effectively on behalf of their municipal owners and to encourage a broad range of programming to enhance their usage for the betterment of citizens. The RMTS and its Board of Directors have identified the efficient use of the theatres, access to dates in the Royal Theatre and diversity of audiences and programming as critical issues in ensuring the relevance and sustainability of the theatres, now and into the future.

Access

Commencing with the 2020/21 season, the RMTS is making changes intended to address those critical issues, in part through increased efficient use of the Royal Theatre. Currently, three organizations, Dance Victoria, Pacific Opera Victoria and the Victoria Symphony Orchestra occupy more than 90% of the prime dates in the Royal Theatre during peak theatre-going season, between Labour Day and Victoria Day. Additionally, they consume nearly 60% of every day during this period. However, for the majority of these days, the Royal Theatre sits dark, empty and unable to be rented to other presenters for their performances. As a result, the RMTS has implemented new booking policies to ensure that more days are available to other artists, presenters and their audiences during this period, commercial and not-for-profit alike. This provides more work for RMTS staff, and arts and entertainment choices for residents of the region.

These changes include:

- Priority will be given to allowing performances to occur on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, whereas previously the Royal Theatre was often booked by the three organizations but closed to the public on those days.
- Rental rates for non-prime days of the week will be priced at a significant discount for not-for-profits to encourage the use of all days of the week, not just weekends.
- Performance series that historically attract less than five hundred paid audience members per show will not be accommodated at the 1,416 seat Royal Theatre.
- One weekend (Thursday to Saturday) in each month during the theatre season will be made available to other presenters, both not-for-profit and commercial.
- The days the Royal Theatre is allowed to sit idle or where excessive set-up and rehearsal days are booked will be reduced, thereby allowing more entertainment options for the region.

The RMTS will continue to provide advance booking privileges to the three organizations so that their seasons can be programmed two years in advance. This courtesy has not been offered to other presenters. The RMTS will continue to provide ticketing and database services to these partners at rates below cost for events taking place at the Royal Theatre and McPherson Playhouse.

Rental Rates

The RMTS must ensure the fiscal sustainability of the Royal Theatre and McPherson Playhouse through prudent financial management. Government operating funding for the Royal Theatre has been unchanged for twenty-one years and now amounts to just 4% of its annual operating budget. The RMTS, itself a not-for-profit organization, has been heavily subsidizing other not-for-profit organizations' use of the theatre. This is no longer sustainable at the same level. Without making changes to how the Royal Theatre is used, the RMTS is forecasting significant operating deficits.

Not-for-profit clients will continue to receive subsidies from the RMTS through lower rental rates and reduced box office charges at both the Royal Theatre and the McPherson Playhouse. Full rental discounts for not-for-profit clients will still be available during the slower months of the year, Victoria Day through Labour Day. Also, lower rates are available on days other than Thursday through Saturday.

McPherson Playhouse

There are no changes to rental rates or booking procedures at the McPherson Playhouse.

The McPherson Playhouse and the Royal Theatre have different municipal ownership structures, funding, and budgets, yet the RMTS manages the theatres in a symbiotic manner. Though the McPherson Playhouse has more space in its calendar, use of this theatre is increasing and it has been running with a balanced budget for years. Both commercial and not-for-profit presenters book the 772 seat Playhouse, presenting a variety of entertainment for the region.

Context

The Royal Theatre is the largest soft seat venue on Vancouver Island and with the McPherson Playhouse, forms the region's de facto performing arts centre. Modern performing arts centres provide classical, contemporary and popular forms of arts and entertainment, and endeavour to serve a wide, diverse citizenry. As the Capital Region's population grows and its demographics change, there is an obligation to make the Royal Theatre accessible to a wider range of presenters and the diverse audiences they serve.

RMTS's Management and Board is committed to continuing its support of not-for-profit entities at both the Royal Theatre and the McPherson Playhouse through discounted rates, advance booking privileges and providing ticketing and database services at rates below cost.

Facts

Royal Theatre Changes Discussions:

- Discussion regarding the need to make changes to booking procedures and rental rates at the Royal Theatre began in the summer of 2013 with a meeting between RMTS and POV Staff Leaders.
- Discussions were broadened to include Dance Victoria and the Victoria Symphony Orchestra. Subsequently, leadership changes occurred at Pacific Opera Victoria and the Victoria Symphony Orchestra.
- In 2018, multiple meetings were held with Dance Victoria, Pacific Opera Victoria and the Victoria Symphony Orchestra to outline RMTS's concerns and understand the needs of the three organizations.
- After these meetings in 2018, the RMTS sent letters with new Royal Theatre booking policies and rental rates on October 29, 2018. Subsequently, the four organizations met twice in January 2019, where the three large not-for-profit clients requested more time to adapt to the changes.
- In letters of March 19, 2019, the RMTS communicated that it will delay the implementation of the changes and provide a full 2 years' notice for price changes and 3 full years' notice for changes to booking policies.
- In 2017/2018 the RMTS Board and staff met with eleven municipal councils, the Capital Regional District (CRD) Finance Committee's RMTS Advisory Committee, the CRD Arts Manager, The CRD Head of Finance, Councillors from Oak Bay, Victoria, and Saanich, a City of Victoria Senior Cultural Planner, and numerous not-for-profit client groups to discuss the state of the theatres.

Local Contributions

- The RMTS employs over 200 CRD residents annually. This includes Production, Front of House, Box Office, Janitorial and Administrative Personnel.
- The RMTS works with numerous local contractors for building maintenance and capital projects.
- The McPherson Playhouse and Royal Theatre host 250 events and host 180,000 audience members annually.

Local, National and International Work

The RMTS provides venues for local, national and international presenters and performers. The RMTS seeks to find a balance in supporting residents of the region's access to quality arts and entertainment.

Below are examples of regular theatre clients:

- Dance Victoria with national and international touring dance companies
- Atomique Productions with local, national and international artists in a variety of genres
- Pacific Opera Victoria with local, national and international artists
- Victoria Operatic Society with local artists
- Kaleidoscope Theatre for Young People with local artists
- Victoria Symphony Orchestra with local, national and international artists, and international artistic leadership
- Numerous local dance schools
- Victoria Jazz Society with local, national and international artists
- Numerous local school theatre productions and art shows
- Broadway in Victoria with international touring musical productions
- Canadian College of Performing Arts with local and national students
- Live Nation with national and international artists

The Theatres

The Royal Theatre

- Opened in 1913 and had various owners until purchased by Oak Bay, Saanich and Victoria in 1972.
- It was subsequently gifted to the CRD in trust for the three municipalities.
- Seating capacity is 1,416.

The McPherson Playhouse

- Opened in 1914 as part of the Pantages chain of theatres, had various owners until gifted to the City of Victoria in the early 1960's.
- Seating capacity is 772.

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