

September 11, 2006 (For immediate release)

DEATH OF AN ICON: HERBERT WHITTAKER LEAVES LASTING LEGACY FOR CANADIAN THEATRE

Toronto – Theatre Museum Canada is sad to announce that its founding Chairman, Herbert William Whittaker, died on Saturday September 9. He was 95.

Born in Montreal on September 20, 1910, Mr. Whittaker began designing and directing plays for Montreal's burgeoning theatre scene during the 30s. Recognizing the financial limitations of that mostly amateur world, in 1935 he signed on as drama critic for the *Montreal Gazette*.

In 1949 he moved to Toronto and became *the Globe and Mail*'s pre-eminent drama critic until mandatory retirement forced him to leave in 1975. He continued to write freelance articles for the *Globe* and also occasionally wrote for the *New York Times*, *Herald-Tribune*, and *Christian Science Monitor* among other publications.

The author of 6 books, mostly about Canadian Theatre, he also continued to direct and design throughout his career, working with many companies, including the Montreal Repertory Theatre, Hart House, the Crest Theatre, and the Canadian Players.

During the last twenty years of his life, he was driven by his passion to create Canada's first Theatre Museum, to which he donated his extensive collection of designs and theatre memorabilia. While the Theatre Museum has not yet found a permanent home, the collection has expanded and the museum has a track record of mounting exhibits at local theatres and libraries.

Kate Barris, president of the Theatre Museum board and a close friend says, "Herb's devotion to the theatre, Canada's theatre in particular, was unshakable. And it's a comment on his critical style that he was loved and respected by the theatre community. Actors, directors and playwrights often sought his advice before they tackled a show. His contribution to Canadian theatre was huge and his passing marks the end of an era." The Theatre Museum Board will continue to work vigorously to make his dream a reality.

Besides his work establishing Theatre Museum Canada, Herbert was the founding Chairman of the Canadian Theatre Critics Association and an early advocate for the Canada Council, National Arts Centre, Dominion Drama Festival, the National Theatre School and the Toronto Drama Bench.

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An Officer of the Order of Canada, he received honorary doctorate degrees from York and McGill Universities and earned many awards and medals for distinguished service in the theatre, including an honorary life membership in the Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

He also won the coveted Silver Ticket, which guaranteed him two tickets to every show that ran in Toronto, a privilege that he took advantage of well into his nineties.

He is survived by niece Leslie Whittaker and nephew Jeffrey (Maura) of Vancouver, BC, who both remember him as a favourite uncle, Uncle Bert, who introduced them to the performing arts.

Herbert Whittaker leaves behind many friends and a Canadian theatre that is much stronger thanks to his passionate care and enormous contribution.

A Memorial Service will be held at the Arts & Letters Club of Toronto sometime in the near future.

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