

# Canadian Public Diplomacy and Nation-Building: Expo 67 and the World Festival of Arts and Entertainment

By Kailey Hansson



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**Canadian Public Diplomacy and Nation-Building:  
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and Entertainment**

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**CANADIAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND NATION-BUILDING:  
EXPO 67 AND THE WORLD FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT**

**Introduction**

Expo 67 is remembered largely for its architectural grandeur: the United States' geodesic dome, the Soviet pavilion's ski slope roof, and the inverted pyramid of Canada's federal pavilion. But held in the year of Canada's centenary, it was also a singular moment in Canadian history that symbolized the country's search for international recognition and national unity. Despite a growing animosity between Francophone and Anglophone Canadians, Montreal became (in retrospect at least) the scene of Canada's happiest hour. According to journalist Robert Fulford, Expo was a "utopian vision made briefly true: beautifully designed streets that were empty of cars but full of life, and nations working together, competing only in their claims to human progress, agreeing totally on the value of culture" (Fulford C1).<sup>1</sup>

Expo 67 was also an opportunity to showcase the best each nation had to offer in the highbrow performing arts. The fair's premiere artistic event was the World Festival of Arts and Entertainment; it was designed to be the "greatest parade of performing artists and companies ever assembled" (Kriegsman D10). Over six months, thousands of musicians, dancers, actors, and opera singers—from both the communist and non-communist world—performed in the Place des Arts in mid-town Montreal, in addition to the 2,000-seat Expo Theater built specifically for the world's fair. Consisting of over 1,300 concerts, with 25,000 performers from 25 different countries, the World Festival was a major site of cultural transmission and exchange during the Cold War.

As Asa McKercher argues, international exhibitions have always been “intensely political,” mostly because enemy nations are “forced to confront one another and clashing ideologies are mixed together” (1). The same was true at the World Festival. Participating nations sent cultural groups and individual entertainers to Montreal to showcase their respective nations’ cultural prowess. At stake was also proving to the international community which system—either free enterprise or state socialism—was superior for the performing arts.

For Canada, the World Festival provided a vital showcase for its performing arts. Elite cultural nationalists believed the World Festival had the potential to educate Canadians and enhance their sensibilities. High culture was considered necessary to cultivate a sophisticated, mature image of Canada’s performing arts culture in the wider world.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Canada’s cultural bureaucrats wanted the World Festival to showcase a Canadian cultural identity that was separate from the mass entertainment industry that many associated with the United States. There was tension, therefore, between the cultural conservatism advocated by Canada’s cultural elites—which valued classical, European art forms—and the desire for Canadians to project their unique cultural heritage to an international audience.

The World Festival also provided an important means of building national unity between Anglophone and Francophone Canada. Prime Minister Lester Pearson announced in 1966 that it had become “imperative to foster Canada’s development in the humanities and the arts” in order to “strengthen the identity and unity of our country as we approach the centennial” (“Temporary Aid” 12). Organizers realized, therefore, that the Festival needed to showcase Canada’s bicultural and bilingual heritage. At the same time, however, Quebec nationalists wanted to use cultural productions during Expo 67 to communicate their own values and ideologies. For both Canadian and Quebecois nationalists, then, the arts provided crucial venues in which they could “perform” their nationhood in front of an international audience.

What follows is an examination of the participating nations' involvement in the World Festival, the attendant tensions that were generated, and the reaction to the performances by the North American mainstream press. Further, I examine the relationship between the performing arts and image-building, while adding to the growing literature surrounding world fairs as sites of public diplomacy and cultural transmission.<sup>3</sup> In terms of Canadian government efforts to promote culture under free enterprise and therefore showcase the failure of the performing arts under communism, I argue that the World Festival was unsuccessful, as many Canadians, at least as reflected in the mainstream press, appeared to receive Soviet performing artists with open arms. Similarly, although the World Festival provided a useful platform to demonstrate Canada's growth in the performing arts, it was less successful in projecting Canada as a bicultural, bilingual nation.

Although the collection of studies on kindred programs in the United States is substantial—and marks one of the fastest growing areas of study in the field of America in the World—there is only a small smattering of studies on Canada's public diplomacy initiatives. Donald Macintosh and Michael Hawes have examined sport diplomacy in Cold War Canada, while political scientist Evan H. Potter has done important work on the Canadian “brand” and soft power in a globalized world. However, a study of the connections between Canada's public diplomacy initiatives and its efforts to develop its identity in the Cold War world has yet to be written.

Similarly, the few works that have looked at Expo 67 have not dealt with the public diplomacy aspect. Rhona Richman Kenneally and Johanne Sloan's edited collection, *Expo 67: Not Just a Souvenir*, provided an in-depth examination of the linkages between material culture and nationalism at Expo, while Erin Hurley's *National Performances: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Celine Dion* (2011) demonstrated how the Quebec pavilion at Expo helped assert Quebec's nationhood. However, there has yet to be a study of the linkages between public diplomacy and internal nation-building in the context of Canada. This article fills this lacuna.



## **Part I: Laying the Groundwork**

### *Canada-Soviet Relations Ahead of Expo 67*

The World Festival provided a unique stage upon which Cold War ideologies could be performed. For the Soviet Union, the World Festival was part of a bigger effort to bolster the image of Soviet communism. As Expo 67 coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, it was especially important to the Soviet delegation that Expo convey an image of confidence and strength. In the spirit of the growing East-West détente, Soviet authorities worked diligently in the lead-up to Expo to lay a foundation of goodwill in general, and friendship with Canada in particular. As one journalist put it, Expo was a chance for the Soviet Union to “embrace Canadian public opinion in a bear hug of effusive goodwill” (Griffin C31).

The Soviets began cultivating this goodwill in the early 1960s with a Canadian-Soviet wheat deal, which reached \$1 billion Canadian dollars in 1966. In June 1966, a new contract was signed that sent nine million tons of wheat to the Soviet Union. The following month, the collaboration of both countries was reinforced after the successful visit to Ottawa of D.S. Polianskii, the First Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers (Black 256). Paul Martin, Canada’s Secretary of State for External Affairs, reciprocated this visit with a successful one of his own to Moscow in December 1966. On the surface, then, it appeared that Expo would contribute to a flourishing diplomatic relationship between Canada and the U.S.S.R.

Behind the scenes, however, officials within Canada’s European Division worried that the Soviets were using Expo as a “pretext to break down security measures” (1). More specifically, officials suspected that the vast majority of the six hundred Soviets attached to Expo functioned in an intelligence capacity. Their fear was that the Soviets would engage in some sort of espionage or subversion during their time in Montreal. On the other hand, Canadian officials reasoned that Moscow’s “very large investment in Expo” was intended to persuade Western countries that it was a “prosperous, progressive and peaceful nation;” it was unlikely, therefore, that the

Soviets would “jeopardize that image and therefore that investment” (1). Nonetheless, Canadian diplomats concluded: “It is still too early to know just what mischief the large Soviet expo staff has been able to get up to” (3). Despite the official narrative of international fraternity and cooperation, the Cold War could not be removed from either Expo or the World Festival.

Expo organizers had already witnessed how a performing arts festival could promote international goodwill and understanding. The Commonwealth Arts Festival, which took place in London in 1965, provided Expo organizers with a model for a large-scale, multi-national arts festival. It also demonstrated how an arts festival could be organized with the express purpose of cultivating fraternity and goodwill. According to its founder, Ian Hunter, the Festival was intended to generate understanding of the Commonwealth’s importance for a new generation. Speaking to the Commonwealth Arts Festival joint meeting in early 1965, Hunter stated: “We feel that this festival, by building up a link, by creating understanding and by making people of one country at least anxious to understand the arts of another, will be doing a great deal to build up the Commonwealth concept” (606).

The Entertainment Branch of the Canadian Corporation hoped to capture a similar feeling of international fraternity to sell Expo 67. In keeping with the fair’s theme of “Man and His World,” organizers envisaged the World Festival as a “living illustration of ‘Man and His Leisure’” (3). Participating nations would come together not in celebration of national achievement but to display how the performing arts had flourished worldwide through international cooperation and exchange. However, there was some concern amongst organizers that participating nations would not take the performing arts as seriously as other contributions to Expo. This worry was recorded in the Entertainment Branch’s meeting minutes: “We might find that most of their overall budget, intended for their participation in Expo 67, has been awarded to their pavilions, to their contributions towards theme pavilions, or to other general understandings of Expo, such as plastic arts, gardening, etc., and that nothing or little is left for their

cultural (whether popular or not) participation” (2). It was crucial, then, that organizers took measures to ensure that the highest quality talent was sent to Expo.

As a result, Gordon Hilker, the Festival’s artistic director, and a team of entertainment organizers met with cultural officials from around the world to discuss sending various national acts to the World Festival. These trips were essential in persuading nations to see the Festival as both a public relations opportunity and a chance to strengthen international relations. As Peter Diome of the *Montreal Gazette* said, the World Festival was “an easy lesson in music, geography, friendship, and understanding—as the whole exhibition is meant to be” (D6).

Friendship and understanding aside, Hilker and Pierre Dupuy, Expo’s commissioner general, had to navigate Cold War tensions during their negotiations. Perhaps one of their most important “missions” was Hilker and Dupuy’s trip to Moscow in November 1965. Along with their associates John Pratt and David Haber, Hilker and Dupuy hoped to convince the Soviet Ministry of Culture to participate in the Festival. “When we first approached Moscow,” John Pratt told the *Los Angeles Times*, “we got a loud ‘Nyet!’ Then they reversed themselves partly because they are appearing on America’s doorstep, I suppose” (Smith C18). The Soviet Ministry of Culture undoubtedly saw the Festival as an important propaganda tool. However, by the mid-1960s most of the Soviet Union’s major performing arts groups had already made several appearances in the West, including the Bolshoi and Kirov ballet companies, the Red Army Choir, and the Moscow Theater Circus, not to mention a host of pianists, violinists, and orchestra groups. As the majority of projected visitors to Expo would be Canadians and Americans, the Soviets had to give North American audiences something they had not seen before. Moreover, whichever groups were sent had to be at their best to reassert the Soviet prowess in the performing arts. In the end, the Ministry of Culture opted to send the Red Army Choir, the Mosiyev dancers (a folk dancing troupe), and its headline attraction, the Bolshoi Theater Opera.

It was more difficult, however, to secure participation from those nations whose cultural groups were only partially subsidized by federal funds. Under normal circumstances, troupes would not have the funds in their operations budgets to cover the cost of sending their productions to North America. Here, it was up to the governments to provide financial assistance, if they deemed it worthwhile. The investment was significant: participating countries were expected to pay to transport their cultural groups to and from Montreal, while the Festival would cover the cost of food and lodging and a \$12 per diem for each performer. According to Pratt, the tide shifted once the Netherlands decided to send the Amsterdam Orchestra, followed by the Austrian government's promise to send the Vienna State Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic. "A small country willing to spend half-a-million dollars on its cultural contribution. That broke the dam. Eventually we had more offers than we could accept" ("Expo 67 Features" A6).

The United States, however, was "among the most inactive and least cooperative nations in the entertainment festival" (Smith C18). Organizers envisioned the performing arts playing an important role in re-branding the U.S. as something more than a "rich, powerful, mighty, noisy" country (Monahan I40). The United States Information Service (USIS) and Consul-General "agreed on the strong desirability of a creatively vigorous American performing arts program in Montreal in 1967, to stand up to and surpass all the dancing bears or other cultural manifestations that might be brought in to prance in the spotlight" (1964). Potential candidates for the World Festival included the New York Metropolitan Opera; the company estimated that the cost to send an entire production to Montreal would be \$300,000. However, when the USIS asked Congress to appropriate \$12 million U.S. dollars to fund the entire U.S. effort, which included the U.S. pavilion structure and entertainment, it was shocked that Congress approved only \$9.3 million—nearly \$5 million less than the \$14 million appropriated for the State Department's efforts in Brussels nine years earlier (Masey and Morgan 318). As for entertainment, a paltry \$50,000 was earmarked for the performing arts. As Expo 67 organizers

discouraged corporate sponsorship, there was little chance for the USIS to deploy specific groups onto the Festival stage. Nor was there much incentive for cultural centers to pick up the tab. For example, the Music Theater of the Lincoln Center (MTLC), which had been scheduled to open the new 2,000-seat Expo Theater with a production of *West Side Story*, suddenly cancelled its trip. When asked why, MTLC general manager Maurice Jacobs said, “We’ve decided against touring. We find these shows are too expensive to send on the road” (Smith G7). Jacobs did, however, believe it was “shameful” that neither public nor private funds had been made available to underwrite at least one program of American theater, particularly a musical, which he considered a “uniquely American art form” (Smith G7). In its place went one production of the variety show *Hello, Dolly!* Cecil Smith noted dryly, “Greece sends *Katrina Paxinou* in Sophocles and the United States send a tired company in a second-rate show direct from Dayton, Ohio” (G7).

In the end the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the New York City Philharmonic, Martha Graham’s dancers, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, the New York City Ballet, and the Buffalo Symphony all represented the United States. However, none of these troupes was deployed to further any specific effort in public diplomacy. John Pratt perhaps summed up the American participation best: “You think of what a little country like Austria, population about 8 million, can send and contrast it to what is offered from the rich, powerful United States—and it’s a little shocking” (Smith G7).

Canada, in contrast, was able to assemble a strong contribution because of an influx of government funds as a result of the country’s Centennial Celebrations. As one journalist boasted, “the Centennial is going to do for Canadian cultural development what the Second World War did for ... Canadian industry” (Braithwaite 27). The prediction proved correct. The Centennial Commission was invaluable in strengthening the cultural products put on the stage at the World Festival. For example, the Canadian government appropriated \$3,300,000 for a cross-national tour of Canadian performing arts dubbed “Festival Canada.” The tour, which stopped

in 60 cities across the country throughout 1967, was meant to foster “an awakening of the performing arts in Canada.” By exposing the Canadian public to professional accomplishments, organizers hoped to raise the level of amateur art within Canada. “We look at Festival Canada as a pump-priming operation,” explained one Canadian arts official, “We hope the pump will continue to work in 1968” (“What is Festival Canada?” 6). In order to ensure that average Canadians could afford entrance to the shows, federal and provincial cost-sharing programs subsidized the attractions at levels ranging from 30 to 60 percent (Wrong 1).

Festival Canada organizers promised to promote both “serious and popular works.” However, the tour was predominantly highbrow. Although the Festival brought the Stratford Shakespeare Company, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, and the National Ballet of Canada to small regional centers, the question remained whether it would suit the tastes of such communities. Despite the highbrow character of the tour, its promotional material focused particularly on it as a vehicle for generating national “pride” for Canadian talent. Judy LaMarsh, the Canadian Secretary of State, reaffirmed this view at a press conference: “If we are to build an even stronger country in the years ahead, we Canadians must learn more of the various cultural traditions which make up our national mosaic” (“What is Festival Canada?” 6).

Although they were not officially linked, the Festival Canada tour and Expo’s World Festival worked in tandem to create a strong showing of Canadian performing arts during 1967. Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien, Expo’s Director of Operations, reported that the World Festival’s organizers were “collaborating very closely with the Centennial Commission to arrange joint bookings so we can spread this talent across the country” (34). The Canadian federal government heavily subsidized the World Festival: the total cost of the festival was budgeted at \$14 million, while ticket sales were projected to generate only \$9 million. The deficit was justified mainly because building the necessary theaters to host the event was seen as an investment in Montreal’s permanent cultural infrastructure. The

investment would also be worthwhile if it exposed Canadians to a high grade of international talent and pushed Canadian performing arts to a higher level.

### **High Culture vs. ‘Low’ Culture**

Like Festival Canada, the World Festival struggled to find a balance between high culture and popular entertainment. During the early planning stages, a debate emerged within the Entertainment Branch as to what distinguished “CULTURE (capital ‘C’) from culture (small ‘c’)” (3). Aside from semantics, it was important to determine which kinds of culture would project a better image of Canada; although organizers were unable to come up with a clear definition of what was and was not cultural, it was agreed that “the term should not be used in a rigid sense” (3). However, as planning for the Festival moved forward, it appeared that cultural forms normally considered lowbrow or popular occupied only a peripheral role. Ben Nobleman, Toronto alderman and president of the Society for the Recognition of Canadian Talent, complained to the *Ottawa Journal* that some of Canada’s top variety entertainers had not been asked to perform at Expo and were “very hurt” as a result. Actor and musician Lorne Greene and impressionist Rich Little were two such entertainers who, Nobleman insisted, would “give their right arm to perform at Expo.” Nobleman went so far as to allege that the entire attitude of Expo and the Centennial Commission worked to “denigrate Canadian talent” (Gardiner 3). Nobleman was not the only one to be critical of the festival’s elitism. Others argued that the World Festival had “foisted” highbrow performances on the masses (Siskind 47). Hilker told the *Danville Register* that “80 per cent of the attractions are cultural and 20 percent popular,” adding, “But we’ve tried to divorce this kind of thinking from the festival because who the hell is to say what culture is?” (Glover 12C) The truth, however, was that highbrow culture was greatly represented at the World Festival. Hilker, and the rest of the Festival’s organizers, wanted the Festival to serve an educational purpose: to promote the high arts as a rewarding and enjoyable intellectual experience. As

Hilker explained, “Whether audiences like everything they see or not, they are being exposed to new experiences” (Glover 12C).

The World Festival’s greater emphasis on high culture was also bound up in a desire to impress a cultured, typically European, crowd. There was a lingering worry that Western Europeans did not know Canada to be a place of refinement. As a Canadian Corporation brief argued in 1964, “...we cannot allow anyone to believe that the heritage of a country is solely a bundle of stones, steel, or glass properly arranged by men. One must understand that besides this material arrangement a way of living also exists” (Cournoyer 1). In the months leading up to Expo, the Operations Department of the Canadian Corporation conducted a preliminary study to determine the projected number of foreign visitors. It estimated that 300,000 Expo visitors would arrive from Europe, particularly Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and the Scandinavian countries (1). Moreover, these visitors would likely be educated individuals (3). According to the American Society of Travel Agents, “the best prospect for foreign travel to North America from Europe is a professional or businessman between 35 and 45, well-educated, with cultural interests” (qtd. in Operations Department 3). Thus, it was crucial that the World Festival presented the kind of high-quality cultural fare that such Western Europeans were used to seeing. They would return to Europe impressed by Canada, and by its cultural producers.

This image was driven home during the World Festival’s gala opening on April 30. The evening began with a poem read by two heavyweights of the high cultural world: famed stage actors Sir Laurence Olivier and Jean-Louis Barrault. The rest of the evening was an ode to classical and chamber music, featuring a series of Canadian talent, including the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and contralto Maureen Forrester. What did not appear on stage were any forms of folk culture or contributions from the non-Western world. The World Festival was very much a celebration of highbrow performing arts, but one that demarcated folk culture and non-



Western cultural performances as “lowbrow” entertainment best consumed unofficially by the masses.

## **Part II: Projecting Identities**

### *Performing Arts as Public Diplomacy*

There were four main disciplines on display at the World Festival: theater, opera, music, and dance. However, various tensions were at play—between Cold War ideologies, high and lowbrow culture, and Canadian and Quebecois national pride. The following section will evaluate how these tensions affected the transnational friendship-building aspirations of the Festival. In addition, it will examine whether the Canadian contributions were successful in engendering the national “unity” for which the Centennial Commission and Expo organizers had so fervently hoped.

Festival organizers strove to entertain Canadians with national theater companies that had never before performed in Canada. Representing Japan was the Kabuki Theater, which had received rave reviews from international audiences for its elaborate productions of centuries-old plays. Also in the lineup were Israel’s Cameri Theater and the National Theater of Greece. Despite widespread participation, noticeably absent in the lineup was the Peking Opera, which had enjoyed a triumphant cross-Canada tour in the early 1960s. However, as invitations were only extended to those nations that were officially recognized by Canada, the World Festival had to make do without the crowd-pleasing troupe from mainland China.<sup>4</sup>

There was still a communist country in the lineup: Czechoslovakia brought to the World Festival *Laterna Magika*, which was performed at a specially built stage at the Czechoslovakian pavilion. A combination of live action theater and film, the show was unlike anything audiences in North America had yet experienced. Expo visitors lined up for hours in the hot sun for a chance to watch it. As a journalist for the *Montreal Gazette*, Pat Donnelly recalls, “It was the one attraction everyone said not to miss. I recall being totally enthralled by the graceful interactive magic of this innovative troupe

from Eastern Europe” (C2). Far from demonstrating that theatrical innovation suffered because of communism, *Laterna Magika* showed just how modern the arts could be under communist rule.

In addition to theater, Festival organizers booked six of the world’s leading opera companies to perform at Expo: the Royal Swedish, the Hamburg State, the Bolshoi, the Vienna State, the English Opera Group, and La Scala from Milan. According to John Kraglund of the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, such high-end talent presented “the greatest challenge faced in the history of opera in Canada.” While Kraglund admitted that this challenge “was never put into words,” the implication was clear: “Here are six major European opera companies. How interested are your audiences in opera and how well do your Canadian companies stack up against the imports?” (17). Opera in post-Second World War Canada was far less developed than it was in Western European countries. However, the Centennial Commission sought to strengthen Canadian opera ahead of centennial celebrations and the World Festival. As a result, the Canadian Opera Company (COC) received a federal grant in 1966 to create a production that would stand up well in competition. The product of these efforts was *Louis Riel*, the first opera to be based entirely on a Canadian theme. It was not without irony, however, that the Canadian government used the image of a Métis man (an Indigenous North American of mixed race) who was executed for treason against Canada to advertise its tolerance and sophistication to the wider world.

However, as Jennifer Reid has argued, the opera signaled “a changing cultural perception about Riel and the movement he led” (43). According to Reid, what was most striking about the opera was its explicit condemnation of nineteenth-century settler colonialism, and such complicit individuals as Prime Minister John A. McDonald (43). The Canadian government mobilized the image of Louis Riel to epitomize (in Andrew Nurse’s words) “a different type of geopolitical order that could encompass the fractures and divisions (ethnic, linguistic, regional) that has made Canada such a problematic nation-state.” Instead of a murderer and traitor, in this

treatment Riel was the forefather of the post-colonial nation-state (Nurse 435). The opera, with its emphasis on colonial resistance, therefore provided a useful way for Canada to project itself as a supporter of post-colonialism.

Furthermore, the opera represented the bicultural and bilingual image of Canada that the government wanted to project. The characters sang in both English and French. Though the opera dealt with a historical subject, it was designed, composed, and executed in such a way that it pointed to the relevance of contemporary Anglo/Francophone tensions. It was precisely this quality that made it such a valuable public relations tool for Canada during the World Festival. While a significant accomplishment for a young opera company like the COC, there was very little in the content of the story that could appeal to audiences outside of Canada. Richard Purser from the *Winnipeg Free Press* acknowledged this point: “*Louis Riel* can probably never be performed successfully abroad...it is non-exportable. This is something for us alone...” (29). Although it was less likely to succeed outside of a Canadian context, *Louis Riel* confirmed that opera could represent the country’s bicultural heritage—at least as it was understood by an assertive and powerful liberal elite.

As successful as was the COC’s production of *Louis Riel*, the Bolshoi Opera was in a league of its own. North American audiences knew the Bolshoi Opera only by reputation from the group’s performances in Europe. Sending the Bolshoi to Expo was meant to communicate the grandeur of Soviet culture. As *Time* magazine noted, “Bolshoi means big in Russian, and Moscow’s Bolshoi Opera more than lives up to its name.” The Opera arrived in Montreal with 193 tons of scenery, 3,000 costumes for five operas, and 350 performers, including soloists, ballet dancers, an orchestra, and a chorus. Although the performers sent to Montreal were a mere splinter group from the 3,000-member company back in Russia, Chief Designer Vadim Rindin gave his assurances that “the spectacle that will be seen here will be in no way inferior to that seen in Moscow” (“Soulful Giant” 42). Canadian audiences were

nothing short of enthusiastic in anticipation of the Bolshoi's arrival; all dates for its 21-day stand in August were sold out well before the opening performance ("Mixed Note" 7B). However, the Opera created headlines south of the border when it cancelled a separate vaudeville show booked for the Lincoln Center Festival scheduled for July 1967. As some of the performers were scheduled to perform with the Bolshoi Opera at Expo, the media wondered if the Soviet Ministry of Culture's sudden change of heart would affect the World Festival.

The cancellation did not disrupt the Bolshoi Opera's Montreal performances, however, leaving some American journalists to wonder if the New York show had been cancelled purposely to chastise the United States. As one reporter put it: "The Canadians rate as 'peace-loving' and hence loveable, but the Yanks are currently not so." According to Robert Landry of *Variety* magazine, "the U.S.S.R.'s official slant amounts to asking, 'How can we sing and dance with a happy heart in a country which wages war?'" (1967). Once the Bolshoi's performances got underway, however, such criticisms were abandoned. Both the Canadian and American press lauded the Opera's powerful performances. The *Los Angeles Times* ran the headline "Bolshoi's Operatic Conquest at Expo 67 Festival" (Bernheimer C26), while Kraglund declared that the Opera had "lost none of its reputation as one of today's great opera companies" (15). Stories of interactions behind the curtain shed light on the people-to-people aspect of the performances. Six interpreters were reportedly on duty to relay commands between the Canadian and Russian stagehands. "The linguistic problem was a big stumbling block," confessed Andis Celms, the stage manager of the Salle Wilfred-Pelletier at the Place des Arts. "But you start catching words after a few weeks. What with a word or two, and sign language you manage to get along" (Schonberg A14). Behind the scenes and on stage, the Bolshoi Opera succeeded in putting a human face on Soviet-style communism. It also demonstrated what could be accomplished in the arts with full state support.

For some Americans, the Bolshoi's success at the World Festival highlighted the weaknesses of the free-enterprise system. According to the *Milwaukee Journal*, it would have cost the Metropolitan Opera (the first rank opera company closest to Montreal) approximately \$300,000 to go to Expo. While the Met only had to travel 320 miles, somehow the Soviets had managed their major feat despite having to travel 4,500 miles (Remmy 1). In the field of opera, then, it was particularly obvious which cultural producers benefited from government subsidy or, in the case of the Bolshoi, full state-sponsorship. The high quality of the Bolshoi's sets, the opulence of its costumes, and the sheer grandeur of its performance made it a particularly useful public diplomacy tool for the Soviet Union. As for Canada, although the COC made a statement with a uniquely Canadian piece, *Louis Riel* was limited in its ability to reach across cultural and language barriers to resonate with foreign audience. Indeed, there seems to have been little mention of it in any U.S. press coverage of Expo. Still, that the opera was so well attended at the World Festival suggested that Canadians were at least receptive to musical drama.

Popular music was also critical in communicating Canada's national unity. Many people who remember Expo, and Canada's centennial year in general, would instantly recognize the catchy song "CA-NA-DA," written by Bobby Gimby. The song, which sold over 200,000 singles in 1967, was played on repeat during Expo 67. Despite its vapid lyrical content, the song undoubtedly cultivated a kind of national "love-in" for the duration of Expo. Though Gimby's song has become virtually synonymous with the fair, it was merely the Anglophone contribution of the Expo soundtrack. It was Quebec composer Stephane Venne who wrote and composed "Un jour, un jour"/ "Hey friend, say friend," Expo's official theme song. Unlike Gimby's lyrics, however, Venne's tune made no mention of the word Canada. Despite organizers' best attempts to promote national unity, a thread of Anglo/Franco tension wove its way throughout Expo's musical fare. With the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism scheduled to table its controversial recommendations in late 1967, from the federal government's perspective it was

imperative that the rough edges of national unification be smoothed out during Expo. As a result, the Festival organizing committee took pains to schedule concerts that featured an extensive line up of French-Canadian chansonniers. Organizers knew it was important to showcase the depth and breadth of Francophone musical talent to international visitors if they were to walk away convinced of Canada's bilingual and bicultural heritage. It was equally important for Anglophone Canadians to experience French-language music first hand. Organizers hoped that such performances would inspire greater understanding between Canada's two official linguistic groups.

It was with these thoughts in mind that *Semaine de la Chanson*, an event affiliated with the World Festival, and devoted entirely to French-Canadian song, was created. The musical genre "chanson" played a significant role in Quebecois cultural identity in the post-1945 period. According to S.D. Jowett, chanson was a key site of Quebec's cultural identity in the 1960s and 1970s, and was one of the defining elements of the "Quiet Revolution" (118). Compared to *yéyé*, which cultural elites considered the *déclassé* outcome of the cultural imperialism and consumer capitalism of American and British rock and pop music, chanson's folk-tune lyricism captured the quest of many young Quebec nationalists for national identity and liberty.

*Semaine de la Chanson* was also an important addition to Expo because of its connection to a traditional, "authentic" past. As Jowett explains, the chanson genre was popularized in response to the modernizing and urbanizing landscape in post-1945 Quebec. The aesthetic of the chansonniers—young singer/songwriters equipped with an acoustic guitar, singing songs about rural life and its struggles—invoked a mythical traditionalist view of folk music, and of Quebec society in general, that many visitors found pleasing (Jowett 124). As a result, chanson provided organizers with an easily distilled, packaged form of French-Canadian entertainment that could be presented to foreign audiences and to Canadians alike.

The chansonniers themselves, however, fit less neatly into the category of “proud Canadian.” Parti Québécois leader Jacques Parizeau once quipped that “three or four ministers, 20 civil servants, and 50 chansonniers” brought about the Quiet Revolution (Maser B2). Among the invited performers for *Semaine de la Chanson* were some of the best-known talents from Montreal’s coffeehouse scene, some of them also explicit in their support of Quebec’s sovereignty. Among them was the iconic chansonnier Gilles Vigneault. His song “Mon Pays,” written and arranged in 1964, would later become the anthem of Quebec nationalism. Another was Pauline Julien. Described by one journalist as one of the “midwives of the sovereigntist movement,” Julien’s music helped give the Quebec separatist cause its “cultural *raison d’être*” and “quixotic righteousness” (Yakabuski A18). She famously refused to perform for Queen Elizabeth II at a concert in Charlottetown in 1964. “I have nothing against Elizabeth personally,” Julien told journalists, “but only against what she represents. I cannot disassociate my artistic activities from my independentist convictions” (“Independent Singer” 35). According to Julien, the Quebec nation was in the midst of a struggle for its own survival against the forces of imperialism.<sup>5</sup> “We’ve been subjected to two imperialisms: we’re a minority which on the whole has never melted into the rest of Canada, and America is at our gates.” As far as Julien was concerned, the situation was dire: “If we don’t react, we have only a few years left; after that immigration and Americanization will swallow Quebec up into the North American continent” (qtd. in Cellard 28).

Why, then, did Julien agree to perform at Expo, an event that was so explicitly connected with Canadian unification? Quebec nationalists saw Expo 67 as a celebration of Quebec rather than of Canada’s achievements. According to André Arthur, a popular radio talk-show host and Expo 67 tour guide, for Quebec nationalists, “the dynamic atmosphere and mentality that existed at Expo represented everything that Quebec could one day become.” Monique Simard, a talk-show host and former labor leader, said the fair proved that Quebec was no longer a rural, cultural backwater run by the Catholic Church, but rather an emerging power. “We all had this sudden

feeling of great freedom, the feeling that anything was possible,” Simard told the *Globe and Mail* in 1992 (qtd. in Picard A1).

For Quebecois like Simard, such performers as Vigneault and Julien represented the voice of a new generation, one that yearned to declare its cultural, economic, and political independence. While chansonniers were well known in Quebec, they were virtually unknown to people in English-speaking Canada. Anglophone Canadians had to be educated about what the genre was and why it could (or should) speak to their own feelings of nationalism. Those who were already chanson converts did their best to convince the uninitiated. Don Schrank from the *Ottawa Journal* explained to readers ahead of Expo that the chansonniers were actually “a pleasant surprise” (50). Perhaps more convincing was the Anglophone *Montreal Gazette*’s review of the chansonniers’ performances at Expo: “If you haven’t heard Quebec’s chansonniers you’ve missed something of the real flavour of our province” (Hill 36). Despite such efforts to generate enthusiasm, there was a sense that the chansonniers represented a “foreign” brand of music that failed to register with visitors from the English-speaking parts of Canada. Much to the dismay of Expo organizers, Pauline Julien managed to draw only a small crowd for the Semaine de la Chanson’s opening performance on May 14.

Quebecois cultural pride received a major boost, however, when French President Charles de Gaulle arrived in Montreal in July for his Canadian and Expo tour. Standing on the balcony at Montreal City Hall, de Gaulle delivered a resounding speech to the crowd in which he shouted: “Vive le Québec Libre!” The remark was met with cheers and applause from thousands of pro-separatists who had gathered to listen. The Canadian government, however, swiftly condemned de Gaulle’s comments. Lester Pearson gave a live telecast to air the government’s displeasure. He told television audiences that de Gaulle’s words were “unacceptable to the Canadian people,” adding that “Canadians do not need to be liberated” (“Pearson prevails” A6). The English-speaking media used more forceful language to express their displeasure. The *Montreal Gazette* conveyed outrage that de



Gaulle dared to disrupt the idyllic mood that Expo had created. “Let no one tamper with the Spirit of Expo,” the editors threatened. “If he does, he will leave this country an unhappy man” (“Some Lessons” 6). The French President’s remarks seemed to purposely drive a sword through the Expo organizers’ plans to project Canada as a bicultural, united nation.

Montreal Mayor John Drapeau also worried that de Gaulle’s comments would take the sheen off of Expo. Drapeau moved quickly and decisively to counteract de Gaulle’s speech, giving an impassioned one of his own at a civic luncheon to honor the French President just twenty-four hours after de Gaulle’s historic moment. Although the room was full, it seemed like Drapeau was speaking only to de Gaulle. Explaining that though French Canadians saw their connection to France as advantageous, nevertheless, they were not nostalgic for the days of colonial New France. Instead, Drapeau believed the renaissance of French culture in Quebec would serve Canada as a whole: “We are not here to make short term gains, but to export our culture and serve Canada better” (qtd. in *Auf der Maur*). *Maclean’s*, Canada’s best-selling weekly newsmagazine, applauded the speech, arguing that it should mark the end of the conversation. “Let’s just say Mayor Drapeau spoke for all of Canada, and let the whole matter drop” (14).

Despite efforts to sweep de Gaulle’s comments under the rug, they had undoubtedly generated momentum for the nationalist cause for the remainder of Expo. As one journalist recalls, the atmosphere on September 4 at the Place des Arts was “charged” when Gilles Vigneault, alongside fellow nationalists Pauline Julien and Raymond Levesque, performed in front of a packed house. Having three troubadours of the nationalist cause perform together served as a powerful symbol not only of the strength of Quebecois culture but also of the vitality of the nationalist movement among young Quebecois. The Anglophone press largely ignored the trio’s performance. The *Toronto Star* pulled few punches when it declared, after the fair was over, that *Semaine de la Chanson* had been a “flop” (Littler 31). In the context of Canada’s cultural and public diplomacy,

then, *Semaine de la Chanson* was less effective at communicating the equal value of Quebec culture in Canada. However, as far as rousing support for Quebec nationalism, the celebration of French-Canadian music succeeded in emphasizing the importance of safeguarding Quebecois culture from English-Canadian indifference. In this way, public diplomacy could convey, but not resolve, the contradictions of the country that sought to deploy it.

## Conclusions

While the entire exhibition was hailed as an unqualified success, journalists also agreed that the World Festival had proven to be a “crowning achievement.” Hebert Whittaker declared it an “extraordinary banquet of culture,” with Canadians “notably contributing to the dessert course” (17). After the final curtain call, arts and theater critics immediately got out their scorecards. Which nation had come out on top? It was, after all, a most unusual circumstance to have a series of national companies perform in quick succession. One arts critic confessed that it was “enormously interesting to compare them virtually side by side, something one could only do with the help of an Expo” (Kriegsman D10). However, critics differed on which national troupe would be remembered as the creator of the Festival’s greatest triumph. Others emphasized the theme of transnational friendships. *Time* magazine, for example, argued that the World Festival, and Expo at large, would leave behind a “splendid legacy of international goodwill” (“Fairs; Goodbye”). The World Festival had undoubtedly succeeded in bringing together performers and spectators from various ethnicities, ideologies, and political persuasions. Having drawn an audience of 2,136,400, the World Festival had also exposed performers and audience members alike to new techniques, styles, and customs. For the West, the hope was that the Festival had succeeded in communicating the strength of the performing arts under a liberal democratic, free enterprise system.

However, the Festival was far from an unqualified success for Western public diplomacy. On the contrary, successful artistic groups

from the U.S.S.R. and Czechoslovakia seemed to reaffirm that the performing arts could thrive equally well under state sponsorship. For Czechoslovakia, performing arts groups, coupled with its pavilion, made for a wildly successful Expo. As evidence of Czech success, the cost of building the *Laterna Magika* theater and all its correlated expenses were paid off in just 87 days through admission fees. What is more, after witnessing its success, the organizers of the 1968 international trade fair in Malta wanted *Laterna Magika* as part of their offerings (Bantey 1).

As for the Soviet Union, if there had been any doubt of the U.S.S.R.'s tradition of excellence in the performing arts, they were quieted after the World Festival. The media's positive reaction to the Soviets' performances indicated a general respect for Soviet cultural achievements that had been building in Canada since the first cultural exchanges of the 1950s. Canadian arts critics could only offer the Russians praise for developing cultural productions that were of the highest artistic standard. "In our Centennial Year," wrote Ralph Hicklin, "we lucky Canadians have been exposed to a barrage of Russian performing art." Hicklin, who had seen a number of Soviet productions in the early Cold War years, including the Bolshoi ballet, the Moscow Circus, and the Bolshoi Opera, lauded the "motivation, the devotion of Russian performing artists, the unique quality of joy they bring to whatever they do, whether it be pirouettes or pianissimos" (Hicklin 12). Soviet performances at the World Festival may not have altered perceptions of the U.S.S.R., but they did reinforce what Canadians already believed to be true about the excellence of Soviet performing arts.

As for Canada, critics were unanimous in believing the World Festival had left a significant imprint on the country. According to Herbert Whittaker of the *Globe and Mail*, "its principal benefit has not been to the people who came to Canada for Expo but to Canadians" (17). In Whittaker's estimation, "No outpouring of artistic wealth such as the World Festival provided can leave any country unchanged, uninspired and unambitious." The World Festival certainly gave Canadians a chance to see a collection of international

achievements that they would not have otherwise experienced. “For years I longed to see Greek classical drama performed at Epidarus,” wrote F.S. Maner of the *Winnipeg Free Press*. “I doubt whether my dream will ever come true, but to see the Greek National Theater... was more than second best” (25).

Improved infrastructure was another tangible outcome from the World Festival. In addition to the Expo Theater, a new bilingual cultural center opened in downtown Montreal. “Normally, it would have been impossible to open a theater like this,” one official told the *Globe and Mail*. “We can open it now because suddenly there is an audience, and it has a better knowledge of the entire spectrum of show business” (Kirby 17). The Montreal Symphony Orchestra also reported a marked increase in subscriptions for its season. Despite seeing some of the world’s best orchestras, Montrealers were excited for more: “Expo, instead of killing an interest in music,” said the orchestra’s director Pierre Beique, “seems to have increased it” (Kraglund 16).

The general increase in interest for the performing arts suggests Canadians felt a sense of pride in how their country performed at the World Festival. As a journalist for the *Montreal Gazette* argued, “Local talent vied with the greats of the rest of the world and, by and large, came out well. Canadians have nothing to be ashamed of where their participation in the World Festival is concerned” (Siskind 47). The Centennial Commission played no small part in putting the best possible product on the World Festival stage. The COC’s staging of *Louis Riel* suggested that Canadian opera could develop with its own style and context. The talent on display signaled to critics, and to the international arts community at large, that Canadian performing artists were learning to innovate rather than merely imitate the success of Western European and Russian companies. Although these “achievements” meant more to Canadians than foreign audiences, they succeeded in drawing on the budding sense of national pride ignited by Expo 67 and Canada’s Centennial celebrations.

As for the performing arts lineup at Expo and the World Festival showcasing Canada as a harmoniously bicultural and bilingual nation, it was more difficult to write a happy ending. The *Semaine de la Chanson* was a feeble effort on the part of Expo organizers to show support for Quebec's culture. On a personal level, Julien would feel the effects of Anglophone hostilities three years later when she, along with her civil partner Gerald Godin, were targeted by the RCMP as complicit in the October Crisis—a government round-up of suspected separatists in the wake of a series of terrorist attacks. They were subsequently arrested under the War Measures Act – a memory that Julien said still filled her with anger years later (Yakabuski). French Canadians could therefore be excused if they felt efforts by the Anglophone majority to include French-Canadians were expressed only when national unity was under the artists' microscope. The World Festival of Arts, then, was unsuccessful in showcasing Canadian performing arts as fundamentally bicultural or bilingual.

Canadian public diplomacy efforts during the 1960s were not without contradiction. As the World Festival at Expo 67 demonstrated, the image of a harmonious Canada that was projected to the rest of the world was far from the reality. The failure of Expo to project a harmonious Canada underlines an important shortcoming of mega-events as a public diplomacy tool: while it might succeed in influencing foreign publics to see a nation-state in a positive light, it might not work to mend rifts within that same country's national fabric.

## Endnotes

1. For more on Expo 67 as an important “moment” in Canadian and Quebecois history, see Erin Hurley, *National Performances: From Expo 67 to Céline Dion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Rhonda Richman Kenneally and Johanne Sloan, eds. *Expo 67: Not Just a Souvenir* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Eva-Marie Kröller, “Expo 67: Canada’s Camelot,” *Canadian Literature* (1997): 36-51.
2. There is an extensive literature on the role of cultural elitism and nation-building in twentieth-century Canada. See Maria Tippett, *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Philip Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Ryan Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
3. For a historical analysis, see for example Sarah Nilson, *Project America, 1958: Film and Cultural Diplomacy at the Brussels World Fair* (McFarland & Co. Inc. Pub, 2011). However, a more extensive body of writing comes from experts in the field of communications and political science. See for example, Nicolas Cull, “Editorial: The Legacy of the Shanghai Expo and Chinese Public Diplomacy,” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* (2012) 8: 99–101 and Cesar Corona, “The Diplomatic Component of Expos,” *CPD Monitor* 1.5 (2010), [https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdin\\_monitor\\_article/diplomatic-component-expos](https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdin_monitor_article/diplomatic-component-expos).
4. The Canadian government did give serious consideration to extending an invitation to China. However, in the end, Minister of Trade and Commerce Mitchell Sharp argued that Canada needed to abide by the international convention regarding world fairs, which stipulated that invitations were only to be extended to countries officially recognized by the host nation. See *Debates*, Hansard, March 3, 1964, 1245.
5. For more on why ‘60s Montreal came to imagine itself as part of a global anti-colonial movement, see Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Cold War Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010).

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