

CAA Ep 3 Royal Alexandra Tour
Described Video Transcript

00:00:00:01 - 00:00:03:04

(NO AUDIO)

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Blue bars swipe up the screen

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The CAA Calling All Neighbours logo is displayed over a blue and white background

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Blue bars swipe down the screen

00:00:03:04 - 00:00:06:17

(MUSIC)

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Text over a blue and white background

TEXT ON SCREEN - A Virtual Tour of the Royal Alexandra Theatre

00:00:06:17 - 00:00:17:07

[NARRATOR]

In 1900, Toronto was a quiet town of only 200,000, but only five years later, it had grown by 50% to 300,000. The city was bustling.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Still black and white shots of Toronto in the early 20th century are shown

00:00:17:07 - 00:00:29:17

[NARRATOR]

The main form of entertainment was live theatre, but most of the theatres were makeshift relics from the last century, when Toronto was still a backwater. The city needed a new theatre that reflected its new status.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white shot of a theatre called the Grand

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Black and white shots of theatres in the early 1900s are shown

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white photo of men standing with early cars is shown

00:00:29:17 - 00:00:43:07

[NARRATOR]

In 1906, Cawthra Mulock, known as the Boy Millionaire, set about correcting this. He hired architect, John Lyle, and instructed him, "Build me the finest theatre on the continent."

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A photo of Cawthra Mulock is shown

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A photo of John Lyle is displayed

00:00:43:07 - 00:00:53:08

[NARRATOR]

The Royal Alexandra Theatre, the first North American theatre to be issued a royal patent by Buckingham Palace, officially opened on August 26th, 1907.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white shot of the Royal Alexandra Theatre in the early 1900s is shown

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A shot of the plaque detailing the royal patent

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white shot of the full auditorium of the theatre

00:00:53:08 - 00:01:24:17

[NARRATOR]

Immediately the Royal Alex became the place to be. Its roster of stars is an honour roll of 20th century theatre. Mary Pickford, Helen Hayes, Al Jolson, Orson Welles, Humphrey Bogart, John and Ethel Barrymore, Fred and Adele Astaire, Katherine Cornell, Deborah Kerr, John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, Edith Piaf sang here, Paul Robison played Othello here, Pavlova danced here, the Marx brothers made Alex audiences laugh, and Mae West made them blush.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A shot of the Royal Alexandra exterior in the early 1900s

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white photo of a group of men in uniform standing in front of the Royal Alexandra theatre

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The pictures of the stars named are shown one after the other

00:01:24:17 - 00:01:27:20

(MUSIC)

00:01:27:20 - 00:01:34:01

[NARRATOR]

By the late 1950s, it was the city's only surviving legitimate theatre that had not been converted into a cinema.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white photo of the exterior sign of the Royal Alexandra Theatre

00:01:34:01 - 00:01:35:08

(MUSIC)

00:01:35:08 - 00:01:47:06

[NARRATOR]

But its fortunes began to wane. First film, and then television offered other forms of entertainment. The Royal Alex had to find new energy, and perhaps a new owner, to flourish again.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Black and white shots of people wearing 3D glasses at a theatre, and a family watching television together are shown

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white shot of the camera panning over empty auditorium seats

00:01:47:06 - 00:02:00:21

[NARRATOR]

That owner was Ed Mirvish, who with the enthusiastic support of his wife, Anne, bought the theatre in 1963 saved it from demolition, spent lavishly to restore it, and built an exciting neighbourhood around it.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A photo of Ed Mirvish is shown

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A photo of Anne Mirvish is shown

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A newspaper article detailing the purchase of the theatre by Ed Mirvish is displayed

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white shot of Ed Mirvish speaking to someone else

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white shot of the exterior of the restored Royal Alexandra Theatre

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

An old fashioned map of downtown Toronto is shown

00:02:00:21 - 00:02:11:16

[NARRATOR]

Today the Royal Alex is as vital as ever, and still considered the finest theatre on the continent. Let's now discover the building itself.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A shot of the exterior of the Royal Alexandra Theatre in the present, with cars and pedestrians passing in front

00:02:11:16 - 00:02:22:12

[NARRATOR]

The exterior of the building is brick and sandstone. Beneath its exterior walls are two feet of concrete, reinforced by a steel structure, the first theatre in North America to be constructed this way.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans over the exterior of the building, including the Come From Away sign

00:02:22:12 - 00:02:35:15

[NARRATOR]

Stepping into the front foyer, it's easy to see the splendour of the materials used. The foyer is clad in a green marble imported from Italy. The floor is a mosaic created by craftsmen in Venice.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans over the front foyer

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans over the marble walls

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera shows the mosaic tile floor

00:02:35:15 - 00:02:47:00

[NARRATOR]

Step through the second set of doors, and you're in a sea of rich walnut wood imported from Turkey. The grand staircases were hand-carved of cherrywood from Austria and Hungary.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera moves through the doors of the lobby and turns toward the staircase on the right

00:02:47:00 - 00:03:02:00

[NARRATOR]

Above the doors leading into the auditorium is the crest of the British royal family, as the Alex has a royal patent, and is named after Alexandra, the consort of Edward the VII, later Queen Alexandra, and the great grandmother of Queen Elizabeth II.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans up to the crest of the British royal family over the doors to the auditorium

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A framed photo of Queen Alexandra that hangs on the wall is shown

00:03:02:00 - 00:03:09:11

[NARRATOR]

Off the front lobby are rooms where the audience can rest, and perhaps enjoy a beverage before the performance, and at intermission.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans across a painted sign over a door that reads, "Empire Room"

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The interior of the Empire Room is displayed

00:03:09:11 - 00:03:15:05

[NARRATOR]

The manager's office is also here, a wood panelled room where the theatre's early news clippings are kept.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans around the manager's office

00:03:15:05 - 00:03:22:07

(MUSIC)

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Bound books of news clippings line the walls of the room

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Various news articles about the shows playing at the Royal Alexandra Theatre over the years are displayed

00:03:22:07 - 00:03:31:03

[NARRATOR]

Inside the auditorium, the wainscoting and doorways are of sturdy Canadian oak. The walls are covered in cream and gold silk.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The walls of the auditorium are shown

00:03:31:03 - 00:03:39:09

[NARRATOR]

The seats are upholstered in striped cream and gold wool, and silk gaberdine, specially woven in England by Burberry's.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera shows the auditorium seats

00:03:39:09 - 00:03:51:10

[NARRATOR]

Until the 1950s, it was customary for men to wear hats, but what to do with them during the performance? The answer was to put them under the seat in these specially designed wire racks.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A black and white shot of men lifting their hats in a group of smiling women is shown

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The wire racks under the seats in the auditorium are shown

00:03:51:10 - 00:04:02:06

[NARRATOR]

All the decorative carvings in the building were made by artisans brought over from Germany. All the ornate plasterwork on the walls and ceiling was made by master craftsmen from France.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The decorative carvings on the banisters are shown

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The plaster on the walls is displayed

00:04:02:06 - 00:04:26:09

[NARRATOR]

At the top of the proscenium arch, which frames the stage, is the sounding board. Its purpose is to bounce the sound of the actors' voices from the stage into the auditorium. At the Royal Alex, the sounding board features a mural by Frederick Challenger, the finest muralist of his time. It shows a classical scene, Venus and attendants discovering the sleeping Adonis, with Cupid close by.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans up the arch

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The mural on the sounding board is shown

00:04:26:09 - 00:04:44:12

[NARRATOR]

Now, let's go to the dress circle, which is the second level of seating in the auditorium. Thanks to the structure's steel frame, the Royal Alex was the first theatre to have cantilevered balconies, meaning the weight of the balconies is held up by the steel and concrete structure, not pillars, which would obstruct the view of audience members seated behind them.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera shows a seat in the dress circle, and then pans over the lower seats to show the stage

00:04:44:12 - 00:04:55:21

[NARRATOR]

When Lady Diana, the Princess of Wales, came to see Les Miserables at the Royal Alex in 1990, this is where she sat. Dress circle, first row, centre seat.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A still photo of Princess Diana walking into the theatre is shown

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A still photo of Diana greeting fans

00:04:55:21 - 00:05:04:09

[NARRATOR]

Off the dress circle is the CAA Lounge. Overlooking King Street, this gracious room is beautifully appointed, and a favourite with patrons.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans around the CAA Lounge inside the theatre, with a piano, a bar and seats

00:05:04:09 - 00:05:15:05

[NARRATOR]

The balcony is the third level of seating. It offers great views, but is much higher up. In the 19th century, the balcony would have been called the gods, for obvious reasons.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera shows the seats on the balcony, and shows the view to the stage

00:05:15:05 - 00:05:24:17

[NARRATOR]

On the sides of the stage are a few more seats. These are called the boxes. Traditionally, this is where public figures sat so that they could be seen by everyone else in the auditorium.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera shows the box seats on the sides of the stage

00:05:24:17 - 00:05:39:16

[NARRATOR]

Now, let's walk back downstairs to the orchestra level. But first, as we descend the staircase, note all the framed photos on the walls. These are only some of the noteworthy stars from the Royal Alex's first four decades.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A staircase lined with framed and autographed photos of stars who have worked at the theatre is shown

00:05:39:16 - 00:05:55:02

[NARRATOR]

Before we go on stage, and backstage, let's go to the newest part of the building, the Yale Simpson Lounge. Named after a former general manager of the theatre, it was built in 1990 in the former crawl space of the theatre.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

An ornate carving of a face hangs from the wall in the theatre

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans across the lounge

00:05:55:02 - 00:05:59:23

[NARRATOR]

We'll go backstage through the green room, which is located just the other side of this door.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera approaches a door that has a sign reading "Staff Only Past This Point," and opens it

00:05:59:23 - 00:06:01:04

(MUSIC)

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera moves up the stairs from the door to the green room

00:06:01:04 - 00:06:14:14

[NARRATOR]

The green room is where the actors, crew members, and musicians can hang out when they're not on stage. There are many theories about why it's called the green room, but you should know that no green room in any theatre is actually green.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera moves through a room with booths and tables, fridges and appliances

00:06:14:14 - 00:06:24:00

[NARRATOR]

Behind the back wall of the stage are the dressing rooms. In fact, there are four levels of dressing rooms, which can accommodate more than 40 performers.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera shows the dressing room, with clothes hanging from the wall and make up tables

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Different dressing rooms are shown

00:06:24:00 - 00:06:36:05

[NARRATOR]

Here we are in the stage right wings. The set on stage is *Come From Away*, which has been playing at the Royal Alex since February of 2018 - one of the theatre's most popular shows.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The set from *Come From Away* is visible from the side of the stage; the camera moves on stage

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The cast of *Come From Away* performs on stage

00:06:36:05 - 00:06:44:15

[NARRATOR]

Notice that the view from the stage allows you to see every seat in the auditorium. That means every seat provides a good view of the stage.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The auditorium seats are visible from the stage

00:06:44:15 - 00:07:13:10

[NARRATOR]

Now we are in the old stage door room, which is located on the east side of the building. Until the late 1980s, this was the entrance to the stage for everyone who worked here. The room has been left intact because of its rich history. And a new stage door was created at the rear of the building. Notice that there are more actors' photos on the wall, even on the ceiling. If these walls could talk, the stories they could tell of the lives of the show people who have walked through here.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera pans around a room with writing and pictures on the wall

00:07:13:10 - 00:07:34:22

[NARRATOR]

We are now on the fly floor. In olden days, this is where technicians would control the scenery hung in the fly tower. They would lower scenery pieces onto the stage to create a new setting, while raising or flying out the scenery from the previous scene. Fun fact - the people originally hired to do this job were sailors because they had experience with ropes and sails.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The camera shows a room with ladders, ropes, and technical equipment

00:07:34:22 - 00:07:36:18

(MUSIC)

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A pile of rope is shown

00:07:36:18 - 00:07:42:06

[NARRATOR]

The fly tower is almost a hundred feet tall. Behind it are the four levels of dressing rooms.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The fly tower is shown from the stage side

00:07:42:06 - 00:07:48:21

[NARRATOR]

What a different world it is back here from the rich and gilded world of the auditorium and lobbies.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Shots of writing on the wall, cables and labeled technical equipment backstage

00:07:48:21 - 00:08:10:06

[NARRATOR]

Thank you for joining us for this tour of the Royal Alex. We hope you've enjoyed a little of this beloved building's history. In closing, here is David Mirvish, the theatre's owner. He is the son of Ed and Anne Mirvish. Like his parents, he loves this building, and is committed to continuing its long tradition of offering the best in theatre to audiences in Toronto and beyond.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

A shot of the stage and auditorium of the theatre

00:08:10:06 - 00:08:56:20

[DAVID]

The theatre isn't just another business, it's a life-long passion. The Royal Alexandra Theatre is the place where my wife and I had our first date. I'm very honoured to partner with CAA in making theatre more accessible to its members. CAA's dedication to its community, and its support of the arts is superb. Thank you for that support. As a member since 1966, they give me the confidence to keep running my car. I look forward to seeing you at the theatre when the time is right. Please stay tuned for a big announcement delivering CAA members even more excitement and benefits when they attend our four incredible theatres.

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

David speaks to the camera while sitting in his convertible outside of the theatre

00:08:56:20 - 00:09:03:22

(ENGINE RUMBLING)

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

David drives away

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Blue bars swipe up the screen

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

The CAA Calling All Neighbours logo is displayed over a blue and white background

(DESCRIBED VIDEO)

Blue bars swipe down the screen

END OF TRANSCRIPT