

The way a curtain opens and closes and opens again

(For the Roxy Theatre)

by Mary Pinkoski, Edmonton Poet Laureate

In 1938, 124st watched the Roxy Theatre
Stretch itself up off the sometimes sleepy sidewalk
Like a queen waking up from an afternoon nap
And adjusting her yellow crown

Called Alberta's most modern and beautiful neighbourhood playhouse
The Roxy opened its curtains to likes of Canadian film star Deanna Durbin
In a movie called Mad About Music

Sure it was the depression era,
Sure it might seem a little mad to open a theatre in a recession,
A little decadent
But that didn't stop a new theatre queen from lifting her golden crown into the sky

There is something magical about a theatre opening its curtains for the first time
Or for the last time
Something about the curtains pitching outwards and upwards
that reminds me of a bird about to take flight

And soar is what the Roxy did
From neighbourhood movie house to home of Theatre Network
From that first movie beginning with Canadian film star Deanna Durbin,
To Stephen Heatley's Theatre Network,
To Nextfest,
To, lastly, Morgan Smith's Human Loser Theatre

The Roxy was home to local talent
It was an altar to countless new artists
Emerging, enterprising artists
Blessing the stage with their voices,
Their ideas, their imaginations
It knew no bounds

It was a neighbourhood and a community
A basement maze filled with the ghosts of theatre past
A catacomb of artifacts holding the secret dramas of Edmonton's playwrights
It was more than a theatre
It was a museum, a memory, and a story

I have heard tales of wine soaked carpets,
Of yellowing posters,
Of aging mannequins
Of repossessed toilets
Of box offices and Saturday morning cartoons
Of late night actor parties
Of rooftops and of the way the dawn broke itself
as if almost in an offering to the bright glint off the Roxy's sign

It was more than a theatre
Even now it is more than a theatre,
As it is and still remains a neighbourhood and a community
A celebration of remembrance and an honoring of what is to come

And it still knows no bounds

For despite the ash around her feet
Despite the rubble brushing up against her knees
There is still a theatre
That is lifting itself up,
On the shoulder's of this city
A city that is writing a love poem to a community
With its every embrace

A city that is forming around the idea
Of a community, not a structure, being a theatre
And holding them there

Until they are ready to rise once again
Much like a queen waking from an afternoon nap
Stretching herself into this city
like the decadently royal expression of talent that she is

To the Roxy Theatre
To the actors and the playwrights
To silverscreens and a neighbourhood that lost a landmark
I salute you
I thank you
I remember you
I embrace you

And I journey with you into new spaces and new homes
Let this not be a eulogy but rather the precursor to a house warming

May your curtains forever open and close
Like the wings of a bird taking flight and soaring
Into so many new places