Empty buildings and fat wallets

Neglected historic venues in Winnipeg

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ardrobes turned into condos, shopping strips, and large win-
dowed skyscrapers — if you go to almost any major city in Canada, you will see a similar layout. Buildings that were constructed and had their heyday at the turn of the century (and sometimes earlier) have either been torn down, or converted into some sort of structure that doesn’t maintain any of the architectural or aesthetic beauty it once had.

People often comment when they come to Winnipeg for the first time about how amazing it is that we still have so many older buildings intact. This year Winnipeg will see a bright shining multi-million dollar MTS Centre put into the centre of the city. But in the area surrounding the structure, there are buildings and theatres that have been neglected for years. These buildings, such as the Metropolitan Theatre, sit still, while new buildings are put up all over the downtown area. Each one of these buildings has a rich and vibrant history and an equally impressive interior. But it is not only downtown Win-
gipeg that sees the neglect of beautiful structures — the University of Manitoba has so many older buildings that could use some serious love and care.

I had only heard about Taché Hall auditorium from my mom, who during her years at the U of M had seen bands such as KISS, T Rex, and all of the Winnipeg bands that were big at the time, such as Crawford and Pete Dobro. Being a serious live music lover, I always wanted to see what the venue looked like. This summer I had the chance to take a look at the auditorium. Set up much like the legendary Mongoose club First Avenue, Taché Hall Auditorium was more amazing than I imagined it would be. With an arched stage much like that of Pantrags, a wrap-around balcony and a hardwood main floor that could fit 500 people comfortably, the auditorium is too good to be true.

It’s hard to believe that such a huge venue is sitting unused and dust-filled in the university when space has always been an issue on campus. Student groups and organizations are constantly battling the lack of space for functions at the univer-
sity. So why has Taché auditorium been forgotten?

Asbestos removal occurred early in 2004, and the last actual event in the auditorium took place only three or four years ago. Money and time appear to be the only factors preventing the auditorium from being renovated back to its original splendour. After seeing the size and potential of the auditorium, I couldn’t help but wonder why this space does not appear to be a major funding priority for the university.

Winnipeg does not have any adequate medium-sized venues. When acts come through town, they do not want to be put in a venue that is either too big or too small for them. Burton Cummings Theatre is much too large for certain acts that draw a fair number of people — for example, two years ago Wilco moved their show to Le Rendezvous (recently closed) after poor ticket sales relative to the size of the theatre. Taché Hall auditorium is the perfect size for all kinds of events around the city and university.

It is crucial to preserve campus history at the U of M. Similarly, with so much money in the city being put into sterile architecture like the MTS Centre, it’s a shame that businesses wouldn’t try to invest in projects that would beautify and enrich the downtown area.

It’s important to keep fighting for growth and development in the city and at the uni-
versity, but why this isn’t done with history in mind is beyond me. It’s quite sad to imagine what places such as Taché Hall auditorium looked like when they were being funded and used. If time and money were put into Taché Hall auditorium, it would be sure to benefit not only the university, but also the cultural scene in Winnipeg in general.