

ARTS

BEAT



PAINTING THE TOWN - Artist Tom Carter's Images of Vancouver



By Bill Allman
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A bomb blew up the front of the Royal Theatre on East Hastings Street in Vancouver on March 20th, 1933.

Part of the ticket office flew across the street and landed in a restaurant belonging to artist **Tom Carter**'s grandfather. Ninety years later, Carter recalls hearing about the incident for the first time from his own father. "Dad just mentioned it in passing as the reason that my grandfather moved restaurants. He felt that Hastings Street in the 1930s had become too dangerous."

But that passing remark about a long-forgotten bombing set Tom on a research quest that would soon inform his entire line of custom paintings of Vancouver's past. In the absence of details, and confined in the 1990s to archival microfiche, Tom began piecing together a picture of Vancouver as it had been. In particular, his own interests as a musician, sound engineer, and recording studio owner drew him to recapture the City's entertainment scene and nightlife.

"Paintings are all about how something feels," he says. "I spoke to people who were around in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s and asked them 'Have I got it?' They always say 'Yeah, this is how it felt!' which is the best compliment!"



Above: Dundarave - looking west

Below: Chinatown Neon - Pender Street

"I've had clients cry looking at an image. People remember things, not just aesthetically, people remember things emotionally."

Tom Carter's images evoke the glamour and excitement of their era - an era that Tom sees returning to the City. His paintings grace private residences, corporate boardrooms, and company lobbies and have sold to clients worldwide, as far away as Dubai. "All of my works are commissions now," he says. "I do have a couple of pieces in the Petley Jones Art Gallery on Granville, but mostly I get retained to provide exclusive commissions for people who want to sense what they knew or what their parents and grandparents knew - that excitement, that romance!"

Tom remembers downtown in the 1970s, experiencing the old buildings with wrought iron fire escapes, neon signs, and fast-moving chaser lights. "I saw it. I know the feeling. And I can convey that in my paintings." He counts **Chip Wilson**, former **Mayor Sam Sullivan**,



You can see samples of Tom Carter's artwork, buy prints, or engage him for a commission at: tomcartergallery.com



Marquee Magic - painting and artwork for Vancouver's favourite entertainers

and late bandleader **Dal Richards** as admirers of his work. And Tom's efforts to preserve and illuminate Vancouver's history are not limited to his paintings. He has personally recovered thousands of photographs and documents as well as 'artefacts' that are in his private collection, on display, or bound for Vancouver's Archives or UBC's Special Collections.

"The boards that I serve on, The Vancouver Historical Society, the Friends of the Vancouver City Archives, and the BC Entertainment Hall of Fame are all dedicated to preserving and reclaiming this history. What's been especially interesting is how that history, these images, have become inspiring to the new tastemakers. When the excitement fully returns to Vancouver nightlife, I'd like to think that I'll have been part of that."

President of the BC Entertainment Hall of Fame, **Bill Allman** is a "recovering lawyer" who has been a venue manager (the Vogue), president of Theatre Under the Stars, a concert promoter, a television writer/producer, a theatre producer, and an adjunct professor of law at UBC. He currently owns **Famous Artists Ltd.**, taking the company name with founder Hugh Pickett's blessing, and produces plays, musicals, and concerts. He is no longer willing to move your piano.