JESSICA B. HILL IS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE AS VIOLA IN TWELFTH NIGHT

THE INVENTION OF THE MUSICAL! (INSPIRED BY A RIVALRY WITH ... SHAKE...?)

WHERE ARTISTS ROAM YOUR CULTURAL GETAWAY

STRATFORD FESTIVAL

SEASON 2024

INSIDE THE SEASON PLAYBILL

SOMETHING ROTTEN!
ROMEO AND JULIET
LONDON ASSURANCE
LA CAGE AUX FOLLES
SALES...IN CHINA
Cymbeline

+ MORE!
EXPERIENCE THE
STRATFORD FESTIVAL

AROUND THE CORNER, A WORLD AWAY.

TWELFTH NIGHT • SOMETHING ROTTEN! • ROMEO AND JULIET • LONDON ASSURANCE
LA CAGE AUX FOLLES • WENDY AND PETER PAN • SALESMAN IN CHINA • CYMBELINE
HEDDA GABLER • THE DIVINERS • THE GOAT OR, WHO IS SYLVIA? • GET THAT HOPE

PLAN YOUR VISIT TODAY.

2024 SEASON TICKETS ON SALE NOW
9 Introducing the 2024 Season
34 Meet Our Acting Company
36 A Star Is Reborn
   Interview with actor-turned-director Seana McKenna.
38 Meighen Forum Listings
   Live events and immersive experiences.
46 Will Power
   Why Something Rotten! is a musical for Shakespeare lovers.
48 Taking the Reins
   The directors behind Stratford’s new productions.
52 Learn as You Look
   The social impact theatre generates through its audiences.
54 2024 Productions & Events Calendar
60 Get to Know Our Theatres
62 Diary of a Theatre Kid
   Meeting Members and making memories.
72 Creative Vacationing
   How to spend a day in the city of Stratford.
80 Food, Drink & Accommodation Listings
To go to the theatre is to go on a journey: to enter an imagined world, resembling our own or fantastically different from it, where we can see anew with beginners’ eyes and gain fresh perspectives.

That invitation to explore beyond our daily lives seems particularly welcome right now. The current post-pandemic travel boom indicates our yearning, after the enforced home-keeping of the past few years, for new sights and new experiences. And so, as I set out to plan the Festival’s 2024 season, the idea of journeying was very much on my mind.

What does being away from home teach us and bring to us? What are the benefits, and what might be the risks, of seeking out worlds elsewhere? When we leave our familiar surroundings, we may encounter uncertainty and challenges. Still, at the same time, we can enjoy the freedom of no longer being bound to the identities that defined us before. And perhaps our journey will culminate in finding something that completes us and makes us happy.

Transformative voyages, both literal and metaphorical, pervade this season’s playbill. “What country, friends, is this?” asks the shipwrecked Viola in Twelfth Night. It’s Illyria, a topsy-turvy realm where Viola is reunited with her long-lost twin while unexpectedly finding love.

These “elsewheres” on our stages this season offer profound insights and closures: the New World of America in Something Rotten!, the Wales to which Imogen flees in Cymbeline, the nightclub in La Cage aux Folles and Neverland in Wendy and Peter Pan. Travelling to the other side of the world enables the protagonists of Salesman in China to see beyond the cultural assumptions of the “other.” At the same time, a sojourn in the country awakens the city sophisticates of London Assurance to the idea of love that reaches beyond oneself.

Journeys can come at a cost too, as with the Jamaican-Canadian family in Get That Hope, who find themselves betwixt the old world and the new, never truly at home in either. And while Morag, in The Diviners, prevails in her struggle to remake herself, others are tragically thwarted. Hedda Gabler rails wittily but vainly against the world where she is trapped; Romeo and Juliet attempt to create a new one for themselves. In both cases, the result is their tragic undoing.

And at what point is a world elsewhere a world too far? That question is raised, disturbingly, in The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?

Whatever journeys we take, we want them to bring us joy and hope, ideally with laughter along the way. That too was an important consideration in selecting these works: even the darkest sparkles in its own way and leaves us feeling uplifted.

For all these playbill choices, comic or tragic, I have brought together extraordinary artists who will offer journeys from which I hope you will return invigorated and eager to embark on your next great adventure. Buon viaggio!
Welcome to the Stratford Festival. It is a great privilege to gather and share stories on this beautiful territory, which has been the site of human activity—and therefore storytelling—for many thousands of years. We wish to honour the ancestral guardians of this land and its waterways: the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat and the Attiwinonderonk. Today many Indigenous peoples continue to call this land home and act as its stewards; this responsibility extends to all peoples, to share and care for this land for generations to come.

**Land Acknowledgement**

Here’s to the comfort of our patrons! Download our free app and skip the line by ordering drinks from your phone, organize your tickets in our digital wallet, find tips for exploring both the Festival and the city + MUCH MORE!
It’s not till you get here that you really understand. Yes, we can tell you about our four magnificent theatres and the glorious parklands along the Avon River where two of those theatres are situated. We can tell you about the vibrant downtown setting of our other two venues, with its fine restaurants and boutique shopping. And we can tell you about our richly varied range of theatrical entertainment, from spectacular musicals to Shakespeare plays, as easily as we can list the ways our remarkable repertory system enables you to enjoy so many different performances in the space of even just a couple of days.

We can tell you all this and more; we can show you photos and videos. But just as a play is only words on a page until people bring it to life on stage, mere descriptions can’t begin to capture the lived experience. It’s when you’re here in person that Stratford really touches your heart.

I’m always moved by the stories patrons share with me. Even when they think they know what to expect, they’re often surprised by how deeply affected they are by their visits here. Last season, for instance, I met a couple who’d come to Stratford for the very first time, all the way from California. They’d discovered our digital streaming service, STRATFEST@HOME, during the pandemic, followed us online for a couple of years, then decided to make the long trip east. Enthralled by what they found—the Festival, its repertoire, its whole environment—they felt they were in theatre Nirvana.

And it’s not just the Festival that makes Stratford such an alluring destination. As you’ll discover if you spend any time here, this city is blessed with a community of arts-dedicated people whose talents and creativity sustain a whole range of other cultural attractions, including Stratford Summer Music; the SpringWorks festival of puppetry, theatre and dance; the Here For Now company’s annual summer season of new or underproduced plays; the Stratford Perth Museum; Gallery Stratford; the Art in the Park outdoor show and sale and the Stratford Symphony Orchestra, whose season overlaps with ours in the spring and the fall.

In short, Stratford is more than just a city; it’s a cultural retreat, a place where people come to connect with their fellow theatre lovers, with our artists and special guests appearing at Meighen Forum events and with the local business owners who welcome them back or introduce them to our community for the first time.

It’s that human connection that makes Stratford so special. It’s what makes people want to linger here; it’s what makes first-time visitors feel like they’ve stumbled on a magical secret—one that has to be seen to be believed—and one that they can’t wait to share.
## 2024 AT A GLANCE

### FESTIVAL THEATRE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Plays and Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TWELFTH NIGHT</strong></td>
<td>Comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOMETHING</strong></td>
<td>ROTTEN! Musical Comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ROMEO AND JULIET</strong></td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LONDON ASSURANCE</strong></td>
<td>Comedy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AVON THEATRE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Plays and Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LA CAGE AUX FOLLES</strong></td>
<td>Musical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WENDY AND PETER PAN</strong></td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SALESMAN IN CHINA</strong></td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TOM PATTERSON THEATRE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Plays and Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CYMBELINE</strong></td>
<td>Romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEDDA GABLER</strong></td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE DIVINERS</strong></td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### STUDIO THEATRE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Plays and Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE GOAT OR, WHO IS SYLVIA?</strong></td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GET THAT HOPE</strong></td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### VISITORS’ GUIDE 2024

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On the Cover: Actor Jessica B. Hill from *Twelfth Night* wears top and blazer by Beaufille.
Photography by Ted Belton :: Styling by Nadia Pizzimenti at P1M :: Makeup by Viktor Peters at P1M :: Hair by Kirsten Klontz at P1M.
THE MEIGHEN FORUM PRESENTS

THEMED WEEKS

JUNE 10–16
PRIDE WEEK
THE BODY POLITIC
A QUEEN PREPARES
+ MORE

JULY 8–14
SEASON DEEP DIVE WEEK
THE OTHER DIRECTORS: INTIMACY AND FIGHT DIRECTORS
HISTORY OF THE STRATFORD FESTIVAL
+ MORE

JULY 15–21
CBC IDEAS WEEK: BRAVE NEW WORLDS
THE RIGHT TO SECURITY
RIGHTS FOR THE FUTURE
+ MORE

AUG 5–11
GLOBAL THEATRE WEEK
SHAKESPEARE AND THE WORLD
FROM STAGE TO PLATE: 2024
+ MORE

AUG 19–25
READERS AND WRITERS WEEK
THE GOLDEN AGE OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE
ON MARGARET LAURENCE
+ MORE

SEPT 16–22
SCHOLARS AND EXPERTS WEEK
DEATH OF A SALESMAN GOES TO BEIJING
CULTURAL DIPLOMACY
+ MORE

THE MEIGHEN FORUM
SUPPORTED THROUGH AN ENDOWED GIFT FROM KELLY & MICHAEL MEIGHEN AND THE DR. MEIGHEN FAMILY FOUNDATION
INTRODUCING THE 2024 SEASON
TWELFTH NIGHT
On the mysterious island of Illyria, young Viola, shipwrecked and separated from her twin brother, disguises herself as Cesario and enters the service of Duke Orsino. When the Duke sends Cesario to deliver love letters to Countess Olivia he triggers a love triangle, with Olivia falling for the messenger. Meanwhile, an undercover Viola finds herself pining for the Duke, who is confused by the romantic feelings stirring for his new pageboy. When Viola’s twin brother arrives and is mistaken for Cesario, a tangled drama of mistaken identities unravels to laughs.

One of Shakespeare’s most celebrated romantic comedies, *Twelfth Night* captures the earthy ribaldry of the Elizabethan feasting season in its excesses of the heart and the stomach, and indulgence in festive spirit, poetry and music. Homing in on Shakespeare’s refrain, Canadian theatre icon Seana McKenna transitions from actor to director to recast *Twelfth Night* into a revelling season a little closer in time to our own: spring 1967. “The Summer of Love is just around the corner,” she says. “Not quite there, but heading that way.” Noting “some modifications, as there always are in any production,” McKenna assures audiences this production will be loyal to the play in its new time period. The essence of the story will be exactly as Shakespeare intended: there will be “some fun, some folly, some mad love, some sorrow, some song. Or, as the play's subtitle says, *What You Will*.”

“Present mirth hath present laughter: What's to come is still unsure.”

**TWELFTH NIGHT**

*By William Shakespeare*

Director Seana McKenna
Set and Costume Designer Christina Poddubniak
Lighting Designer Bonnie Beecher
Composer Paul Shilton
Sound Designer Verne Good

Production sponsors: Priscilla Costello, Dr. Desta Leavine in memory of Pauline Leavine, Peggy Ptasznik, Laurie J. Scott, The Whiteside Foundation and Catherine Wilkes in memory of David.

From left: Deborah Hay, Jessica B. Hill and Laura Condlin.
SOMETHING

“Welcome to the Renaissance with poets, painters and bon vivants...”
R O T T E N!

The Bottom brothers, two struggling playwrights in Renaissance London, are rehearsing their new history play, entitled Richard II, a work they’re certain will finally rocket them to fame and fortune. Unfortunately, rockstar playwright William Shakespeare is inking his own version of the ill-fated king’s reign over England. Broke, desperate for ideas and soon to be relieved of the patronage provided by the penny-pinching Lady Clapham, Nick Bottom goes to Soothsayer Alley. There he meets with Thomas Nostradamus (not that Nostradamus) who receives a vision of a bold new theatrical genre: The Musical. Hearing of this yet-to-be-originated next big thing in which actors inexplicably burst into song and dance, Nick is convinced the stars have delivered him a million-pound idea! A saucy and affectionate send-up of the Bard, musical theatre and celebrity culture, this Broadway hit has everything necessary to captivate audiences.

“Something Rotten! is a wonderful comedy, with a great book, great songs and huge dance numbers,” director-choreographer Donna Feore says enthusiastically. In fact, Feore has been pondering a Stratford Festival production of the musical since seeing its original run. For the director, it was a natural fit. “Stratford is after all a festival that offers both Shakespeare and musicals.” Eager to take on the challenge of adapting the musical for the Festival Theatre’s thrust stage, Feore is creating an experience focused on the audience. “That theatre is a brilliant space for the communal experience, which is what this show is all about.” Well, that and laughs. In regard to the latter, Feore assures audiences will not need an MA in English Literature to get the jokes. “This show is open to and has something for everyone! I feel this show is full of laughter, passion and heart, and I hope I can create an experience for the audience that gives them all of that.”

From left: Mark Uhre, Jeff Lillico, Henry Firmston and Olivia Sinclair-Brisbane.
“For never was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”

Romeo and Juliet is arguably the most well-known and cherished love story of all time. It is the template of the modern tragic romance and a veritable lexicon of phrases and images—“star-crossed lovers,” “wherefore art thou,” “parting is such sweet sorrow”—cribbed by young lovers for over 400 years. The plot is stark, the characters complex and fully alive with teenage angst and hormones. The Capulets and Montagues are two noble families of Verona, locked in a generations-long blood feud. When their two brightest stars—Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet—fall hopelessly in love, their secret marriage unleashes a torrent of violence and recrimination that threatens the future of both ancient lineages.

“The cost of love is grief—anyone who has lost anyone knows this,” says director Sam White, frankly. A veteran Shakespeare director, White’s vision for this play hinges on highlighting romance to emphasize tragedy. “Love has to always be apparent for the loss of life to impact the artists, the audience and anyone who encounters this play.” Aware of the traction Shakespeare’s famed play has amassed over the centuries with its many adaptations onstage and onscreen, White answers confidently when asked which is her favourite performance: “The one I am directing at the Stratford Festival.” The director’s passion comes from an appreciation of the basic magic of theatre: “This team of artists working together, all on the same play, has never happened and will never happen again.” And while most of us have already read and seen one version or another of Romeo and Juliet, White insists this is beside the point. “Great stories were meant to be told again and again.”
One of the great comedies of the British stage, *London Assurance* by Dion Boucicault laid the groundwork for the radical works of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw several decades later. Today, the play remains as pertinent as it was in 1841 when it took the London and New York theatre scenes by storm with its satirizing take on the pretensions and fashions of the upper classes. Sir Harcourt Courtly is an aging London dandy with his targets set on a rather scandalously younger bride, Grace Harkaway, who, because of a loophole in her father’s will, must marry Harcourt to claim her substantial inheritance. At beautiful Oak Hall, the country estate of Grace’s uncle, Harcourt’s plans for a quiet weekend in the country with his bride-to-be are unexpectedly upended by a riotous cast of holidayers. This group includes the witty Lady Gay Spanker and Harcourt’s son, Charles, in disguise as he attempts to escape his London creditors.

“This play is filled with unbridled joy,” declares Antoni Cimolino, the Stratford Festival’s artistic director and director of Boucicault’s literary canon gem. Cimolino is heartened to share a wickedly good time at the theatre with audiences. Brimming with sexual innuendo, puns, slapstick and farce, this 19th-century...
ASSURANCE

The play has the pluck to contend with the many onscreen portrayals of the delightfully dramatic—and colourful—chase after the good life. “The sense of modernity about the piece may surprise audiences,” says Cimolino. “As will the strength of the female characters.” The director singles out Lady Gay Spanker, whose commanding presence reads like Bridgerton’s Lady Danbury in a top hat. “Spanker is a marvel. She is a free-thinking, spirited, joyful and independent woman. As the young heroine Grace says of Lady Gay, she is so delightful ‘you must love her.’” With Cimolino himself enthralled by the play’s comedic prowess—“I knew there was going to be a lot of fun to be had even during the rehearsals”—London Assurance promises all a welcomed helping of comic relief.

LONDON ASSURANCE
By Dion Boucicault

Director Antoni Cimolino
Set and Lighting Designer Lorenzo Savoini
Costume Designer Francesca Callow
Composer Wayne Kelso
Sound Designer Ranil Sonnadara

Production sponsors: Catherine Elliot Shaw, Dr. Dennis & Dorothea Hacker, Jane Fryman Laird, Dr. M.L. Myers, and Dr. Robert J. & Roberta Sokol.

From left: Deborah Hay, Geraint Wyn Davies, Austin Eckert and Marissa Orjalo.

Geraint Wyn Davies
Sir Harcourt Courtly

David Collins
Max Bankamy

Austin Eckert
Charles County

Deborah Hay
Lady Gay Spanker

Marissa Orjalo
Grace Harcourt

Michael Spencer-Davis
Adolphus Spanker

Emilio Vieira
Richard Dazzle

Rylan Wilkie
Cool
La Cage aux Folles is a St. Tropez nightclub and drag cabaret headlined by “Zaza,” aka Albin, the long-time romantic partner of the club’s manager, Georges. When the son of Georges, Jean-Michel, arrives in town with his fiancée, Anne, daughter of an ultra-conservative couple who want to shut down the local drag clubs, Georges is put in a bind. Faced with the decision to “play it straight” when meeting the future in-laws or proudly wearing his heart on his sleeve, Georges does what he thinks best for the sake of his son and opts for lies. Equally committed to their family, Albin agrees—reluctantly—to play butch “Uncle Al” during the pivotal meeting. As the act goes on, it becomes clear a wig and a pot of makeup can only go so far.

La Cage aux Folles, based on the French play of the same name (and the narrative inspiration for the blockbuster film The Birdcage), ran for over four years on Broadway in its original production, picking up Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Score and Best Book. It was the first Broadway
hit to focus on a homosexual relationship, and it remains a cultural touchstone in the history of gay theatre. A testament to the social impact the arts can have, this audience favourite is a thrill for director Thom Allison to take on after directing another top fan pick—Rent—last season. While he jokes “I hope the audience doesn’t go blind from all the sequins,” Allison is earnest in his reason for taking on the project: “I’m so aware of the lack of care and respect for different groups of people that we are seeing in the world today,” Allison says. “That also happens in this show, and I find it heartbreaking and infuriating because every character in this show is making a choice in the name of love, for better or for worse. I love that.” A musical as evocative as it is entertaining, La Cage aux Folles is a celebration of love in all of its forms, with a message that is as relevant today as it was for original audiences. For Allison, this is the story’s takeaway. “My hope is that the audience will see that, despite the glamour and humour in the piece, the heart of the story is two parents and their son, trying to navigate a family drama and the many facets of love.”

“Life’s not worth a damn till you can say, ‘Hey world, I am what I am!’”
Elia Hickson’s crowd-pleasing adaptation of J. M. Barrie’s Peter Pan; or, The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up makes its North American première at the Stratford Festival! Wendy and Peter Pan brings all the wonder and charm of the children’s classic while presenting a Wendy Darling audiences have never seen before. Meet a daring heroine who does more than play den mother to little boys as you hitch a ride to Neverland, where Wendy and her brothers, along with Peter Pan, the Lost Boys and Tiger Lily, battle the nefarious Captain Hook, whose death ticks ever closer.

“I think audiences will be wowed by the adaptation,” says the director, Thomas Morgan Jones, excitedly. “From design to performance to the sheer imagination of the writing.” Absolutely over the moon with how Hickson has “reimagined this story in a way that is both familiar and completely brand new,” the director is excited to see the story that has earned a place in the hearts of generations come alive on stage. With the narrative juggling multiple themes, including aging, childhood, grief, adventure on top of justice, Jones intends to highlight the bond between them all: home. “All of the homes in this story (London and Neverland) are unsettled and in turmoil,” Jones explains. “This story explores how homes can be places for happy thoughts.” An opportunity to learn with your children and be entertained alongside them, the director sees Wendy and Peter Pan as inviting “thousands of children to visit Neverland” and join in a shared experience that will see audiences—children and adults—“moved by the story. Empowered by the journey. And dazzled by the production.”

WENDY AND PETER PAN
Adapted by Elia Hickson
From the book by J.M. Barrie
North American Première
Director Thomas Morgan Jones
Choreographer Jera Wolfe
Set and Costume Designer Robin Fisher
Lighting Designer Arun Srinivasan
Composer and Sound Designer Romeo Candido
Production sponsor: The Schulich Foundation.
My head feels like a bridge that all of Beijing has been walking over.

Leanna Brodie and Jovanni Sy's Salesman in China brings to life an ambitious and daring act of cultural cross-pollination: the 1983 Mandarin production of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman at Beijing People's Art Theatre. A historic collaboration symbolizing the beginning of a new era of American-Chinese diplomatic relations, the story imagines the relationship between Miller, brought in to direct the play himself, and legendary actor Ying Ruocheng, cast to portray the downtrodden salesman, Willy Loman. A time-stamped project riddled with seemingly insurmountable challenges—Could a theatrical production bridge the gap between the languages, cultures and national identities of two rival superpowers?—Beijing's staging of Miller's pivotal play is a meeting of two worlds at a unique moment in cultural history, laid bare by Brodie and Sy for audiences to contemplate.

Sy, a veteran of Canadian independent theatre, is beyond thrilled about the world première of this play. "It seems surreal that this play, which features twenty actors and where a significant amount of the show is performed in Mandarin, is getting a production on hallowed ground like Stratford." In its storytelling, Salesman in China helps the audience realize that the original Broadway production of Miller's Salesman was just as ground-breaking as Beijing People's Art Theatre's version. "It's hard for a 21st-century audience to wrap their head around how radical Miller's play was in 1949," Sy remarks. "We see so many plays that incorporate the theatrical idioms used in plays like Death of a Salesman that these plays aren't given their due as badass acts of artistic subversion." Warmed by the idea of bringing "so much incredible Asian talent" to the Stratford stage, Sy is counting down to the moment of the play's first curtain call. "When I began my career over thirty years ago, I dreamed of being part of this company and seeing shows like ours," he says. "I get a little emotional thinking about how that dream is now a reality."

This production is in English and Mandarin with surtitles.

SALESMAN IN CHINA
By Leanna Brodie and Jovanni Sy
Suggested by the memoirs of Arthur Miller and Ying Ruocheng
Chinese translations by Fang Zhang
A Stratford Festival/Banff Centre Co-Commission

World Première
Director Jovanni Sy
Set Designer JoAnna Yu
Costume Designer Ming Wong
Lighting Designer Sophie Tang
Composer and Sound Designer Alessandro Juliani
Projection Designers Caroline MacCaull and Sammy Chien (Chimerik 似不似)


Developed with support from the National Arts Centre's National Creation Fund.

From left: Tom McCamus and Derek Kwan.
SALESMAN

IN CHINA

推销员在中国
Cymbeline is the final play from Shakespeare’s First Folio, an intoxicating late work that fuses romance, comedy and tragedy. Cymbeline is queen of an ancient British fiefdom chafing under the rule of its Roman overlords. When she discovers that her only daughter, Imogen, has married a commoner, Posthumus, Cymbeline banishes the young man to Italy and sets in motion a dangerous chain reaction that puts at risk not only Imogen but the whole kingdom. In Italy, Posthumus wagers the wealthy scoundrel Iachimo that Imogen will stay true to him, setting the stage for an enchanting fantasia of courtly intrigue, romance and gender-swapping disguises.

“Cymbeline is a play full of magic and beauty, and to me, it’s Shakespeare at his finest,” declares director Esther Jun.
Theatre in its purest sense, the play experiments with an unconstrained style, seeing Shakespeare freed of genre limits and left to fully explore the complex themes at the heart of his work. Freedom and play, says Jun, make this story a pleasure to direct. “Pure joy, wonderment and emotion well up when I think about directing this play, because it brings together all the things I truly love and hold dear about theatre,” she shares. “The words are sublime, [they] float around you and settle into your soul. That is the beauty of this play and its characters.”

A play that will entrance Shakespeare lovers with its revelatory gift of poetry, audiences new to the playwright’s work will be equally entertained by what Jun calls *Cymbeline’s* “magical, fantastical, complicated and entirely human” storytelling. 

“Love’s reason’s without reason.”
“I wanted to know everything I was forbidden to know.”
More than a century after its controversial 1891 première, Henrik Ibsen’s brilliant psychological drama still shocks audiences with its complex portrait of female rage and neurosis. Hedda Gabler is a brilliant, ambitious woman thwarted by the social conventions of a time and place that, as Ibsen wryly noted, viewed women “as either intimate servants or decorative house plants.” When Hedda returns from her honeymoon already bored with her new respectable life as a housewife, she asserts her powerful will, wreaking havoc on everyone within her reach.

For director Molly Atkinson, the everlasting draw of the play’s anti-heroine is no surprise. “Hedda is not interested in living the life a woman is expected to live,” says the director. “She has questionable morals and romantic ideals. She is brave and a coward. She wants to know all of your secrets and wants to punish you for telling her. And she is constantly looking for a way to not be seen as a victim.” Atkinson’s view on the play’s protagonist gives room for the sharp corners and deep crevices of her personality to creep into the light. “We see Hedda fighting for a voice, fighting for a different path and desperate to survive. But we also see her give in, trap herself and slowly lose the control and power she so desperately needs.” Is Hedda a victim of circumstance or the author of her own destruction? Every audience member will have their own answer—one dependent on their own circumstance. “Deep down, there are parts of her in all of us,” offers Atkinson. “She says the things we would never dare say. She does the things we would never dare do, and to watch her do those things is both appalling and thrilling.”

HEDDA GABLER
By Henrik Ibsen
A new version by Patrick Marber
From a literal translation by Karen and Ann Bamborough
Director Molly Atkinson
Set and Costume Designer Lorenzo Savoini
Lighting Designer Kaileigh Krysztofiak
Composer and Sound Designer Mishelle Cuttler
Production sponsors: M. Fainer and three generations of the Schubert Family.
On left page: Sara Topham.
THE DIVINERS

Based on the novel by Margaret Laurence
Text by Vern Thiessen with Yvette Nolan

World Première

Directed by Krista Jackson with Geneviève Pelletier
Choreographer Cameron Carver
Set and Lighting Designer Bretta Gerecke
Costume Designer Jeff Chief
Composer Andrina Turenne
Music Director and Sound Designer MJ Dandeneau

Production sponsors: Karon C. Bales & Charles E. Beall, Cathy & Paul Cotton, the Harkins-Manning Family in memory of Jim & Susan Harkins, The Fabio Mascarin Foundation and The Tremain Family.

This page: Julie Lumsden, portrait by Danny Shumov.
Right page: Irene Poole.
The Diviners, published in 1974, is recognized today as Margaret Laurence’s pinnacle achievement and one of Canadian literature’s greatest novels. It is also Laurence’s most autobiographical work. In this bold new adaptation for the stage, premiering at the Stratford Festival, novelist Morag Gunn is struggling to finish her novel-in-progress. Overwhelmed by regret, isolated from her only daughter, far from the rest of the world in her cabin, Morag’s mind drifts from past to future, weaving through dream and memory, all the while excavating the histories of the peoples of Manitoba: Indigenous, Métis and European. In her navigations of these varied states of mind, Morag struggles to find her true voice and vocation, as a woman and an artist.

Epic in scope, spanning centuries of Canada’s past, and with a cast of over 20 performers, this world première adaptation of The Diviners remains rooted in the spirit of an unforgettable protagonist, while bringing Indigenous narratives to the forefront. “Morag is bringing us on the noble journey of reconciling her past, present and future,” says co-director Geneviève Pelletier. “This journey is relatable to anyone that has gone through any introspection in life.” Pelletier’s collaborator Krista Jackson agrees. “Morag carves out a life that is full of integrity and purpose. She chose to leave a marriage that wasn’t working, and then chose to be a single mother in a time when that was shunned. She supported herself and her daughter, Pique, by writing novels. I see Morag as an inspiration and Laurence as being ahead of her time.” In an organic adaption of the work, the directors infuse new perspective into an already illuminating narrative work. “Margaret Laurence’s novel is quite epic, so we chose to move with the path of national reconciliation that she evokes,” explains Pelletier. “It reflects the national conversation; it nourishes the national conversation.”

“The river flows both ways.”
Martin Gray has it all. Barely 50 years old, settled in a beautiful home with wife Stevie, Martin has just won the highest honour in architecture, the Pritzker Prize, timed with a prestigious commission to design a model city. On the day that Martin is to be interviewed about his fabulous life, he confesses to Stevie that he’s fallen in love with a goat named Sylvia. The aftermath of the confession will see a perfect life and an ideal marriage torn apart by the furies of betrayal and forbidden desire.

Understandably, Sylvia, the play’s namesake goat, is a standout character in Edward Albee’s 2002 Tony Award-winning play, but as director Dean Gabourie notes, Albee’s unconventional cautionary tale is less about a man’s relationship with a goat than how secret desires can crash even the most solid—and coveted—of domestic foundations. “Here Albee decided to take a very concise focus on the themes and issues that had driven his work, all of which was really about tearing the gloss away from the privileged class in which he’d grown up.” Overflowing with the playwright’s signature wit and rhythmic wordplay, the play is deliberately structured as a classical Greek five-act tragedy, layering the text with allusions to the plays of the classical period to put forward Albee’s intention of catharsis. “When the great Greek tragedies were written, the pharmacy was formally connected to the theatre, and you could be prescribed a tragedy as part of your healing process,” says Gabourie. “You would sit through the tragedy and experience an emotional catharsis without having to suffer the same violent fate as the characters on stage.” For audiences of The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?, the director will present Albee’s wish for people to feel for Martin what they might for any tragic hero. Yes, falling in love with a goat is primed with comedy, but within this absurdity is emotion. “The humour in the writing opens us up emotionally, so that the tragedy can get in there and make us feel.”
“Knowing it—knowing it’s true is one thing, but believing what you know ... well, there’s the tough part.”

THE GOAT OR, WHO IS SYLVIA?
By Edward Albee

Director Dean Gabourie
Set and Costume Designer Shawn Kerwin
Lighting Designer Kaileigh Krysztofiak
Sound Designer Adam Campbell

Production sponsor: Sylvia Styrka.

From left: Rick Roberts and Lucy Peacock.
In a crowded apartment in Toronto’s Little Jamaica, Richard Whyte is planning the ultimate Jamaican Independence Day party. If only his family—wife Margaret and adult children Rachel and Simeon—would get with the program. Margaret has long resented Richard for foisting the care of his daughter from a previous relationship on her. Rachel, who works two jobs to support the family, has had enough of her stepmother’s disrespect, while Simeon, suffering from PTSD after a stint in the military, just wants to find a job. Over the course of a sweltering Toronto day, the brisk, upbeat façade the Whytes present to the outside world is about to meet its greatest challenge: each other.

“Life is hard wherever you go. We fight for control and happiness in life but when do we ever get it, and if you do, for how long?” These are the types of questions director André Sills wants his audiences to ponder while watching Andrea Scott’s Get That Hope on stage. Making its world première at Stratford’s Studio Theatre, Scott’s play is a complex, bittersweet domestic drama brimming with laughter and tears. “This is a play about family in all its complexities,” Sills affirms. “Families are complex things full of history, full of secrets, full of trauma, and you’re stuck with them. The play asks: Can you really share the darkness in your life with your parents or family members?” The intimate theatre setting invites us to share the Whytes’ secrets and to find in them a version of our own struggles and triumphs. “We come to the theatre to be engaged,” Sills says, “for the audience to breathe as one, to go on a journey, to possibly come out on the other end slightly different than how we came in.”

“Sometimes you got to take a likkle bit of sufferin’ to get that hope.”

GET THAT HOPE
By Andrea Scott
World Première
Director André Sills
Set and Costume Designer Sarah Uwadiae
Lighting Designer Steve Lucas
Composer and Sound Designer Maddie Bautista

Production sponsors: Bryan Blenkin & Alan Rowe and Sylvia D. Chrominska.

Clockwise from top: Kim Roberts, Kaleb Alexander, Celia Aloma and Conrad Coates.
don’t believe in overthinking,” declares Seana McKenna on the topic of directing. Anyone who has had the good fortune of watching McKenna perform can attest to the actor’s intuition for the dramatic arts, which reads as an innate gift, finely tuned through decades of experience onstage at the country’s most renowned theatres. A Stratford Festival mainstay, McKenna—last seen in 2023’s Les Belles-Soeurs—is stepping off stage to take on a new role, sitting at the helm of Twelfth Night as director. With her she brings the same incomparable intuition that has earned this Member of the Order of Canada world renown as an actor.

Beloved by Shakespeare fans, McKenna’s skill at inhabiting the playwright’s most complex characters, from Lady Macbeth to Julius Caesar, is owing to her deep understanding and appreciation for the text—a cerebral connection audiences will see carried over into her work as a director this season. “He wrote for everybody. Shakespeare doesn’t often make judgments. He gives you another side to counter [any] judgment,” she suggests. Also important to note, adds McKenna is the fact that “he often gives the underdog a chance to speak.”

Equal parts intelligence and emotion as an artist, McKenna quotes the words of one of her past directors when speaking about her approach to lifting Twelfth Night from page to stage. “You just got to love each other.” Here, McKenna joins actor Jessica B. Hill (Twelfth Night’s Viola) to discuss her take on theatre as a craft and her journey from a young audience member to a Canadian stage legend.
Jessica: Let’s start by talking about the play itself. *Twelfth Night* is actually the first play I fell in love with. I’ve been trying to articulate why. What is it about this late comedy? What is Shakespeare trying to say about love or identity or family? What does the play mean to you and, what is it that draws you to it?

Seana: Well, as you may know, I have a long relationship with this play. I studied it in university, I’ve been in it twice, I have seen many productions and I worked on it with young actors, both at the National Theatre School of Canada and Stratford’s Birmingham Conservatory. And it is a play that never ceases to surprise me.

I think *Twelfth Night* is a beautifully cut gem of a play; it is multifaceted. It is such an ensemble piece—there are plots and subplots, but they all share the stage time quite equally. I think the whole play is about yearning; for that other half, or that partner to go through life with, or just love—even though characters may not know that’s what they’re looking for or don’t realize it until they think somebody loves them. I think it leans toward joy, [like] *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*. I think we all could use a little levity right now and a world that sees possibilities for communion.

J: What do you hope people take home from our production?

S: I think it’s hopeful. Comedies are hopeful. They often end in new unions, new possibilities, new life. But hope and fear both live in the future; they are anticipatory. “What’s to come is still unsure;” right? So why focus so much of your time on it? Be here now.

J: It’s also an invitation to love each other, right? In the here and now: be there with each other.

S: Yes. “Love the one you’re with.” At one point, I thought let’s call it “What You Will or Twelfth Night.” Because “what you will” is so evocative.

In modern lingo, it would be “whatever” [laughs]...or it would be “what you will”. What will it to be, what you want it to be. I don’t say that the play is Chekhovian because Chekhov came after; but if you want to see it as a melancholy autumnal play, yes, you can. If you want to see it as an ode to love and its madness, you can. If you want to, you can see it as about the fluidity of love and the fact that barriers don’t often work.

You fall in love with someone because of who they are inside and out. Say you have to love this kind of person and then you fall in love with a different kind of person; it’s still love, you know? And the theme of disguise is huge: how you appear to the world. You may see this appearance and make assumptions about who I am, you don’t necessarily know who I am. You don’t know what people are carrying with them. Do we even truly know ourselves? Self-deception, or folly, is everywhere in Illyria.

J: So when did you decide, or know, that you wanted to direct, as well?

S: I think it’s like me acting ... I always did it. Even as a kid. Miles, my husband, was one of the first to say you should be directing; he has always been very supportive. I’ve always seen plays holistically. Even as an actor, I try to ascertain what my function in the play is—not just, this part is great, but why is that character there? What part of the story are they telling? I don’t know that I’ve always wanted to direct. I just felt that it was a natural extension of my life in the theatre. I think the thing I enjoy about it is what I also enjoy about teaching, but in a different way; I love to enable actors, and I love to collaborate with designers and have a team that is coming together to create a story on stage. For me, it is so exciting to see something lift of from paper and make it three-dimensional.

J: Do you have a favourite director that you’ve worked with as an actor? And what is it about them [that stands out]?

S: Yes, I married him [laughs]. I’ve always loved working with Miles. First of all, I think he has the best dramaturgical skills in the country for new plays. And second, he has such great respect for writers and actors. And I always know my pattern with him. He’ll make a suggestion in the first week and I’ll go, “I’m not so sure about that.” And two weeks later, I’ll come back and say, “Hey, I’d like to try this.” He was one of the first directors to say to me, “Trust your instincts.” He liberated me from doing what I thought I should do or what the right thing was; he valued my erinings and my questions. I’ve always felt that it was very collaborative when I worked with him and that my work was better.

J: Coming up, was there an actor that you looked up to, [someone] whose career inspired you in how they navigated certain things?

S: I admired Charmion King, Martha Henry and Douglas Rain—so many [actors] I admired for their work and some for their tenacity and sense of humour. Charmion King was one of those. Martha I admired for her skill—she was breathtakingly beautiful on stage. Douglas Rain was the head of the theatre school I was at, and he impressed upon me the importance of rigour, specificity and choice of words, which I’m failing miserably at in this hour that we’re speaking. [laughing] So yes, there were a lot of them.

J: I feel so lucky [to be] so well surrounded. I really do feel people—the generations—holding hands when I work here. The word communion keeps coming to mind.

S: Yes, it is something quite wonderful to have theatres last for so long, you know? The Festival is a continuum and people that you saw as a child you eventually work with. It’s extraordinary.

J: One of the things I admire most about you is your curiosity. It ties to that rigour, that eagerness to just dive into it and never stop searching and mining the text, which resonates deeply with me. I think it connects [back] to the directing side of seeing the play holistically. How does that [process] inform you as an artist? I guess I wonder, was that curiosity always there? Has it shifted? How has your approach to the work itself changed over the course of your career?

S: I’m not as concerned with consistency. I think I am a pretty consistent actor, but I’m not concerned with the absolute replication of what I did the night before. My intentions are the same. My storytelling is the same, with moments that I cherish, but I think I am more open to actively receiving what I am getting and responding ... which means—I hope—I think I am better, you know?

I want to keep surprising myself. If there’s a role I’m ofered, and I can see exactly what I’m going to do with it, I’m not that excited about it. I’ve always asked questions, maybe too many questions, because I really am curious. I want to know why. I can see in it pictures of me as a child. I have to work at looking pleasant because my face, in repose, you know, it looks quite stern, I think. And it’s not because I’m not liking something, it’s because I’m trying to figure it out. So, yes, I’ve always been curious.

J: It’s one of the most valuable tools for an actor, I think. Because the work never ends. Again, it ties to that space between two people, always mining deeper. What makes people tick? What is being human in the world?

S: I remember when directors would say, “No, but you, you. How would you respond?” To not ignore how you would respond in that situation, because then you are stitching yourself to that character.

J: You know it will be my first time playing on the Festival stage?

S: No! I did not know that, Jessica!

J: I’ve moved furniture on it [laughs] and understudied.

S: Oh, well, you are in for a treat. The Festival stage is a very friendly space, especially from the actor’s viewpoint, because you can put out your arms and embrace the entire audience. It feels very intimate. Theatre is a conversation; we give the audience the story, but they’re bringing their own stories and they respond accordingly. That’s why it’s subjective. That’s why people are moved at different places and why people laugh at different places. There is no barrier between the players and the audience. We are all breathing in the same room.
JUNE 15
THE BODY POLITIC: A HISTORY OF QUEER NEWS IN THE GAY AND LESBIAN LIBERATION ERA
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Friday, June 15 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

The Body Politic was Canada’s primary queer periodical from 1971 to 1987, promoting queer lives and fostering the gay and lesbian liberation movement. Join Raegan Swanson, Executive Director of the ArQuives, Nicholas Hrynky of Thompson Rivers University and others as they delve into the history of queer news in Canada.

JUNE 16
TRANS FAMILIES: AN INTERVIEW WITH KINLEY MOCHRIE, COLIN MOCHRIE AND DEB McGrath
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Sunday, June 16 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

In this beautiful story of family, identity and acceptance, join Kinley and her parents, Colin Mochrie and Deb McGrath, as they discuss what it means to be a supportive family, from Kinley’s coming out journey to dealing with uninformed relatives and transphobic trolls.

THE GUARDIAN AT THE STRATFORD FESTIVAL
A Meighen Forum first! Join Chris Wiegand, stage editor for The Guardian—one of the world’s most respected newspapers—for conversations about theatre and the arts around the globe. From $29

PATRICK MARBER AND SARA TOPHAM
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Saturday, June 22 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

Award-winning theatre creator and author of this season’s adaptation of Hedda Gabler, Patrick Marber joins company member Sara Topham in a conversation with The Guardian’s Chris Wiegand to discuss creating theatre in a modern world and unravelling the intricacies of Ibsen’s timeless masterpiece.

AN INTERVIEW WITH SAM WHITE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Sunday, June 23 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

Guardian journalist Chris Wiegand talks with director of this season’s Romeo and Juliet, Sam White, who is also the Artistic Director and founder of Shakespeare in Detroit.
SEASON DEEP DIVE WEEK
Join Stratford Festival leaders and artists for conversations about developing the 2024 season, from planning the playbill and writing the plays to executing onstage design and action. From $29

UP CLOSE WITH ANTONI CIMOLINO AND ANITA GAFFNEY
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Friday, July 12 | 12:30 p.m.–noon
Artistic Director Antoni Cimolino and Executive Director Anita Gafney answer your questions about the 2024 season and plans for the future.

THE OTHER DIRECTORS: INTIMACY AND FIGHT DIRECTORS
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Friday, July 12 | 5:30–7 p.m.
Have you ever wondered what it takes to be a fight or intimacy director? Join us for a conversation with some of the Festival’s fight and intimacy directors to discuss what their job entails. Discover the behind-the-scenes activities of those who ensure the safety of our actors throughout their performances, encompassing everything from kissing to punching and everything in between.

THE HISTORY OF THE STRATFORD FESTIVAL
Festival Stage | Saturday, July 13 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
Stratford was not always the bustling theatre town that it is today. Travel back in time with us on the Festival Theatre stage as we revisit the history of the beloved Stratford Festival. In this conversation, moderated by Maev Beatty, learn about Tom Patterson, Tanya Moiseiwitsch and Tyrone Guthrie, and hear how the Festival went from a tent to four remarkable theatres.

MONDAY NIGHT MUSIC
THE PHILIP SEGUIN QUARTET: SONGS THE THEATRE TAUGHT ME, VOL. 2
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Monday, July 8 | 7:30–9:30 p.m.
Following last season’s triumphant debut, Festival trumpeter Philip Seguin brings his quartet back for a second installment of songs. With 40 years in show business, Phil gives you a glimpse into the life of a theatre musician and will share his love and interpretations of the classics from the Great American Songbook featuring Brian Dickinson (piano), Dave Young (bass) and David Campion (drums). From $29

SPECIAL LOBBY TALK
SHakespeare AND ASTROLOGY
Festival Lobby
Thursday, July 11 | 12:30 p.m–3:00 p.m.
Have you ever wondered how astrology inspired Shakespeare? International speaker and author Priscilla Costello, M.A., writer of Shakespeare and the Stars: The Hidden Astrological Keys to Understanding the World’s Greatest Playwright, shares her insight and sheds some light on the Bard’s familiarity with astrological symbolism and how the stars influenced his plays. Free

STRATFORD FESTIVAL ANNIVERSARY DINNER
Festival Marquee | Saturday, July 13 | 5:30–7:30 p.m.
On the anniversary of the Festival’s first performance, join us for a celebratory meal curated by Kendrick Prins, the Festival’s Executive Chef. This meal will be a journey for your taste buds, taking you to the 1950s culinary scene with a modern twist, showcasing how the Festival has evolved. This event features a complimentary cocktail or mocktail and a cash bar. From $95

PEER INTO THE PLAYBILL
From $29
FOPS AND DANDIES: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF MEN’S FASHION
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Thursday, July 4 | 12:30 p.m.–noon
From Harcourt’s “foppishness” to Zaza’s sequins, men’s fashion throughout history has been a source of oppression and an avenue for liberation. Join La Cage aux Folles costume designer David Boechler, along with Nishi Bassi, curator and manager of exhibitions at the Bata Shoe Museum, and others as they discuss the history of men’s fashion and societal expectations of gender presentation.

RAISING THE CURTAIN AND LOWERING BARRIERS: ACCESSIBLE THEATRE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Thursday, July 11 | 12:30 p.m.–noon
What are theatres doing to welcome audiences and artists who have barriers to participating in performance arts? Join the Stratford Festival’s Accessibility Coordinator Kayla Besse, Disability Dramaturg Dr. Jessica Watkin, Theatre Passe Muraille Artistic Director Marjorie Chan and others in a panel discussion on how theatres have been making their work and their spaces more accessible and the goal of greater inclusion.

TIGER LILY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Thursday, July 25 | 12:30 p.m.–noon
Since preparations for the production of Wendy and Peter Pan began, the Festival’s creative teams have partnered with several consultants from different communities to consider how to approach Tiger Lily, a character whose history is fraught with racist stereotypes, in a forward-thinking way. Join some of the people behind this production for a conversation about Tiger Lily’s history, present and future.

ACCESSIBLE THEATRE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Thursday, July 25 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
Theatres have been making their work and their spaces more accessible and the goal of greater inclusion. Raising the Curtain and Lowering Barriers: Accessible Theatre. Set, costume and lighting are integral to the art of storytelling. Each element immerses the audience in the world of the drama, often propelling it forward with innovative staging, lighting and costumes. Lighting designer Michael Walton and others discuss the artistry of how design helps tell the story.

DEVELOPING NEW PLAYS AT THE STRATFORD FESTIVAL
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Sunday, July 14 | 12:30 p.m.–noon
Did you know that at any given time there are dozens of projects in active development at the Stratford Festival? Join Keith Barker, Director of the Foerster Bernstein New Play Development Program, Laboratory Coordinator Andrea Demars and others in a conversation charting the path of a play from concept to production.
This five-part series, moderated by CBC Ideas host Nahlah Ayed, explores the kind of future we want to live in, something that has never been tried before? How do we create a better world? How do we articulate the kind of future we want to live in, make them real by focusing on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. From $29

THE RIGHT TO SECURITY: ARTICLE 3
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Wednesday, July 17 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

The right to “life, liberty and security of person” is one of the most important, but most contested, rights we have. In this panel, Nahlah Ayed and guests explore what the right to security could mean and how it could transform our world.

THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY: ARTICLE 12
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Thursday, July 18 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

“No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation,” states Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It’s a right with profound implications for our lives in the 21st century, from digital surveillance to sexuality and autonomy.

THE RIGHTS TO LEAVE, TO RETURN, AND TO SEEK ASYLUM: ARTICLES 13 AND 14
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Friday, July 19 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” One also has the right to seek “asylum from persecution” in other countries. At a time when record numbers of people are forcibly displaced, Nahlah Ayed and guests explore where these rights came from and the impact they have today.

THE RIGHTS TO FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION: ARTICLES 18 AND 19
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Saturday, July 20 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

The guarantee of freedom of thought, as well as freedom to express those thoughts, is especially relevant in today’s society. In Orwell’s novel 1984, he proposed a future of “thought-crime,” and in many places that day has arrived; freedom of opinion is under even greater threat with the dominance of opining on social media.

RIGHTS FOR THE FUTURE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Sunday, July 21 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

If the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were rewritten today, what rights would we add to strive for a more just world? The right to a healthy environment? The right to communicate? In the final panel, Nahlah Ayed and guests look beyond our fractured present and try to imagine what new rights we need for our own millennium.

FUNNY FORUM FRIDAYS From $29

DON KELLY
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Friday, July 12 | 9–10:30 p.m.

Don Kelly is an Anishinaabe comedian from Treaty #3 region whose mix of observational comedy and issues-driven materials sometimes draws on his First Nations heritage. This year, he brings his comedic skill and insight to the Meighen Forum; join Kelly for an evening that is definitely not one to be missed!

WOLVES OF GLENDALE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Friday, July 26 | 9–10:30 p.m.

Wolves of Glendale is a comedy band born from the minds and talents of Ethan Edenburg (vocals/guitar), Eric Jackowitz (vocals/drums) and Tom McGovern (vocals/keyboards) and their keen eye for life’s absurdities, along with amazing musical abilities. Catch their live performance and prepare to be enthralled by a set including clever parodies of popular songs.
AUGUST

SHAKESPEARE AND THE WORLD
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Friday, August 9 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
The work of Shakespeare is known across the globe for exploring universal experiences, lending itself to culturally specific adaptations and being used as an instrument of imperialism. Join Rodrigo Bellfuss, Artistic Director of Shakespeare in the Ruins, and others as they discuss the meaning of Shakespeare worldwide.

THEATRE ACROSS BORDERS: THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF GLOBAL THEATRE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Sunday, August 11 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
Theatre is universal, so it should be a trivial thing to take it around the world. But bringing art overseas is not always smooth sailing. Join Danny Everson, Executive Director of Mermaid Theatre, and other Canadian theatre practitioners in a discussion on how they bring their theatre to the rest of the world, while simultaneously bringing international theatre to Canada.

ECODRAMA: GREENING THEATRE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Sunday, August 11 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
Ecodrama is a new approach to telling stories about the climate crisis through live performance. It invites theatre companies to choose sustainable and decarbonizing pathways and provides a public forum for thinking about how to live through calamities with collective resilience and hope. Learn more details about ecodrama with Canadian playwright Colleen Murphy, Shakespeare Professor Randall Martin and others.

MONDAY NIGHT MUSIC From $29

THE PROTEST SONG, REIMAGINED
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Monday, July 22 | 7:30–9:30 p.m.
The SPECIAL INTEREST group brings a new rhythm to songs of hope and struggle. Listen as the group infuses songs from the civil rights, labour and protest movements with elements of folk, blues, rock, R&B, jazz, reggae and ska.

GIMLET’S FINE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Monday, July 29 | 7:30–9:30 p.m.
An evening of songs and tunes in the Celtic tradition with Ian Harper, Graham Hargrove, Michael McClennan and George Meanwell.

FORUM ACADEMY SERIES: MAKING ECO-SHAKESPEARE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Sunday, August 11 | 2–3:30 p.m.
What can Shakespeare tell us about today’s climate catastrophe? Eco-Shakespeare-in-performance project Cymbeline in the Anthropocene invited international theatre companies to examine this question. Through their creativity and passion, they discovered environmental insights about adapting and staging Shakespeare. Randall Martin, project leader of Cymbeline in the Anthropocene, and Montana State University Professor Gretchen Minton gather to share their expertise on eco-Shakespeare. From $35

FORUM ACADEMY SERIES: EXPLORING THE WORLD OF THE STRATFORD FESTIVAL ARCHIVES
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Sunday, July 21 | 2–3:30 p.m.
In this session led by Stephanie Vaillant, Interim Archives Manager at the Stratford Festival, learn the unique role of a theatre archivist and the particular intricacies and challenges of managing the Festival’s Archives. Gain insight into the diverse multimedia archival holdings dating back to 1952. From $35

FUNNY FORUM FRIDAYS From $29

ARTHUR SIMEON
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Friday, August 9 | 9–11:30 p.m.
Get ready to laugh with Arthur Simeon, a Ugandan-born comedian based in Toronto, who has been performing worldwide for a decade. Arthur’s gift for storytelling and his unique comedic voice have made him a regular on CBC Radio’s Laugh Out Loud and The Debaters. Outside of his comedic career, Simeon is also a banana-bread connoisseur and lover of slow jams.

KENNY ROBINSON
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Friday, August 23 | 9–11:30 p.m.
A unique blend of energy, sharp wit and impeccable style, this one-of-a-kind act is not for the faint-hearted or narrow-minded. Canadian comedian Kenny Robinson fearlessly challenges sensibilities by delivering unspoken truths that assault both your heart and funny bone. This evening promises an unforgettable experience that will transcend the ordinary.

SPECIAL CONCERTS

RON SEXSMITH IN CONCERT
Tom Patterson Theatre
Monday, August 29 | 7:30–9:30 p.m.
Stratford local and three-time JUNO award-winner Ron Sexsmith returns to the Forum for a mesmerizing evening of music. Sexsmith’s soulful voice and poetic lyrics create an intimate atmosphere, weaving tales of love and life. With the enchantment of his musical storytelling, Sexsmith’s performance will transport you on a harmonious journey through his acclaimed discography. From $29
HEDDA GABLER: POWER, SEX AND DEATH
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Thursday, August 1 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

Hedda Gabler has been called a modern-day Hamlet; she is an emotionally complex, richly written character trapped in desperate circumstances not of her own making. Join director Molly Atkinson, expert in psychology Laura Moore and others in this fascinating conversation about the mentality of the character and what Freud would say about the play.

WHAT’S IN A ... GENRE?
SHAKESPEARE’S LATE ROMANCES
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Thursday, August 8 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

Cymbeline has been called a tragedy, a comedy and even a tragicomedy, though nowadays it is considered one of Shakespeare’s “late romances.” Maev Beatty moderates a panel of theatre experts, including Professor Holger Syme, to discuss these “tragedies that end happily,” as well as the usefulness of categorizing Shakespeare and how his late plays help us understand Shakespeare’s life.

BEYOND WILDE: REVEALING THE MYSTERIES OF 19TH-CENTURY THEATRE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Thursday, August 15 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

Some say that there were no great English plays written in the period between Richard Sheridan and Oscar Wilde. Yet playwright Dion Boucicault’s London Assurance was a success at a time when melodrama, minstrel shows and musical revues dominated English theatre. Co-Artistic Directors of the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival Julia Nish-Lapidus and James Wallis, Dr. Cheryl Thompson and Dr. Terry Robinson discuss this unique era in theatre.

CENTERING THE MANGO:
CELEBRATING THE JAMAICAN CANADIAN EXPERIENCE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Thursday, August 22 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

Andrea Scott’s première of Get That Hope features and celebrates Jamaican Canadians and Jamaican culture. Join the playwright, educator Phiona Lloyd-Henry from the Jamaican Canadian Association and others as they discuss beef patties, Caribana and the influence Jamaican culture has had on Canada.

WHAT MAKES A TRagedy?
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Thursday, August 29 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

The Goat or: Who is Sylvia? is Edward Albee’s attempt at writing a modern-day Greek tragedy. Romeo and Juliet is regarded as the world’s greatest love story, even though it ends in death. Maev Beatty and a panel of experts, including classicist Adriana Brook and Michael Y. Bennett, President of the Edward Albee Society, discuss the origins of tragedy and its perennial draw.

READERS AND WRITERS WEEK

THE GOLDEN AGE OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Friday, August 23 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

The Golden Age of Children’s Literature marked a period of innovation and creativity in children’s books, giving rise to many enduring classics that continue to captivate and inspire readers. Director, teacher and actor Allen MacInnis moderates a conversation with authors and experts about how J. M. Barrie and his counterparts influence the way we view and create literature for young readers.

VALLEY OF THE BIRDTAIL: CONVERSATION WITH CO-AUTHORS DOUGLAS SANDERSON (AMO BINASHII) AND ANDREW STOBO SNIDERMAN
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Saturday, August 24 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

Co-authors Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii) and Andrew Stobo Sniderman discuss their acclaimed book Valley of the Birdtail: An Indian Reserve, a White Town, and the Road to Reconciliation, a true story about how two communities became separate and unequal—and what this means for the rest of us.

ON MARGARET LAURENCE WITH JANE URQUHART AND GUY VANDERHAEGHE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Sunday, August 25 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

Margaret Laurence will forever remain in the hearts of Canadian readers. Her iconic style and empathetic characters are just one layer of the influence she had on modern writers and artists. Literary critic and writer David Staines leads this conversation with award-winning novelists Guy Vanderhaeghe, Jane Urquhart and others.

MONDAY NIGHT MUSIC

NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Monday, August 12 | 7:30–9:30 p.m.

“Imagine if the early Police and Green Day begat a child and raised them on Dostoevsky and Donne,” is how this band describes themselves. Notes from Underground’s fast-paced melodic music has been called an “alt sonic-pop attack.” Featuring Aaron Krohn (guitar and vocals), Bethany Jillard Krohn (vocals), Ben Carlson (bass) and Graham Hargrove (drums). From $29

LARRY’S JAZZ GUYS
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Monday, August 26 | 7:30–9:30 p.m.

Larry and his “Guys” return for an encore performance, featuring Festival musicians past and present. Experience a delightful blend of beloved standards, new favourites and the sort of surprises synonymous with a fantastic evening of music. From $29

MONDAY NIGHT MUSIC
PEER INTO THE PLAYBILL  From $29

THE FASCINATION WITH HISTORICAL FICTION
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Thursday, September 5 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
Historical fiction combines fiction with historical settings and events. While historical figures, like William Shakespeare, may appear, the central characters are typically fictional, like Nick and Nigel Bottom in *Something Rotten!* Join Professor Thomas Luxon of Dartmouth College, Professor Michael Dove of Western University and others as they discuss how fictionalizing history can help people understand past and present in a deeper way.

ON THE DIVINERS: LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Thursday, September 12 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
Language flows like a river in our new adaptation of *The Diviners*. Michif, the language of the Métis, features prominently in the script and is key to Métis identity. In this discussion, we talk with Elder Lorraine Coutu-Lavallee and other Indigenous-language and cultural-revitalization experts about how the preservation of language allows us to preserve history and culture.

BRIDGING THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Thursday, September 19 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
From the Greatest Generation and Generation Alpha to parents and children, generations are one way we define our lives—but how are generations defined? How can generational conflict be reconciled? In this discussion, Dr. Norah Keating, Chair of the Board of the Vanier Institute of the Family, and other experts discuss what we can learn from each other and how we can live together.

FINDING FUNNY WITH WENTWORTH & WYN DAVIES
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Thursday, September 26 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
Why are we still able to laugh at jokes that were first told 430 years ago? What does it mean to be funny? What is the essence of comedy? These questions will be considered in this casual chat with seasoned actors Scott Wentworth (Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*) and Geraint Wyn Davies (Sir Harcourt Courtly in *London Assurance*).

DEATH OF A SALESMAN GOES TO BEIJING
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Friday, September 20 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
What on earth possessed Arthur Miller to come to China in 1983 to direct his quintessentially American masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman*? Join Leanna Brodie and Jovanni Sy, the playwrights of *Salesman in China*, and others as they discuss the historical, political, artistic and personal context around the real events that inspired their play.

CENSORSHIP AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Saturday, September 21 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
In this conversation with experts on public policy, human rights and artistic freedom, the history and modern-day realities of censorship are examined, along with the reasons art is censored and the ways artists fight being silenced.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Sunday, September 22 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
The U.S. Department of State has a policy to support American artists performing abroad and foreign artists touring the United States. Arthur Miller’s sojourn in Beijing to direct *Death of a Salesman* in 1983 can be viewed in this context. Co-founder of the North American Cultural Diplomacy Initiative Sascha Priewe and others join moderator Deanna Horton to examine cultural diplomacy past and present.

FORUM ACADEMY SERIES: 21ST-CENTURY THEATRE MAKING—IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGY AND THE EXPANDING FRONTIERS OF LIVE PERFORMANCE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Sunday, September 22 | 3–4:30 p.m.
Immersive technologies, from virtual and augmented reality to virtual production and the metaverse, are expanding opportunities for theatre-makers and opening up new possibilities for storytelling and audience engagement. In this discussion, immersive storytelling consultant Christopher Lane will unpack these new technologies and explore their impact on creating theatre in the 21st century.

SCHOLARS AND EXPERTS WEEK
Scholars and experts explore the playbill, bringing insight and experience to discussions around the impact of art, even when circumstance would see it obscured or contained. From $29

DEATH OF A SALESMAN GOES TO BEIJING
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What on earth possessed Arthur Miller to come to China in 1983 to direct his quintessentially American masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman*? Join Leanna Brodie and Jovanni Sy, the playwrights of *Salesman in China*, and others as they discuss the historical, political, artistic and personal context around the real events that inspired their play.
ON STAGE WITH ADAM GOPNIK

Award-winning writer and essayist Adam Gopnik sits down with some of today’s most inspiring and insightful thinkers. From $29

ON STAGE WITH ADAM GOPNIK:
JESSICA B. HILL
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Saturday, September 28
10:30 a.m.–noon
What does it take to shift from one art form to another art form? In this in-depth conversation with company member and playwright Jessica B. Hill, she contemplates theatre, art, writing and life with globally acclaimed author Adam Gopnik.

ON STAGE WITH ADAM GOPNIK:
ROSALIE ABELLA
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre
Sunday, September 29
10:30 a.m.–noon
Witness the magic unfold as retired Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Abella chats with friend and celebrated author Adam Gopnik. Join these two friends as they discuss the intersection of influence and creativity. This conversation promises to leave you inspired and enriched.

RARELY PLAYED WORKSHOPS

Discover your inner actor! After a brief introduction, you’ll be randomly assigned roles to read and guided through a reading and discussion of a play written by one of Shakespeare’s contemporaries. Presented in collaboration with Shakespeare BASH’d. From $25

’TIS PITY SHE’S A WHORE BY JOHN FORD
Festival Marquee | Wednesday, July 3 | 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
A rapturous love affair that threatens the quiet religious certainty of a community. This play bubbles with desire and passion, similar to Romeo and Juliet; however, the difference is that these two lovers are siblings.

ENDYMION, THE MAN IN THE MOON BY JOHN LYLY
Festival Marquee | Wednesday, August 14 | 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
A deeply enjoyable mythical prosaic comedy of madness, yearning and unrequited love between a goddess and a man. Endymion, the Man in the Moon, works as a companion to Twelfth Night.

PHILASTER, OR LOVE LIES A-BLEEDING BY FRANCIS BEAUMONT AND JOHN FLETCHER
Festival Marquee | Wednesday, August 28 | 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
A raucous tragicomedy with knights in love, maidens in disguise and ridiculous encounters and adventures. It was an enormous success for the playwriting duo; it was either an influence on or inspired by Shakespeare’s Cymbeline.

THE CONVENT OF PLEASURE BY MARGARET CAVENDISH
Festival Marquee | Wednesday, August 28 | 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
A rare classic that is humorous, musical and ahead of its time, notably written and published by a woman. This work of utopian fiction tells the story of Lady Happy who rejects social norms to create a “convent” for free women.

SPEAKER EVENTS

THE ARTIST’S LIFE WITH BOB WHITE
Lazaridis Hall, Tom Patterson Theatre | Saturday, July 6; Sunday, July 28; Friday, August 16 | 10:30 a.m.–noon
Veteran director, dramaturg, Artistic Director and theatre practitioner Bob White sits down with legendary Stratford artists, directors and playwrights for in-depth and personal conversations about their chosen paths, untold stories and what it takes to be a theatre maker in the 21st century. Guests to be announced. From $29
More Forum events and details will continue to be announced. Visit our website for details and Forum news:

SPECIAL PERFORMANCES

**THE GREAT FIRE**
By Roland Schimmelpfennig
Translated by David Tushingham
Conceived and Directed by Alan Dilworth
Featuring and Hosted by Maev Beaty
Sound Design and Mix by Debashis Sinha
Dialogue Editor/Assistant Recording Engineer Emma Pressello
Installation Design by Rick Banville
A Necessary Angel Theatre Company presentation.
Lazaridis Hall | July 25–27, August 15–17, September 12–14

The Great Fire, a five-part immersive audio experience conceived and directed by Alan Dilworth and hosted by Dora Award–winner Maev Beaty, evokes a world both everyday and otherworldly. Within a familiar folk setting of competing rural villages, Schimmelpfennig conjures a magical yet modern world beset by prejudice, misunderstanding, plague and climate catastrophe. From $59

**SONG AND DANCE: SOMETHING ROTTEN!**
Festival Theatre | Wednesday, July 10; Friday, August 9; Sunday, September 8
10:30 a.m.–noon
Audiences can learn and perform step-by-step choreography and music from Something Rotten! with artists from the show! Culminates in an engaging Q&A. These 90-minute workshops are for all ages and require active participation. From $32

**SONG AND DANCE: LA CAGE AUX FOLLES**
Studio Theatre | Friday, July 26; Thursday, August 15; Saturday, September 7
10:30 a.m.–noon
Audiences can learn and perform step-by-step choreography and music from La Cage aux Folles with artists from the show! Culminates in an engaging Q&A. These 90-minute workshops are for all ages and require active participation. From $32

**ROMEO AND JULIET: THEN AND NOW**
Stratford Festival Archives | Friday, May 17; Friday, September 27
10:30 a.m.–noon
Explore Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet by visiting the Stratford Festival Archives. Alongside our Education and Archives staff, discover how the play has been reimagined by directors and designers throughout our history, with a close-up look at historical costumes, props and other archival materials. From $29

BACKSTAGE TOURS

**FESTIVAL THEATRE**
10–11:30 a.m.
Friday, July 10; Thursday, August 15; Saturday, August 17; Saturday, August 24; Friday, August 30; Friday, September 6; Thursday, September 12; Friday, September 13
Learn behind-the-scenes secrets on this exclusive backstage tour led by members of our production team. Join us to discover all that goes into running a show at the Festival Theatre.

**AVON THEATRE**
10–11:30 a.m.
Friday, July 26; Friday, August 2; Wednesday, August 14; Wednesday, September 4; Saturday, September 7
Members of our production team offer a tour and behind-the-scenes insights into the triumphs and tribulations of the shows at the Avon Theatre, both past and present.

**TOM PATTERSON THEATRE**
10–11:30 a.m.
Thursday, July 11; Friday, August 9; Tuesday, August 13; Friday, August 23; Thursday, August 29; Thursday, September 5; Thursday, September 12; Friday, September 20
Take a tour of our award-winning facility with people who work backstage. Learn secrets from industry professionals and see how your favourite shows of the season come to life.

**GHOST TOURS**
9–10:30 p.m.
Wednesday, October 16; Friday, October 18; Monday, October 21; Monday, October 28; Wednesday, October 30
Artists and audiences love the Stratford Festival—so much that sometimes they never, ever leave. As twilight falls, tour the Avon Theatre to discover stories of ghostly apparitions forever found at the Festival.

Support for On Stage with Adam Gopnik is generously provided by Richard & Mona Alonzo.
Support for Monday Night Music is generously provided by Sandra Rotman in honour of Louis Applebaum through The Louis Applebaum Visiting Artists Program.
Support for Peer into the Playbill is generously provided by The Dorothy Strelsin Foundation.

Prices are $35 in advance and $40 on the day.
William Shakespeare was an influencer with imposter syndrome who plagiarized his greatest work. Or at least that’s how the Renaissance rockstar is portrayed in Something Rotten!, a historical fiction about the invention of musicals and the cult of fame. Told by two of Shakespeare’s rival playwrights, Nick and Nigel Bottom, the Bard’s reputation is fodder for a brewing feud between the publicly revered artist and the scrappy up-and-comers.

“Stratford is the best audience this show could ask for,” raves director and choreographer Donna Feore. “They come to see musicals. They come to see Shakespeare. What a perfect set-up.” A true tribute to theatre, Something Rotten! is packed with references to hit musicals, some of which Feore directed on the very same Festival stage—The Sound of Music, A Chorus Line and The Music Man. It also comes stacked with hype; the show’s original Broadway run earned 10 Tony nominations in 2015, including Best Musical. All too aware of its past success, Feore has issued herself a challenge: make a self-referential musical revival original. “I don’t want to repeat myself,” she says, promising, “I’m not going to hold back.”

The Bottom brothers are also after something original, but for different reasons. As their name suggests, the pair are downtrodden, struggling to make it big in the Renaissance arts scene. In 1595 London, their plays are always upstaged by a more popular writer and his notions of star-crossed lovers and ancient grudges. A pox on William Shakespeare.

To best the beloved playwright, Nick hires Nostradamus, a soothsayer who can see the future, sort of. Nostradamus predicts musicals will revolutionize theatre and gives Nick an idea to write about ... an omelette? Wait, that can’t be right. “Nick knows it’s a terrible idea,” Feore explains. “But he’s desperate.” Nick convinces himself the idea is just novel enough to work. “Welcome to the Renaissance,” the ensemble sings, “Where everything is new!”

And so Nick snubs his own creative instinct in an earnest attempt at fame. Committed to the cause, he shuts down protests from brother and writing partner Nigel, who declares, “I’m ignoring the breakfast theme because

CONTINUED ON PAGE 69
Throughout the history of THEATRE, it’s always been about YOU.

By Staf | Interviews by Isabela Stille

From the days of Homeric legends, when the memory and knowledge of ancestors were immortalized in epic poems for oral performance, to the modern day, when the voice of pop culture’s reigning Homer, actor Dan Castellaneta, switches hats and mediums to doubly charm Simpsons fans from an off-Broadway stage, theatre has been a home for storytelling of all types. Here, whether you’re into the grief and rage fuelling Greek warriors or more about watching your favourite television star act silly up close and personal, the likelihood of seeing your lived experience reflected back at you is equal to the chance of taking in a perspective on life that’s entirely new to you. These odds are what make theatre theatre: an art form distinguished by a flexible nature and enduring reach, skilled at making stories adaptive and timeless. For the people who make theatre, these qualities translate into a space where “belonging” is an inviting, open-ended conversation—a limitless exchange between artists and audiences.

Looking back to when William Shakespeare was writing, players—their characters—have always been a reflection of the faces crowded around the stage. The playwright understood and valued his audience. In all likelihood, Shakespeare’s instinctual ability to connect with audiences would see him ranked high in a “guy you’d want to have a beer with” poll during the English Renaissance. “Theatre never was high art, theatre was populist,” says Dr. Joanna Bucknall from the University of Birmingham’s Department of Drama and Theatre Arts. It wasn’t until the Victorian era that theatre etiquette took hold. Before that, getting pummelled by fruits and pies from unentertained theaetgoers was a real possibility for actors—an assault that would have packed the same punch as a modern 1-star review.

Wanting to dodge the flying leftovers, early theatre troupes courted their audiences. As Dr. Bucknall explains it, in this way audience representation was top of mind. “They would integrate local knowledge and local aspects into either the prologue or the play itself, so that it would have a connection with the audience.”

Shakespeare went even further; he famously leaned into audience reactions, utilizing these people as unofficial editors. “We know that he did multiple drafts after performances,” says Dr. Bucknall. “In some ways, those audiences are immortalized in the development of those plays, because they were changed and shifted in responses to those audiences.” Even if that meant daring to portray everyday characters and modern ideas deemed uncouth, Dr. Bucknall is heartened by Shakespeare the maverick: “He was definitely controversial.”

Today, theatre remains loyal to a philosophy adhered to by the ancient Greeks (one Shakespeare evidently appreciated): the spoken word is living. In their eyes, the value of this living thing is its relationship with the audience—its relevance to their lives. Socrates believed that once something had been written down, it would lose its ability to change and grow. In his career, Shakespeare warded this off by keeping a sharp eye on audiences and wick ready in hand. Similarly, today’s artists rely on revisiting text to help breathe the “living” into older literary works.

Take Stratford’s acclaimed production of Much Ado About Nothing last season. Directed by Chris Abraham, with additional text written by Canadian playwright Erin Shields, this production extends thoughtful contemplation on the Hero character’s journey with bookend additions to the play, giving every Barbie movie fan another everyday introspective hero (pardon the pun) to quote. Like this dinner-party worthy quip: “To watch her watch herself, is to recall / A time your innocence was in its bloom.” From critical praise, including a Globe and Mail review calling it “a shoo-in for future lists of all-time greatest Stratford shows,” to an outpouring of positive audience reaction, the excitement around Abraham’s Much Ado About Nothing demonstrates theatre patrons are happy to see old stories revitalized to reflect modern audiences like them. As Festival patron Breanne Ritchie’s shared on Instagram, “Easily one of my favourite SF productions, especially the additional text by Erin Shields. Happy closing and congrats to all involved!”

In Dr. Bucknall’s perspective, refreshed works like this and last season’s audience darling Richard II are an important extension of the audience. “It does us all good to see and hear those other experiences.” Instagram user Marian Doucette has said as much. After attending a performance of Richard II Doucette wrote: “This is one of the most magical pieces of theatre at @stratfest this season. Stephen [ackman-Torkof] is perfectly cast in their role. I love how this production pushes all boundaries. The excitement of the three young women seated in front of me was infectious and it was exciting to know that this production is reaching a younger audience. I loved the experience so much I’m booked to see it again. BRAVO!”

Relevance and representation go hand in hand. Theatres are guided by their audiences; patron growth is dependent on audience feedback, and while theatres across the globe are striving to hear their audience and deliver diverse storytelling and viewing experiences, the industry has obstacles to overcome. The National Arts Centre’s “Black Out Night” initiative, which originated on Broadway,
N o record of Shakespeare directing his own plays exists, but he clearly understood the deep importance of the role to a successful production. The actors in the play within the play of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would clearly be lost without their director Peter Quince, and Shakespeare has Hamlet mouth advice he probably passed on to the actors in his own company: “Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines.”

Speech, music, staging, choreography, lighting, sets—with so many elements and artists at work in every performance, the director’s importance cannot be understated. Tyrone Guthrie, the Stratford Festival’s founding artistic director and the visionary behind its inaugural production of *Richard III* in 1953, described his role as a kind of “chairman of the proceedings.” Like Shakespeare (by way of Hamlet), Guthrie was not above criticizing his actors in rehearsal; even still, he believed a director’s key attribute was flexibility: “All the collaborators in a production must feel that they are partners and not servants. Everything hangs on everybody. Hence the need for a flexible attitude.”

Stratford’s current crop of inspired directors embody Guthrie’s spirit of leadership, passion for collaboration and devotion to the craft. Here, they share their insights on the role of a director as they have experienced and envision it.

Over four decades in theatre, as a celebrated actor and director, have taught Seana McKenna that it really does take a village to raise a curtain. “A play comes off the page into its true form—a production—with the collaboration of many players, designers, stage managers, crew and, finally, the audience. Which is why I am somewhat skeptical of the word ‘vision’: it is not mine alone, and it will shift.” That sense of communal experience extends, for McKenna, to audiences across the ages, to anyone who has ever sat down—or stood, in Shakespeare’s time—for a performance of *Twelfth Night*. That is the power of great theatre. “For me,” she says, “good plays of any age are contemporary—and that annoying word ‘relevant’—because they are just that: plays. They are being performed live by and for people living right now, who have entered the same theatre, read the same headlines that day, endured or enjoyed the same weather. There are many stories being revisited in the theatre: the stories of the play, and all the stories that come in with each audience member. They connect in the theatre.”
Donna Feore’s decision to direct the Broadway hit *Something Rotten!* at Stratford just might be the perfect marriage of artist and material. Feore has choreographed, directed, acted and danced in dozens of musicals and plays at the Festival: what better use of her multiple talents than a song-and-dance satire of all things Shakespeare and musical theatre? Mounting the production on the Festival Theatre’s thrust stage, which faces the audience on three sides, is especially intriguing to Feore. “Whenever I direct/choreograph a show for the Festival stage, I always have to reimagine the work. The unique qualities of the thrust stage demand it and offers the audience exceptional intimacy. *Something Rotten!* will have all new staging and choreography, and we have an incredible cast, creative team and orchestra to bring it to life.” She assures audiences that the show is as in love with Shakespeare and musical theatre as they are. “I see this show as an affectionate take on musicals and Shakespeare and the collision of the two. The writers aren’t afraid to have fun and irreverently send up both!”

The enduring appeal of *La Cage aux Folles* is easy to sum up for director Thom Allison: “It’s a gloriously funny and entertaining show, with composer Jerry Herman, of *Hello, Dolly!* fame, at his very best. Hit song after hit song.” After bringing *Rent*, also a Broadway smash, to Stratford in 2023, Allison feels ready to meet the challenges of mounting another complex work of musical theatre. “It’s always a juggling act,” he says. “I think if you strive to keep your attention on telling the story, you’ll be closer to success than not.” For his latest production, the story is anchored in familial love and the need for forgiveness. “It’s important to me that the audience understands the true nature of what it means to forgive when we are deeply hurt by one who is deeply hurting. And how, when we can understand and forgive, the love that’s left is clearer.”

As a veteran director and the founding artistic director of the Shakespeare in Detroit theatre, Sam White has helmed many an innovative Shakespeare interpretation, including a version of *Twelfth Night* set in 1920s Harlem. For *Romeo and Juliet*, her first Shakespeare production at Stratford, White is going in a different direction: “Hyper classical Italian Renaissance. Folks may be surprised to see actors in tights!” White knows she is bucking the trend to recast Shakespeare’s works in innovative times and settings, but she is up to the challenge. “I haven’t seen a hyper classical play in a long time and, I’m really looking forward to creating a story—with my collaborators—that feels resonant today but looks like candy with beautiful textures, colours and silhouettes and movement. The discord, violence and death in the play only matters if it is juxtaposed with art and beauty and music and life.” The heart of the play is its brief and tragic love affair, which unfolds in less than a week. “Life comes at you fast,” White says. “I know from personal experience that tragedy doesn’t forewarn you and life can be altered in the blink of an eye. I show up for the work, the artists and the characters with compassion because I know Shakespeare understood life and how quickly it can change.”

Antoni Cimolino’s 36-year association with the Stratford Festival—including 13 as artistic director—have trained his eye and ear for the nuances of language, movement, choreography and comedy. Who better than him to helm a revival of *London Assurance*, a blistering, boisterous comedy of manners? “The play has a wonderful sense of movement,” Cimolino enthuses, “including the potential for dance. The lyricism of the language is mirrored in the body language and in the line of the costumes.” Cimolino notes that, although the best comedy is specific to its time and place, particularly to a society’s laws at the time of writing, the genre remains “the most enduring art form of all. Fashions and laws change over time but human folly endures, and character-based comedy has been popular since the dawn of human consciousness. So long as we focus on the behaviours of these amazing characters, laughter will follow.”

**DONNA FEORE**
DIRECTOR OF *SOMETHING ROTTEN!*

**SAM WHITE**
DIRECTOR OF *ROMEO AND JULIET*

**ANTONI CIMOLINO**
DIRECTOR OF *LONDON ASSURANCE*

**THOM ALLISON**
DIRECTOR OF *LA CAGE AUX FOLLES*
Every play, every production, every performance presents a bevy of challenges to the director. Family-oriented theatre is no exception. Wendy and Peter Pan director Thomas Morgan Jones knows he has his work cut out for him. “Making plays for children is an act of honouring their many capacities: emotional, intellectual, imaginative,” he says. “This type of playmaking demands that we as artists create the most joyful and also the most sophisticated theatre we possibly can. Full of heart, intelligence and wonder. The greatest invitation is to wonder.” That invitation is especially important in an age in which children’s imaginations are so thoroughly captured by digital screens. Live theatre, Jones insists, “is unlike anything children can experience through a screen. That liveness is, I think, both inspiring and empowering to children. It shows them that this play, this experience, was made and is being made only for them in real time. Because they are special.”

“I am so thrilled to dive into the madness of Hedda’s brain, moving a mile a minute. How does this woman grapple with the relationships around her in the last 36 hours of her life? Is her destruction the bravest and most courageous thing she could do in her circumstances?” These and other perplexing questions began “swimming around” Molly Atkinson’s brain when she learned that she’d be directing Hedda Gabler, one of the most analyzed, misunderstood and beloved works of European theatre. For Atkinson, questions about Hedda and the play’s other conflicted, complex characters largely get hammered out in rehearsals. “That’s the exciting part of the rehearsal process: answering these questions,” she says. “Approaching the play in rehearsals is an extraordinary collaboration of everyone’s thoughts and ideas of the characters and the story. We get to compile all of the amazing information and sift through it to get to the heart of the story and hopefully entertain the audiences.”

For all of its pageantry, fantasy and romance, Cymbeline stands out as one of Shakespeare’s most complex character studies. Director Esther Jun is especially fascinated by Posthumus and Imogen, the young lovers who are swept up in the court intrigue and war unleashed by Cymbeline’s actions. “Imogen is a complex character who makes her own choices. But the play is not so much about whether these people make the right choices, it’s about how they navigate the choices they make.” It would be easy, Jun notes, to label Posthumus as a villain, considering his treatment of Imogen. Not so, says Jun. “With Posthumus, Shakespeare has created a compelling male character, full of contradictions, but entirely human and a product of this society and upbringing. Posthumus is one of the only male characters in the canon who regrets his decisions before he finds out that he was wrong. I find that fascinating and somewhat the crux of the play.”

Jovanni Sy, the director and co-author of Salesman in China, is up front about the challenges of producing a bilingual play. “They could fill a book,” he admits. “I’ll share just one example that often comes as a surprise to non-Chinese speakers: the huge degree of variability in spoken Mandarin.” The Mandarin spoken in Beijing in 1983, the setting of the play, required actors to speak the language with authentic Northern Chinese accents. Most of the company, however, do not naturally speak with that accent. “So our company members needed the same kind of support to master their Beijing accents,” Sy says, “that an American actor would to master a Mississippi Delta accent if they were acting in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.” This is more than just a technical problem. “Because there are close to a million people of Chinese descent who live within 200 kilometres of Stratford (and because we are hoping many of them will come to see our play), it’s important that we get a detail like this right.” Issues of negotiating language and culture are nothing new to Sy, though. “I know the feeling of living between worlds and serving as a bridge between cultures. In the play, Ying (the actor cast as Miller’s Willy Loman) talks about the impossible task of being all things to all people. I certainly can relate to that as an Asian Canadian theatre artist in an industry that has historically centred on white stories.”
The Diviners’ fluid, almost impressionistic time structure and staging, which reflects the ebb and flow of its protagonist Morag’s memories, is key for co-directors Krista Jackson and Geneviève Pelletier. “Time is not linear in one’s memory, and it is not linear in this adaptation [of Margaret Laurence’s novel],” Jackson notes. “The company of actors carry Morag on the river of her past and present. They are the currents that move her where she needs to go as she divines the story of her life.” This non-linear approach is also reflected in the centrality of Manitoba’s Red River to Morag’s story and the history it encompasses. “We are most linked to the image of the Red River, its flows, its ebbs,” Pelletier says. “It can be quite tumultuous and at the same time the river is life. The actors will be just as fluid in how they move across time and space.”

Before the play has been cast or the sets and costumes designed, Dean Gabourie puts himself through a rigorous, exacting and inspiring process that he calls “filling the well.” How does it begin? “You read the play a million times,” Gabourie says. “This gives you a million other things to research and themes to dive into. Then you find out everything you can about the playwright—I always try to read the playwright’s canon, so that you know where the writer was in the arc of his or her work for that particular play. You have to fill the well so that you know everything about the work.” The process continues throughout the production, with collaborators—actors, designers, voice coaches—casting their own ideas and knowledge into the well. Gabourie can’t imagine directing a play any other way. “You never know when or what you’re going to have to draw from the well. You can use what you’ve learned at every stage of the production. You can answer the actors’ and designers’ questions when they come up, and you can give them direction. It also shows the actors that you’ve done your work on your end.”

André Sills is known to theatre devotees as one of the country’s most dynamic, versatile actors. Get That Hope marks his directorial debut for the Festival. Primed for a challenge, he gives credit to his support system. “I know that I have a lot to prove by stepping into the director’s chair,” he says. “But going into this process, I know that it will be a full team effort to make it a magical experience for our audiences.” Sills, who considered a career in professional rugby in high school, likes to stress the physicality of live theatre. “Live theatre is about a full body experience. Will it be laughter or tears, a sensory feeling?” He also stresses the difference in responsibilities between an actor and a director. “As a director I have to keep track of the whole tapestry, as Philip Akin likes to put it, following all of the threads of each character of each storytelling beat from beginning to end. It is very consuming because the brain is always thinking of possibilities and ways to solve problems and use those problems as opportunities.”

Ted Belton is a portrait and fashion photographer living in Toronto and working internationally. His work has appeared in publications including Rolling Stone, Dazed, AirMail, Kinfolk, The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, Elle Canada and Elle Decor. His work has been nominated for three Canadian National Magazine Awards, and in 2015 he was the recipient of the Proctor & Gamble Beauty Award for Photography.

James Grainger is a writer and arts journalist from Toronto, currently residing in small-town Ontario. He is the author of the Relit Award-winning The Long Slide (ECW Press) and the critically acclaimed novel Harmless (McClelland & Stewart), heralded by The Globe and Mail as “a book made for today.” As a journalist, he has been the reviews editor and contributing editor for Quill & Quire magazine, as well as a book reviewer and arts writer for The Toronto Star since 2000, in addition to freelancing for national magazines and newspapers.
Stratford’s 2024 lineup proves theatre is an **AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE**, capable of **ALTERING EMOTIONS AND CULTURE** at large.

By Katie Hewitt

Live theatre is one of the few reasons strangers from all walks of life gather in an intimate setting. By enticing audiences to sit detached from their own lives, immersed in other people’s stories, theatre can change minds. It can even shift paradigms.

“The social impact of theatre is baked in from the beginning,” says R. Darren Gobert, PhD, chair of Theatre Studies at Duke University. He points to Aristotle’s Poetics, “the foundational document of Western dramatic theory” and the origin of the term catharsis. Circa 330 BCE, before it became a buzzword for both drama and therapy, Aristotle’s catharsis “was really about emotional learning.” Gobert explains, “Aristotle said audiences ‘learn as they look.’ Seeing something you emotionally engage with is instructive and reshapes the spectator.”

Thousands of years later, catharsis is measurable. A 2021 study published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* found watching live theatre increased feelings of empathy for groups depicted and even prompted more charitable donations among audiences. Reshape enough spectators, it seems, and you get social change.

The Festival’s 2024 season playbill is proof that theatre has no shortage of changemakers. Gobert cites Henrik Ibsen’s feminist leanings in the late 19th century. The playwright galvanized emotional allies for housewives before women could legally vote or own property. “*A Doll’s House* intervened to make middle-class bourgeoisie audiences realize how hopeless the situation was for women.”

With *Hedda Gabler*—reimagined this season by Patrick Marber and director Molly Atkinson—Ibsen paints another portrait of domesticity, one Gobert views as “much bleaker” than the playwright’s previous take. “Hedda is suffering from the same patriarchal constraints [and] in some ways, this play is even more forcefully making a point about the limitations on a woman’s selfhood.” A controversy in Ibsen’s day—amid talk of women’s suffrage—gender inequality remains, unfortunately, timeless. The sentiment continues to permeate contemporary storytelling, as seen in recent films including *Promising Young Woman* and *Fair Play*, in their depiction of everyday sexism against the backdrop of the survivor-led #MeToo movement.

A century after Hedda first took the stage, Jean Poiret’s *La Cage aux Folles* premiered in 1973. Lighthearted as the synopsis may seem today—a gay couple pretends to be straight to impress the ultraconservative parents of their son’s fiancée—the story had a ripple effect. “No audience member, no matter what their politics are, wants to identify with the conservative couple,” Gobert says of the parents who put themselves above the happiness of their daughter in the musical. “You’re forced to sympathize with the gay parents.” That’s Aristotle’s catharsis at work.

Over time, *La Cage aux Folles* has taken new shape through various adaptations. In 1996, it was reincarnated into a hit film *The Birdcage*, directed by Mike Nichols with Robin Williams and Nathan Lane as its lovable protagonists. Constantly revisiting narratives serves as a temperature check on culture over time. Recognizing that “the worldview has shifted so much” since the musical was first produced, Gobert muses about how *La Cage aux Folles* itself is at the root of this change. “Of course, it’s shifted in part because of [queer] representations like these.”

The act of shifting worldviews is not absolute or simple, as directors Krista Jackson and Geneviève Pelletier understand. Together, they will bring to life an adaptation of Margaret Laurence’s 1974 novel *The Diviners* for Tom Patterson Theatre audiences in Stratford—a world première to heal the ages. “There’s a lot of ‘othering’ that goes on in the world,” says Jackson. “I think theatre has the potential to unite people, even for two hours at a time.”

Taking a famously banned book and turning it into a play, staged at a world-renowned theatre festival is perhaps its own testament to
the social impact of the arts. In *The Diviners*, themes of sexuality, poverty and racism converge in the intimate relationship between a white woman, her Métis lover and their daughter, a lightning rod for religious and conservative groups back when it was first published. In its newly adapted form, featuring text by Vern Thiessen with Yvette Nolan, “the narrative constructed itself around Indigenous reconciliation,” explains Pelletier. Choosing from the “several stories woven in” to the book, the writers have pulled out and put forward the “Indigenous weave.” For Pelletier, a Métis artist, “theatre is a thought provoker, a changemaker bringing forth conversations.” This play acts as a means to explore Canada’s shared history—critical knowledge she wants to pass on to a wider audience. “That cycle of learning and unlearning is really important.”

“theatre can change minds.
IT CAN EVEN SHIFT PARADIGMS.”

Theatre is an “excellent medium” for emotional engagement in Gobert’s opinion. Actors embody characters and we, as spectators look into their world. “We are made to identify with these characters … and with subjective positions that are not our own.” Being outside oneself and one’s own perspective, he adds, helps us see someone else’s point of view. “That’s where empathy comes from.”

Playwright and producer Andrea Scott is ready to tap into Festival audiences’ empathy this season with another world première at the Studio Theatre, *Get That Hope*. Her own emotional reaction to a 2018 production of *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*—Eugene O’Neill’s iconic dysfunctional family drama—sparked inspiration for her latest play. She recalls the experience. “I remember sitting in the audience, saying, ‘I don’t see stories with messy Black families who have their own stresses and joy. Why don’t I write that?’”

The story of a hopelessly normal Jamaican family living in Toronto, loosely based on her own—“warts and all”—*Get That Hope*
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### Calendar Information

- **Price Category:** 1, 2, 3
- **Senior & Student Midweek:** Matinée Special: S
  (see ticket info on page 61)
- **Pay-What-You-Wish:** PWW
  Pay-What-You-Wish tickets are available for purchase until May 26
- **The Meighen Forum:**
- **Relaxed Performances:**
- **American Sign Language Performances:**
- **Audio Described Performances:**
- **Open Captioned Performances:**

Calendar photography by Ted Belton.
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Tracy Frayne, Head of Wigs and Makeup – Festival, works on a wig for Cymbeline’s Imogen, played by Allison Edwards-Crewe.
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## AUGUST

### SUNDAY
- **4**
  - Global Theatre Week
  - Civic Holiday
- **5**
  - Eclectica
  - London Assurance (2)
- **6**
  - London Assurance (2)
  - The Diviners (2)
  - Forum Academy
  - College Night
- **7**
  - London Assurance (2)
  - London Assurance (2)
  - Member Post Show Chat
  - Member Insights

### MONDAY
- **8**
  - Opening: The Goat or, Who Is Sylvia?
  - Shakespeare's & World
  - Opening: Get That Hope

### TUESDAY
- **9**
  - 10:30 Peer into the Playbill
  - 2:00 Romeo and Juliet (2)
  - 2:00 Hedda Gabler (2)
  - 2:00 London Assurance
  - 2:00 London Assurance (2)
  - 2:00 London Assurance (2)
  - 9:00 Meet the Festival

### WEDNESDAY
- **10**
  - 10:30 Peer into the Playbill
  - 2:00 Romeo and Juliet (2)
  - 2:00 La Cage aux Folles (2)
  - 2:00 Cymbeline (2)
  - 2:00 Cymbeline (2)
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### THURSDAY
- **11**
  - 10:30 Eclectica
  - 2:00 London Assurance (2)
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  - 2:00 London Assurance (2)
  - 2:00 London Assurance (2)

### FRIDAY
- **12**
  - 10:30 Children's Literature
  - 2:00 Something Rotten (2)
  - 2:00 Something Rotten (2)
  - 2:00 Something Rotten (2)
  - 2:00 London Assurance (2)
  - 2:00 London Assurance (2)

### SATURDAY
- **13**
  - 10:30 Eclectica
  - 2:00 London Assurance (2)
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**Duncan Johnston**
Head Scenic Artist, at work in the Scene Shop.
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Actor Vanessa Sears in fitting for Visitors’ Guide photo shoot.

Costume designer and Visitors’ Guide stylist Michelle Bohn selects trim for a costume.

Tailor TerriDans working on a robe for Juliet, played by Vanessa Sears, in Romeo and Juliet.
FESTIVAL THEATRE
55 QUEEN ST.
Built in 1953, the Festival Theatre’s revolutionary thrust stage provides a theatrical experience so profound, it has inspired look-alikes around the world. Originally housed in a tent, the stage now sits in an iconic example of Modernist architecture.

AVON THEATRE
99 DOWNIE ST.
A Stratford landmark since 1900, the city’s downtown Avon Theatre ofers audiences the Festival’s only traditional proscenium arch stage. The theatre is known for its lavish sets and is also home to family-friendly shows, among other productions.

STUDIO THEATRE
34 GEORGE ST. E.
Opened in 2002, the Studio Theatre offers a smaller, modified version of the Festival’s thrust stage. Situated downtown, at the rear of the Avon Theatre complex, the Studio is wonderfully intimate and well suited to both new and classical work.

Musicians Derek Conrod, Philip Seguin, Mary Jay, Janice Owens and David Campion perform the Stratford Festival Fanfare by Louis Applebaum. Photography by Scott Wishart.
Our newest venue is also our most celebrated, taking home five major architectural awards since opening in spring 2022. A LEED Gold-registered building, constructed with sustainable and natural materials, the auditorium—bespoke in every way—offers a unique elongated thrust stage and an exceptional viewing experience that brings the action into the audience.

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SENIORS’ & STUDENTS’ WEEKDAY MATINÉE

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WAYS TO SAVE

SEATS ON A BUDGET
Our Bravo Zone has over 90,000 seats available for just $39 each. All season long! Not available at the Studio Theatre.

SENIORS SAVE
Guests 65 years of age and older enjoy special savings. Ticket prices start at $31 for performances marked “S” on our calendar.

2-FOR-1
Get two tickets for the price of one! Applies to most 8 p.m. performances on Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the season.

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PAY-WHAT-YOU-WISH
Choose the price you’d like to pay, from as little as $15. See our calendar on pages 54-59 to view eligible performance dates. Pay-What-You-Wish tickets are available for purchase until May 26.

FAMILIES PAY LESS
Purchase an adult-priced ticket and get up to four additional tickets for young theatregoers 18 and under for as little as $15.50 with our Kids Ticket program. Discount not available in Globe Ring and Founders’ Row seating.

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A premium applies to aisle zone seats and to weekend matinée performances.

A premium applies to aisle zone seats for seniors.
Excludes performances between June 28 and September 1. Senior prices available to those 65 and over. Proof of age may be required. Student prices available to full-time students with valid student ID.
The night I spent in Henry VIII’s bed AND OTHER UNFORGETTABLE Festival memories.

By Ann Swerdfager

When I was a young teen, I slept in Henry VIII’s bed. Not a reproduction created for a show. His actual bed. Tucked under the covers, the idea that the king might have married, bedded and beheaded me had I been lying there centuries earlier did not escape me.

These are the kind of memories a Stratford kid collects.

I am always grateful for the privileged childhood I had, owing to my family’s connection with the Stratford Festival. Henry VIII’s bed is just one of a thousand incredible memories I have, thanks to this inspiring place and the people who have visited and supported it over the past many decades.

When I reminisce over my memories of the Festival, I recall so many wonderful productions and even more wonderful people. Walking through the lobby with my parents was always such a jovial experience, one smiling person after another stopping them to talk about the shows. I loved listening to my parents thanking them for their support and catching up on what had happened in everyone’s life since the previous season.

Artistic Director Antoni Cimolino always talks about how important theatre is because of the connections it forges. For me, and for many people who are Members of the Festival, that connection goes way beyond the work on stage, giving us lifelong friendships—even if we see these Festival friends only once a year.

Take the owner of Henry VIII’s bed, a Texan millionaire who was one of the kindest, happiest and most engaging people I’ve ever met. He introduced our family to so much—Texas for a start, but also the art of Björn Wiinblad, Häagen-Dazs ice cream (yes, there was a time when it was new and unavailable in Canada), shibui boxes and so much more. We got to know his entire (rather large) family, all of his children and, ultimately, many of his grandchildren. They were a world away from us regarding wealth, but the relationship was forged through theatre and a love of Stratford.

Now, working at the Festival, I have my own Festival friends who I see once a year. Because of my job, many of them work in theatre journalism, and I treasure their annual visits. But there are also individuals and families whose annual sojourn in Stratford I anticipate with great joy. People I have met wandering the hallways or chatting after a Forum event. You know who you are!

Of course, not all of the people who cross our paths remain in the lifelong friend category. Occasionally, though, they do get filed under unforgettable memories.

I remember a day of heightened excitement in our home when I was five or six years old. For several years, a member of the Festival had been staying with us for a few days each season—a holdover from the time of the first tent back in the ’50s, when nearly everyone in Stratford took in Festival guests—and he was staying with us again. Something happened one night while I slept. After the evening show, he and my parents were sitting outside. He had a few too many (or many too many) and while my mom was inside, he confessed his undying love for my father. My father politely declined his interest and the man flew into a rage. At the height of the commotion, the guest threw all of our patio furniture into the pool and then disappeared into the night.

Thinking back now, I can still remember peering out my brother’s bedroom window, watching the lawn chairs bobbing in the water.

Ah, memories!
As any Festival-goer will tell you, it doesn't take growing up in Stratford or even being a member to walk away from a visit with long-lasting memories. Memories that can change you.

Proof of the power of theatre comes to us frequently in letters detailing memories from the Festival.

Back in 2015, a particularly powerful note arrived about our production of Carousel, a musical that deals with the domestic abuse of its central character, Julie.

One summer’s day, an email arrived. “Yesterday I came to Stratford, a place full of wonderful summer memories, with my mother, father and infant son. My father and I chose to come to see Carousel, thinking it would be a nice escape from the hellish reality we have been living. I am a Julie,” the letter read. “When my father and I entered the Avon, we were looking for an escape from what happened. Instead, we were faced with seeing my life played out on stage. I want to commend all of you on tackling this show.”

At the end of her letter, the writer asked that the following message be sent to Alexis Gordon, the actress playing Julie, along with all of the members of the cast and creative team. “Ms. Gordon, your performance was outstanding. You brought such sensitivity to a difficult role and instead of offending me (or any other survivor, for that matter), I connected with you and cried with you. Thank you all. Yesterday was difficult for me, but you also all helped me realize that it wasn’t me; it was nothing I did; it was him and his character and problems. This is something that I have been working on in counselling, but your performances helped me more than anything has thus far.”

Antoni always says, “The magic of theatre is that by watching others, we can change ourselves.” Be you a Stratford kid, Member, long-time Festival-goer or one-time visitor, the truth of these words are in your memories—yours just may not include remembering that time you slept in Henry VIII’s bed or any patio furniture drama.

Membership in the Stratford Festival makes memories like the ones shared here possible. In a typical year, Members contribute more than $7 million to the Festival, directly supporting the work on stage and making unique, unforgettable moments possible. This support is vital, exceeding government funding and serving to augment revenue raised through ticket sales.

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Join our knowledgeable guides as you explore the behind-the-scenes secrets of our Costume and Props Warehouse, where thousands of props, costumes and set pieces from seasons past await your discovery. Then embark on a journey to the most whimsical worlds ever created for the Festival’s stages at the Stratford Festival Archives Exhibition, “A World Elsewhere.” This historic exhibition of eye-catching costumes, designs and other-worldly delights will provide insight into how artists turn mystical feats of the imagination into on-stage wonders. $20 in advance, $25 on the day.

SET-CHANGEOVER TOURS
Settle into the Festival or Avon auditorium after the afternoon show to watch our skilled stage crew transform the stage for the evening performance. Your guide will share details of the process, including technical knowledge invisible to the average theatre-goer! $20 in advance, $25 on the day.

COSTUME AND PROPS WAREHOUSE TOUR
Join us for a deep dive into the hidden treasures of our Costume and Props Warehouse! Discover thousands of set, prop and wardrobe pieces from seasons past and learn about the development, construction and lifespan of the dazzling creations that help bring the Stratford Festival’s productions to life. $20 in advance, $25 on the day.
Meet JESSICA B. HILL, this season’s Viola.

Words & Interview by Jennifer Lee
Photography by Ted Belton
“Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness,” declares Viola in act 2, scene 2 of *Twelfth Night*, after realizing that in disguising herself as a page boy named Cesario, she has tangled herself into a love triangle in which the person she has been charged with delivering love letters to—Olivia—has instead fallen for her. Cast to play the role of Shakespeare’s cunning protagonist in the Stratford Festival’s 2024 season production of *Twelfth Night* is Jessica B. Hill. Unlike Viola, Hill sees the beauty in disguise—on stage for the sake of storytelling, that is.

For the actor, nothing quite compares to the moment following creating something with a company of artists—the excitement that comes with waiting for a play to meet its audience. “There’s a feeling of fellowship, of purpose, of having built something larger than the sum of its parts.”

Hill counts up to eight seasons at Stratford this year, a tenure that includes two honing her craft with the Festival’s Birmingham Conservatory under the expert tutelage of theatre icon Martha Henry. Last seen on stage in 2022’s *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *Richard III* (now streaming on STRATFEST@HOME), Hill returns to take on a character beloved by Shakespeare fans, in one of the Bard’s most popular plays. With anticipation at a high to see a Festival favourite star in a canon classic, Hill is staying focused on the [creative] task at hand. “Theatre is a communal, ephemeral thing. Our art form is written on the wind, it all kind of ‘melts into air,’” says the actor. “But what we do have is each other. We’re mosaics made up of all the people who’ve brought us here, people whose shoulders we stand on.”

At the ready to jump into disguise, here’s what Hill has to say about her craft and the inspiration anchoring it.

**Q.** What type of stories do you gravitate toward?

**Jessica:** Stories that explore what makes us similar and what unites us as people. I love stories that reach toward the myth and the mundane at once. Stories that play with paradoxes, stories that examine the many forms love can take, stories that celebrate our contradictions and complexities and can crystalize them into something disarmingly relatable and wistfully simple. I love when a story makes me think of or care about a character in a way I hadn’t initially considered.
Q. How do you personally interpret the purpose of theatre?
Jessica: I think the theatre is where we go to witness our collective consciousness in action. It unites us and it expands our view of the world and each other. There’s something elemental and healing about gathering together in a theatre to witness a story unfold before our eyes. Theatre helps us understand what it means to be human and to exist in the world. It can teach us something about ourselves, opens us to entirely different perspectives and manages to entertain while doing it!

Q. What inspires you?
Jessica: As actors, we’re bridges between human experiences. In life, I get excited about fostering connections with people I don’t know, discovering what we have in common and learning something new about the world. I think it’s the same thing that ignites me on stage and has always drawn me to Shakespeare.

Q. What do you think connects an actor to the audience?
Jessica: It’s hard to explain, isn’t it, when something moves you on stage? I think what it is, is truth. It’s when I see an actor be compellingly honest, bravely intimate and lovingly detailed in their embodiment of character and their portrayal of truth. It’s a live-wire connection. The actors I admire most feel like magicians: they work exceedingly hard but radiate this compelling, magnetic ease onstage. That’s where the work is. I see each performance as a cherished opportunity on that continuous search for truth, ease and connection.

Q. How did it feel the first time you fully realized the theatre was where you belonged?
Jessica: There were many moments, but I think the big one was the first time I sat in an empty theatre before a show. There’s this ritual that happens in the last moments of rehearsal, the actors sit in the audience and the director takes the stage to rally their company one final time. It’s the moment [right before] our private sandbox transitions into a public venue. Sitting there, my first time, I felt this shift in the space … even the seats looked different. I remember feeling so deeply moved and in awe: every artist, both on stage and off, had poured themselves into a story we were about to share. I felt humbled and bigger at once; I was home. I get those same feelings every time I sit in a theatre about to be filled. It reminds me how grateful I am to be able to do the work we do.

Q. How has your approach to acting evolved since starting?
Jessica: Acting, like life, evolves with you as you grow. It never stops, you keep learning and expanding. When I was younger, I think I was looking for some kind of goalpost, a plateau, something concrete to achieve when playing a role. The wonderful realization that came with experience was that the work never stops … we’re always discovering on stage, refining, exploring, deepening. The more open you are to being in the moment, the more alive the acting. I’ve also had, and continue to have, cherished mentors who’ve profoundly shaped my approach to acting. They’ve made me better, braver and more open to discoveries.

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Actor, playwright and musician Beau Dixon is the creative mind behind the groundbreaking artistic achievement Freedom Cabaret and its sequel Freedom Cabaret 2.0. Using an inspiring blend of blues, gospel, reggae, soul and jazz, Dixon explored the influence African American music had on Western civilization during the Freedom Movement and Civil Rights era through an intimate onstage performance that has travelled across Canada, since their inceptions at the Festival.

Back for another season in Stratford, Dixon brings with him a new passion project: The Shape of Home, Songs in Search of Al Purdy. This theatrical concert experience offers audiences an eye-opening and heartwarming look into the life and work of the poet Al Purdy, the man who introduced the world to Canada through "The Country North of Belleville."

We caught up with Dixon and one of his co-creators, Marni Jackson, to learn more about what to expect from this new production and why Purdy fans will be pleased.

Q: What inspired you and your fellow artists to create a show in tribute to Al Purdy?

Beau: My dear friend Hailey Gillis was commissioned to put a concert together about Al Purdy. Hailey approached myself, Frank Cox O'Connell, Raha Javanfar, Andrew Penner and Marni to collaborate. As a collective, it was apparent that we connected with Al's poetry and found a commonality in our journey as artists trying to navigate our careers in this crazy world.

Q: Purdy's voice is very distinct. Did you find that creating a piece using the poems of one artist created their own story, or did you have a story you wanted to tell and Purdy's canon offered what was needed to tell it?

Beau: I had no idea I wanted to create a story about Al or a story about my own struggles. That's what's wonderful about art; whether it's a painting, dance, song or poem, if it's good enough, you'll usually see a reflection of yourself in the work.

Q: And that commonality is pretty perennial. What about Purdy's work allows it to retain its evergreen relevance?

Marni: To read a Purdy poem is to hear his voice in your ear, making you smile, waking you up to ideas and emotions, asking what home means to you. That's what makes it good poetry: a sense of timelessness and a voice that sounds alive and singular.

Q: Let's talk process. How has developing Shape of Home been different from preparing past projects in terms of your own personal connection and reaction to excavating Purdy's life and work?

Beau: The process differed from any other project I've created. That's why I'm so proud of it. There's a specific and eloquent flow to the whole piece that makes it theatrical, but it's also a very raw and honest portrait of five musicians just wanting to rock out and figure out their place in the world.

Q: The audience will love that! What do you hope will excite them most about this performance?

Beau: The unique delivery and marriage of music, theatre and poetry. It really is like nothing you've seen before.

Marni: Purdy's honest voice, his love of Canada and his humour.
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it’s ridiculous.” Nick also disregards his befuddled acting troupe (dressed as eggs) and his wife, Bea, who defies Renaissance-era gender roles to support her husband. While all evidence points to a flop, Nick leads the charge into the age of musicals. Feore imagines his desperate motivation, “Nick thinks, ‘I’m going to do the next greatest thing and Shakespeare can screw himself.’”

Nick’s ill-conceived creation is a musical within a musical that spans genres. “Author’s Notes” from writers John O’Farrell and Karey Kirkpatrick suggest striving for “satiric pastiche,” not unlike the pitch of last season’s spunky production of Monty Python’s Spamalot. For Something Rotten! the result is a full tilt musical—a mixed bag of glam rock riffs and classic overtures, all dripping with dramatic irony. Audiences can leave it to Feore to balance big orchestrations and elaborate dance numbers rooted in narrative, not just the spectacle. “How do you avoid parody?” Feore ponders. “You have to have truth to do great comedy. There has to be sincerity. Tell the truth.”

While the omelette is absurd, envy is familiar. Take Nick’s rant, an up-tempo number with toe-tapping frustration: “God I hate Shakespeare ... I mostly hate the way he makes me feel about me.” The hook is universal; it verbalizes the tendency to chase a better version of ourselves through the filtered lens of someone else’s life. (Social media and self-doubt, anyone?) Digging deep into Nick’s 21st-century-esque neuroses, Feore intends to unpack it all—celebrity, fandom and power. “They’re fawning over Shakespeare,” she says of audiences. “Back then, he had complete access and quick reach.” Four hundred years before Instagram, followers were physical crowds. “Shakespeare figures out what audiences want, and he gives it to them,” she muses. “That’s what celebrities do.”

Feore sympathizes, “As directors, we can’t just say, ‘I’m going to do my art now’, we have to get people there to see it.” After all, most art is meant to be seen—a play or musical requires an audience for commercial success. And this fact leads to bigger questions: Is theatre about mass appeal or inner truth? Who decides: the competition, divine inspiration or cash flow?

In Something Rotten! Nick and Nigel’s patrons are risk-averse, afraid of Puritans protesting rehearsals and shrinking profits. One funder pushes for a proven model: just copy Shakespeare. Meanwhile, Shakespeare has his own problems. He is a questionable muse given his secret insecurities and habit of stealing material, regularly taking lines from unknown poet Nigel.

Shakespeare wrestles with his fame in the rock anthem, “It’s Hard to Be the Bard.” A spectacle of Brit rock, Feore calls the song, “a true statement of celebrity and how to sustain it.” To stay relevant, “he is reinventing himself constantly.” Similarly, reinvention is essential to Feore’s creative vision: “When I do a revival at Stratford, as director and choreographer, I will reimagine all of it.” Meaning, if you saw Something Rotten! on Broadway, “it won’t be the same show,” promises the director.

Feore is very much in on the irony of making Something Rotten!—a mashup of her own history with theatre—into something new. “It’s very meta. Very self-referential. I’ve never been in a position like this before, where I’m literally sending myself up.” And Shakespeare goes up with her, along with her penchant for directing musicals. The journey is in the show’s punchline: “People just start singing for no apparent reason?” Feore says, laughing, alluding to both a scene and a common complaint from non-musical people. “Yes, they do. And it’s great!”

“SHAKESPEARE FIGURES OUT what audiences want, AND HE GIVES IT TO THEM. THAT’S WHAT CELEBRITIES DO.”
Yes, And…
An INTROVERT’S TAKE on theatre workshops and active PARTICIPATION!
By Katie Gilson Clark

As a formerly introverted child, and still introverted adult, the thought of any sort of theatre “workshop” has me shaking. Just thinking about Stratford’s own InterACTive Preshow used to send shivers down my spine, until I had a chance to learn a little more about it via a couple of the Festival artists involved. Teaching artist and actor Jennifer Villaverde’s nutshell summary of the school-geared activity is reassuring. “We just chat about the show, have fun with them and hopefully crack something open.” Nothing too scary about that. Teaching artist and actor Austin Eckert’s take on things is also pretty nerve calming. “These kids have an opportunity to engage with theatre, engage in play and engage with students from other schools.” The word “engage” maybe shakes my boots a bit, but “play”? That sounds alright.

Behind its big name, an InterACTive Preshow is really just a live, interactive workshop before a play or musical on our stages. It’s an event that gathers students on the stage before a matinée performance to explore themes and characters through play and activities with peers and Festival artists—the very same ones who will be appearing in the matinée, on the same stage performers will be stepping onto for the big show. The group is normally large (cue introvert internal scream), with students participating in warmups such as a game of call and response. The purpose of this sort of icebreaker is to give reluctant participants (hello!) an opportunity to settle in with the group. “Reluctance is an interesting thing because it’s often someone who just wants permission to be weird,” says Eckert. In other words, get out of your head and into an experience that sees extroverts and introverts gather together, flying their freak flags. Villaverde’s personal favourite exercise fits perfectly into this mandate: Shakespeare’s Insults, a Shakespearean rap battle with a punch.

Following a long period of pandemic-forced screen time, any activity that helps young people connect in-person is beneficial to personal development. “I find, socially, it’s of immense value to students,” says Eckert. “It’s unlike your English class, where you are assigned a role to read or need to raise your hand.” Taking kids out of their typical classroom structure to share a fresh look at the arts is an important experience, in Villaverde’s opinion. “I really want to nurture art as part of our culture. And

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Musical theatre for your artistic extrovert or playwriting for your creative introvert—our one-of-a-kind Theatre Arts Camp has got it all. This camp will nourish your child’s creativity in a fun and supportive environment. For more than 20 years, young artists have been guided by professional theatre artists as they participate in various sessions. Why not immerse your child in a camp that fosters self-confidence, develops skills as a theatre artist and creates long-lasting friendships?

ON THE DRAMA
By Katie Gilson Clark

In 2018, the People for Education released research regarding arts funding and school budgets within Ontario elementary and secondary schools. In the findings published by the CBC, the report showed that “budgets varied dramatically in elementary schools, with 27 per cent reporting a budget of less than $500.” The report also indicated that “grade three and six students from schools with lower arts budgets were more likely to say they ‘never’ participate in art, music, or drama activities outside of the school day.” With the new Ontario Education curriculum focusing on getting “back to basics,” meaning a heavy focus on “mathematics throughout the education system,” some parents worry arts education may fall by the wayside.

The building-something-from-nothing component of art provides a space where students can express themselves by entering a realm of the brain that other subjects can’t open up. According to a 2019 World Health Organization report, “The arts have been shown to help build social cohesion and support conflict resolution through developing cognitive, emotional and social skills for constructive engagement with conflict, and by supporting empathy, trust, social engagement, collaboration and transformative learning, thereby producing more cooperative relationships.”

Art programs introduce children and young adults to experiences and perspectives outside of their own. And with this comes the empathy, tolerance and understanding of humanity necessary to create shifts in society at large.

Do you see the benefit of early exposure to the arts? Try testing out the suggestions included here and watch as young ones in your life become blooming theatre kids.

TELL A TEACHER
Foster the arts in school by letting teachers know about student matinées, which make a perfect retreat for a school trip! Visits include InterACTive Preshows, Bespoke Workshops, Post-Show Chats and Student Picnics. In addition, the Festival of ers programs such as the Teaching Stratford Program, which pairs teachers with professional artists and includes in-school workshops, free of charge.

GET IN
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1 THEATRE ARTS CAMP
Musical theatre for your artistic extrovert or playwriting for your creative introvert—our one-of-a-kind Theatre Arts Camp has got it all. This camp will nourish your child’s creativity in a fun and supportive environment. For more than 20 years, young artists have been guided by professional theatre artists as they participate in various sessions. Why not immerse your child in a camp that fosters self-confidence, develops skills as a theatre artist and creates long-lasting friendships?

2 ON THE DRAMA
By Katie Gilson Clark

In 2018, the People for Education released research regarding arts funding and school budgets within Ontario elementary and secondary schools. In the findings published by the CBC, the report showed that “budgets varied dramatically in elementary schools, with 27 per cent reporting a budget of less than $500.” The report also indicated that “grade three and six students from schools with lower arts budgets were more likely to say they ‘never’ participate in art, music, or drama activities outside of the school day.” With the new Ontario Education curriculum focusing on getting “back to basics,” meaning a heavy focus on “mathematics throughout the education system,” some parents worry arts education may fall by the wayside.

The building-something-from-nothing component of art provides a space where students can express themselves by entering a realm of the brain that other subjects can’t open up. According to a 2019 World Health Organization report, “The arts have been shown to help build social cohesion and support conflict resolution through developing cognitive, emotional and social skills for constructive engagement with conflict, and by supporting empathy, trust, social engagement, collaboration and transformative learning, thereby producing more cooperative relationships.”

Art programs introduce children and young adults to experiences and perspectives outside of their own. And with this comes the empathy, tolerance and understanding of humanity necessary to create shifts in society at large.

Do you see the benefit of early exposure to the arts? Try testing out the suggestions included here and watch as young ones in your life become blooming theatre kids.

TELL A TEACHER
Foster the arts in school by letting teachers know about student matinées, which make a perfect retreat for a school trip! Visits include InterACTive Preshows, Bespoke Workshops, Post-Show Chats and Student Picnics. In addition, the Festival of ers programs such as the Teaching Stratford Program, which pairs teachers with professional artists and includes in-school workshops, free of charge.

GET IN
my hope is that theatre isn't this thing on the outside that is only accessible to certain people. Theatre is accessible to everyone and should be normalized.”

Eckert—who grew up in Regina, Saskatchewan—sees the benefits of widening perspective through meeting new people from different places. “I think it’s extraordinarily special to have this opportunity at the Festival,” he gushes. “To be in a place that’s creating these kinds of relationships with students and to have them engage enthusiastically and creatively on their own is really incredible.”

Every individual learns differently, but whether you are interested in STEM or STEAM, interacting within an artistic environment of something that can be applied to any subject through emotional and social intelligence. Programs like the InterACTive Preshows promote growth by encouraging young people to share a space to hear and discuss each other’s stories—some they can relate to and some they learn perspective from. For Eckert, who is “obsessed with Shakespeare and the cosmic scale that he allows you to feel,” this type of workshop is exactly what students need to delve into “the depths of your sadness or the [heights] of your love, especially as a young person.” Villaverde credits the InterACTive Preshow for providing “a different way of learning. We are giving them the opportunity to get on their feet and experience theatre.”

I am lucky to have a mom who appreciates the alternative way arts can engage the mind. She would always encourage me and my siblings to foster artistic learning. If, like my mom, your life includes an introvert, try to encourage them to break out of their shell by way of the arts. I can attest, they will eventually thank you for it. (Thanks, Mom!)

“RELUCTANCE IS AN INTERESTING THING BECAUSE IT’S OFTEN SOMEONE WHO JUST WANTS PERMISSION TO BE WEIRD.”

–AUSTIN ECKERT

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SIX ways to get your children to CARE about that thing called THEATRE.

KIDS TICKETS & RELAXED PERFORMANCES
Be the parent of the year, or at least the week, by surprising your kids with a day of theatre! Whether they’re an aspiring artist or have yet to have a theatre experience, the Festival has it all. First-time theatregoers can try one of our Relaxed Performances, where youngsters and adults can move freely and make noise during the performance. Relaxed performances this season include Wendy and Peter Pan, as well as Romeo and Juliet.

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Wouldn’t watching a Stratford production without leaving your comfy couch be great? You will be happy to hear that audiences can now have a theatrical movie night right from their living room with STRATFEST@HOME. Our streaming service provides access to Stratford Festival productions, award-winning films, audio plays and original programming inspired by the stage. Enthrall and engage the whole family in the magic of theatre with STRATFEST@HOME!

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Every single young adult should know about Play On, which is a fantastic offer for all people between the ages of 16 and 29 who have a passion for theatre. Give your teen or young adult the inside scoop by showing them how to become a Play On member by creating a patron account through our website to get tickets starting at $24.

MEIGHEN FORUM EVENTS
Do you have a kid interested in learning song and dance from Something Rotten?! Or maybe one who would like to know more about the theatre design process? The Meighen Forum has various events to select from, whether you are raising a lively musical-theatre enthusiast or a behind-the-scenes creative! The Forum offers a unique artistic experience for families, with compelling discussions, exciting performances, enlightening events and interactive workshops.

SIX ways to get your children to CARE about that thing called THEATRE.
The cultural vortex is a phenomenon accredited to cities famed for the creatives they attract and inspire, like Gertrude Stein’s flock of writers in Paris during the 1920s, or New York eternally for artists of all mediums—or so anyone who has lived even the shortest of stints in the Empire State would happily argue.

In Canada, localized cultural vortexes have given way to movements with global reverberations, including the famed Group of Seven, and sown the seeds for grassroots institutions with cult followings, like Arts & Crafts Productions, label to Broken Social Scene and Feist. And then there’s our country’s own perennial cultural vortex. A different look than the metropolises one might imagine, ours is rolled in with Ontario’s picturesque farmlands: Stratford. Once a hub to railway lines dating back to the 1850s, this unassuming little city now draws theatre’s brightest creative talents with the magnetic force that is the Stratford Festival.

Since its inception in 1952, the Stratford Festival has been stomping ground to theatre greats and industry mavericks. At the behest of festival founder Tom Patterson (via an introduction from theatre pioneer Dora Mavor Moore), Tyrone Guthrie—widely considered among the leading directors in the industry at the time—trekked across the Atlantic to rural Ontario, where he helped imagine a stage that would become the stage in Canada.

Today, the city enveloping Patterson’s theatres—four in total—breathes in rhythm with the vision for his festival, each thriving on the individual spirit of the artists it welcomes and the unique stories they bring with them to share with audiences from around the world.

When you enter a cultural vortex, you know it. The sensation of being surrounded by creativity and the warmth of the open invitation to explore everything inspiring and pouring out of this creativity is tangible. That’s what it feels like to visit Stratford. Everywhere you look, you see someone reading, writing or practicing their lines. Here you sip on your morning coffee next to the writer of the play you watched the evening before. Here you take home jewellery from one of the Festival’s theatre shops made by the actor who transfixed you with their performance. Here you enjoy a show at the Avon theatre and cross the street for a chilled treat at a gelato shop operated by the partner of one of the creative minds behind the Festival’s Meighen Forum.

Stay a day, stay a week—any amount of time in the city will be long enough to feel the beautifully inspiring pull of the artists shaping this epicentre for world-class theatre. As for how to get the full effect—here’s an insider’s guide to an artist’s Stratford.
A Stratford morning is accompanied by a grade of quiet synonymous with shimmering rivers speckled with swans. It also happens to offer stellar café options to rival the most oat-milk-latte-filled metropolises that Instagram can rank.

The crux of coffee shops with exceptional brew and quality people watching are on Ontario St., or just of it: see Balzac’s (a hometown roaster with deep coast-to-coast appeal), The Ashborne Cafe, formally Edison’s Cafe (where no one leaves without baked goods) and Revel (most likely to spot an actor getting their morning fuel).

Of in a different direction, away from the core, is another spot for breakfast fare as cute as its Tropical Bowl (a yogurt parfait) is delicious. Literally underground, Brch & Wyn is a basement coffee shop and bar with round-the-clock offerings. The morning menu here is chock-a-block with sweet and savoury accompaniments for coffee or tea. The homemade pastries are a fine way to satiate a sweet tooth, while the aforementioned yogurt parfait is a healthy morning dessert plated, seemingly special, for your feed. Come back in the evening for wine and charcuterie.

Should caffeine not be your cup of tea, opt for Bowl Bar instead, where smoothies are a protein-rich delight. For extra convenience, pop by The Little Green Grocery for a yogi’s breakfast: bottles of pressed juice and seed-filled vegan energy bars.

Once breakfast is in hand, take it for a walk along the Avon River. Find the La Cage aux Folles album on Spotify and start your day of with a glamorous kick of self-motion. Wander the river’s path and soak in sights, including the Tom Patterson Theatre. The building’s handsome exterior is just one of the reasons this award-winning building has graced the pages of magazines, including Architectural Digest. Pro tip: the gardens here are worth a wander for anyone looking to take a selfie with envious “Where are you?” generating comment power.

From left to right: Actresses Antonette Rudder and Tara Sky enjoy breakfast at Brch & Wyn.
AFTERNOON

After catching your photo op, break for a light lunch at the Tom Patterson Theatre Café. Sit outdoors and continue enjoying the tranquil beauty of the Avon River and its winged wildlife. Try the scones, and don’t be surprised if a goose crosses the road for a visit!

After clearing your plate, keep walking a few feet and you’ll hit the Festival Theatre, where a matinée performance of Romeo and Juliet or Something Rotten! calls your name. For you Shakespeare lovers: should catharsis be what you seek, the former will fill and empty your heart in a single sitting. But should laughter be the order of the day, director Donna Feore’s latest musical keeps the playwright top of mind without a murmur of iambic pentameter, as it comedically imagines the conception of the musical during the Bard’s heyday.

This theatre also boasts its own shop, where 2024 season souvenirs, theatre trinkets and one-of-a-kind jewellery by Festival artists are ready to be wrapped up and taken home. Look out for the beautiful, handcrafted beadwork of Tara Sky, or, as this year’s audiences of Wendy and Peter Pan will know her, Tiger Lily.

Walk back toward the centre of town for more shopping. Find a trove of accessories at Harmony Jewelry & Co., a trendy boutique with a collection of cozy crewnecks, featuring a close alternative to thrifting with apparel here giving Northern Reflections charm, like its selection of Canadian national parks sweatshirts and local souvenir sweatshirts designed to pair smartly with mom jeans. For more rugged looks, try Gadsbys, where gorpcore needs are well served by way of waterproof gear and utilitarian boots, in addition to a plethora of Pendleton goodies. Stop by the nearby MacLeods Scottish Shop next to grab the perfect fair-isle cardigan or cable-knit sweater to complete your look. The shop’s selection of wooly jumpers rivals the runway’s latest take on these enduring classics, translating into you being as likely to find a top to pair with a maxi skirt and heels as you are to pick up something to layer under that new raincoat you bought at Gadsbys.

For homebodies, Stratford has a bounty of shops with stock that would make Toronto’s One-of-a-Kind Show turn green with jealousy. Bradshaw’s is a strong choice for anyone in the market for kitchen outfitting, meaning no Food Network viewer will walk out of this shop empty-handed. Then

“SHOPPING AT WILLS & PRIOR IS LIKE SHOPPING IN MY DREAM HOME.
Everything is so beautifully curated,
I’M SURE I’M NOT THE ONLY ONE WISHING THEY OWNED EVERYTHING IN THE STORE.”
— JOSH DOIG

From left to right: Actors Heather Kosik, Jason Sermonia, Carla Bennett, Josh Doig and Bethany Kovarik at Wills & Prior.
As the sun sinks, the city’s streets crowd with theatregoers heading to their pre-show dinner. Even if you walked around the river in the morning, the refreshing exhale of a short repeat putter is worth a detour before sitting down to your evening meal.

Or, skip traditional dining altogether and go al fresco with takeout and a bottle of wine from a local restaurant. With designated spots for outdoor eating and drinking, including Market Square and the picturesque Tom Patterson Island (twinkle lights galore!), you can live out a European-inspired picnic daydream. This style of dining is also translatable into a family-friendly meal made great by having room to run before heading to see *Wendy and Peter Pan* with the kids.

For a sit-down meal, the choices in town are varied and each uniquely delectable. Bluebird Restaurant & Bar is a recent addition to the scene, headed by husband-wife duo Aaron and Bronwyn Linley—a pair quintessential to Stratford’s culinary scene. With close ties to the Stratford Chefs School (Aaron was a chef instructor) and having owned another restaurant and a gourmet market in town previously, their newest spot—a bistro influenced by international flavours—is packed with locals and in-the-know tourists. Reservations here are a must... and so is the chicken ‘Naka’ style with special sauce.

If looking to go totally off the beaten path come mealtime, go in the direction of one of Stratford’s multiple culinary trails (available for purchase at the Destination Stratford office in town) and fill up on whatever your personal food staple may be. Before choosing between Bacon and Ale or Chocolate trails, check closing times of participating locations to avoid being left with a grumbling tummy. With five stops on the first self-guided trail and six on the latter cocoa-themed one, this variation on dinner is something of a method-viewing experience for patrons heading to an evening performance of *London Assurance*, a play in which indulgence is the dish du jour.
For post-show reverie, theatregoers will be happy to find that tranquil as Stratford’s Avon River may colour it, this ain’t no sleepy town. Live like a local and stop in at The Relic Lobby Bar for an expertly mixed cocktail. Between the warm staff, cozy atmosphere and effortless cool of the bar, first-time visitors are sure to become return customers one El Presidente (white rum, orange curaçao, French dry vermouth and grenadine) in.

“I THINK WHAT I LOVE MOST ABOUT THE RELIC IS THAT IT’S A SPOT THAT HAS wholeheartedly welcomed the artists IN TOWN. STAFF HERE NOT ONLY DESIGN EXCELLENT COCKTAILS BUT A WONDERFUL, INTIMATE EXPERIENCE.”

When the moon rises over the city, theatres empty as bars fill—first with patrons thirsty for conversation about the production they just watched and later with actors, ready to unwind after their show. Together—again—worlds meld, audiences and actors share a space, and that feeling of being immersed in creativity pulses through the air.

Photography on page 72 by Lucia Remedios. Story photography by Ted Belton.
LEARN AS YOU LOOK
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 53

embraces Scott’s belief that social impact is tied to representation. “If you can’t see it, you can’t be it,” she says. This thinking goes beyond the big themes critics tend to gravitate toward. With Get That Hope, for example, Scott anticipates critics will point to the Jamaican diaspora and gender norms within the family. And while these are salient themes, the playwright’s real goal is for audiences to feel something—to emote. “I want people to have joy when they see this play,” says Scott. “I want them to hug their mom, and I want them to call their brother.”

What Scott desires is something liberal arts research labels “prosocial effects,” which lead to “fostering ethical and moral behaviour.” In everyday terms this means calling your mom or empathizing with unfamiliar stories—the stuff audiences instinctively know and feel, without the aid of newspaper reviews.

Bottom line: theatre is a way of feeling seen. And in the experience of some—for the first time ever. “Even though I strongly believe that theatre helps dissolve differences between groups of people, it’s also true that we take particular joy in seeing people like us represented,” Gobert says. His own experience proves as much. He remembers attending the premiere of Michel Marc Bouchard’s play Tom at the Farm, about a gay man from the big city feeling alienated in a small town. “It felt strange to identify in that kind of naïve way that I sometimes think about academically,” Gobert recollects, “I was like, alright, this is what people are talking about when they talk about seeing themselves represented.”

Theatre’s potential for social impact is two-sided. Research proves artistic mediums do instill empathy in audiences, evidence that can be used to inform public policy and arts curricula. In other words, there is science behind it. The other side is immeasurable. According to Gobert, when Aristotle spoke of catharsis he “wasn’t imagining that plays are pedagogical.” He wrote about distinct internal reactions theatre stirs within its audience—a depth of emotion that can alter us. “Catharsis is a kind of emotional learning that may or may not have anything to do with cognition—it’s experiential,” says Gobert. “You have this experience, and therefore you’re changed by it.”

Maybe catharsis is one part reason and one part emotion. A big part is intangible, but according to Aristotle, it’s also inevitable, which means theatre’s social impact is empathy building by design. How audiences choose to act on that emotion is entirely up to them.

Katie Hewitt is a journalist based in Vancouver. She has interviewed thought leaders and celebrities including Nobel Peace Prize laureates Malala Yousafzai, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and Selena Gomez. Her writing has been featured in The Globe and Mail, The National Post, Reader’s Digest, Chatelaine and Flare.
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<td>Sally's Place</td>
<td>295 &amp; 299 Ontario St. Stratford, N5A 3H6</td>
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<td>$215-$390</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Stamp House</td>
<td>186 Hibernia St. Stratford, N5A 5V4</td>
<td>519.271.384 <a href="mailto:stay@stamphouse.ca">stay@stamphouse.ca</a> <a href="http://www.stamphouse.ca">www.stamphouse.ca</a></td>
<td>$175-$225</td>
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exemplifies such challenges. When introduced to a Canadian audience, CBC reported "a backlash erupted online that accused the arts centre of planning a racially segregated show." Dr. Bucknall is leary of impeding change when it shuts out audiences. "Theatre should always be a mirror that represents life. If it's always just one very narrow perspective, I think that's dangerous, you can create an echo chamber of self-affirming ideologies and belief systems."

In Shakespeare’s day, who made up the audiences was a testament to the accessibility of theatre. The Globe Theatre used colour-coded flags to indicate the type of play showing (e.g., a red flag represented a history play), and while to us this may seem gimmicky, during a period when education represented the divide between rich and poor, these flags eliminated the tiers of society, inviting in both the literate and illiterate.

Relaxed performances are the colour-coded flags of today. A new type of experience offered by cinemas, retailers and theatres alike, relaxed performances are inviting to neurodiverse audiences as well as guests looking for an experience sensitive to families with young theatregoers. Without this type of experience, maybe a grandmother would be without an unforgettable moment like the one cherished by patron @doctornursejane, who fondly recalls her granddaughter and her granddaughter’s service dog attending a production, where “both felt very welcomed.”

Theatre is a living thing, and it should enjoy the same air as its audience. That’s why this season the story of the lost boys starts with Wendy Darling, the catalyst for action in Peter Pan’s greatest adventure. And why Cymbeline is a warrior queen played by theatre legend Lucy Peacock, an actor with a presence on stage as commanding as any real-life king presiding over his court. This centuries-long art form is most emotive, most relatable, most entertaining when used as a mirror to reflect its audience. There is no storytelling without the audience. To take them—you—out of the equation would make this art form obsolete. As Dr. Bucknall concludes, “The moment theatre becomes disconnected from its audiences, whose story is it telling?”

IT DOES US ALL GOOD TO see and hear THOSE OTHER EXPERIENCES.
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Stratford Pickup Begins – 5 p.m. and 11 p.m.
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217 Wellington Street | Stratford N5A 2L7
SpringWorks is a set of multi-disciplinary arts and puppet festivals in Stratford, showcasing acclaimed international & local artists. We animate the community with live performances, workshops, and events for all ages. Follow us to find out about this year's exciting programming, including our 3rd annual World in a Weekend: International Puppet & Music Festival, August 1-4.
springworksfestival@gmail.com | www.springworksfestival.ca

STRATFORD-PERTH ARCHIVES
4273 Line 34 (Highway 8 West) | R.R. # 5 | Stratford N5A 6S6
519.271.0531 ext 259 | Toll Free 800.463.8275
Welcome to Stratford-Perth Archives! Drop in to explore free exhibits illuminating Perth County’s rich heritage in the James Anderson Gallery. Appointments recommended for in-depth research in Reading Room.
archives@perthcounty.ca | www.perthcounty.ca/stratfordpertharchives

STRATFORD PERTH MUSEUM
4275 Huron Road | Stratford ON N5A 6S6 | 519.393.5311
Just west of Stratford. Open 10-4 daily. Home to the world’s only Justin Bieber Exhibit with over 150 personal artifacts. Our 2024 Stratford Festival costume exhibit celebrates La Cage aux Folles and non-traditional gender roles as played out on Stratford Festival stages. Learn more @ stratfordperthmuseum.ca
www.stratfordperthmuseum.ca

STRATFORD SUMMER MUSIC
Box 1013, 19 Waterloo Street South | Stratford N5A 6W4 | 519.271.2101
An annual multi-week music festival programming artists of musical excellence and varied genres in venues throughout Stratford. A discount of 10% is being offered to patrons of the Stratford Festival: StratfestVG2024!
info@stratfordsummermusic.ca | www.stratfordsummermusic.ca

As Stratford Festival’s Official Package Partner, we provide customized travel planning. Combine theatre (including 2-FOR-1 tickets), meals, rooms, tours, airport transfers and more.
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info@scottishshop.com | www.scottishshop.com

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info@rheothompson.com | www.rheothompson.com

**SMALL-MART GENERAL MERCANTILE**
119 Ontario Street | Stratford N5A 3H1 | 519.508.6300
Unique goods from Canada and beyond. A contemporary take on a classic general store, Small-Mart offers a selection of vintage candy, retro T-shirts, socks and accessories, novelty items, souvenirs, games, puzzles, etc. etc. etc. Small-Mart is an essential destination for those looking for the fun and unusual and an enjoyable stop for the entire family. Also visit twin store Werk-Shop, just two doors down.
info@small-mart.ca | small-mart.ca/home/

**STRATFORD FESTIVAL SHOPS**
55 Queen Street and 99 Downie Street | Stratford N5A 6V2
519.271.4040 ext. 2320 or 5580
A Theatrical Shopping Experience! Show souvenirs, original clothing, one-of-a-kind jewelry, journals, books, pashminas, and much more. All purchases directly support the Stratford Festival. Three convenient locations across from the Festival Theatre, next to the Avon Theatre and inside the Tom Patterson Theatre – or shop online.
store@stratfordfestival.ca | www.stratfordfestival.ca/store

**WERK-SHOP**
111 Ontario Street | Stratford N5A 3H1 | 519.508.2080
Parts and accessories for modern life. Established in 2021, Werk-Shop was created when the owners of Small-Mart decided to divide it into two unique concepts. Werk-Shop is the new home for backpacks and bags, hats, clothing, jewelry, and various accessories for men and women. Stationery, food items and things for the home are also part of the selection. Visit Werk-Shop, just two doors down from Small-Mart.
info@werk.shop | werk.shop/home/

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**Ken Seiling Waterloo Region Museum**
10 Huron Rd, Kitchener, ON N2P 2R7
519-748-1914 • regionofwaterloomuseums.ca
@RWMuseumArchive
WILLS & PRIOR
94 Ontario Street | Stratford N5A 3H2 | 519.273.0202
Stratford's home decorating destination features two expansive floors of home textiles, furniture, wall décor and Canadian-made home accents and gifts. New to the shop this year, Wills & Prior is proud to feature ceramics from celebrated local artist Shane Norrie.
info@willsandprior.com | www.willsandprior.com

OUT OF TOWN

ART & MUSEUMS

KEN SEILING WATERLOO REGION MUSEUM AND DOON HERITAGE VILLAGE
10 Huron Road | Kitchener N2P 2R7 | 519.748.1914
Visit Ontario's largest community museum. Explore 12,000 years of Waterloo Region, past to present. Enjoy hands-on activities, camps, gardens, historic buildings, indoor/outdoor exhibits, special events, walking trails and more! @RWMuseumArchive
www.waterlooregionmuseum.ca

MCDougall Cottage Historic Site
89 Grand Ave South | Cambridge N1S 2L7 | 519.624.8250
Downtown Cambridge's hidden gem! McDougall Cottage circa 1858, is a unique space to explore, with stunning murals, heritage gardens, engaging exhibits and activities for all. Connect across generations at this riverside haven. @RWMuseumArchive
www.mcdougallcottage.ca

SCHneider Haus National Historic Site
466 Queen Street South | Kitchener N2G 1W7 | 519.742.7752
Nestled in the heart of downtown Kitchener, this vibrant public gathering space connects the past and present. Enjoy camps, gardens, hands-on activities, indoor/outdoor exhibits, special events and more! Old Haus, new stories. @RWMuseumArchive
www.schneiderhaus.ca

ST. MARYS MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES
177 Church Street South | St. Marys N4X 1B6 | 519.284.3556
Beautiful 1850s home built from St. Marys limestone. Twelve exhibit areas, changing displays and seasonal activities. Excellent resources for local history research. Open daily June, July, August; weekdays year-round.
museum@town.stmarys.on.ca | www.stmarysmuseum.ca

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ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

**AUDIO DESCRIPTION**

Audio-described performances are designed for guests who are Blind or have low vision. Delivered via headset, the live audio description gives details of costumes, sets and on-stage action without interfering with spoken dialogue. Magnifying sheets are available from the house manager.

Upon request, the Festival offers copies of house programs and visitors’ guides in Braille to patrons who are blind or have low vision. Please ask ushers for assistance.

**HEARING ASSISTANCE, OPEN CAPTION AND AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE**

Our theatres offer wireless radio-frequency hearing-assistance receivers (HARs), compatible with t-coil hearing aids and cochlear implants. For optimal performance, guests are encouraged to bring their own headphones; however, we do have a number of headphones to lend. Reserve your hearing-assistance device when booking your ticket.

At our open captioned performances, the dialogue and sound effects of the play will be shown as text on a screen in front of a reserved section of seating. These captions will be displayed in sync with the actors’ spoken lines. Designated seating has been reserved for best viewing of the stage and the screen. American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation will be available on selected dates throughout the season.

**RELAXED PERFORMANCES**

Relaxed performances (RPs) aim to meet the needs of autistic and other neurodiverse people and people with disabilities. It is also suitable for families or first-time theatregoers.

RPs foster a casual approach to the traditional theatre experience, rethinking expectations for all audience members in a performance space. Within this relaxed space, people are welcome to move around, make noise or step out to a quiet area. RP modifies lighting and sound, in addition to consulting people with disabilities, to ensure everyone feels welcome and safe.

**MOBILITY INFORMATION**

We offer accessible and mobility-friendly seating in all our theatres. Accessible seating is available for wheelchair users, while mobility seating is fixed in place but can be accessed without stepping up, and is reserved for those with reduced mobility. Patrons can remain in their wheelchairs in accessible seating areas. Canes can be brought to your seat, while large devices such as walkers must be stored outside the auditorium during performances. While all theatres are equipped with handrails, please note that regular seating areas at the Studio Theatre and in the Avon Theatre balcony are steeply inclined.

Pre-paid accessible parking is available with a disability parking permit at the Festival and Tom Patterson Theatres. Spaces are limited, so please reserve when booking tickets. The City of Stratford also provides unreserved accessible parking in Upper Queen’s Park, adjacent to the Festival Theatre, and near our other theatres. Metered parking is free throughout Stratford in designated spaces with a disability parking permit. For more details, visit stratfordfestival.ca/parking.

**FOR GUESTS WHO REQUIRE A SUPPORT PERSON OR ANIMAL**

We welcome support persons who provide services or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to our facilities. Support persons...
must have their own tickets for performances and events. Complimentary admission for one support person will be granted with a CNIB card or Access 2 card. Other requests for complimentary admission for support persons will be considered case-by-case. Please call the Box Of ce prior to the performance.

Service animals are always welcome. Please call our Box Of ce if you have any questions or concerns regarding the best seating locations when visiting with a service animal.

FOR GUESTS WITH SCENT ALLERGIES OR SENSITIVITIES
We encourage patrons to refrain from wearing scented products. While we cannot guarantee a scent-free environment, should you have an allergy to scented products and need to be moved from your original seating location, please see the House Manager.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
Additional open caption, audio-described and ASL-interpreted performance dates may be available to groups of 20 or more for performances after July 1. For more information contact groups@stratfordfestival.ca.

The new StratFest OnSite App is here to help with your accessibility needs. Containing specific information on each of the venue’s amenities, 360 pictures inside Front of House areas and more, the app is a great tool for anyone looking for information about attending the Stratford Festival! Available Spring 2024.

FOR MORE DETAILS
Visit stratfordfestival.ca/accessibility or email accessibility@stratfordfestival.ca.
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Photography by Lucia Remedios.