

## Acting out

### Stratford Festival stretches actors' skills

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When an actor performs in repertory, he or she has to be prepared to move smoothly from one role to another even if those roles call for completely different thespian skills.

One of the joys of attending the Stratford Festival in Canada is to see actors stretch in many different directions. This year, Graham Abbey makes a strong impression as he moves from the tragedy of *Hamlet*, as the aggrieved Laertes, to the light, quick wit of Oscar Wilde to the dashing swordplay of Alexander Dumas all with equal aplomb.

#### 'The Importance of Being Earnest'

Oscar Wilde subtitles his famous play "A serious comedy for trivial people." The master of the *bon mot* was considered shocking in his day, but his skewering of the upper classes now seems to have gained a moral superiority all its own.

*Earnest* is first and foremost a funny farce that hasn't lost its ability to set an audience laughing at its absurdly smug society twits. This production uses Wilde's rarely performed original four-act version. The play's first producer pared the play to its usual three-act, and the extra exposition doesn't add appreciably.

Still, Stratford artistic director Richard Monette directs with the appropriately light touch and quick pace that Wilde deserves. The sets also suggest an airy Art Nouveau style.

Two dandies, John (Jack) Worthing and Algernon Montford, each practice what Algernon calls "bunburying," pretending to be someone else or visiting someone else when they want to avoid responsibility at home. This sets up the comic situation when Algernon decides to play some mischief in pursuit of Jack's attractive ward, Cecily. Meanwhile, Jack pursues Algernon's cousin Gwendolen. This is all played out in a London townhouse and a country manor.

Graham Abbey is quick tongued, bright eyed and ingratiating and irritating in one as

#### Stratford Theatre

**At the Festival**  
Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, through Nov. 6  
Raby's *The Three Musketeers*, through Nov. 4

Stein, Beck and Harnick's *Fiddler on the Roof*, through Nov. 4  
Moliere's *Tartuffe*, Aug. 1 to Nov. 3  
**At the Avon**  
Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, through Nov. 4

Goodrich and Hackett's *The Diary of Anne Frank*, through Nov. 6  
Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, through Nov. 6

Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*, July 11 to Oct. 13  
**At the Tom Patterson**

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, through Sept. 30  
Euripides' *Medea*, through Oct. 1

Findley and Thompson's *Elizabeth Rex*, through Sept. 30  
Margulies' *Collected Stories*, July 21 to Sept. 2

Maxim Gorky's *Oscar Remembers*, Sept. 8-29

To get to Stratford, take the bridge to Windsor, follow Highway 401 east to Exit 223 (the next exit after Ingersoll), then follow County Road 6 north to Stratford.

For ticket information, call 1-(800)567-1600, or check their Web site at [www.stratford-festival.ca](http://www.stratford-festival.ca).

Algernon, an Edwardian slacker, who gets the lion's share of witty retorts.

When a servant suggests reservations about marriage Algernon laments, "Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them?"

Donald Carrier is less light-footed as Jack but still hams it up appropriately.

Veteran Patricia Collins gives another of her fine anodyne performances as Lady Brancaster, who gets to remark, "To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness." Claire Jullien is appealing as



CITIA VON THOMAS

**Upper crust:** The cast of "The Importance of Being Earnest" (left to right) Claire Jullien, Patricia Collins, Graham Abbey, Domini Blythe, Donald Carrier, Bernard Hopkins and Michelle Giroux.

the innocent Cecily.

All's well that ends well, of course, when everyone learns the importance of being earnest.

#### 'The Three Musketeers'

Not all theater is about words. Some theater is about sword fights, derring-do, bravado and romance.

All of these burst through in Peter Raby's stage adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*. As the opening prologue suggests, this is a perfect introduction to theater for young people, especially boys. A young boy in his pajamas comes on stage with a giant storybook which suddenly comes to life with musketeers, swords aloft pledging, "All for one and one for all."

There are some suggestive scenes and a prologue to an execution but these move quickly.

Raby has pared Dumas' sprawling novel down to focus on young D'Artagnon's quest to become a musketeer against the wicked intrigues of Cardinal Richelieu and Milady de Winter. But the novelistic sweep, multiple characters and plot complications are retained.

Director Richard Monette moves his cast through 41 scenes across northern France and southern England. This sort of cinematic speed is punctuated with stirring fencing scenes.

Graham Abbey leaves the offstage Aligernon behind in his rousing, comic-heroic portrayal as the headstrong, and easily seduced, D'Artagnon, the youth from Gascony who long to be a musketeer.

The three musketeers of the title, Porthos, Athos and Aramis, are the King's loyal guards who spend most of their time fighting the rival guards of the Cardinal. Benedict Campbell is the most dashing and the most heavy hearted as Aramis. Andy Velasquez is the poetic Aramis and Thom Mariott is the romantic Porthos.

In key roles are Stephen Russell as the politically astute and treacherous Richelieu, Kate Trotter as the sexually provocative spy Lady DeWinter, Claire Jullien as Constance, and Robert King as the grumbling grocer.

This is theater with joie de vivre to spare!

(Sunday, a look at Niagara-on-the-Lake's Shaw Festival.)



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#### FESTIVAL

### Westland gets in gear for summer fun

Family fun, that's what the Westland Summer Festival, Thursday, June 29, through Tuesday, July 4, is all about.

The festival will take place at Central City Park and environs, by City Hall, Ford Road and Central City Parkway. Daily features include carnival rides, Vegas and bingo games and music, everything from country and classic rock to polka and top 40. Here's the schedule of events:

#### Thursday, June 29

Rich Eddy's Band (1950s/1960s rock) 7-11 p.m., Main Stage.

#### Friday, June 30

Golf Chipping Contest 3-4 p.m., Tot Town.

Horseshoe Pitching 3 p.m.

Carnival rides 3-11 p.m.

Jacob Ramig's Polka Band 5-7 p.m., Main Stage.

R.P.M. Band (top 40) 7-11 p.m., Main Stage.

#### Saturday, July 1

Parade 10 a.m. to noon.

Car Show 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., by the lake.

Carnival rides noon to 11 p.m.

Horseshoe Pitching 1 p.m.

Parade awards 1 p.m., Main Stage.

Family Day noon to 7 p.m.

Children's Picnic 12:30-2 p.m., Tot Town.

A la Mode Barbershop Quartet 1-3 p.m.

Ice Cream Eating Contest 1:30 p.m., Main Stage.

Josh Gracin (country) 2-4 p.m., in the park.

Golf Chipping Contest 3-4 p.m., Tot Town.

Pie Eating Contest 4 p.m., Main Stage.

Oglee Dream (classic rock) 7-11 p.m., Main Stage.

#### Sunday, July 2

Free continental breakfast 10:30 a.m. to noon.

Carnival rides noon to 11 p.m.

Game Show Party noon, 1:15 p.m., 2:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m.

Horseshoe Pitching Finals 1 p.m.

Benji and the Jets (oldies and classic rock) 1-5 p.m., Main Stage.

#### Golf Chipping Contest Finals

3-4 p.m., Tot Town.

Lonestar Dancers 5-8 p.m., Main Stage.

Young Country Band 7-11 p.m., Main Stage.

#### Monday, July 3

Game Show Party noon, 1:15 p.m., 2:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m.

Siren's Web (modern rock) 7-11 p.m.

#### Tuesday, July 4

Baby and Toddler Contest Finals 10:30 a.m. to noon.

Carnival rides noon to 11 p.m.

Eclipse (various music) 1-5 p.m.

Tom's Karaoke 5-9 p.m., Gazebo by the lake.

Bobby Lewis & Cracker Jack Band (various music) 7-11 p.m.

Fireworks at dark, Central City Park.

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