

TRAVEL

Stratford is idyllic site for miraculous performances

By HUGH GALLAGHER STAFF WRITER

With the Canadian "lonie" at an all-time low against the U.S. dollar (about 68 cents), it is a great time to visit our neighbors to the north (or the south if you go across at the Ambassador).

Over the next two weeks we will take a look at Canada's two great summer repertory theaters and the idyllic towns that house them. The Stratford and Shaw festivals have always been a great draw from suburban Detroit, but this could be a record year with a healthy economy and that fantastic exchange on the dollar.

Stratford is a regular stop for tour buses, honeymooners, weekend vacationers and area school groups (see related story). In addition to excellent theater (usually), the town itself is a treasure. It is a place designed to relax even the most excitable Type A personality.

A park runs along the Avon River, inviting strollers to walk for miles along its banks. Here are flower gardens and beautiful homes. Many of the homes are in the Ontario cottage style in yellow brick that is peculiar to this area. Gardeners will want to linger at Shakespeare's Garden with its display of flowers and herbs. Special maps are available in town for walking excursions through historic areas.

Bicyclists can wheel about town or take to the road for side visits to St. Mary's, Shakespeare, Tavistock and other picturesque towns.

For the third year in a row, we opted to stay at the Queen's Inn. We enjoy its central location to the three Stratford theaters, its intimate size and its friendly staff. After experimenting with a Southwest themed restaurant, the Inn has returned its main dining room to a traditional menu under the name Henry VIII's. The Inn's Boar's Head Pub continues to serve pub grub, a wide selection of beers and, while we were there, World Cup soccer.

Stratford doesn't have a true luxury hotel like Niagara-on-the-

Lake, where the Shaw Festival resides. It does have several moderately priced motels, small hotels like the Queen's Inn, The Stratford and the Victorian Inn on the Park and a selection of B&Bs. Also, you can opt to stay out of town at several rural B&Bs.

Each year we splurge on one fine dinner. This year we chose the Church Restaurant's Belfry. This is one of those restaurants that serves beautifully presented, modestly proportioned but superbly prepared meals that you can follow with an equally eye-filling and satisfying dessert. Our meals did not disappoint. In addition to the Church, Stratford offers the Old Pines, Bundles and the Hyacinth House in this category.

But we also search out less expensive alternatives. Two years ago it was Mrs. Carter's Restaurant, which serves and melts-in-mouth Luciano and excellent, moderately priced meals. This year's find was the Trattoria Fabrizio, an Italian coffee house that offers casual cafeteria-style pasta dinners, a selection of coffee and tea drinks, excellent pizza and Luciano's favorite on the openers. It also promises an occasional Italian family squabble now and then, but we missed that part. Check it out.

But, of course, "the play's the thing." Stratford began in 1953 with the one Guthrie as a Shakespearean theater. But it now offers a wide range of theatrical experiences including four plays by the Bard and works by Moliere, Chekhov and Beckett and a musical (see schedule).

Today and Thursday will offer a sampling.

The Miracle Worker

William Gibson's name is never mentioned in the pantheon of great dramatists. His output has been small and his reach was never to the limits of a Shakespeare, a Chekhov or a Beckett.

But this year at the Stratford Festival, an emotionally riveting production of Gibson's only famous play, "The Miracle Work-

Stratford Schedule

At the Festival Theatre William Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar," through Nov. 7. Wasserman-Leigh-Darion musical "Man of La Mancha," through May 8. Robert Bolt's "A Man for All Seasons," through Nov. 6. William Shakespeare's "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," July 30 to Nov. 7.

At the Avon Theatre Joy Presson Allen's "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie," through Nov. 6. William Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing," through Nov. 6. William Gibson's "The Miracle Worker," through Nov. 7. Moliere's "The Miser," July 31 to Nov. 7.

At the Tom Patterson Theatre William Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale," through Sept. 20. Anton Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard," through Sept. 19. Tennessee Williams' "The Night of the Iguana," July 7 to Sept. 18. Samuel Beckett's "Waiting For Godot," July 10 to Sept. 19.

For a copy of the visitor's guide and information on tickets, call 1-800-587-1600.

or," demonstrates how careful direction and great acting can often lift lesser works to a level of theatrical greatness.

"The Miracle Worker," at the Avon, is the true story of how in the 1880s a young Annie Sullivan combined compassion with discipline to bring the deaf and blind Helen Keller into the world of "language." It is also the story of how Sullivan fought against the indulgent and damaging love of Helen's parents.

Director Jeannette Lamberton had to work against the memory of those who have seen Arthur Penn's film version with the play's original stars, Anna

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This fall the juniors will be seeing "Man of La Mancha" and "Much Ado About Nothing."



Cherry Orchard: The trouble family of Anton Chekhov's tragic-comedy, left to right, Anne Ross as Anya, Sarah Dodd as Varya, Stephen Russell as Leonid, Martha Henry as Lyubov and James Blendick as Lopachin.

Bancroft and Patty Duke. It is enough to say that Lambermont's production is so fresh, vital and emotionally nuanced that it stands alone.

The gifted Cynthia Dale is a curiously amazeing. This year she is playing Annie Sullivan and Aldona in "Man of La Mancha" in repertory. She gives to Annie Sullivan a complexity that is intriguing to watch. Annie is a young girl herself, just 20, with a lilting Irish accent and outwardly happy expression. But she is haunted by memories and steely in her methods. Dale, in her mid 30s, conveys both the youth and the depth.

She is matched by 19-year-old Trish Lindstrom playing a 12-year-old Helen. Lindstrom looks younger than her years, but more important her performance is focused, intense and real. Her long face takes on a simian look, distant, unconnected until she latches on to something and that inner intelligence beams.

The brutal fights between teacher and pupil are exhausting but each ends in a step forward until that famous, draining climax.

Other strong performances come from Kevin Gudahl and Barbara Fulton as Helen's very Southern parents and Adam Brazier as her troubled but caring half brother.

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Director Dianna LeBlanc, who specializes in these wrenching family plays, remembers what



Miracle Worker: Trish Lindstrom; left, is Helen Keller and Cynthia Dale is Annie Sullivan in Stratford's wrenching production of William Gibson's historical play.

many directors forget, that Chekhov's plays are comedies.

"The Cherry Orchard" is a sad comedy, a comedy with tragic and historic implications, but still a comedy, rich in humor as well as humanity.

The play concerns Lyubov and Leonid, sister and brother, who own a cherry orchard in rural Russia. Lyubov has been away several years following the accidental death of her young son and has now been brought home by her daughter. The cherry orchard must be sold to pay taxes. The two childlike siblings can not bear their loss.

Around this story are a complex group of characters, Lyubov's adopted, rigid daughter Varya; her everescent 17-year-old daughter Anya; the radical, full-time student Petya; and several servants and town's people each with a story to tell. That is Chekhov's method, to allow each of his characters to tell their stories and by doing so to unpeel the layers of Russian society to find the humanity in everyone. We laugh with them, not at them.

Central to this play is Lopachin, a serf's son with painful memories of slavery but warm feelings for the adult children of his former "owners." Blendick's performance as Lopachin is full, gregarious, "Russian" and when his warmth turns to chill and his kindness to triumph it is incanting.

But in a production so full there are many fine performances including the incomparable Martha Henry as the painfully frivolous and anxious Lyubov, Stephen Russell as the carefree but sweet Leonid, Jordan Pettie as the bumbling Yepichodov and, especially, David Jansone as Petya, the perennial student who understands the world but not his own feelings.

The production drags toward the end. The symbolic "time-to-go" gets tedious. But to understand Russia, you need to understand Chekhov and this is a good start.

Thursday, "Julius Caesar" and "A Man for All Seasons." Next Sunday, a look at the Strat Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Area students enjoy Stratford

By HUGH GALLAGHER STAFF WRITER

Tony Magni has been running a cross country camp at the Pinery in Ontario for 34 years. But it wasn't until 10 years ago that the Redford Catholic Central teacher and coach decided to include the Stratford Festival as part of the deal.

"I'm sorry I didn't think of going to Stratford earlier," he said.

Each year Stratford plays hosts to school groups from Ontario, Michigan and New York, offering many students a first opportunity to see works by Shakespeare and other playwrights performed by professional actors.

"We go to Stratford and see the play and then come back to camp," said Magni, who teaches history at Catholic Central. "The English teachers give extra credit for anyone that will write on the Shakespeare play."

The reaction from Magni's students has been positive.

"They love it. A few of the young kids, the sophomores, don't know what to expect. I try to get them information on how

to act and a synopsis of the play so they know what's going on," he said.

Over the years, the CC students have seen "Taming of the Shrew," "Midsummer Night's Dream," "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and "Julius Caesar." Last year they saw "Camelot." This August they will see "Two Gentlemen of Verona."

"Anybody who comes to camp, part of the fee includes the ticket to Stratford," he said.

The annual trek is so popular that many of the Canadians living near the Pinery join the young runners to make a bus load.

This year Rose Rada-LaValle will not be accompanying Livonia Ladywood students to Stratford as she has done every year since 1990. She was promoted from her position as an English teacher to assistant principal.

"We try to do a Shakespeare and another play. Some years it's a straight play and some times it's a musical. It's a good experience and enriching," Rada-LaValle said.

Students sign up at the end of their sophomore year to attend

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