



## The Play's the Thing

17/10/2013

### Shaken, stirred and inspired at the Stratford Festival

For 61 seasons now, our own Stratford Festival in southwestern Ontario has set the standard for classical theatre in North America – and has given a stage for the talents of many of Canada's best performers. As the largest theatre festival in Canada, it has delighted, entertained and enriched its audiences with the very best of Shakespeare and far beyond.

I remember having the pleasure of going there on some wonderful school trips to see Hamlet and Macbeth some years ago. I can still recall how inspired I left – and how enchanting the whole town felt with its café-lined streets, little bridges over the Avon, and many cute B&Bs.

Stratford has grown so much over the years in its focus, entertainment choices and mandate. According to its new artistic director, Antoni Cimolino, the festival has really "evolved to address the ever-changing, ever-challenging Canadian cultural landscape." Today, it offers more contemporary plays and musicals like Tommy and Fiddler on the Roof, and the world premiere of Judith Thompson's new Canadian play The Thrill, in addition to its classic fare. So if you haven't checked out the bill in a few years, there is still time before the season closes at the end of October.



### Introducing WordPlay, PlayOLG's very own blog!

Giving you a fun rundown on people, places and events that matter to Ontario.

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Like PlayOLG, Stratford of course is all about 'Play' (if you'll pardon the double entendre)-- and providing great entertainment and exhilarating experiences. But while Stratford seeks to move you to laughter and tears through high art... we only aim to bring smiles and good fun!

Another thing I think we have in common with the great festival is our giving spirit: While PlayOLG is committed to supporting and building Ontario communities, institutions and schools, Stratford also builds our province in a profound way. Its theatre productions play a critical role in feeding our souls and spirit and helping us feel and understand the world around us. Notably, the focus this season is on the idea of communities: the bonds that hold them together and the differences that divide them.

It's a theme that resonates at OLG as well. And just one more reason OLG is proud to be a key supporter this year.

### **Five things you may not know about the Stratford Festival:**

1. It was the brainchild of local Stratford journalist Tom Patterson who wanted both to boost the Canadian drama scene and also resuscitate the sagging economy of this small railroad town in the 1950s.
2. Sir Alec Guinness was the first 'star' actor from England in its first season in 1953.
3. Also in 1953, Irene Worth was the first actor to request a bicycle. The reason? The festival could not afford to provide her with a car. Ever since, bicycles have been the transportation of choice for Stratford actors.
4. In its early days, Stratford also featured a music festival where Duke Ellington played in 1957. The jazz great even wrote a Shakespearean jazz suite for the festival called 'Such Sweet Thunder'.
5. Quebec-born actor Richard Monette was the Festival's most successful and long-tenured artistic director. He led the festival for 14 years starting in 1994 and saved it from the verge of financial ruin, transforming it to a highly profitable festival by introducing a more diverse range of theatre, including popular musicals.

Be sure to make it out to one of Stratford's great stages this fall... before the curtain falls!

*Emily*