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When Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* said, "There is a world elsewhere," he could have been discussing Ontario's summer theatres outside of Stratford and Shaw.

And sometimes it turns out to be more than entertainment as well, because there's a new generation of artistic directors out there anxious to raise the stakes and show that you don't have to restrict yourself to that textbook called *Summer Stock 101*.

There's a lot of new and exciting stuff going on and an increasing number of big-name talents venturing onto what was once called "the straw hat circuit."

Here's your guide:

4TH LINE THEATRE, Millbrook (705-932-4445): This is always a unique experience. The plays are performed outdoors and the theme is always drawn from local history. This year, *Eldorado Town: The Port Hope Play* (6/29 – 7/24), deals with the discovery of radium at the end of World War II. Coming back for a revival is *The Right Road to Pontypool* (8/2 – 8/28), Alex Poch-Goldin's 2009 hit about the summer haven for Jewish immigrants and a time when "No Dogs or Jews Allowed" was a common sign on holiday destinations.

BLYTH FESTIVAL, Blyth (1-877-TO-BLYTH): Another success story built on Canadian content, performed in repertory, Blyth is celebrating its 35th year of offering quality theatre and equally wondrous church suppers. This year's bill includes a revival of Kelly Rebar's popular drama, *Bordertown Café* (6/30 to 8/14), and Leanna Brodie's saga of spiritual journey, *The Book of Esther* (8/4 to 9/4).

CENTURY CHURCH THEATRE COMPANY, Hillsburgh (519-855-4586): Run along more conventional lines, this is a community operation where you're likely to see shows such as Norm Foster's popular *Sadie Flynn Comes to Big Oak* (7/14-7/24) and a music-hall styled revue, *Footlight Follies* (9/24 to 9/26).

DRAYTON ENTERTAINMENT: This is definitely the biggest and slickest of all Ontario's summer theatre operations, with the indefatigable Alex Mustakas filling five playhouses of different sizes and shapes with solid productions and happy audiences. I recently caught a *Sweet Charity* they mounted at Grand Bend starring Cynthia Dale that would have made any musical theatre lover happy. Too much to list! Just steer your browser to: www.draytonentertainment.com/ and make your plans.

DRIFTWOOD THEATRE (905-576-2396): This group performs outdoors all summer, touring a new production of a Shakespeare play each year in their own distinct style, which is big on interpretation, short on frills, but usually high on the enjoyment scale. The play this year is *Twelfth Night* and its mixture of comedy and romance should be right up this eclectic group's street.

FESTIVAL PLAYERS OF PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, Picton (613-399-5677): It's one of the prettiest parts of the province and Sarah Phillips is trying to give it a matching theatre. Her playbill is eclectic, mixing old Canadian thriller hits like *I'll be Back for You Before*



Thousand Islands Playhouse at Gananoque boasts a location and a solid repertoire.

HANDOUT

Midnight (6/19-7/24) with iconic Canadian playwright John Gray presenting a newly reworked version of his musical, *Amelia: The Girl Who Wants to Fly*, starring Eliza Jane Scott and running from (8/10 to 8/28).

GLOBUS THEATRE, Bobcaygeon (705-738-2037): Comedy is king here, with titles like *Nobody's Perfect* (6/30-7/10), *Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks* (7/14-7/24), *The Star-Spangled Girl* (8/11-8/21) and *Sunshine Express* (8/25-9/4) on the playbill in a lovely setting in the Kawartha Lakes.

HIGHLANDS SUMMER FESTIVAL, Haliburton (705-457-9933): This festival in the heart of cottage country presents a large and eclectic program with a heavily musical emphasis. Musical comedies like *The Goodbye Girl* (7/5-7/16) and *Summer Wind* (7/12-9/7) alternate with the likes of Don Harron, Richard Margison and a full production of *La Bohème!* (8/29-9/1).

LIGHTHOUSE FESTIVAL THEATRE, Port Dover (519-583-2221): Lots of crowd-pleasing material on the agenda here, including a couple of Norm Foster comedies (*Race Day*: 5/25-6/12 and *Looking* 6/15-7/3), and a Grey Power comedy entitled *Freedom 85!* (8/17-9/4)

PORT STANLEY FESTIVAL THEATRE, Port Stanley (519-782-4353): Patterns in the carpet start to reappear about now, and seasons start to look the same. Norm Foster comedies, Elvis Presley revues and senior citizen comedies. Sex, drugs, rock and roll. You figure out which is which!

ROSE THEATRE, Brampton (905-874-2800): The loveliest theatre in the area and a real town that's not just for "summer folk." An interesting playbill, too, featuring Morris Panych's *7 Stories* (7/9-7/31), a new revue called *Broadway Gold II* (7/23-7/31) and even Peter Colley's old favourite, *You'll Get Used to It! The War Show* (8/6-8/28).

SHOWBOAT FESTIVAL THEATRE, Port Colborne (905-834-0833): A couple of musicals (one by Norm Foster) and a couple of comedies, including that vintage favourite, *The Owl and the Pussycat*. (8/19-9/4). Summertime business as usual.

ST. LAWRENCE SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL, Prescott (613-925-5788): A beautiful outdoor amphitheatre and a playbill that leans just heavily enough on Shakespeare. *Macbeth* (7/14-8/14) should be nice on the banks of the St. Lawrence as should veteran playwright John Lazarus's *Trouble on Dibble Street* (7/10-8/14), a specially commissioned play dealing with the comedic Shakespearean characters.

STARBRIGHT SUMMER FESTIVAL, Sarnia (519-344-7469): Standard stuff but with super-standard names! Michael Learned stars in *Driving Miss Daisy* (7/17-8/20), *Broadway Baritones* (7/16-8/21) features David Rogers and the lovely Susan Gilmour dazzles with *I Dreamed a Dream* (call for dates). Starry stuff for Sarnia!

STIRLING FESTIVAL THEATRE, Stirling (613-395-2100): Yet another Norm Foster musical (how does he do it?) and two revues, one of which is about 60's soap operas. Now if they could figure out how to combine them into one, it would be the perfect summer theatre show!

THEATRE COLLINGWOOD, Collingwood (705-445-2200): They bill the season as "Fantasy, Fun and Dangerous Games." It has a Norm Foster comedy (7/12-7/17), a Patsy Cline revue (8/16-8/21) and *Sleuth* (9/13-9/18). Guess which is which?

THOUSAND ISLANDS PLAYHOUSE, Gananoque (1-866-382-7020): One of the big-time summer theatres with a glorious location. It's one of the few places where you'll see playwrights like Joan MacLeod and Athol Fugard along with your usual mysteries and comedies. All the shows I've ever seen here have been good ones.

UPPER CANADA PLAYHOUSE, Morrisburg (613-543-3713): Another country Western revue about Dolly Parton called Rhinestone Cowgirl (10/13-10/17), a female version of Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* (9/11-10/3), and a play by a newcomer named Norm Foster. Nice to see people trying different programming.

VICTORIA PLAYHOUSE PETROLIA, Petrolia (1-800-717-7694): Lots of fun here this season, from *The 39 Steps* (6/8-6/26) to *See How They Run* (8/10-8/28). Musical revues as well, including the nifty *Altar Boyz* (6/29-7/10) and *Cowgirls* (about the urban sophisticates on Manhattan's East Side. Not. (7/20-8/7).

WESTBEN ARTS FESTIVAL THEATRE, Campbellford (705-653-5508): Everything from a musical about a giant to Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (7/2-7/4), with every stop along the way in between.