

[« Back](#)

Crowds grow for Shakespeare Festival

Updated 2 days ago

PRESCOTT — As the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival wrapped up on Saturday, organizers and actors celebrated a season so successful that none of the actors wanted to go home on Sunday.

"We were very pleased and encouraged by attendance this season, which was up eight per cent over last year. Almost 4,700 people came this year, compared to 4,327 in 2009," said Ian Farthing, the festival's artistic director.

"Doing a brand new play in the main season was different for us," he said.

The strong contrast between the tragedy of Macbeth, and the silliness of Trouble on Dibble Street, a new play by John Lazarus, of Kingston, based on The Merry Wives of Windsor worked well, Farthing said.

"Dibble Street was set in Prescott, but even people unfamiliar with Prescott got all the jokes. It turned out well."

The response was so positive that festival organizers will remain open to the idea of presenting a new play in future, too, but the festival's lineup for 2011 returns to the tried and true.

Next summer, the festival features Twelfth Night, one of the Bard's best-loved comedies, and All's Well that Ends Well, one of his less frequently performed comedies.

Twelfth Night will be directed by Craig Walker, who directed Dibble Street, and, after several years behind the scenes, Farthing will return to the stage in the role of Malvolio.

All's Well will be directed by Jan Irwin, who directed The Taming of the Shrew last year.

The return of Twelfth Night is a milestone for the local festival – the first time in its history it has repeated a play. The St. Lawrence festival first staged Twelfth Night in 2005.

"We've now done all of the sort of well-known, popular comedies," said Farthing.

That, he agrees, says something about the longevity of the festival, which has now completed eight seasons.

"It's a nice position to be in," said Farthing, who is looking forward to getting back on the Prescott stage – especially since Malvolio is a role he has always wanted to play.

The artistic director said Twelfth Night matches well with All's Well, and he did not want to run the risk of running two lesser-known comedies.

"Five years is long enough to bring something back," said Farthing.

This will be a different staging from the 2005 one, and since the audience has doubled since then, many will be seeing it in Prescott for the first time, he added.

Farthing also announced two off-season events in Prescott.

In October, the festival stages two performances of Jake's Gift, in the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

On December 10 and 11, Bain and Bernard, a madcap comedy team that entertained in this summer's Sunday Series, returns to give two Christmas performances, also at the church.

This summer's season saw a significant increase in out-of-towners, Farthing said. Word is getting out about this festival and people are specifically coming to Prescott from as far away as New Jersey and Toronto.

Fourteen professional actors and four student interns were billeted in homes throughout the town, and for the first time in many years, five local children performed this season.

Billeting is a great way, said Farthing, for actors to be part of the town. There were tears on Sunday as the actors went their separate ways.

With files from Ronald Zajac

Copyright © 2010 Brockville Recorder and Times