

Savour Shakespeare on the St. Lawrence

Head to Prescott for comedy, fresh air and a beautiful sunset setting

BY PATRICK LANGSTON, OTTAWA CITIZEN JULY 9, 2011

WHAT DID YOU DO?

The past couple of summers, I headed south to the historic village of Prescott to see shows at the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival. Prescott is about 80 kilometres from Ottawa, straight down Highway 416.

WHY DRIVE ALL THE WAY THERE TO SEE THEATRE?

Spirited, professional productions of great plays in an outdoor amphitheatre overlooking the St. Lawrence River on soft summer evenings - how can you go wrong? The Kinsmen Amphitheatre is on Water Street West with free parking a short distance away. If it rains, the show shifts to the nearby St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Round up some friends - even non-theatre goers will enjoy the informal setting and the summer fare, and you'll have plenty to gab about all the way back to Ottawa.

WHAT'S PLAYING THIS SUMMER?

Two comedies. Twelfth Night, a story about a shipwreck, love and disguises, opens today. The festival's artistic producer Ian Farthing plays Malvolio, a puritanical steward whom Farthing has described, with a certain fondness, as "a pompous ass." The romantic comedy All's Well That Ends Well opens July 13. Part fairy tale, part challenge to conventional gender roles, it's directed by veteran Ottawa director and writer, Janet Irwin.

WHEN CAN I GO?

Both shows run Tuesday to Saturday at 7 p.m. until Aug. 13; there are 2 p.m. matinee performances on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$20 for students; children 12 and younger are free. For tickets and more information, call 613-925-5788 or visit stlawrenceshakespeare.ca.

YOU SAY THE SITE OVERLOOKS THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER. ISN'T THAT DISTRACTING WHEN YOU'RE WATCHING A PLAY?

No. In fact, the sight of distant sailboats scudding across the water and folks strolling along the boardwalk reminds you that theatre is a snapshot of reality, albeit one that's had a Photoshop enhancement.

What do you sit on in the amphitheatre?

It's a stone amphitheatre, so bring a lawn chair, blanket or cushion to ward off numb bum. If you forget, there are a limited number of rental folding chairs (\$3) and cushions (\$1). Remember to bring mosquito repellent: the shows finish just as darkness sets in and the little critters begin looking for something to drink.

ARE THERE OTHER EVENTS DURING THE FESTIVAL?

If music be the food of love, play on. Shakespeare's plays have inspired everything from Broadway musicals (*West Side Story*) to operas (Verdi's *Macbeth*). As part of the festival's Shakespeare Sunday series, Christopher Coyea, tenor, and Alex Fleuriau Chateau, bass, perform songs and arias from some of these works on Sunday, July 17.

Other events in the series include *The Two Trees*, a solo show about Irish poet W.B. Yeats' unrequited love for a beautiful, fiery revolutionary, and *Love in the Afternoon* featuring songs and poetry on the theme of love.

All tickets for the series are \$15.

WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO DO IN PRESCOTT?

The town, which recently celebrated its 200th anniversary, abounds in United Empire Loyalist heritage. It was named for General Robert Prescott, governor-in-chief of Canada from 1797 to 1807, and was a strategic military site for protecting the Canadian border against American and French invasions. (The town also had 27 taverns, which might have diluted the quality of protection.)

Be sure to visit Fort Wellington, now a national historic site. It was built in 1812 to defend the St. Lawrence River shipping route between Montreal and Kingston from attack by the United States. The site features costumed historical interpreters, presentations and period demonstrations including cannon firings and period crafts and games.

There's also the Forwarders' Museum (it doubles as an information centre), built to warehouse goods transported by ship, and walking tours of the town.

I'VE HEARD ABOUT SOMETHING CALLED LOYALIST DAYS. WHAT ARE THEY?

Although Prescott Loyalist Days run Aug. 18 to 21, after the theatre festival ends, they're worth the extra trip. This year, the event marks the bicentennial of the War of 1812 with battle re-enactments at Fort Wellington and on the St. Lawrence River. Count on seeing full naval, infantry and cavalry forces defend King and country against those troublesome blokes to the south.

Loyalist Days also includes the Little Miss Loyalist Pageant - apparently a high point of 19th-century life - an outdoor screening of *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, the latest instalment of the series starring Johnny Depp, and The Seaway Autumn Studio Tour featuring Eastern Ontario artists.

See prescottloyalistsdays.ca for full details.

WHAT'S THE TOWN LIKE?

Leafy streetscapes, period architecture and a farmer's market make it a pretty place to walk. Pub fare, fast food and the like are pretty much the order of the day at Prescott eateries.

AND THE WATERFRONT?

Pre-1969, the waterfront wasn't much of anything except deserted. Since then, it's been revitalized and now boasts a boardwalk, grassy areas, an ice-cream stand and a marina. It's part of the 900-kilometre Waterfront Trail stretching from Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Quebec border along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. The river's clear waters make the area popular for divers exploring sunken shipwrecks.

© Copyright (c) The Ottawa Citizen