



By Richard Ouzounian Theatre Critic

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Summer Theatre: Fun, mandatory; mosquitos, optional.

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Exterior of the Thousands Island Playhouse in Gananoque.

One of the great things about Southern Ontario as a vacation spot is that, no matter where you are, there's a quality summer theatre nearby to give you something entertaining to do on the nights when you solved the mystery you're reading on page 26, or you've seen every episode of *CSI* that's on the tube.

ASTRO (Association of Summer Theatres 'Round Ontario) is a great umbrella organization for most of these groups and they maintain a very complete website of what's available at <http://www.summertheatre.ca/>

But some people can't resist a list, so here's a roundup of the theatres in question, with a brief description of one show they're presenting that sounds especially promising.

4th Line Theatre (Millbrook) — <http://www.4thlinetheatre.on.ca/> — (1-800-814-0055)
Celebrating their 20th anniversary, they present outdoor Canadian shows with an epic flair. This year opens with Drew Hayden Taylor's comic *The Berlin Blues*, the saga of what happens when German developers open "Ojibway World". (SEE SIDEBAR)

Blyth Festival (Blyth) — <http://www.toronto.com/article/www.blythfestival.com> — (1-877-862-5984) One of the region's veterans, with 36 seasons of Canadian plays to boast of. *Early August* by Kate Lynch sounds like a winner: a comedy about the perils of producing theatre in Huron County.

Century Church Theatre (Hillsburgh) — <http://www.centurychurchtheatre.com/> — (519-855-4586) Alan Ayckbourn is one of the geniuses of modern theatre and his play, *Confusions*, consists of 5 separate incidents, funny yet touching, which all link together by the evenings end.

Classic Theatre (Perth) — <http://www.classictheatre.ca/> — (1-877-283-1283) Stop by for the second season of this theatre in the Ottawa Valley, where one of the shows is the forgotten charmer *Bell, Book and Candle*, John Van Druten's whimsical look at witchcraft and romance.

Drayton Entertainment (Drayton, Grand Bend, Penetanguishene and St. Jacob's) — <http://www.draytonentertainment.com/> — 1-888-449-4463. They've got 6 theatres, no waiting! This ambitious undertaking from Alex Mustakas is producing 13 shows this summer. The one I'm looking forward to in particular is *Blood Brothers* and no wonder, with stars like Paul McQuillan and Charlotte Moore.

Driftwood Theatre (touring Ontario) — <http://www.driftwoodtheatre.com/> — (905-576-2396) — This hardy group takes a small-scale, but not small-minded, production of Shakespeare around the province each summer. I haven't seen all their past work, but I've liked what I've seen and I'll be there to catch this year's *Macbeth*, given a dystopian setting.

Festival Players of Prince Edward County — <http://www.festivalplayers.ca/> — (1-866-584-1991) They produce an assortment of plays in an assortment of venues around the county and, in both cases, variety is the spice of life. *The Book of Esther*, by the empathetic Leanna Brodie, sounds like an intriguing study of a 15 year-old-girl struggling to grow up in a rural setting.

Globus Theatre (Bobcaygeon) — <http://www.globustheatre.com/> — (1-800-304-7897) *The Big Voice (God or Merman?)* isn't your typical Ontario summer fare, but should provide a welcome dose of showbiz flash and big-city sophistication in its story of two

boys who want to believe, but find that their divine inspiration is coming from musical theatre.

Highlands Summer Festival (Haliburton) — <http://www.highlandssummerfestival.on.ca/> — (705-457-9933) Who says you have to go to PEI to see *Anne of Green Gables*? This theatre is promising a smashing production of it and since the man directing it, Scott Denton, is a veteran of the Charlottetown Anne Machine, the odds for success are strong.

Humber River Shakespeare Company — <http://www.humberrivershakespeare.ca/> (416-209-2026) — *The Comedy of Errors*, with its two sets of twins, is already a wacky affair. But this production, touring the Humber River, also offers: “strange visitors, burlesque dancers, fortune tellers, and magicians.” Toss in the kitchen sink and I’d say we had a deal.

LaughOutLoud At the Opera House (Orillia) — <http://www.orilliaoperahouse.ca/> -(1-888-ORILLIA) An eclectic program, but the one I’d make certain I saw is Cathy Elliot’s *Moving Day*, the musical story of one woman trying to make her place in the universe on the day man lands on the moon.

Lighthouse Festival Theatre (Port Dover) — <http://www.lighthouse theatre.com/> -(1-888-779-7703) Chills are just as much a part of summer theatre as laughter, which is why *When the Reaper Calls*, by the Canadian master of mayhem, Peter Colley, is a safe bet to give you a pleasantly uneasy evening.

Port Hope Festival Theatre (Port Hope) — <http://www.capitoltheatre.com/> — (1-800-434-5092) Sometimes you want to put your brain on hold and just get off on the music. That’s what *Groovin’ Thru the ’60s* promises: a collection of songs from the era when “Make Love, Not War” seemed like an excellent idea. Still does, come to think of it.

Port Stanley Festival Theatre (Port Stanley) — <http://www.psft.on.ca/> — (519-782-4353) World premieres are exciting things, especially in summer theatre, which is why Michael Wilmot’s *7-10 Split* sounds appealing. The story of a wannabe pro bowler who falls under the spell of internet gambling seems like a worthy bet.

Rose Theatre Presents Summer Theatre (Brampton) — <http://www.rosetheatre.ca/> - 905-874-2800. One of the most attractive playhouses in Ontario offers an assortment of

shows, including two blockbuster musicals: *A Chorus Line* and *Cabaret*. Shakespeare outdoors, as well.

Shaw Festival (Niagara-on-the-Lake) — <http://www.shawfest.com/> — 1-800-511-SHAW)

One of the province's two biggest theatres, you can see 11 shows at 4 theatres. My favourite so far has been the charming Irish comedy, *Drama at Inish*, which the company perform to perfection.

Showboat Festival Theatre (Port Colborne) — <http://www.showboattheatre.ca/> — (1-

888-870-8181) Norm Foster's comedies provide a substantial portion of the Ontario summer theatres' repertoire, so it's nice to welcome *Mending Fences*, one of his works with a tear in its eye as well as a chuckle in its throat.

Starbright Summer Festival (Sarnia) — <http://www.starbright.ca/> — (1-877-344-7469)

David Rogers and Susan Gilmour have two of the finest voices on our stages and when they're announced as starring in a show called *The Power and Passion of Broadway*, you know that's just what you're going to get.

Stirling Festival Theatre (Stirling) — <http://www.stirlingfestivaltheatre.com/> — (1-877-

312-1162) A lot of Ontario theatres are presenting a comedy called *Sex Laundry* this season, so this might be the place to check it out. Middle-aged couple purchase sex manual and hilarity, as they like to say, ensues.

St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival (Prescott) —

<http://www.stlawrenceshakespeare.ca/> — (613-925-5788) A beautiful outdoor setting on the banks of the St. Lawrence and a pair of Shakespeare gems to perform: *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Twelfth Night*. Play on!

Stratford Shakespeare Festival of Canada (Stratford) — <http://www.stratfordfestival.ca/>

— (1-800-567-1600) 12 spectacular shows on 4 distinctive stages. This year's winners so far include *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I'm also looking forward to *Twelfth Night* and *The Homecoming*, both starring the great Brian Dennehy.

Theatre By The Bay (Barrie) — <http://www.theatrebythebay.com/> — (1- 866.735.9243)

TV and film star Robert Joy, currently a regular on *CSI: NY*, returns home for his first Ontario theatre engagement in many, many years as he plays Prospero in *The Tempest* at Georgian Theatre for this adventurous company.

Theatre Collingwood (Collingwood) — <http://www.theatrecollingwood.com/> — (1-866-382-2200) Dan Needles is best known the one-man *Wingfield* shows he's written, but now he gives us *Fair Play*, a multi-character comedy about the hilarious tribulations of Petunia Valley.

Thousand Islands Playhouse (Gananoque) — <http://www.1000islandsplayhouse.com/> — 1-866-382-7020. One of the most gorgeous venues around also presents some of the most entertaining shows. They just offered the Canadian premiere of *The Marvelous Wonderettes* and the Norm Foster-Leslie Arden musical *Ned Durango* comes later in the season.

Upper Canada Playhouse (Morrisburg) — <http://www.uppercanadaplayhouse.com/> — (613-543-3713) Laughs, laughs and more laughs on the agenda, with the intriguingly titled *The Sensuous Senator* by Michael Parker promising a politician who scores higher in the bedroom than in the polls.

Victoria Playhouse (Petrolia) — <http://www.thevpp.ca/> — (1-800-717-7694) A nicely mixed season here, with the crowd-pleasing finale being provided by Leisa Way, a honey of an entertainer. Having dazzled crowds for years as Patsy Cline, she now turns to Dolly Parton in *Rhinestone Cowgirl*.

Westben Arts Festival Theatre (Campbellford) — <http://www.westben.on.ca/> — 1-877-883-5777. Most of this company's attractions are classical in nature, but of course my eye was caught by one called *Broadway in the Barn* — *Send in the Sondheim!* I guess Sweeney Todd uses a scythe instead of a razor.