

News of the arts

Stratford season's special tribute

Stratford Festival's ambitious twenty-sixth season opened on June 5 with a gala "tribute to Shakespeare" by selected performers from Stratford, Ontario, the Canadian Opera Company and the National Ballet. This is the first time the three companies have joined forces in honour of the playwright.

The Company is presenting this year *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, with William Hutt, Alan Scarfe and Domini Blythe; *The Devils*, with Nicholas Pennell, Martha Henry and Richard Monette; *Macbeth*, with Maggie Smith and Douglas Rain; *Uncle Vanya*, with William Hutt, Brian Bedford and Martha Henry; *The Winter's Tale*, with Brian Bedford and Martha Henry; *Candide*, with Edward Evanko and Caralyn Tomlin; *Julius Caesar*, starring Eric Donkin and Nicholas Pennell, and *Titus Andronicus*, with William Hutt in the title role. Artistic director Robin Smith has also arranged for the presentation of *As You Like It*, with Maggie Smith and Brian Bedford; *Judgement*, offering a powerful solo performance by Richard Monette; *Heloise and Abelard*, with four actors alternating performances as the two lovers; *Ned and Jack*, an original Canadian play commissioned by the Festival, starring Alan Scarfe and Jack Wetherall; *Private Lives*, with Maggie Smith and Brian Bedford; *Medea*, with Patricia Idlette in the title role, and *Four Plays by Samuel Beckett*,

with Karen Austin and Mary Savidge. The season ends mid-October.

Auspicious beginning

The Festival, founded in 1953, had as its first artistic director Sir Tyrone Guthrie. From its early years when performances were held in a tent, the organization has grown to international stature, arranging for its actors tours which have included Copenhagen, Warsaw, Moscow, Leningrad, Edinburgh, New York, and, last year, four major cities in Australia. Originally dedicated to the works of Shakespeare, the theatre now entertains theatre-goers from May until October with classical, popular and experimental theatre and music. There are three theatres in use most days and evenings. The Festival Theatre, with a seating capacity of 2,264, was built in 1957 on the banks of the River Avon. It features a modern adaptation of the Elizabethan stage, using a fixed balcony above a portico with pillars on each side, several trap doors, seven levels and nine main entrances.

The Avon Theatre, a former movie house in downtown Stratford, was acquired by the Festival in 1963. Smaller than the Festival Theatre, it has a seating capacity of 1,102. Works other than those by Shakespeare are featured here. The workshop, started in 1971, stages mainly experimental theatre. With three theatres mainly in constant use, the Festival manages to present ten to 15 productions each season.



Maggie Smith as Rosalind in the 1978 production of *As You Like It*.



Richard Monette as Officer Vukhov in *Judgement*.



The magnificent Festival Theatre won for its architect, Robert Fairfield, the Massey Gold Medal for Architecture in 1958.



William Hutt as Sir John Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Robert Ragsdale

Photos by Robert Ragsdale, Zoë Dominic and Tony Hauser