

Stratford sees slimmer Shakespeare season

The 2009 season at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival of Canada will feature only three plays by the world's greatest playwright, down from five last year. They will be "Macbeth", "Julius Caesar" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream". None of them will be on stage on his 445th birthday on 23 April. Zounds! Instead, "West Side Story" will have its fifth performance in the Festival Theatre that evening. Sblood!

Antoni Cimolino, the Festival's General Director, says in the Visitors' Guide that Shakespeare's influence is seen in this year's two musicals, "West Side" and "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum". In the first a member of a New York City gang falls in love with the sister of the leader of a rival bunch of toughs. That is vaguely reminiscent of the Montagues and the Capulets. "Funny Thing", however, has no affinity to Julius Caesar except that it takes place in Rome and, as critic Rick Pender once said, the 1962 musical has been around long enough to be considered a classic.

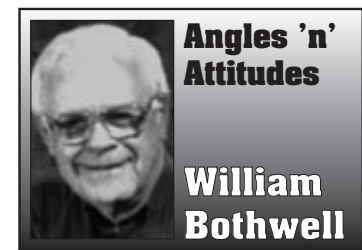
The claim that everything on the current playbill will show how Shakespeare's "unprecedented exploration" of the human condition paved the way for others of this year's featured works is a bold one. He enabled later playwrights to extend "the astonishingly varied dramatic universe that Shakespeare helped to create", says Cimolino. Ben Johnson was a contemporary so he doesn't count but his "Bartholomew Fair", Racine's "Phedre" and Chekhov's "Three Sisters" are promised to be "fearless examinations" of how we humans do naught (or little) for our comfort. And Oscar Wilde's incomparable Lady Bracknell will be played by veteran actor Brian Bedford in drag.

More will be said here about who and what are on stage in Stratford ON in due course. For the moment, let the spotlight be on Shakespeare. But first, as the Festival advertises itself as North America's leading classical theatre, both words need definition.

"Classical" denotes something of acknowledged excellence that has survived many changes in popular taste. "Yesterday's hits, today's classics" are an enduring challenge to the shallowness of much that we call entertainment.

Turner Classic Movies? Well, maybe a few of them fit the definition. The word "theatre" is in its root meaning "a place of seeing". Whether it be the open air amphitheatre of Greece and Rome, the inn courtyard of medieval England or more recent arrangements of stage and stalls, a theatre is a place where one sees the comedy or tragedy of human existence encapsulated.

The classical theatre has been challenged by the ubiquity of motion picture houses and the comparative affordability of their



Angles 'n' Attitudes

William Bothwell

films. People endure willingly the advertising, excessive noise and violence of the "cineplex" screens. Admittedly, the legitimate theatre requires more of an investment, both financially and intellectually. A film, once finished, can be marketed for \$8 or \$9 per person. Not so a production that involves the daily presence and performance of actors, musicians and stage hands. An old advertising pitch is relevant to the "live stage": "Costs more. Worth it".

Now, back to the skimpier Shakespeare schedule. Since it is important that every child have some understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare's work it is also important that at least one parent familiarise him / herself with the story lines of the most commonly staged plays. Summaries are easily obtainable. Even a primary school youngster can be told the story of Julius Caesar and something about the inner struggles of Macbeth. "Midsummer" is pure fairyland fantasy though many find it too much so, as did the diarist Samuel Pepys.

James Murden, author of *Shakespeare Well Versed*, a book that summarises each play in, well, verse, says "School turned me off Shakespeare. Twenty years later as a student taking a teaching degree in English I met him again. As Mark Twain said of his parents, it was amazing how much wiser he had become by the time I had

grown up".

The Bard should be approached in easy stages, perhaps by beginning at an early age to memorise a few lines of his wisdom. Some of us were not much older than seven or eight when we were encouraged, phrase by short phrase, to recite Polonius's advice to Laertes, "This above all: to thine own self be true. And it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man". Shakespeare, as someone quipped, is "so full of quotations". Parental guidance can make his words, both archaic and current, understandable and memorable.

It would be a great cultural service to the community if the English departments of our local secondary schools were to offer introductory classes to the current season of

Shakespeare productions at Stratford. One evening devoted to each play, discussing the human issues involved, examining and explaining the use of language and poetry and highlighting the most 'felicitous' passages would be of interest to many people, not the least those who were unable to appreciate all that when they were callow youngsters.

Speculation as to who the playwright really was, his political, religious and sexual orientations and the ways in which the plays have been presented and bowdlerised over the years are all topics of general interest. If I were on the Festival board of governors I would try to launch that kind of programme in every Ontario town and city.

Does all of the above sound elitist and, for many people, irrelevant? Think again. In his best-selling book *A Whole New Mind* Daniel Pink says that future success will require a greater use of the imaginative, creative right side of the brain which has been kept underdeveloped by our education system's left brain emphasis on mathematics and science. "The right hemisphere is the key to expanding human thought. It's the seat of creativity, of the soul". Scott Hughes, a local sales and management consultant, says that five years from now we will be selling and buying goods and services that have not yet been imagined. Imagine that!

Maybe "Midsummer Night's Dream" is more significant than Mr Pepys thought.

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All it means is higher taxes - period

The late U.S. senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan once quipped that "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts." And so it was on March 10 that Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty offered his opinion to the provincial Liberal caucus that nothing had been decided on the thorny - and tax-raising - issue of harmonizing our eight-percent provincial sales tax (PST) with Ottawa's five-percent general sales tax (GST). He lied.

Even as he stood before his own party MPPs to say he wanted to hear what they thought of harmonizing the two taxes, McGuinty and Finance Minister Dwight Duncan had already signed a secret memorandum of understanding a day earlier in a meeting with federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty.

And on the very day McGuinty said the issue was still up in the air, he and Duncan had actually signed the deal, accepting a promise from Flaherty for \$4.3 billion by way of compensation to help smooth the transition.

This is the same man, let us never forget, who during his first successful run for the premiership, publicly signed a pledge that he would not raise taxes, only to immediately announce a health premium, one of the largest single tax increases in Ontario history.

He lied to all the voters then. He lied to his own caucus last month. And now we're stuck with the bill.

Besides demonstrating once again that McGuinty cannot be trusted to keep his word, what does all this tax harmonization mean to you, Mr. and Mrs. Beleaguered Taxpayer?

Higher taxes. Period. Now, instead of enjoying PST-free purchases on several consumer items, you'll now be paying the full 13 percent on the vast majority of your purchases. Things such as books, car repairs, diapers, children's clothing and footwear, children's car seats and feminine hygiene products, which had been exempt from the PST, will now be taxed when it kicks in July 1 this year.

So too will gas, fuels and electricity - all previously exempt - along with the costs of conferences and seminars, prepared foods under \$4, tobacco (along with nicotine replacement therapy), and the tax will be added to the bill for professional services from lawyers, accountants and architects, et al.

Even getting a hair cuts will cost you more in

taxes, along with membership fees in gyms and fitness clubs, as well as your daily newspapers and magazines, taxi and limousine fares, internet access fees, golfer's green fees, and live theatre admissions.

They'll even slap the full tax on your vitamin pills and - if you can believe it - the legally blind will now have to pay the full tax on their audio books. Sweet, eh?

And at a time where the economic situation is already critical - with hundreds of thousands of Ontarians losing their jobs (although none who work for the government, alas) - McGuinty has tacked the tax onto the purchase of homes worth \$500,000 or more. Now you might think that's a pretty swanky home. And it is in many parts of Ontario. But for those taxpayers living in the larger cities, particularly Toronto and environs, it will add 10s of thousands of dollars to the purchase price and further deflate an already-struggling real estate market.

To ease the pain of transition - or, to buy off the immediate anger from taxpayers - McGuinty's budget includes transition payments of \$1,000 to families with incomes of \$160,000 or less and \$300 to singles with incomes of \$80,000 or less - with two installments in 2010 and a third in 2011. But after that, the handout is gone and you'll be left to pay the higher taxes for the foreseeable future.

To be fair, the budget did include some modest tax cuts, but overall - and despite spurious claims to the contrary - most of you will end up paying more in taxes, even as you see your current earning power and savings erode.

The government says the tax moves will save business about \$500 million a year in taxes. Perhaps. But the more likely scenario, as Judith Andrew of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business told reporters last week, is that "It means higher prices ... There are clearly some sectors that are going to have trouble with this."

Which is why, no doubt, McGuinty didn't want to come clean with his intentions and give the public - not to mention his own caucus - a chance to debate it.

That's far too democratic for his tastes. He'd rather tell us one thing and do another.

But then, despite his slippery tongue, voters did re-elect the guy. We can thank John Tory for that. Geez!

Comfort Zone: Friendship

Thinking of relationships, I am reminded of a Canadian/US controversy over fishing rights in the Gulf of St Lawrence shortly after the Iranian hostage affair in the US embassy when the Iranian government held the American diplomatic corps hostage. U.S. staff members, absent from the building at that time, took refuge in the Canadian embassy from which the Canadian ambassador finally managed to get them out of the country.

Our staff, protecting them, exemplified friendship between nations. Later with Canada still riding high in American eyes a disagreement arose pertaining to fishing in 'Canadian' waters. A friend quoted an old saying, "They were friends to the end. He asked for ten and that was the end".

Apparently economic considerations trump appreciation. How does one define friendship?

Just about now we should be having a reunion of the forestry class of 5 Tree 3 after 56 years since graduation from the University of Toronto. As we're not as young as we used to be a physical reunion does not appear to be in the books. However with winter over now is a time of reflection, a reminder of the close relationship we experienced during 4 years together as classmates. It hardly seems that long since we held a 50th reunion in Loretto in 2003, now six years ago.

At that time friends got together, traveling from all parts of North America, Alberta, Manitoba, Michigan, Colorado, etc. A long letter from Arne in Oslo helped to fill out the crowd. Since then we've attended a 50th wedding anniversary in Orillia, I

stayed at a friend's home in the mile high city of Denver, Colorado and enjoyed the company of another from Michigan en route to his summer cottage in the Kawarthas. Occasionally we have enjoyed phone conversations with classmates in Michigan and in Peterborough. Unfortunately we have also heard of the death of our friend in Norway and in an e-mail last week, the loss of Jerry's wife in Parry Sound.

In a phone conversation with a classmate, we were reminded that we planned to get together for lunch in the spring when the roads were clear. Don and Donna live in Toronto and Anne and I are looking forward to a pending visit. We have kept in contact over many years.

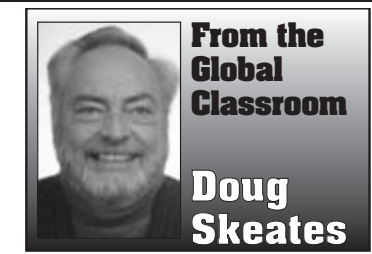
When we're together there is no thought of intervening years. We had a similar relationship with many in the class and their wives when we got together at our reunion enjoying the recounting of old times as if they were yesterday.

Time passes but friendships do not.

Over my career I have encountered cultural differences toward long standing relationships. An African friend has spoken of his classmate relationships which supercede close family ties. My son's father-in-law in Japan meets regularly with others of his school years and speaks about them as though they were siblings.

A Thai friend is so close to his classmates that they constantly help one another with such things as business or even personal problems.

Family relationships remain equally important. I find myself on the phone to my brother (in his



From the Global Classroom

Doug Skeates

'80s yet!) on a weekly basis. A daughter and her family living in Bolton is close enough that we're able to get together about once a week.

Another daughter in Los Angeles has a neat telephone arrangement facilitating free communication every two or three days. Weekly calls to or from a son and his family in Whitley keep us in touch there as well as regular calls with another in Pickering.

Talking with our youngest son in Japan each weekend is part of our communication portfolio. "Kids" now are on our network of close friends.

It is most gratifying that phone calls between siblings provide added glue helping to hold us all together.

Modern communications such as the global telephone have made these contacts easier whether using e-mails or phone calls, especially contacts of longer distances. We have been able to maintain relationships with many.

A lifetime of friendship has complemented our retirement comfort zone.

Your Weekly Chuckle . . .

By KEITH HUNTER

NAN: "You've been counting calories for months now and haven't lost any weight!"
JAN: "Yes, but my arithmetic is much better."

Dipping Into the Past

Death threat deemed not a consequence of his mental illness

Toronto was just rounding the curve when the engineer saw another engine flying toward his. He whistled and threw on the emergency brake, but the intervening distance was so slight and the speed so great that the two engines crashed together. The engine of the passenger train escaped with slight damage to the cow-catcher. The other engine had its pilot badly smashed and the trucks thrown off the track. The light engine came from a southbound freight train which had become stalled a short distance south of Chatsworth. Instead of sending out flagmen, the engine was sent to stop the passenger train.

Budget 'leaks' have become commonplace

Anyone around the Ontario legislature one day recently must have thought Barack Obama at least was on the premises.

Enough police, armed and in body armour, to rid this city's streets of crime were patrolling the grounds, watching from cars and standing at entrances and in corridors. The legislature's regular security officers do not carry weapons.

Police were packed most densely around a second-floor room, helping an equal army of civil servants make sure only reporters and photographers with proper accreditation were allowed in.

The government had the journalists pledge they would not take in electronic equipment through which they could pass information to the outside world and warned direly any who disobeyed would be barred from such events for life.

Once inside, journalists were given copies of the budget outlining the government's spending plans for the year, so they could write news stories, columns and editorials to send to their newspapers and TV and radio stations the moment they were allowed out.

They were escorted by police to washrooms and back and not set free finally until 4 p.m., when Finance Minister Dwight Duncan began reading the budget in the legislature.

The Liberal government put on as big a show of security as if it was protecting the military plan to defend the western world or recipe for Kentucky Fried Chicken.

But it was all a hoax and sham, because Premier Dalton McGuinty and unidentified government "sources" had leaked all of the budget that mattered in dribs and drabs over several weeks, as surely as if they had dropped in every home and left a copy. There were no budget secrets left to guard.

This broke tradition, because governments normally kept budgets secret until they are read in the legislature. One reason is they may affect stock prices and should not be made public until markets have closed.

Another is that governments generally have recognized they should present budgets, one of the two most important documents they produce annually

along with the Throne Speech, first in the legislature, out of respect for MPPs.

Both rules are ingrained in the British parliamentary system, on which Canada's is based. A British equivalent of finance minister, who made a brief remark to a reporter that indicated he planned to raise taxes on cigarettes, was gone faster than a puff of smoke.

Federal and provincial governments have been forced to unveil budgets ahead of schedule, because parts became known, and discoveries even of scraps of budgets in printer's garbage have produced furious recriminations.

The tradition that budgets should be disclosed first to MPPs in the legislature was broken once, in 2003 by a Progressive Conservative government, which unveiled one in a Brampton auto factory, trying to remove itself as far as possible from opposition parties' criticisms.

McGuinty said at that time "it is the first recipient of the budget."

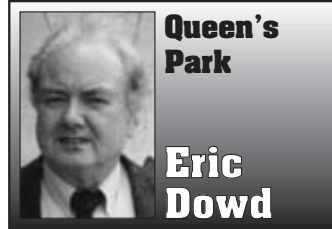
Times have changed, however. The Liberals leaked parts of this budget ahead of time for political gains. One is that bad news (and this was mostly bad), spread out over weeks can have less impact than the same amount announced all on one day.

The Liberals also countered each item of bad news they leaked with a good one. Among examples, they indicated they would harmonize the province's sales tax with federal taxes, which generally increased the tax burden, but softened the blow by almost doubling benefits for children in low-income families.

Business felt it was being left out, so McGuinty fast-forwarded a plan easing corporate taxes and every chamber of commerce branch had prepared a letter by budget day defending this one as fair.

When average taxpayers started worrying, McGuinty pulled another rabbit from the budget showing he would send each \$1,000.

The Liberals have broken fair and well-established parliamentary rules so they could influence votes, but so far few have noticed and they are getting away with it.



Queen's Park

Eric Dowd

dense forest and there were no roads in the locality.

75 YEARS AGO Wednesday, April 11, 1934

Recent meetings to explain the life history and demonstrate the treatment for the warble or heel fly control, arranged by R. C. Banbury, Dufferin's Agricultural Representative, were well attended. Judging from the interest, the war on warbles is under way in earnest and thousands of the warbles, which would make the cattle run next summer, will be exterminated by washing the animal's back.

Traffic by automobile in these parts at present is driving, we might say, with bated breath. The gravel roads are passable, but in a large number of cases, just passable, and heavy rain will bring frost to the surface and mud will reign supreme.

50 YEARS AGO Wednesday, April 8, 1959

Warm weather on Sunday led to

flooding in Grand Valley, an ice jam causing the water to inundate much of the community's south ward, with up to three feet of water covering Highway 104. There was also flooding on Highway 9 at the "sink hole" west of Orangeville.

Dufferin County's fine new snow plow had its first trout Sunday when it was used on some of Shelburne's side streets.

25 YEARS AGO Wednesday, April 11, 1984

Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe MP Perrin Beatty is heading a task force that has recommended a taxpayers' Bill of Rights. The task force has just completed a month-long tour of hearings across Canada.

The eighth annual maple syrup festival at the Orangeville Reservoir Conservation Area drew a record crowd of about 4,500 over the last three weekends.

Representatives of Shelburne OPP have suggested that Mono Township enact a noise bylaw.

