

# Shakespearean Theatre in Canada

By Amanda Wilk



The Stratford Shakespeare Festival's Festival Theatre Photo by Amanda Wilk

## Introduction

Professional Shakespearean theatres and theatre festivals exist in most provinces, with the exception of Prince Edward Island and Quebec (Shakespeare Fellowship, n.d.). By far the greatest number of theatres exist in Ontario, which is also home to North America's largest and most famous Shakespearean theatre festival: The Stratford Shakespeare Festival (Stratford Shakespeare Festival, n.d.). Many North American Shakespearean theatre festivals are hosted only during summer months, and many of these are held outdoors.

Giving young adults the opportunity to see Shakespeare live is extremely important. On encouraging young adults to see Shakespeare, Des McAnuff (the artistic director of The Stratford Shakespeare Festival) states: "Education is about far more than memorizing and regurgitating facts, writing essays and solving mathematical equations. It is about inspiring young minds (and old ones too) to explore ourselves and the world in which we live...to deny young people first-hand encounters with art of the highest order is to hobble their powers of imagination" (McAnuff, 2010).

Below, one Shakespearean theatre from three Canadian regions (eastern, central, and western) will be briefly examined. The goal is to provide a glimpse of the Shakespearean theatres available in Canada in order to inspire all educators to facilitate trips during which students are given the opportunity to experience Shakespeare firsthand.

## Eastern Canada: Shakespeare by the Sea (Halifax, NS)

Shakespeare by the Sea is a seasonal outdoor theatre company, which runs Shakespearean and other theatrical

productions from May to September (Shakespeare by the Sea, n.d.). The company was started in 1994, when a production of Twelfth Night was staged by a team of volunteers and received critical and popular success (Shakespeare by the Sea, n.d.). Since 1996 three productions have been staged each season – usually two works of Shakespeare and one piece of children’s theatre (Shakespeare by the Sea, n.d.). This company continues to evolve and has become an important part of Halifax’s theatre scene.

### **Central Canada: The Stratford Shakespeare Festival (Stratford, Ontario)**

The Stratford Shakespeare Festival was established in 1953 and today is North America’s largest classical repertory theatre (Stratford Shakespeare Festival, n.d.). It is a seasonal theatre festival that runs annually from April-November (Stratford Shakespeare Festival, n.d.). The Festival showcases twelve productions each season, four of which are Shakespearean, as well as two musicals and six additional works (Stratford Shakespeare Festival, n.d.). These works are showcased across four stages, including the world famous Festival Theatre which is home to a unique thrust stage

(Stratford Shakespeare Festival, n.d.). The Stratford Shakespeare Festival is truly a theatrical gem which Canadians should take full advantage of.

### **Western Canada: Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival (Vancouver, British Columbia)**

Bard on the Beach is celebrating its 22<sup>nd</sup> season as a seasonal not-for-profit Shakespearean festival in Vancouver’s Vanier Park (Bard on the Beach, 2011). Each season four Shakespearean or Shakespeare-related productions are mounted. Productions run from June through September, and are staged in two tents. The Mainstage Tent is open-ended, so the background to all productions is the mountains, sea and sky. This creates a unique experience for theatregoers (Bard on the Beach, 2011).

### **References**

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## **How Online Social Media is Revolutionizing Shakespearean Theatres**

*By Amanda Wilk*



### **Introduction**

In the past few years online social media tools (OSM) such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have changed the way

people are interacting and communicating with one another. Young adults are one demographic that has widely adopted these new technologies. Classical theatres have begun utilizing online social media to market themselves to the public. Interestingly, they have also gone beyond using these tools for marketing, and have developed new performances that incorporate OSM tools. The development of new marketing strategies and new performances are beginning to result in the creation of new audiences engaged with Shakespearean and Classical theatre.

### **New Marketing**

Theatres have begun to use online social media tools to market themselves to audiences. The use of online social media has proven to be successful for recruiting new audiences and developing a community of theatre supporters. The Stratford Shakespeare Festival – the largest Shakespearean theatre company in North America (Stratford Shakespeare Festival, n.d.) – has utilized all of the aforementioned tools to attract new audiences. This had been extremely beneficial as it has made their theatre appear more approachable and has allowed people of all ages (including young