

Shaw Festival Announces 2009 Season

Media Release #20

The Idea

Shaw ... Coward ... Osborne? The ideas of these playwrights rocked society far beyond the confines of the theatre world. The Shaw Festival's 2009 season celebrates the brilliance of the work of these writers and opens up a new corner of its mandate to show the continuum of provocative theatre The Shaw is renowned for producing. In announcing the 2009 Season today, Artistic Director Jackie Maxwell said, "We're thrilled to be embarking on our 2009 adventure. Two exciting events will be highlights of the season: a once-in-a-lifetime celebration of one of Bernard Shaw's most famous contemporaries, fellow provocateur Noel Coward, and a new initiative in a new space with a new writer for The Shaw. We'll do that – and we'll present an additional six remarkable plays, while continuing our exploration of contemporary Shavian writers in our reading series. The choices made this season play to the strengths of our multi-faceted and extraordinary Company and are made in concert with our ongoing emphasis on nurturing the careers of emerging theatre artists and developing new work for our stages. Welcome aboard, and enjoy the ride."

The Reality

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, September 23, 2008 . . . Artistic Director Jackie Maxwell officially announced the Shaw Festival's 2009 season today. In 2009 The Shaw takes on a monumental and historic project with full productions of each play in Noel Coward's famous *Tonight at 8:30* collection. The Shaw's 2009 productions represent the first time all ten short plays have been performed in repertory by a professional company since they were first produced by London's Phoenix Theatre in 1935-36. The plays will be performed in sets of three, one on each of the Festival's Niagara-on-the-Lake stages, with the tenth, the rarely produced *Star Chamber*, being the lunchtime production in the Royal George. And to celebrate this idea for the event that it is, on two separate occasions, we will present all ten in one day – an event we are appropriately naming "Mad Dogs and Englishmen".

Ms. Maxwell said of the collection: "As the idea of doing all of Coward's *Tonight at 8:30* came to me, and as I reread the plays, I was struck that each one is a brilliant jewel – like the best short stories – some well known, some not. As is typical of Coward – who was always pushing the envelope in both form and content – the ten plays vary hugely. There are out-and-out comedies, heart-wrenching dramas, fantasy musicals and historical tales. Coward is a brilliant miniaturist, a master storyteller, and any group of these plays, seen together, is a truly satisfying evening at the theatre. The experience of seeing them in one fell swoop, for those who are game, will be thrilling indeed."

English actor, playwright and composer Noel Coward (1899-1973) is renowned for his full-length plays *The Vortex*, *Hay Fever*, *Easy Virtue*, *Bitter Sweet*, *Cavalcade*, *Private Lives* and *Design for Living*, most of which have been produced by The Shaw. His ambitious *Tonight at*

8:30 cycle, which he wrote and starred in with his frequent stage partner Gertrude Lawrence, was originally written to be performed in combinations of three plays for a different playbill each night.

Artistic Director **Jackie Maxwell** will direct the first set of plays, in the Festival Theatre. Titled *Brief Encounters*, this includes *Still Life*, *We Were Dancing* and *Hands Across the Sea*. The Royal George set, directed by Artistic Director Emeritus **Christopher Newton**, titled *Play, Orchestra, Play*, will include *Red Peppers*, *Fumed Oak* and *Shadow Play*. The Court House group, director to be announced, titled *Ways of the Heart*, will include *Ways and Means*, *Family Album* and *The Astonished Heart*. **Kate Lynch** will direct the lunchtime *Star Chamber*. Music plays a huge role throughout *Tonight at 8:30* and The Shaw's Music Director **Paul Sportelli** will be Music Director for the whole project.

John Osborne (1929-1994), playwright, activist and the original inspiration for the phrase "angry young man", revolutionized English theatre in 1956 with his play *Look Back in Anger*. An outspoken critic of The Establishment and the monarchy, as well as English theatre, Osborne combined unsparring truthfulness with devastating wit. In 2009 The Shaw will produce a limited run of Osborne's 1957 play *The Entertainer*, directed by **Jackie Maxwell** in the Festival Theatre Rehearsal Studio. *The Entertainer*, a boldly theatrical piece combining drama and vaudeville that Osborne wrote for Laurence Olivier, uses the metaphor of the dying music hall tradition to comment on the vicissitudes of post-war life in 1950s England. The production of both *Tonight at 8:30* and *The Entertainer* in the 2009 season will create a vivid juxtaposition between Osborne's angry existential soul search and the polished work of Coward, while also revealing the deep connection between the two.

The 2009 playbill includes six additional full productions. The Shaw's celebration of Coward's witty and subversive world sits perfectly beside the work of house wit and subversive, Bernard Shaw. Bernard Shaw's exhilarating *The Devil's Disciple*, last produced at The Shaw in 1996, is directed in 2009 by renowned Polish director **Tadeusz Bradecki**, and presented in the Festival Theatre. The upcoming American election and the ensuing new administration will provide a fascinating backdrop to Shaw's drama of the struggles between England and her American colonies in the late 1700s. In the Royal George, Shaw's hilarious satire of philosophy, playwriting and acting, *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*, will be directed by **Eda Holmes**.

Garson Kanin's classic comedy *Born Yesterday*, directed by **Neil Munro**, will share the Festival Theatre stage. An enduring story of a corrupt tycoon and his not-so-dumb blonde girlfriend, the play was a huge hit on Broadway in 1946 with Judy Holliday as Billie Dawn. Denouncing bribery, corruption and greedy corporate interests, this highly entertaining play could well have been written yesterday.

The Court House Theatre season also includes Eugene O'Neill's romantic drama *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, directed by **Joseph Ziegler**, who deftly handled O'Neill's *Ah Wilderness* for The Shaw in 2004. Continuing to programme Canadian classics, Michel Tremblay's phenomenal *Albertine in Five Times*, in a new translation by Linda Gaboriau and directed by **Micheline Chevrier**, will complete the Court House season. The play, which provides a wonderful challenge for six female actors, is a brilliant deconstruction of the life of Albertine, a complex, troubled woman who appears in many of Tremblay's plays and is one of theatre's most mercurial characters.

Building on the success of the 2008 season's *A Little Night Music* and *Follies: In Concert*, The Shaw continues to explore the work of Stephen Sondheim with a production of *Sunday in the*

Park with George, directed by **Alisa Palmer**, which explores the eternal conflict between life and art through the story of the French Impressionist painter Georges Seurat. The piece is a perfect fit with the intimate jewel-box setting of the Royal George Theatre.

The Shaw Festival's popular reading series of contemporary Shavian writers continues to be an integral component of each season and an important area of growth for the Company. For the reading series, Jackie Maxwell and director Eda Holmes choose full-length plays that represent contemporary writing at its best – witty and compelling, with a distinct modern-day perspective. Like Shaw's, the work of these writers centres on the critical examination of the times and communities in which they live. The 2009 Reading Series focuses on diverse female playwrights with a political voice. It includes the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Topdog/Underdog*, a biting funny, hard-hitting examination of poverty in America by African-American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, directed by Obsidian Theatre's Artistic Director **Phil Akin**, and further titles to be announced.

The reading series is often informed by The Shaw's play development work. As part of the 2009 reading series The Shaw also presents a new musical based on the brief life of Maria Severa Onofriana, a famous Portuguese fado singer who achieved near-mythical status after her death. *Maria Severa* is written by Shaw Festival Music Director Paul Sportelli and Ensemble member Jay Turvey, whose musical *Tristan* received its world premiere at The Shaw in 2007.

The Shaw's play development programme is actively engaged with writers, providing dramaturgical support, playwright-in-residence opportunities and workshops with actors, often working towards producing new work for The Shaw's stages. In addition to *Maria Severa*, other projects in development include an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Canterville Ghost* by Robin Patterson, Artistic Director of St. Catharines' Theatre Beyond Words; *Kaj Munk* by Dave Carley, The Shaw's 2008 playwright-in-residence; an adaptation, by Associate Director Neil Munro, of Henrik Ibsen's *The Master Builder*; and an exciting new project with Cahoots Theatre Projects exploring and developing work from Asia and China of the mandate period.

For theatregoers who like to dig a little deeper into the world of plays, playwrights, theatre artists, and the world backstage, the 2009 season is complemented by Shaw Enriched, an extensive offering of seminars, workshops and other entertaining and informative behind-the-scenes experiences.

Regular ticket prices for the 2009 season range from **\$30** to **\$110** including GST. For Special Matinees, student tickets are **\$25** and senior tickets are **\$40**. Lunchtime ticket prices are **\$30**. Sunday night performances are available all season from **\$45** to **\$60** and, for patrons aged 19-29, **\$30** tickets are available for most performances. Preview prices are **\$55** to **\$70**. Family tickets are available in each theatre: for each regularly-priced ticket purchased, one or two youth tickets (18 years or under) may be purchased for just **\$30**. New in 2009 are specially designated **\$30** seats for most Festival Theatre performances.

Tickets for the 2009 season go on sale to Shaw Festival Members according to Membership level starting November **8**. Tickets go on sale to groups and schools on January **5**. Tickets go on sale to The Shaw's high-loyalty customers on January **3** and to the general public by mail, fax or online on January **5** and by phone or in person on January **10**.

Tonight at 8:30 is generously supported by **Lombard Insurance**.

See next page for the **2009 Season at a Glance**.

Shaw Festival's 2009 Season at a Glance

Production	Author	Director/ Designer	Previews	Opens	Closes	Stage	Sponsor
"Brief Encounters" (1935/36))	Noel Coward	Jackie Maxwell/ William Schmuck	April 11	May 20	October 24	Festival	CIBC World Markets
In Good King Charles's Golden Days (1939)	Bernard Shaw	Eda Holmes/ Camellia Koo/ Michael Gianfresco	April 17	May 21	October 9	Royal George	TBD
Sunday in the Park with George (1984)	James Lapine/Stephen Sondheim	Alisa Palmer/ Judith Bowden	April 1	May 22	November 1	Royal George	TD Canada Trust Music
A Moon for the Misbegotten (1947)	Eugene O'Neill	Joseph Ziegler/ Christina Poddubiuk	April 28	May 23	October 9	Court House	Scotiabank Group
Born Yesterday (1946)	Garson Kanin	Neil Munro/ Sue LePage	May 5	May 23	November 1	Festival	Sun Life Financial
The Devil's Disciple (1897)	Bernard Shaw	Tadeusz Bradecki/ Peter Hartwell	June 14	July 9	October 11	Festival	TBD
Albertine in Five Times (1986)	Michel Tremblay, Linda Gaboriau	Micheline Chevrier/ Teresa Przybylski	June 24	July 10	October 10	Court House	TBD
Star Chamber (1935/36)	Noel Coward	Kate Lynch/ William Schmuck	June 25	July 11	October 11	Royal George	TBD
"Play, Orchestra, Play" (1935/36)	Noel Coward	Christopher Newton/ Cameron Porteous	June 9	July 11	October 31	Royal George	TBD
"Ways of the Heart" (1935/36)	Noel Coward	TBD/ Sue LePage/ Judith Bowden	July 21	August 1	October 11	Court House	TBD
The Entertainer (1957)	John Osborne	Jackie Maxwell/ Peter Hartwell	July 31	August 15	September 20	Rehearsal Studio	TBD

*** titles and dates subject to change**

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