



To Be Or Not To Be?

Canadian Theatre Company Helps Students Answer the Question

Margaret Atwood
Monday, November 17, 2008
Cobb Great Hall, 7:30 p.m.

Margaret Atwood is Canada's literary legend. An internationally respected novelist, she has anticipated, explored and even changed the popular preoccupations of our time by writing about issues on both a personal and world-wide scale with knife-edge precision. Atwood has been called "one of the most inventive, enthralling and accomplished authors writing in English." As a speaker, her pithy observations and comments delivered in her distinctive style both entertain and challenge audiences to think critically about their relationship to words and language.

"It's my niche, I love the classics," says Paul Bourne of his desire to pursue stage acting. The MSU theatre senior cites Shakespeare, Gibson and Chekhov as creators of his favorite scripts. Modern artists gain inspiration from these masters, "but those are the original stories, characters and ideas, and that's my passion."

The same sentiments ring true for artists working with the Stratford Shakespearean Festival who came to campus last fall to instruct and inspire.

In collaboration with the Wharton Center for Performing Arts, visiting artists were integrated into a variety of academic units including the College of Arts & Letters, the department of theatre and the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities, says Michael Brand, executive director of the Wharton Center.

In their second visit to campus, eight actors and a stage designer from Stratford, Ontario, taught more than 50 classes during four days as artists-in-residence.

An artist-in-residence is a professional performer with a dual role as a "teaching artist," says Brand. During a multi-day stay on campus and in the community, an artist-in-residence shares his or her expertise and insights on creativity during close interaction with students and professors.

According to Rob Roznowski, head of acting and directing for MSU's theatre department, students learned stage combat and classical acting through Shakespearean texts, scenes and monologues with this year's Stratford artists-in-residence.

Pat Quigley, director of education and archives at the Stratford Festival, says exploring Shakespeare from a "performance-based approach" opens students' eyes to different ways of seeing texts.

"The acting faculty at MSU do wonderful exercises with us to make our work better," Bourne says, "but the Stratford actors

"Participants come away, feeling better about their craft."

Paul Bourne
MSU Theatre Senior

were coming from somewhere else and had different exercises and perspectives."

"Participants come away feeling better about their craft," Bourne says. He feels fortunate to have worked with actor Jacob James on monologues in his classical acting class. At the end of the week, the students took an abridged version of "Romeo and Juliet" on tour to area high schools.

"Not many students have the opportunity to work with such renowned artists," Roznowski said, adding that it helps them understand a professional work ethic.





In addition to instructing students, free classes were offered to the public, including a question-and-answer session with actor Brian Bedford.

Quigley calls the residency a “positive reciprocal experience,” and notes that the Stratford Festival will continue work with MSU. “East Lansing is very similar to Stratford,” she says, because many of the people share similar interests and values.

The balance of differences and similarities has created a successful dynamic, and the future looks bright for developing further relationships between MSU and Canada.

What began with 8-10 classes in 2006 jumped to 57 classes during the fall 2007 residency, an appropriate way to celebrate “The Year of Arts and Culture” at MSU.

Quigley also said there is a possibility of bringing a Stratford play from the festival in Canada to campus next year for a public performance.

That would allow the university and greater Lansing community to experience a piece of Canadian culture that they may not otherwise be able to enjoy.

Fred Bohm, acting director of the MSU Canadian Studies Center, said he hopes the residency increases awareness of Canadian studies on campus. A specialization in Canadian studies is currently offered, which he hopes to expand in the coming years.

Bohn added that the Stratford Festival residency is consistent with President Lou Anna K. Simon’s vision for a university that is “fully engaged, not only in Michigan but in the world.”

Such a vision promotes both international study and the arts, both during the undergraduate years and beyond.

Roznowski said, “Students have expressed interest in Stratford’s conservatory program and hope someday to work there. It now becomes a goal for them.”

Hayley Outslay

Artist in Residence

Sophie Milman
Thursday, March 19, 2009
Pasant Theatre, 7:30 p.m.

Sophie Milman has already seen and done more than many people twice her age. Since her self-titled debut album was released in 2004, Milman has been one of the hottest, most sultry singers in jazz. Her latest release, “Make Someone Happy,” has been a fixture atop the iTunes and *Billboard* jazz charts, as she has toured the world’s top jazz clubs and made a name for herself as the hottest young performer in jazz today. The Wharton Center is proud to host Milman as an artist-in-residence.