



Above: Blair Williams as Eustace Gaydon, Claire Jullien as Lois Relph and Marla McLean as Monica Gaydon in *The Stepmother*.

Photo by David Cooper.

Clockwise from far left: Courthouse Theatre, the Shaw Festival, Niagara-On-The-Lake, (L-R): Tricia Golob and Dorothy Collinson, co-owners of Beau Chapeau, The Olde Angel Inn, Niagara-On-The-Lake.



the *Shaw* must go on...

BY KATHY BUCKWORTH PHOTOS BY STEVE UHRANEY

Less than an hour and a half from Mississauga & Oakville, Niagara-on-the-Lake delivers a unique experience for theatregoers, wine aficionados and lovers of gourmet food. The Shaw Festival continues to be the jewel in the crown of this village, and main street pedestrian traffic swells with anxious ticket holders, anticipating a world-class theatre and restaurant experience.

This year's Shaw Festival builds on its success with a carefully balanced mix of plays by George Bernard Shaw and his contemporaries, including one uncovered gem, "The Stepmother" by Githa Sowerby, which unbelievably had only one private performance in 1924 prior to this new mounting. It was literally found in a box in the basement of the Samuel French Company, and the fabulous Jackie Maxwell (Artistic Director for the festival) personally directs this North American debut.

The play reveals in its opening minutes that a widowed father of two young girls finds himself in financial straits, and sets about to procure funding by marrying his children's young governess, who has been inexplicably left a small fortune by his very own sister. Unlike the fabled evil stepmother, in this case the titular character (played perfectly by Stratford Festival

veteran Claire Jullien) is the heroine of the piece as she supports the family both financially and emotionally. The villain is so wonderfully evilly portrayed by Blair Williams that he sometimes receives a chorus of complimentary "boo's" during the bows. Marla McLean as older lovestruck daughter Monika, and Robin Evan Willis as Betty, a 1920's version of Tori Spelling, play perfectly off each other, and their onstage "parents". Comedic actress Jenny L. Wright steals the show in providing its few light moments in an otherwise compelling drama.

The Courthouse Theatre is an intimate venue which makes audience members feel as though they are sitting in the drawing room with the embattled family, and allows an up-close view of the exquisite costumes and simple but effective set design. The Shaw Festival continues through to early November. Visit www.shawfest.com for a complete listing of plays and performances, as well as finding out about their "Wine Tastings & A Play" for only \$99.

Another great feature of the Courthouse Theatre is its proximity to the town's oldest, most well known and always-bustling pub, The Angel Inn. After a quick refreshment, most theatregoers can be found strolling

down Queen Street where they can browse and shop in shops selling everything from Provence linens to Christmas-only items.

A stop at the bustling Shaw Café is perfect for a quick bite after a matinee or before an evening performance, where patrons sit amongst beautiful baskets of flowers enjoying gourmet appetizers and people-watching at this busy location. For a complete list of shops, restaurants, and accommodations, the NOTL Bed & Breakfast Association provides a comprehensive listing online. Visit <http://www.bba.notl.on.ca>

The wineries of the Niagara Region are world-class and well known, with many of them offering unique dining and shopping experiences as well. Just a short drive out of the main town takes you to established vintners such as Marynissen Estates, Reif Estate, Peller Estates, and Hillebrand, to name but a small sample. For a complete listing of wineries, visit www.winesofontario.ca, which also lists, all wine related events and special attractions, as well as a route planner.

A trip to Niagara-on-the-Lake provides a welcome break from the grind of suburban life and where your biggest decisions are likely to be around red or white, orchestra or aisle. **GOODLIFE**