

Entertainment Outlook

Tom Patterson first to chronicle Stratford's glory days

Alec Guinness opened the Stratford Shakespearean Festival on Monday, July 13, 1953, with the spine-tingling words, "Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer..."

From that moment, things were never to be the same again for Canadian theatre, for Stratford, Ont., nor for Tom Patterson, the Stratford native whose grand design came to fruition that hot, humid evening.

So great was the impact of that event that it led to a renaissance of theatre in Canada, and of theatre-building here and in other countries. It even produced a new category of Canadian letters — a modest-sized bookshelf could be filled with the books about the festival that have since been written by Stratford insiders and others.

Only now, however, has the Stratford story been brought to completion — by the one man who was there from the beginning. Patterson (assisted by Allan M. Gould, a Toronto-based writer specializing in theatre) has written *First Stage: The Making of the Stratford Festival* (McClelland and Stewart; 224 pages; \$24.95).

WORLD-RENOWN

The Stratford Festival, currently in its 35th season stretching over some six months, has won international recognition as a first-rate classical repertory theatre.

But even if it had flopped, as plenty of people in Stratford and elsewhere were predicting in early 1953, the fact that it had even materialized would have been an extraordinary story.

Tom Patterson had been born in Stratford in 1920, and during his teen-age years the city was so wracked with labor unrest that no new industries could be attracted, and many of its young people drifted off to larger cities such as Kitchener, London and Toronto.

The Patterson boy stayed, however, and — although he had never attended a theatrical performance — conceived the idea of staging a Shakespearean festival, centred on the bandshell in the park. After all, his city was named after the Bard's English birthplace, it too was on an Avon River, the city's various wards and its public schools were named for Shakespearean characters, and there was a bust of William Shakespeare in the park.

POSITIVE THINKING

From then on, Patterson had not the slightest doubt that he would achieve his plan. He nurtured the idea throughout his overseas service in the Canadian Army 1940-45, his three years at the University of Toronto's Trinity College, and four more years in Toronto as associate editor of a Maclean Hunter trade magazine, *Civic Administration*.

By 1952, he relates disarmingly, he had mustered enough supporters — by pitting Toronto people against Stratford people, telling each that they must surely want to match the efforts of the other — that his "good idea" became his obsession.

One of Patterson's strongest, most influential supporters was his boss, Floyd Chalmers, president of Maclean Hunter, perhaps Canada's most dedicated and tireless patron of the arts. In his own 1983 autobiography, *Both Sides of the Street* (published by Macmillan of Canada), Chalmers relates how he hit up political and corporate leaders for six-figure contributions to the dream project of his 30-year employee.

What's more important, Chalmers arranged for Patterson to meet Alec Guinness, who generously agreed to come to Canada and to star in the festival's *Anglo-Canadian* ties.

with designer Tanya Moisewitsch who had frequently been associated with Guthrie productions.

Patterson's book provides an explanation to the mystery of why such theatrical greats were willing to take a gamble with their valuable time, on what must have seemed an unlikely and even bizarre project.

It was because they were bursting with innovative ideas about theatre. "There were no traditionalists because there was no theatre in Stratford, Ont., to be traditional about," Patterson writes.

Guthrie and Patterson enlisted a young architect named Robert Fairfield, and a supremely dedicated building contractor named Oliver Gaffney — neither of whom had previously applied their talents to anything remotely like a theatre.

The result was a highly imaginative structure with an "apron" stage thrusting into the audience, seated in a semi-circle.

Guthrie and his troupe — a handful of English actors, supplemented by some 60 Canadians — brought an equally imaginative style of production to the two 1953 presentations, *Richard III* and the rarely seen *All's Well That Ends Well*.

The critics were generally favorable in their comments and demand for tickets was so great throughout the entire six-week season that additional seating was squeezed in wherever possible.

GETTING GUTHRIE

Through other connections, Patterson got in touch with the eminent British director Terence Guthrie, and

Face in the crowd



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FILMETER

What's new in movies and video
Robert DiMatteo

Predator - Rambo meets Alien

PREDATOR (R) In his hit movies, Arnold Schwarzenegger has been a Viking warrior, a barbarian, a commando and a federal agent — all without ever seeming fully human. That's Arnie's feral charm. He's a cartoon hulk, muscle-bound for action in any era.

In "Predator," Arnie's physique looks a bit scaled-down, more subtly huge — perhaps befitting his new off-screen status as a member of the Kennedy family. He plays the head of a military unit sent into a Latin American jungle to rescue some operatives

from an enemy camp. Once there, he and his team (including fellow hunk Carl Weathers) find that the missing men have been murdered and skinned alive. Eventually, the commandos discover that the murderer is non-human, a chameleon monster capable of changing form, size and dimension. By the time Arnie and the lizardlike creature stalk each other, "Predator" has turned into "Rambo Meets 'Alien.'"

Serious Schwarzenegger fans may prefer their star in beefier form in more blatantly absurdist fare (like "Conan the Barbarian"). But as junk movies go, "Predator" is a crisply directed high-tech action thriller.

GRADE: ★★

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