

10 THEATRE EXPERIENCES TOO GOOD TO MISS

AISLING MURPHY

Record heatwaves, shortages of fans and air conditioners in big-box retailers, and a rush of folks high-tailing it to cottage country can mean only one thing: summer has hit Southern Ontario.

It's a welcome shift in the performance sector. The last few months have been strange ones for theatre in the GTA and beyond: there have been a plethora of conflicting opening nights, for instance, and numerous shows have had to cut their runs short due to COVID cases within casts and creative teams.

But despite the chaos of the last few months, on the way are warmer weather and a powerful new season of theatre. Here are the top 10 shows and festivals I'm looking forward to.

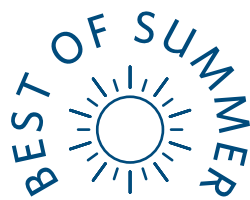
TORONTO: "Where the Blood Mixes" at Soulpepper,

May 26 to June 26, \$25+

Governor General's Award-winning playwright Kevin Loring is a major voice in Indigenous playwriting in Canada. As Artistic Director of the National Arts Centre's Indigenous Theatre, Loring is a champion for native voices on stage — now his own gets to shine at Soulpepper in a play which explores familial strength despite trauma endured at the hands of Canada's residential schools. Visionary director Jani Lauzon brings Loring's lauded text to life in Toronto's Distillery District this June.

STRATFORD: Stratford Festival, various programming through Oct. 29, \$21+

No way could this list possibly exclude the world-famous Stratford Festival. Shakespeare fans might have already committed the lineup to heart, but those of us less friendly with the



Bard might wish to check out the fantastic studio lineup. I'm particularly looking forward to "Hamlet-911," written by Ann-Marie MacDonald and directed by Alisa Palmer. The play wrestles Shakespeare's text into whimsical submission, roving from a matinee performance of the text at the Stratford Festival to ... the Underworld. It's a metatheatrical, daring world premiere, one sure to charm even the least classically informed of Stratford attendees.

TORONTO: "Sweeney Todd" at Talk Is Free Theatre, June 6 - July 3, \$75+

You might already be fa-

miliar with a certain demon barber of Fleet Street, but not like this. The Barrie-based company Talk Is Free Theatre comes to Toronto this summer with an immersive production of what is perhaps Stephen Sondheim's most famous work. Happening at the Neighbourhood Food Hall on Gerard Street East, this "Sweeney Todd" will foster an intimate connection between the audience and the story. Helmed by director Mitchell Cushman, the founding artistic director of immersive theatre company Outside the March, this ambitious take on Sweeney looks to be one for the books. How about a shave?

BLYTH: Blyth Festival, various programming June 22 to Sept. 24, \$15+

Located in a tiny town (like, population-under-one-thousand tiny), the Blyth Festival is one of Ontario's most highly regard-

ed summer theatre events, drawing in audiences from across the province. This year's programming includes Michael Healey's "The Drawer Boy," a Canadian classic with deep ties to Healey's experience working as an actor at the Blyth Festival over twenty years ago. Also featured is Indigenous playwright Drew Hayden Taylor's "Cottagers and Indians," a hilarious and timely look at the relationship between cottage country and the land it occupies.

TORONTO: "& Juliet" at Mirvish Productions, June 22 to Aug. 14, \$49+

"Harry Potter and the Cursed Child," looks to be quite the stunner, judging by the influx of bus ads, social media banners and billboards touting the production. But the equally exciting "& Juliet," a re-imagining of Shakespeare's most famous not-love story, is also coming to King Street for its North American premiere — it's not an overstep to assume the production has Broadway aspirations.

Created by "Schitt's Creek" veteran David West Read, the musical features tunes from legendary producer Max Martin and performances from Broadway's Betsy Wolfe and Tony Award-winning Paulo Szot.

KITCHENER-WATERLOO: "We Could Be" at Green Light Arts, Aug. 16-25, \$0

Five playwrights from the Waterloo region come together with "We Could Be," a collection of short plays which speak to the present moment. Themes of hope and resilience underscore the new works, making "We Could Be" an ideal project for what will be one of Kitchener-Waterloo's first in-person theatre events back since the pandemic. It'll also be taking place inside the Kitchener Market — because who doesn't love a summer farmers' market followed by new theatre?

EAST YORK: "Detroit" at Coal Mine Theatre, July 3 to Aug. 7, \$35+

See SHAW'S, page 19

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