

Comic duo says local audiences quick, receptive

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
Special to *The Champion*

You may not find their equivalent anywhere in 16th century England, but Ronn Baumann and Riki Robinson have kept King Henry VIII and his royal guests in stitches for almost a decade.

Natives of the 'Sunshine State', they have been honing their comedic craft at renaissance festivals throughout the United States since 1990. Now with a polished act, they are bringing their flair for storytelling to visitors at the Ontario Renaissance Festival in rural Milton.

"We're here to take your money and your women," joked Mr. Baumann, after one of his recent weekend performances.

He and Mr. Robinson, AKA the Tortuga Twins, are one of the feature attractions at the local theme park.

And for good reason.

Their wacky retelling of classic folk tales offers an ample supply of hilarity and audience participation. The latter of these two ingredients is what really appeals to festival-goers, according to Mr. Robinson.

"The audience participation is the key. They're the stars of the show," he said.

During eight half-hour performances each weekend, the Tortuga Twins narrate their own version of Robin Hood's story.

Rather than simply adding humor to this old tale, they draw on three members of each audience to play the starring roles of the classic hero, Maid Marion and the evil Sheriff of Nottingham.

Herein lies another talent of the entertainers — being able to select three individuals who'll get a kick out of the experience and make their fellow audience members laugh.

"That's one of our trade secrets. You get vibes from people and can sort of tell if they'll be into it (performing). It's almost like being an expert poker player," said Mr. Robinson. "It's obviously not foolproof, however. You learn through trial and error."

"Another big factor in a show's success lies with Ronn and I being able to read each other's minds and knowing where the other is going. If one of us goes off on a bizarre tangent, the other has to be able to follow."

And bizarre they usually get, with humor that's a little risqué and not exactly PG-13. "It's in your face, physical comedy," said Mr. Robinson.

Mr. Baumann explained their intention is to push the borders of comedy without offending people.

Their unique show has been performed in almost every venue imaginable including a wedding.

Canadian audiences, he added, have been tremendously receptive to their act and shown no anxiety about becoming part of the show.

"People here are very sharp as well, they get all of our jokes," Mr. Baumann said. "We were part of the festival last year as well, and at first people had no idea what was going on with our show. Now we're getting some of the best audiences anywhere."

"I'm tickled to death about being part of the Renaissance Festival and bringing this kind of entertainment to a new country."

The Tortuga Twins' show is one of more than a dozen that can be seen at the Ontario Renaissance Festival each Saturday and Sunday (and holiday Monday) until August 17.

The festival is open from 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. each day, and is located at Eighth Line and Britannia Road.

Art show coming to park

Milton's art community will present its first fine art festival and sale on the weekend of August 30-31 at Victoria Park.

Inspired by the success of an art show at Town Hall last December that was part of the Mayor's New Year's Levee, local artists formed the Fine Arts Society of Milton. The society is sponsoring the exhibition.

The show will feature paintings. In addition there will be music coordinated for the

bandshell and a fund raising t-shirt sale.

T-shirts with a design by artist Maureen Casteller will be sold Thursday and Friday, August 14-15, at Milton Mall and at the Farmers' Market on Saturday, August 16.

There is a plan to continue the shows at least as an annual event, according to Miriam Hynek, chair of the Fine Arts Society of Milton.

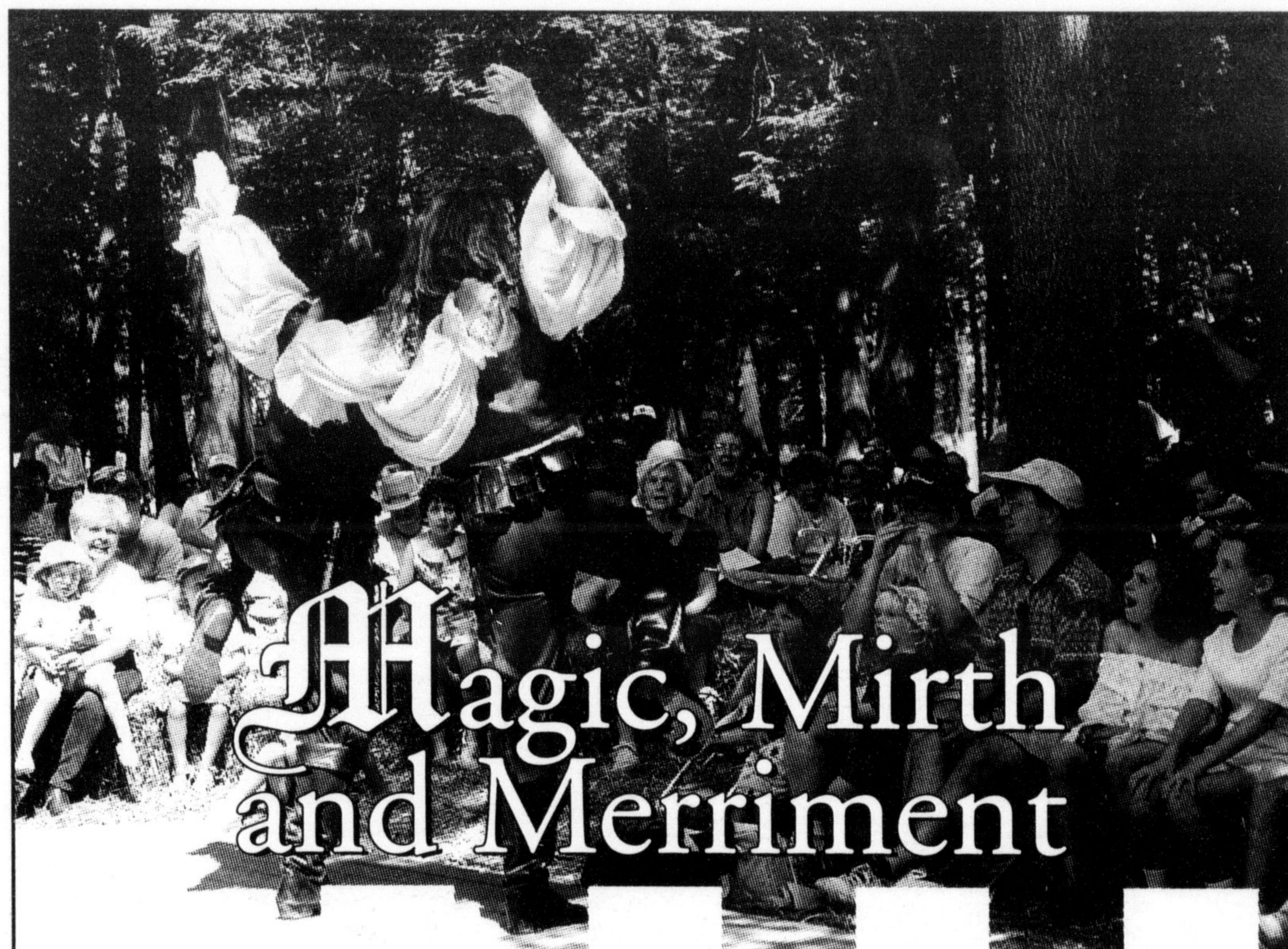
"It's nice to see so many people come forward to help with the show," she said.

— ADVERTISEMENT —



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Riki Robinson (left), one half of the Tortuga Twins, provides a playful blast into the ear of fellow twin Ronn Baumann. The pair are performing at the Ontario Renaissance Festival through Sunday, August 17.



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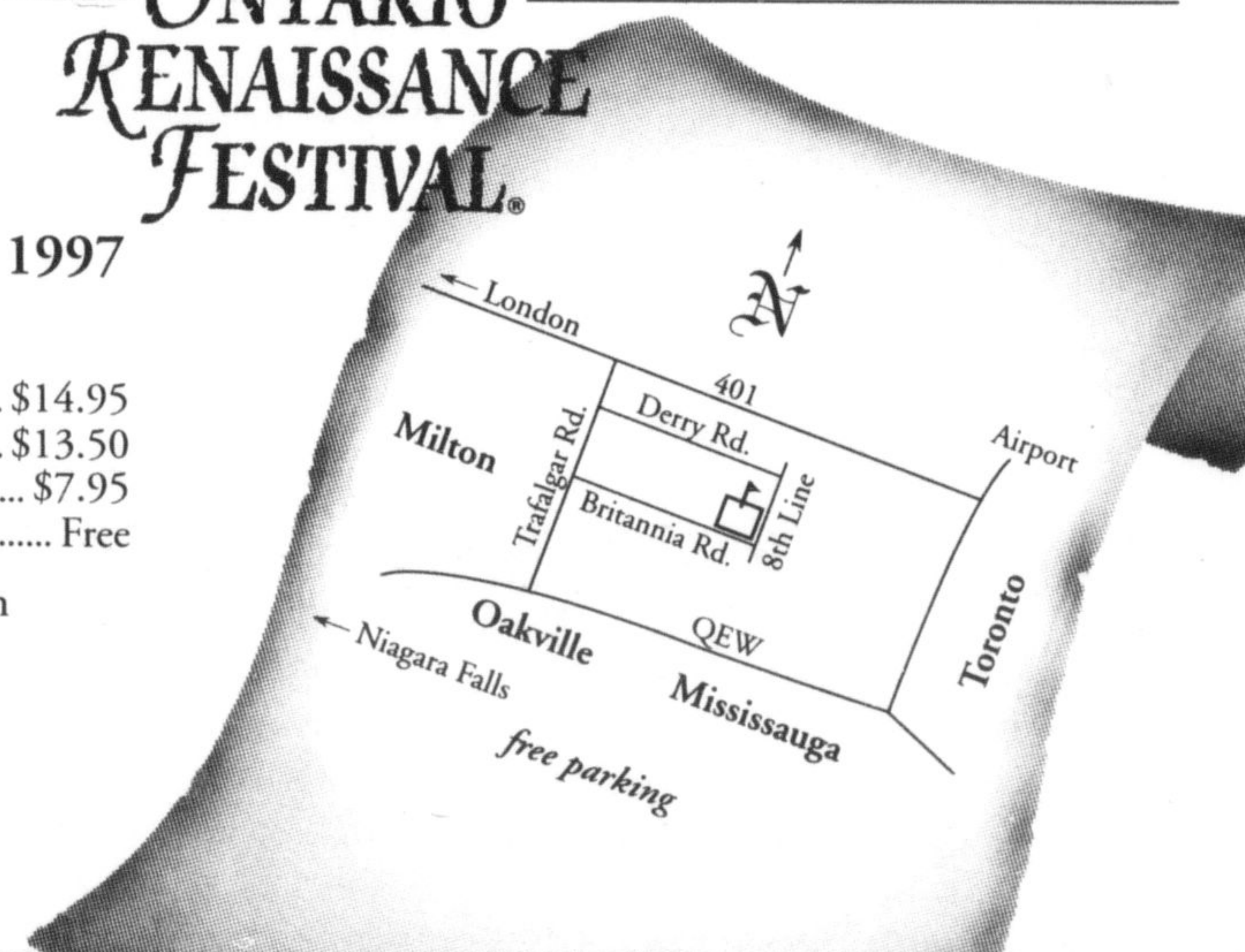
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'Once Upon a Child' opened a new, upscale location at Trafalgar Ridge Shopping Centre, 2423 Trafalgar Rd., Oakville (between Hwy 5 and QEW) on Tuesday, Aug. 5th. Shown is Oakville store owner Joan Strachan. The store sells new and used high-quality, brand-name children's clothing (newborn to size 14), furniture, equipment, accessories, toys, books, and games. The store also buys product from parents. Call 257-5775.