



Monday, January 6, 2003

Shaw Festival's 'Candida' appearing at OU

A timeless treasure from George Bernard Shaw opens the New Year with laughter and a wry look at the complexities of marriage as **Meadow Brook Theatre** (MBT) presents the **Shaw Festival** of Canada's acclaimed production "Candida" Jan. 8 through Feb. 2.

Shaw's masterwork is the centerpiece of a groundbreaking international residency. The Shaw Festival international residency is the first of its kind at Meadow Brook Theatre, Michigan's largest professional theater company, based at Oakland University.

One of the largest repertory companies in North America, the **Shaw Festival** is the only theatre in the world that specializes in producing plays written by George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and his contemporaries.

"We at Meadow Brook Theatre and Oakland University are very pleased to enter into this relationship with the internationally renowned Shaw Festival," said Gary Russi, Oakland University president. "Meadow Brook Theatre's national reputation of cultural excellence clearly is evident to the Shaw Festival. We are honored and gratified as educators and artists for the opportunity to work closely together in establishing this important, new international residency."

The MBT performance of "Candida" is the second stop for the current touring production by the Shaw Festival. The Ottawa Citizen called the production staged at the National Arts Centre, immediately preceding the MBT staging, "fresh, funny (and lovingly shaped)" and a "pure pleasure."

"Candida" tells the tale of a comfortable, if not routine, marriage that gets set on end by a most unlikely source. Victorian propriety is severely challenged as Reverend Morrell must defend his beliefs, his work and his wife against a youthful and idle poet who works to call the cleric's entire world into question. Using comedy and keen characters to make these most weighty subjects amusing and memorable, "Candida" interweaves themes of spiritual longing with an exploration of the nature of marriage, honesty and happiness as only Shaw could.

The play was written in 1895, specifically for the actress Janet Achurch, who toured it throughout England's provincial theatres. "Candida" often was presented in repertoire with "A Doll's House" by Henrik Ibsen, Shaw's contemporary and the thematic inspiration for several of his works. One of the most often produced of Shaw's works, "Candida" premiered in 1900 at a private club in London. MBT produced "Candida" in the 1983-84 season under the direction of Terrence Kilburn. The Shaw Festival has produced it five times since 1962.

Located in the historic town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada, the Shaw Festival today represents an important destination for visitors from around the world. Since opening its first facility in 1972, the Shaw Festival has grown to occupy three distinct theaters, each specializing in staging a distinct category of play.

Dramatist, essayist, a social and political progressive, Shaw was one of the English language's most prolific playwrights. He is considered a prophet of the twentieth century who illuminated the evolving roles of individuals and families, as well as the revolutionary changes to the social conventions of the Victorian Era. After Shakespeare, Shaw is the most-performed playwright in the English language. His work bridges the themes of the classic theatre with those of modern times, addressing political, social and economic progress; equality of the sexes; and the catastrophe of war.

"Candida" is directed by Jackie Maxwell, newly appointed Artistic Director of the Shaw Festival. Maxwell has worked for more than two decades throughout Canada as an actor, director and dramaturge. She recently directed the Shaw Festival's critically acclaimed production of "Picnic," and "Zadie's Shoes" at the Factory Theatre where she was artistic director from 1987-1995. Maxwell is gifted at building new relationships between writers and theatre companies, actors and directors, and English and French Canadians.

The cast features several veterans of the Shaw Festival:

- Bernard Behrens, playing Mr. Burgess, recently returned to the Shaw Festival for his fourth season. He has appeared at the Stratford Festival for nine seasons as well as at theatres throughout North America.
- Laurie Paton, playing Candida, knows the show in detail as she played Miss Proserpine in the Shaw's regular season

production. She also appeared in the Shaw's "Hay Fever" last season. She has worked in theatres across Canada as well as in television and film.

- Mike Shara, who plays Eugene Marshbanks, first appeared at the Shaw when he was 13 years old. A graduate of the University of Windsor Acting Programme, he has many theatrical and television credits.
- Severn Thompson plays Miss Proserpine. She has been at the Shaw for six seasons, most recently in "Hay Fever" and "His Majesty." Like her fellow Shaw actors, Thompson has toured Canada's stages.
- Blair Williams plays Reverend Morrell. He has been part of the Shaw Festival for 11 seasons. A veteran of numerous stage roles, he, too, has toured theatres across Canada.

As part of the educational mission of the Meadow Brook Theatre and the Shaw Festival, company members and artistic staff will conduct outreach activities for students and community members during their stay in Michigan. Residency activities include talks on socialism to marriage as well as the Shaw Film Festival. Outreach activities are free of charge and open to the public.

Tickets for "Candida" and Meadow Brook Theatre's 2002–2003 season are on sale at the MBT box office by calling (248) 377-3300. Group tickets are available at (248) 370-3316.

For more information, visit the [Meadow Brook Theatre](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

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