



Robin Baranyai

## Creative energy

It is often said that art, in its myriad forms—music, poetry, challenging films or evocative photography—feeds the soul. Whether it's Shakespeare in the Park or the latest episode of *So You Think You Can Dance?*, audiences can be entertained, challenged and uplifted.

Artists, too, are both nurtured and nourished by their colleagues. Established musicians often tour with lesser-known performers, helping new talent find a wider audience, and rejuvenating their creativity through collaboration. Take the upcoming Prince Edward County Jazz Festival (Aug. 18-23). In addition to drawing renowned Canadian and international musicians, the festival nurtures new talent with its "Rising Young Star" award. Creative Director Brian Barlow has also assembled such intriguing synergies as "jazz poetry" and a gallery session involving a poet, a musician and a visual artist.

Or take Festival Players, which for three seasons has showcased not only Canadian work, but budding County playwrights, bringing *Picton Papers* and *Ship of Fire* to life on stage. Their current production is the extraordinary *Colours in the Storm* by Jim Betts, a tireless promoter of Canadian musical theatre who co-wrote *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*.

Betts's highly acclaimed play at Fields on West Lake follows the beautiful run of *Schoolhouse* by Leanna Brodie. Winnipeg-born Brodie has also been nourished by her artistic compatriots. In interviews, she revealed that while writing *Schoolhouse*, she listened over and over to k.d. lang's *Hymns of the 49th Parallel*—a tribute album covering the songs of great Canadian talents like Leonard Cohen, Neil Young and Joni Mitchell.

Her play is about a young teacher marshalling her new charges in a 1930s one-room schoolhouse. Inventively staged outdoors at Macaulay House, the play was subject to some drama of its own, courtesy of the weather. On the night the play opened, so did the skies. But that's part of the charm of live theatre—anything can happen. Because of the downpour, we were treated to the "radio play" version inside the museum. The players inhabited a pared-down set with minimal props. This minimal treatment was a refreshing contrast for an audience weaned on the Wachowski Brothers and CGI, allowing the compelling script to wash over the room.

"There is a place for everyone." By the closing lines I was deeply moved not only by the power of the message, but the power of art—the incredible demonstrative capacity of theatre to speak directly to your heart. Witnessing the journey of one "bad seed," the audience could not escape the simple truth of what a difference one individual can make. The audience left nourished by art, and nurtured to grow in compassion and spirit.

This is a fortunate community, blessed with extraordinary artists and creative energy. Enjoy the festivals!

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