



*Jackie Maxwell*

BY CHRISTINE DARRACH | PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID COOPER

With 130 individual productions having graced the stage throughout her leadership at The Shaw Festival, Jackie Maxwell gladly savours the sweet fruits of a commitment to creative achievement at Niagara's pre-eminent theatre destination.

Commencing an 11th season as artistic director, and the only woman in Canada to steer the helm of a major theatre company, the challenge is providing a "provocative," contemporary theatrical experience, sparked by innovative ideas and a clear vision.

Firmly believing in the power of theatre to change things, her motivating mandate seeks to deliver plays that "talk about the world, clarify the assumptions we live under, provoke the mainstream and those who rule, and for us to really think about what we do."

And Maxwell's spent a lifetime preparing for this role, realizing early in an acting career that it was markedly appealing to be a supportive and inspiring advocate for the performing arts' worthy cause. Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, she arrived in Canada in 1978 following a University of Manchester drama degree and secured niches in both program creation and directing at numerous theatre companies, first for Ottawa's National Arts Centre, then at Toronto's Factory Theatre, creating, developing and producing works by some of Canada's most vital playwrights, such as George Walker, Sharon Pollock and Ann-Marie MacDonald.

"Creating new worlds and re-imagining what's gone before" is crucial in offering unique, compelling fare when there's myriad choice for the viewing public, she says, and live theatre is the ultimate reality show, spontaneous and adaptable to any challenge. Staying involved in every aspect, her hands-on approach means she typically directs two productions personally each season.

A well-informed, varied career also begs her wise counsel and she's frequently called upon as teacher and guest artist at many institutions. In November of 2012, she entreated graduates in her Queen's University Doctor of Laws honorary degree acceptance to explore the "importance of your voice, to let your voice be heard and not be fearful of that, and to help other people develop their voices"—as such sound advice has benefitted her own journey. Such advice and her innumerable contributions to her craft also earned her the honour of being a recipient of a Queen's Jubilee Medal this past February.

Surrendering a transient "theatre gypsy" existence over the past decade, Maxwell's established a rooted life in Niagara while still branching into fresh, vibrant territory.

"I believe in taking detours in life," she muses, even if it's an impulsive, solo road trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Gleaning grand rewards from jumping the presumed groove and "staying open to all possibilities," the recent sojourn found her revelling in fabulous food, open skies and artistic promise which stirred the soul, so she definitely plans to make that captivating experience a repeat performance.

10 THINGS I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

1. MY BACK DECK

A great flower-bedecked place to relax after the madness of the day.



2. GOOD WINE

Aren't I lucky to live where I do!



3. MY IPAD

Amazing from the ultimate technophobe!

4. MUSIC

Especially the new stuff my two daughter's introduce me to.



5. MY ESPRESSO MACHINE

...with Balzac's coffee.

6. MICHAEL HOLROYD'S BIOGRAPHY OF SHAW

Absolutely invaluable for every Shaw that I direct.

MICHAEL HOLROYD



7. THE COMMONS IN NOTL

A great place to walk and think.



8. MY TIFFANY BRACELET

It is the most simple and classic one and I have never taken it off since I got it 10 years ago.

9. THE REST (STONE ROAD GRILLE)

The locals' local here in NOTL...great food and so friendly.



10. MY SUBSCRIPTION TO THE NEW YORKER

Even though the magazines pile up when I am busy, they are worth the wait! NM