

PERFORMANCE

MAGAZINE WINTER 2006



ROSS PETTY'S
MAGICAL CARPET RIDE
TO THE WORLD
OF **ALADDIN**

LATIN SORCERESS
AMANDA MARTINEZ
CASTS A MUSICAL SPELL

kicking it with kringle

World famous Rockettes rocking Toronto

Merry Christmas to all!



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PERFORMANCE MAGAZINE

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WORLD FAMOUS **ROCKETTES** MAKE THEIR DEBUT
AT THE HUMMINGBIRD AND KICK OFF THE HOLIDAYS

rockettes red glare

BY JORDAN SOMERS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MSG ENTERTAINMENT

In a flurry of intricate choreography and awe-inspiring spectacle, The Radio City Rockettes have danced

themselves into popular culture consciousness for the past 81 years. Arguably, they are the most famous dance performers in the world.

Along with the Empire State Building and Statue of Liberty, the Rockettes are historic staples of New York City. Perhaps fittingly to the history of the city, the Rockettes did not originate from New York City but instead from St. Louis, Mo., in 1925, then billed as the Missouri Rockets. With their trademark eye-high kicks, they debuted at Radio City's opening night on December 27, 1932 and the performances never stopped. Their success and iconic status continue into a new century.

For the very first time, The Radio City Rockettes are in Canada to perform its *Christmas Spectacular* for a limited engagement at the Hummingbird Centre for the Performing Arts until December 31. Performing with the Rockettes are Ontario's Jocelyne Levesque, 22, of Windsor, and Brampton's Krista Saab, 30, who has been with the famous chorus line since 2003.

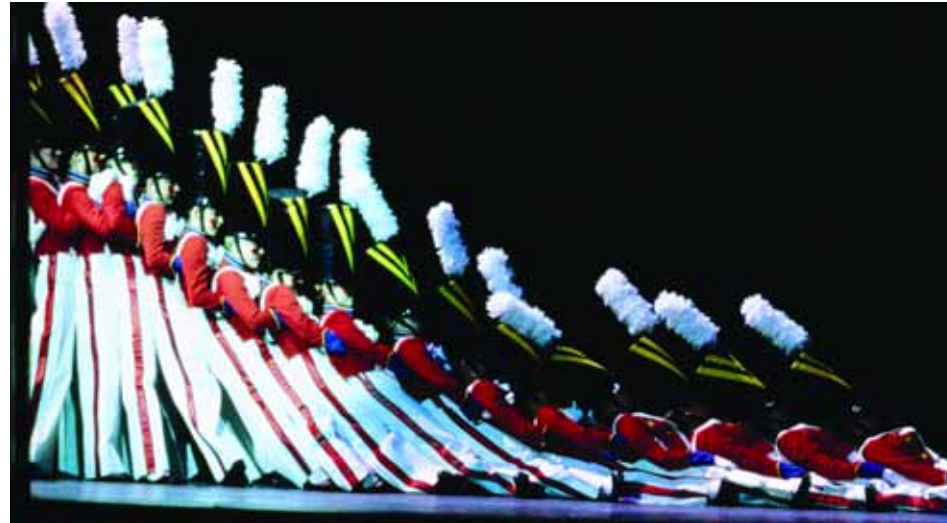
"My mom is a dance teacher in Mississauga so I grew up going to the dance studio instead of to a babysitter. I began dancing at age three, studying ballet, tap, jazz and acrobatics," Saab said. "I think that the diversity of my training was important in preparing me to be a Rockette. Ballet technique is crucial in order to work professionally as a dancer and my jazz training helped me to develop the style that is necessary to be a Rockette. I'm also thankful that I grew up studying tap because along with our famous high kicks, the Rockettes are known for our intricate tap routines."

ON
stage

...

rockettes red glare

CHOREOGRAPHED BY LEON
LEONIDOFF, A TORONTO
IMPRESARIO OF THE 1920S, *THE
PARADE OF WODDEN SOLDIERS*
HAS BEEN PERFORMED SINCE 1933.



A graduate of the theatre and dance program from Ryerson University, Saab's dance credits include productions of *Crazy For You* and *42nd Street*. She also performed with the Aelian Ballet Theatre in Los Angeles and Ballet Jorgen in Toronto. However, as accomplished as she was, the idea of performing with the Rockettes was never far from her mind.

"When I first moved to New York four years ago, I was anxious to attend the auditions for the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*. When I was about 16-years-old, I toured Radio City Music Hall on a trip to New York and the moment I stepped onto the stage I knew that I wanted to be a Rockette. I jumped at my first opportunity to audition and was lucky enough to be offered a spot on the line," Saab said.

Thousands of women audition to be a Rockette, but only a handful of the very best dancers are able to endure the entire audition process.

"My audition for the *Christmas Spectacular* was probably the hardest audition I've ever done," Saab said. Firstly, a Rockette must be between 5-foot-6 and 5-foot-10 1/2 tall so before we are able to dance every woman must be measured. Some shorter women even style their hair as high as they can in hopes of adding an extra half-inch."

The audition consists of the dancers learning and performing numerous dance combinations from the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* as well as many kick combinations. Since the rehearsal process for the show is not very long, the choreographer is looking not only to see how well the dancers perform the combinations, but also how quickly they can learn the choreography and assimilate any corrections they have been given. "It is a rigorous and thorough audition but it really ensures that every dancer is able to meet the demands of being a Rockette," Saab said.

The *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* is a dazzling production that has played to sold-out audiences since its inception 73 years ago.

With 84 performances of the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* in Toronto alone, it may sound like a tough schedule, but for Saab the benefits far outweigh the fatigue. "When you step out on to the stage and see the joy on people's faces you can't help but be happy that you're able to bring that joy to people," Saab said. "It's hard to worry about being tired with children beaming at you in the front row."



Included in the rare Toronto performances at the Hummingbird is one of Saab's favourites and a classic routine, *The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers*, choreographed by Leon Leonidoff, a Toronto impresario of the late 1920s.

"We wear starched white pants (that stand up on their own) making it nearly impossible to bend your knees and tall black soldier hats transforming all of us into life-size wooden soldiers. It really is like watching a kaleidoscope on stage as we change positions and maintain perfectly straight lines," Saab said. "My favourite part is at the end of the routine when all the Rockettes stand in a straight line and fall over like a line of dominoes. You can actually hear the audience holding their breath until we're all safely on the floor. You really can't believe it until you see it."

Along with *The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers* and *The Living Nativity*, both which have been performed since 1933, the show features contemporary numbers like *Christmas in New York* and the showstopper, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, a seven-minute tap routine where the Rockettes become the characters in the age-old *Christmas Carol*.

"It makes me incredibly proud to know that one day I may be able to take my grandchildren to see the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* and I'll tell them that I was a part of that. It is a real achievement and an honour," Saab said.

With a large portion of the Hummingbird Centre's revenue generated around the holiday season, Dan Brambilla, chief executive officer of the Hummingbird Centre, firmly believes that the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* will match the expectations of Toronto audiences that have grown accustomed to traditional holiday fare.

"People are really excited that we're bringing this historical show to Toronto. I've heard many comments from people saying they remember going to see the Rockettes in New York when they were a child and they can't wait to bring their children and grandchildren to the show and share the experience with them," said Brambilla, who made the decision to bring the Rockettes to Toronto in early 2005. "We are importing the Rockette legacy to Toronto for the first time ever and in doing so reconnecting the Toronto audience with Leon Leonidoff's famous Rockette choreography. The audience can expect the freshest and most enjoyable holiday family entertainment around." 📍



FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME,
THE RADIO CITY ROCKETTES
ARE IN CANADA PERFORMING
ITS *CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR*.

ROSS PETTY AND WRESTLING SUPERSTAR
BRET "HITMAN" HART MAKE WISHES COME TRUE

the Hart of aladdin

BY ADAM GRANT

When the 2004 edition of Ross Petty's *Aladdin, The Magical Family Musical* made its run at The Elgin Theatre

in Toronto, much was made out of the casting of Bret "Hitman" Hart as The Genie in the Lamp. After all, he was highly decorated in the world of professional wrestling, where he captured numerous title belts along the way, and at the same time became one of Canada's most recognizable people.

When CBC Television held its *Greatest Canadian* poll in 2004, Hart came in at number 39, but *Time* magazine would do one better by listing him at number 32 in its *Greatest Canadians of All Time* article. So when Petty, *Aladdin's* executive producer, and director Ted Dykstra initially approached Hart to take on the role, they knew they'd be bringing in a high-profile person. However, getting Hart to sign on the dotted line wasn't as easy as putting pen to paper.

Following his retirement from wrestling in 2000 after a severe concussion in the ring, Hart would soon face an even greater health crisis. In June 2002 following a bicycling accident, the "Hitman" suffered a stroke that left him partially paralyzed, and in need of several months of intense physical therapy.

Aside from the physical damage the stroke caused Hart, the emotional side of it also proved to be difficult. There were moments of unexpected meltdowns that would choke him up and force him out of the public forum at times. As those symptoms began to subside, the Calgary man gradually began appearing at smaller gatherings, like sports dinners, to regain his confidence before using *Aladdin* as the perfect opportunity to move.

ON STAGE

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"I realized that when I was in my stroke – that period when I was in the wheelchair and I couldn't stand, and I couldn't walk across the room, and I couldn't turn my head over – I was so bitter and down on myself about what lay ahead for me," Hart candidly recalled. "I was really lucky that I had my recovery come in big steps. Suddenly (I was) walking, then out of the chair, and then talking. I started to move on."

"I remember so many people in the stroke ward that I was with who never really recovered anything. I have realized how fortunate I am, and how unfortunate some of my fellow patients were. I think they looked up to me and they were glad that somebody was getting something (back)," he said. "So I realized that I needed to do this play for them – and to do it for myself, to make it as a certain point for me to reference to remember when I didn't think that I could do any of these things."

In order for Hart to take this stance and actually make it to the stage he also required a commitment from Petty and Dykstra to keep his best interests in mind. Early discussions between the parties allowed Hart to be removed from the production if he was unable to continue. Another small fear Hart possessed was that of forgetting any of his lines. Although his wrestling career required him to do script work, there was concern that his aforementioned stroke would make this part of his *Aladdin* gig a difficult one.

"I am proud to say that Bret went on every night and he never screwed up," Petty said. "My response to him then, to his concern was, 'Bret, I have not had a stroke, and I have a difficult time remembering my lines on stage.' That calmed him down about it."



PHOTO BY BRUCE ZINGER

What also relaxed Hart was the occasional improvised nature of *Aladdin*. Even though the production comes with a firm plot, taking place in a hip-hop land where "sk8er boi" falls in love with a princess, the script is constantly revised with current events while the audience is continually invited to take part in the play. This keeps the cast on their toes because, as Petty puts it, "We never know what's going to come out of their mouths."

Getting rid of that fourth wall that usually keeps the crowd out of a production's way is what Petty sees as the "difference in the kind of entertainment" that they put forward in comparison to other stage shows. This difference is one reason *Aladdin*, which also features Jamie McKnight in the title role, is being given a chance through major American theatre promoter Live Nation to take the 2006 version of the show across Canada for about two months, with Toronto (December 6-24 at the Elgin Theatre) and Ottawa hosting the final two runs in December.

As for Hart, his second go-around as the *Aladdin* Genie is purely for fun. He has had the fame and worldwide fan adulation, while his recent trials and tribulations have indirectly given him a new outlook on life. No longer is "The Excellence of Execution" (his wrestling moniker) and "The Best There Is, The Best There Was, and The Best There Ever Will Be," focused on the negative events that ended his wrestling career and almost his life. He is looking ahead to resurrect aspects of his Bret "Hitman" Hart character within a production that's targeted toward both kids and adults.

And while he may not have been seen as "The Best There Was" when partaking in drama class as a kid, he has certainly come a long way since then as an entertainer, actor and a person, who has always known that he had a hidden talent within him that he was just waiting to show off to the world.

"I was the (butt-end) of a cow in a school play when I was in junior high, but I always kind of liked it," Hart said. "I know that when you're in school drama, everybody can't be the star of the play, but I went out for drama quite a bit as a kid and did a lot of plays and a lot of little skits."

"But I think I was always disappointed when (I went) to drama to play a part, and I always never got to play a part. Like I said, I got to play the (butt-end) of a cow, with no speaking parts. Deep inside, there was a part of me busting out that wanted to do a play that was funny and make my friends laugh. I think whomever my drama teachers were missed that in me and maybe didn't give me the chance. Sometimes they cater more to the Ross Petty-type of kid in the class, rather than the Tie Domi-type of kid in the class." ●

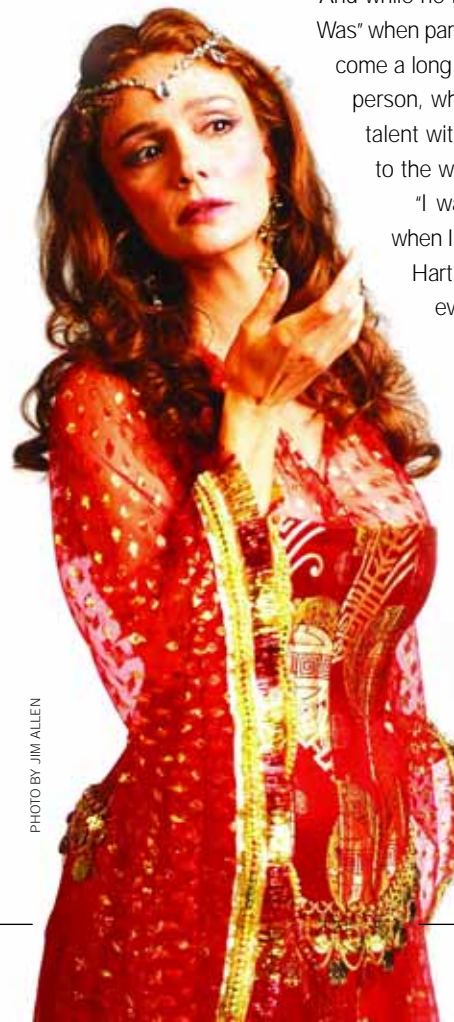


PHOTO BY JIM ALLEN

"I HAVE REALIZED HOW FORTUNATE I AM, AND HOW UNFORTUNATE SOME OF MY FELLOW PATIENTS WERE. I THINK THEY LOOKED UP TO ME AND THEY WERE GLAD THAT SOMEBODY WAS GETTING SOMETHING (BACK)."

– BRET "HITMAN" HART



PHOTO BY BRUCE ZINGER



PHOTO BY ERIN RILEY

WITH HER SULTRY SINGING, **AMANDA MARTINEZ** CAPTURES THE PASSION OF LATIN MUSIC

latin temptress a rhapsody in jazz

BY GEOFF CHAPMAN

Two generations ago, the only Latin music you'd likely hear in Toronto would be by bands that loved jazz

legend Dizzy Gillespie's performances with percussionist Chano Pozo and their smash hit *Manteca*.

Or perhaps it would be the blaring brass of pre-Castro Cuban bands led by Chico O'Farrill. Or that great New Yorker of Puerto Rican heritage, timbales king Tito Puente. Or the soft, swaying Brazilian bossa nova embellished by sax player Stan Getz and singer Astrud Gilberto. Or campy Hollywood movies like *The Gang's All Here* featuring Carmen Miranda, her headgear dominated by bananas.

It's different now.

The face of Toronto has changed with immigration from Hispanic countries, and so has its music scene. Salsa dance classes are commonplace, as are venues for Latin music from numerous countries south of the Rio Grande. Groups from today's Cuba trading on the response to the Buena Vista Social Club, like the Afro-Cuban All-Stars, sell out Massey Hall, jazzers like pianists Hilario Duran and David Virelles have been internationally acclaimed, Canadian-born players such as Jane Bunnett and Rick Lazar heighten the Latin profile, the Spanish and Portuguese-language press follow music closely while radio stations CIUT and CKLN and AM's CHSL promote myriad Latin styles. On the web, there's torontohispano.com and many more.

One Latin music artist enriching our arts milieu is vocalist and composer Amanda Martinez, whose sultry singing in three languages is divinely delightful and whose life symbolizes the fusion of North American, Latin and African cultures.

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“THERE WAS ALWAYS
MUSIC IN THE HOUSE.
IT WAS MY FAVOURITE
FORM OF ESCAPE. DAD
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RECORDS AND WAS
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FROM MEXICO,
COLOMBIA AND THE
ANDES AND THE NUEVA
TROVA OF CUBA SONG
BY SILVIO RODRIGUEZ.
HE ALSO LIKED JAZZ
AND CLASSICAL MUSIC.”

— AMANDA MARTINEZ

● ● ● Her take on Latin music? “People are hungry for it,” she said over tea from her mid-Toronto home.

People are hungry to hear her, too. In October she was named best world music artist at the Toronto Independent Music Awards, her debut album *Sola* won critical acclaim (topping Sam the Record Man’s jazz chart for 12 weeks), and her weekly two-hour radio show *Café Latino*, heard on Saturdays from 4 p.m. on Jazz.FM91, is also popular. She has also been featured in the Latin press, on CBC Radio, Bravo! and Star! TV.

She’s everywhere around town in combos ranging from duos to octets and her accomplished sextet hailing from Canada, Peru and Cuba. Her singing is sweet and sensuous and communicates regardless of language. She’s also blessed with stage presence and stunning good looks.

Martinez might still be an unknown, in showbiz terms, had she pursued a career in international banking or marketing. She was halfway up those career stairways before giving in to musical instincts.

She was born in Toronto. Her father, an engineer born in Mexico, first visited Canada with his brother 50 years ago — on bicycles. With only \$100 US in their pockets, it took them 80 days to venture north on their two bikes.

“At the time they knew very little English and had plans of returning to Mexico by motorcycle. They never made the trip back,” she said.

Her South African-born mother was a nursery teacher. Spanish and English were spoken at home.

“There was always music in the house. It was my favourite form of escape. Dad had lots of records and was into folkloric music from Mexico, Colombia and the Andes and the nueva trova of Cuba sung by Silvio Rodriguez. He also liked jazz and classical music.

“I studied classical piano, but what I really wanted to do was to dance,” she said. “My parents drilled into me the importance of education and although my natural skills were people related, I did science and math at York Mills Collegiate, then a biology degree at (the University of) Western, graduating in 1994.

“Music came naturally to me yet I never thought about making a living from it, though I’d dabbled a bit with Latin bands while at Western. I also did some acting through The Characters agency, which included TV spots. I was also in Atom Egoyan’s (1994) movie *Calendar* and a kids’ show at Stage West.

latin temptress a rhapsody in jazz



(TOP PHOTO) AMANDA MARTINEZ PERFORMING AT TORONTO'S LULA LOUNGE.

(RIGHT PHOTO) FROM LEFT TO RIGHT – ALEXANDER BROWN (TRUMPET), ROSENDO "CHENDY" LEON (PERCUSSION), AMANDA MARTINEZ, OSVALDO RODRIGUEZ (VIOLIN), JULIO CEASAR JIMENEZ (PIANO), KEVIN LALIBERTÉ (GUITAR), RUDDY BOLAÑOS (BASS).



"I was hired by Cadbury's in sales, but with a flexible schedule I kept up my acting side in the television series *Mutant X* and doing commercials. Then I went backpacking solo in Europe in 1997.

"When I returned I went to York University's Schulich School of Business for a masters in international business administration, specializing in marketing for Latin America. One thing I learned is that self-promotion is important. I did semesters in Mexico and Venezuela. When in Mexico I picked up a guitar and played for my family. I have lots of cousins." After graduating in 1999 she got a job at TD Bank as associate director for Latin American relations, and an office on the tower's 19th floor.

Then it happened.

"I was walking through BCE Place one lunchtime and I saw Amy Sky singing her own songs. I thought, 'Wow, I'd love to be doing what you're doing.' It touched me. So I looked for teachers and found Elaine Overholt.

"Up till then I felt singing was just a hobby, and I still doubted myself. But I didn't want to be 90 and always wondering 'what if.' So I worked as a temp, once at Rogers Media, and sought gigs. My first was at Alleycatz on Yonge Street in 2001 singing jazz on Monday nights.

"I was at Sassafraz for two summers and in 2003 I began two years as CityTV's lottery host three nights a week. It sustained me, but I didn't want to be labeled the lottery girl forever."

A fan who volunteered at Jazz.FM91 told her the station was interviewing for a Latin show. "I quickly made a 90-second demo, they liked it and suddenly *Café Latino* hit the airwaves starting February 5 last year. As producer and host it's a privilege for me to be a voice for Latin America."

The show features classic Latin jazz by stars like Eddie Palmieri and promotes local artists.

"I love radio but my main aim is to be a singer. I'm passionate about it. I'm a different person when I'm singing."

Martinez, who had 2006 acting roles on television shows *1-800 Missing* and *This Is Wonderland*, has a spot on the Disney program *Life With Derek* and is in the film *Love Bytes* with Paul Reiser, which is expected to be released next year.

She also runs a business — herself. She books shows, handles rehearsals, promotion and distribution and sells her CD at performances.

For the past three years she has been composing songs. Half of them on *Sola* are hers or collaborations with principal colleague guitarist Kevin Laliberté, and they're frequently mesmerizing. As she says: "It's all about the feeling."

Live gigs are where she thrives. "I love that pre-show nervous energy and the band chemistry on stage even though I'm always asked to do *Besame Mucho*."

Martinez is said to have a "Toronto sound," which she suggests is fusing elements such as her background, the Flamenco style favoured by Laliberté, her love of jazz, Afro-Cuban music, Mexican folk and Brazilian songs that are "so soothing but so powerful."

And, she plans to incorporate dance into her shows, improving her guitar playing and touring this spring and summer.

Toronto has a network of bars and restaurants that play recorded Latin music, and clubs where live Latin music is frequent fare — like flagship Lula Lounge on Dundas St. W., Latinada at Bloor and Keele Sts., and Havana Feelings at Danforth and Woodbine Aves. The Gladstone does Cuban Sundays. Audiences at jazz-first venues like Gate 403 and the Rex welcome Martinez so opportunities are endless for the culturally diverse Latin sorceress. 🎶

"I LOVE THAT PRE-SHOW NERVOUS ENERGY AND THE BAND CHEMISTRY ON STAGE EVEN THOUGH I'M ALWAYS ASKED TO DO BESAME MUCHO."

— AMANDA MARTINEZ

THE MASKED MAN THAT LURKS BENEATH
THE OLD OPERA HOUSE EMERGES AGAIN

phantom descends on Toronto

BY JASON PAUL

The wait is over – the music of the night is returning. But for those who fell in love with *The Phantom of the Opera* during its magical 10-year run at the old Pantages theatre in Toronto, it will be a short visit.

Phantom, which lasted longer than anyone would have imagined until it closed in 1999, has garnered more requests at Mirvish Productions in recent years than any other show.

Producer David Mirvish is reaching back into the past to offer a limited run of *Phantom* at the Princess of Wales Theatre, February 21 to April 1.

"We've had so many calls about it from people wanting to know when it's going to come back," Mirvish said. "So many people have fond memories of it."

Phantom's return will be in the form of a tour production, but Mirvish promises it will be as bold and vivid as its original inception.

After almost two years of negotiations, Mirvish worked out a deal with legendary producer Cameron Mackintosh's theatre company to bring the tour north.

"Cameron Mackintosh has paid very close attention to detail and how it will look that fans won't be disappointed. He has really changed how a touring show looks," Mirvish said. "The expectations are going to be so high for it because the original run caught the imagination of the audience, so you have to be careful to stay true to it."

The biggest difference is that it won't be at the old Pantages (now the Canon Theatre), which is slightly bigger than the Princess of Wales (2,300 seats to 2,000).

"I'm not sure, to tell you the truth," said Mirvish when asked why it's playing at a different theatre. "I think it came down to Cameron wanting it in this building (Princess of Wales), where perhaps it will be more intimate."

theatre

DIRECTED BY JOEL SCHUMACHER,
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA HIT
THE BIG SCREEN IN 2004 WITH
GERARD BUTLER AS THE PHANTOM
AND EMMY ROSSUM AS CHRISTINE.



WITH STAGING AND CHOREOGRAPHY
BY GILLIAN LYNNE, THE CAMERON
MACKINTOSH TOURING PRODUCTION
OF ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER'S THE
PHANTOM OF THE OPERA IS
DIRECTED BY HAROLD PRINCE.



Phantom, which originally was produced by the now-defunct Livent Inc., isn't the only long-running musical to make a re-appearance recently. *Les Miserables*, which had four different runs in Toronto from 1989 to 1998, returned for an eight-week engagement in 2005.

"There could be room for a small extension if the public responds to it," Mirvish said. "The response so far has been very good."

While *The Phantom of the Opera* likely will generate the most publicity in the coming months, Mirvish Productions has three other premieres this winter.

Up first is Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending*, which tells the tale of a guitar-playing drifter who wanders into a Louisiana bayou town and meets a middle-aged married woman — with tragic consequences around the corner.

The show, directed by Miles Potter and co-produced by the Manitoba Theatre Centre, played at Stratford last season and Mirvish was absolutely blown away by it. Both Seana McKenna and Jonathon Goad will reprise the main roles.

"We were riveted by what we saw," Mirvish said. "Tennessee Williams is very challenging on the audience and the quality of the acting was spectacular."

One of the more abstract plays to hit the Toronto stage in recent times is *e-Dentity* — a show Mirvish readily admits he hadn't even seen in its entirety as of early autumn.

"It's not a conventional musical — the subject actually is hard to define," he said. "It's an Internet theme that draws it all together. It shows a chunk of the world we live in where reality blurs itself from what is really reality."

E-Dentity, from the creative minds of Jacquie Thomas and Michael Spence of Theatre Gargantua, will run for six weeks at the Royal Alex, beginning early March.

Also, *We Will Rock You*, featuring the music of Queen, will play at the Canon Theatre beginning March 14, 2007. "Toronto audiences will go ga-ga over this popular piece of music," Mirvish said. ●

TREY ANTHONY'S PLAY **DA KINK IN MY HAIR**
HITS A HIGHER STAGE WITH CANWEST GLOBAL

a kinky new style

BY ADAM GRANT
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF VISION TV

When Trey Anthony entered the theatre world, what she really wanted was the ability to attract everyone from young, black, hip-hop guys to 85-year-old Jewish grandmothers, and have them all relate to the production she was putting on before them.

As the conceptual force behind the hit stage production *Da Kink In My Hair*, as well as *I Am Not A Dinner Mint*, Anthony's critically acclaimed theatrical creations have captured the imaginations of several sold-out rooms, by providing audiences with not only works of entertainment, but personal empowerment.

Taking place in a hair salon, *Da Kink* gives its viewers an inside look into the highs and lows of a black woman's life, while *Dinner Mint* goes right for the throat by looking at "the crap women swallow to stay in a relationship," as its subtitle suggests. While diverse in nature from one another, both have established Anthony as a force in Canadian theatre.

Born in England, Anthony, now based out of Toronto, has taken a wide array of paths to bring her to this point. She has produced several series for the Women's Television Network, been a writer for CTV and The Comedy Network, and has even worked on HBO's *The Chris Rock Show*. However by 2000, something changed.

Having just ended a seven-year relationship with her partner, Anthony had a lot on her mind. So like any writer, she sat down at her computer and started developing what would become *Da Kink*. Initially penned as a one-woman show that focused on a series of monologues, featuring some dark subject matter based on her personal experiences, *Da Kink*, after much feedback from friends and peers, became a comedic ensemble production.



a kinky new style



Debuting at the 2001 Toronto Fringe Festival, *Da Kink* would wind up attracting monstrous lineups as well as praise from several local media outlets. With all of this momentum building, *Da Kink* would make it to several stages in North America, before ultimately being picked up by Mirivish Productions, which brought Anthony's debut to the Princess of Wales Theatre, where the hit production had to be extended five times.

"It was quite overwhelming. I didn't think *Da Kink* would be what *Da Kink* was to audiences," Anthony said. "I just kind of had my own vision of what this play meant to me, and I knew it was important to me to have that voice onstage, but I didn't know it would have that vast effect on people — I really didn't."

Her hit play *I am Not a Dinner Mint* took the Harbourfront Centre Theatre by storm this past summer. As for *Da Kink*, the play and its original Toronto cast went to Hackney Empire Theatre in London, England for a run that started in November.

Da Kink will also be returning to the small screen on CanWest Global this coming year with 13 episodes after discussions for an adaptation with CBC fell through. *Da Kink* originally aired on VisionTV in November 2004 and then re-aired in February 2005. Anthony will be acting as executive producer and head writer of the show.

All that's remaining now is how *Da Kink* will shuffle its way from the stage to an entire country's living room — Anthony already has that plan in mind.

"Before, *Da Kink* was focused more on these individual women who came into the actual salon, and this time it'll be more about the central character, Novelette, and her family — the hair stylists that make up this family.

"Of course, there's a lot more money in TV," she said with a laugh. "So it'll look a lot different in comparison to the theatre. But we'll try to keep to the same theme of what happened with *Da Kink* (in the theatre production) of really trying to delve into women's lives and what happens with women." ●



A CONTROVERSIAL OPERA TELLS THE TALE
OF **LADY MACBETH'S** TORRID LOVE AFFAIR

lovers in a dangerous time

BY L. H. TIFFANY HSIEH
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF NICOLA BELLER CARBONE

Katerina is a rich man's wife. She is bored, depressed and sexually frustrated. When her husband, Zinovy, goes away on business, she becomes involved with Sergey. She kills Zinovy's demanding father (who also has designs on Katerina) — and when Zinovy returns, she and Sergey then kill him. The two lovers are arrested on their wedding day and later sent to a prison in Siberia where Sergey eventually befriends another girl. Katerina kills his new lover and then herself.

Coarse? Not if you've seen Dmitri Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. The very opera that so horrified Stalin in 1936 with its overt eroticism that he banned it in the Soviet Union. In 1962, nine years after Stalin's death, Shostakovich produced a milder version of the opera and removed music that some thought of as graphic, and renamed it *Katerina Ismailova*. *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* didn't resurface on the operatic scene until the 1970s.

Set to open January 31, at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, with German soprano Nicola Beller Carbone as Katerina, the Canadian Opera Company will perform *Lady Macbeth* in its original entirety for the first time since 1988.

"Katerina is a woman with a lot of different characters inside, from violence to tenderness to sweetness and even madness in the end," said Beller Carbone, who'll be making her Canadian and COC debut. "When the opera starts you see that she's really in a boring, unsatisfied and incomplete situation. What I like about her is that she takes what she wants, even if it's dangerous, even if it's not the right way. She's not passive and she's not resigned to her situation."



lovers in a dangerous time

GERMAN SOPRANO NICOLA BELLER
CARBONE DEBUTS IN CANADA,
AND WITH THE COC, AS KATERINA
ISMAILOVA IN THE JANUARY
PRODUCTION OF *LADY MACBETH*
OF *MTSENSK*.



Sounds like a classic case of desperate housewife syndrome, but Beller Carbone argues it's more than that.

"To arrive to this extreme, which she is able to go, you have to be more than only bored," she said. "This is not a woman at home zapping a TV and drinking champagne because she's bored. It's more. It has another dimension."

Also making his Canadian debut with *Lady Macbeth* is Scottish director Paul Curran. His production will be set in the 1930s, when Shostakovich first started writing the opera at age 24, with elements from Nikolai Leskov's violent book, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, on which Shostakovich based his libretto.

"Shostakovich slightly changed bits of the story, which is how he sort of pared it down," Curran said. "He actually saw Katerina more as a victim of the piece — and I think she entirely is — but some of the details got lost when he did it, and certainly more details got lost when he redid it as *Katerina Ismailova*."

A dedication to his wife, Shostakovich proclaimed *Lady Macbeth* to be about love and "about how love could have been if the world weren't full of vile things."

"Listen to the music," Curran said. "The music is some of the most graphic, sexually explicit, violently explicit music that either Shostakovich or any other composer ever wrote." 🎧



opera

DIVAS STEP OUT TO TEST THEIR OPERATIC TALENTS
IN BRAVO! TV'S **SO YOU WANT TO BE AN OPERA STAR**

reality's perfect pitch

BY GLENDA J. FORDHAM
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF KALEIDOSCOPE ENTERTAINMENT INC.

Thanks to the commercial success of *American* and *Canadian Idol*, it seems these days that every time you

turn on your television, there's some eager but musically challenged wannabe wailing into a microphone to be judged by music industry professionals whose opinions sometime border on the inane and nonsensical. What is a true music fan to do?

TV producer Kaleidoscope Entertainment Inc. has come up with a solution in the guise of *Bathroom Divas: So You Want to be an Opera Star*, which launches its second season in February on the Bravo! television network. This exciting six-part, one-hour documentary series proves that true talent — no matter if it has been hidden or suppressed for years in favour of a traditional 9-to-5 career or raising a family — actually can win and offers a unique insight into the intense training and commitment an opera singer needs for a potentially successful career.

Hundreds of non-professional Canadian classical singers auditioned during the show's nationwide talent search. The final contestants included truck drivers, homemakers, store clerks, accountants, construction workers and dentists — all with a passion for opera and vocal chords that hopefully can survive the rigours of competition. The eventual six finalists are given the opportunity to work with top-notch vocal coaches as they are guided through the wonderful worlds of Wagner, Puccini, Mozart and Bizet during an intense three-week opera boot camp. Throughout the process, viewers are privy to some of the

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reality's perfect pitch



COACH AND JUDGE, DANIEL LICHTI, HELPS A CONTESTANT WITH HIS PERFECT PITCH.



LAST YEAR'S WINNER, ELTON LAMMIE, MADE HIS ROY THOMSON HALL DEBUT WITH AN ARIA FROM PUCCINI'S *TOSCA*, *E IUCEVAN LE STELLE*.

most intimate soul-searching moments as each finalist is put through their paces and challenged by some of Canada's most accomplished vocal and musical coaches.

Last season, several finalists had some formal training but had not achieved professional status. The winner, tenor Elton Lammie of Fort Erie, Ont., though, was a complete outsider. Having forged a modestly successful career singing country music — and as a Roy Oribson tribute artist — in bars and clubs across Southern Ontario, he had no prior operatic experience before entering *Bathroom Divas* on a whim. But the judges heard something exceptional in the voice of the 34-year-old; a hint of greatness that promised a potentially exciting sing-off with the other remaining classically trained finalists.

"The idea of going into a completely different musical genre opened my eyes, not just as a performer but as a person," Lammie said. "We got to grow and stretch as performers, and thanks to the focused critiquing and supportive, positive attitudes of the coaches, I think we all came away with much-improved self-esteem."

Lammie, who had also never sung in a foreign language, was singing in tongues by the end of the show with his Italian performances.

"Sure, I was the underdog going into the show and it was a real challenge to try to become an opera singer in a month," Lammie said. "But now I'm recognized coast to coast and I'm always asked to perform at least one song from my new, expanded repertoire."

At his Roy Thomson Hall debut, accompanied by conductor Bromwell Tovey and the Toronto Symphony, Lammie seamlessly performed an aria from Puccini's *Tosca*, *E Iucevan le stelle*, to an audience of 2,000 adoring opera fans.

For those who missed last season, the concept is a familiar one: The contenders perform in front of a panel of celebrity judges, which previously included Measha Brueggergosman, Stuart Hamilton, Robert Gleadow, Richard Margison, Ted Baerg, Wendy Nielsen, Liz Upchurch and Timothy Vernon. The final three perform their well-rehearsed selections in front of the regular series judges that include über musical comedienne Mary Lou Fallis and opera director/drama coach Tom Diamond.



Co-producer and co-writer Michael Ward, who is also one of the series creators, said the original concept for the series was a show that offered participants a chance to fulfill their career fantasies such as becoming a ballerina or a comedian. However, when Kaleidoscope Entertainment pitched the idea of people dreaming of becoming opera singers, that's when Bravo! jumped on the idea.

"I always knew the premise and the process was terrific," Ward said. "And Bravo! was looking to reach a younger audience. Although this may be considered a reality show, I don't stand over the contestants directing them or egging them on to emotional breakdowns the same way other so-called reality programs do. The finalists are sequestered in a private Toronto residence with cameras rolling only during coaching and performance sessions; the filming is not personally intrusive in any way."

Another difference is that the producers don't impose contracts on their finalists. The eventual winner is given an opportunity to perform a live showcase with one of Canada's premiere symphonic orchestras, like Lammie with Toronto Symphony Orchestra. The 2007 season's winner will also take the stage in front of one of Canada's premiere symphony orchestras. That is the extent of the commitment expected from the winner.

Resident pianist and vocal coach, Liz Upchurch, beamed with pride when asked about the level of professionalism and attitudes of the *Diva* contestants.

"I can't believe how much passion there is in this house," she said. "We listen to the stories each of the contestants bring and I've been moved to tears on more than one occasion. This show is as much about sacrifice as it is about the competition and triumph."

Born and educated in Britain, Upchurch is a graduate prize-winning soloist of the Royal Academy of Music and brings a sense of warmth and compassion to the process.

New to the coaching team this season is one of Canada's finest concert and oratorio singers, bass-baritone Daniel Lichti.

"I was amazed by the number of audition tapes submitted once the call went out for would-be divas," Lichti said. "And it was astounding the quality of the tapes we received. Over half of the potential contestants we looked at were invited to live auditions."

Unlike the big bombastic talent shows such as *American Idol*, *Dancing with the Stars* or *Celebrity Duets*, *Bathroom Divas* has no live audience and no family or friends cheering at the grand finale; there is just a big empty, but grand, theatre, the panel of judges and a small production crew.

Contestants, who could not be named at press time, take the stage in February. 



(TOP LEFT PHOTO) JUDGES DANIEL LICHTI, MARY LOU FALLIS, TOM DIAMOND AND LIZ UPCHURCH HEAD UP THE INTENSE THREE-WEEK BOOT CAMP.

(ABOVE IMAGE) TOM DIAMOND WORKS WITH *BATHROOM DIVAS* HOPEFUL.

DANCER **ZDENEK KONVALINA** COVERS ALL GROUND
AS HE STEPS INTO TORONTO'S SPOTLIGHT

one foot forward

BY ERIN KOBAYASHI

His name flows off your tongue like his feet float across the stage.

Zdenek Konvalina — It starts with a Z and ends with an A. It's a name that hails from the Czech Republic and in ballet, conjures up a powerful pair of perfectly arched feet that curve like a Hokusai wave. A name that the National Ballet of Canada immediately snatched up when the star dancer visited the company November 2005. A name that recently made its debut with the National Ballet during the 2006/07 season in *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Song of the Earth & Symphony in C* and of now, *The Nutcracker*.

"Zdenek," the principal dancer said while introducing himself in a boardroom at the National Ballet's Walter Carsen Centre, melting the Z and D together in effortless fusion not found in the English language. The Czech ballet dancer politely repeats his name a few times: *Zdenek, Zdenek, Zdenek Konvalina*.

"I don't know what my mom was thinking," Konvalina, 27, said of his unique name. "It's very Communist style. Perhaps she thought that we'd never get out. She thought, (we) will never travel to America."

His mother was wrong.

Konvalina has had great success in the United States where, for the past five years, he was a principal dancer at the Houston Ballet. Although Konvalina's departure from the company was seen as controversial due to the sexual harassment suit he filed against the Houston Ballet's Australian artistic director Stanton Welch, he said he had already intended to leave the company.

"It was just the time to leave. Of course there were things that happened but that was just to my benefit because I wanted to go eventually," Konvalina said. "Sometimes you question them in the first place but you understand it's for a reason."





Born in Brno, the former Czechoslovakia, nine-year-old Konvalina was encouraged by his mother to dance. Although the men in his family were conservative and business-oriented, Konvalina's mother wanted him to have a separate identity from his twin brother, Mirek.

"(We're) not identical," Konvalina said. "He's ten minutes older than me. He's taller, darker, much better looking and smarter."

Perhaps Konvalina's mother knew what *could* happen to her son. It turned out young Konvalina possessed incredible promise as a ballet dancer. As a dancer, he studied at Brno's Conservatory de Danse where, despite the strict Russian method and harsh learning environment, he graduated first in his class.

In 1998 at the age of 19, Konvalina was promoted to principal dancer at the National Ballet of Moravia-Silesia. Konvalina danced senior roles for the small company and caught the attention of famed Montreal choreographer Eddy Toussaint. The two eventually became involved both professionally and personally, and Toussaint urged Konvalina to come to North America.

In 2001, Konvalina made his name known in the world of dance when he was awarded the gold medal at the Helsinki International Ballet Competition, which certified his status as a great classical performer and sharp technical dancer. With this distinction, he was able to join the Houston Ballet as a principal dancer.

It was no surprise that the National Ballet, under the direction of Karen Kain, jumped at the chance to sign Konvalina.

"Mr. Konvalina is a gifted dancer, with dramatic flair and strong classical technique. His artistry will be a wonderful addition to our company," Kain said about Konvalina's skill and strengths as a dancer.

"MR. KONVALINA IS A GIFTED DANCER, WITH DRAMATIC FLAIR AND STRONG CLASSICAL TECHNIQUE. HIS ARTISTRY WILL BE A WONDERFUL ADDITION TO OUR COMPANY."



PHOTO BY BRUCE ZINGER

It is no doubt that his youth, extensive experience as a principal dancer, and European background adds a fresh face to the principal staff at the National Ballet.

Yet there are moments that are unpredictable and uncontrollable, that can shake even the most seasoned dancer.

He was at The World Ballet Festival in Tokyo in August where only the most renowned international dancers are invited to perform. It was a defining moment in Konvalina's career where he danced Toussaint's *New World Symphony* and George Balanchine's *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux* with Houston ballerina Leticia Oliveira.

It was then that his father passed away.

"It is the top of the top in ballet and then you finally get there, you can't enjoy it really. That's what I wanted for so long, to be among the stars and then finally I am one of the stars and I can't enjoy it so much because I have this thing," he said. "It happened right when I was going on stage in Japan. You see that's life. I couldn't go to Czech to the funeral because I had to dance and there was no way of cancelling it. It changed you, you know?"

Immediately after Tokyo, Konvalina flew back to Toronto to join the National Ballet.

"When I came, the company had already started and so it was a little bit strange because everyone was looking and I was in the corner," he said. "The class is usually one hour and fifteen minutes and you take exercise and just do it. It's very quiet. So what is important are the looks. In ballet you see how one dances and you already know what type of personality they have."

Konvalina is a believer that life struggles, from scandals to personal tragedies, can give him emotional weight as a dancer. "That's what moulds you as an artist. And I'm sure if I picked up a paintbrush it would be different too. It would be just a little more darker I would say," said Konvalina, who has enjoyed some success as an abstract painter. "I love darker paintings anyway."

Konvalina is excited about his new life in Toronto and was especially excited about his recent November debut with Rudolph Nureyev's challenging version of *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. Konvalina, who is often compared to Nureyev, hoped Canadian audiences would see past the similarities.

"It's flattering to be compared to such a big artist. It's fine, but it's also good to have your own identity. I want to be remembered for Zdenek," he said, melting the Z and D together, making his name, his ambition and his situation, sound a lot simpler. 🎧

"IT'S FLATTERING TO BE COMPARED TO SUCH A BIG ARTIST. IT'S FINE, BUT IT'S ALSO GOOD TO HAVE YOUR OWN IDENTITY. I WANT TO BE REMEMBERED FOR ZDENEK."



PHOTO BY ERIN RILEY

WHAT'S On *here*

HERE'S A GUIDE TO GREAT ENTERTAINMENT BETS IN AND AROUND THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Under the inspired baton of guest conductor Richard Bradshaw, the sparkling Hannaford Street Silver Band celebrates *The Majesty of Christmas* with the combination of brass, organ and a children's chorus in the acoustic splendor of St. James Cathedral. The HSSB also welcomes special guests, The Canadian Children's Opera Chorus, Canadian Youth Opera and organ soloist Michael Bloss.

December 18 at 8 p.m., at the St. James Anglican Cathedral, 65 Church Street. \$16-28. 416-366-7723 or visit www.stlc.com

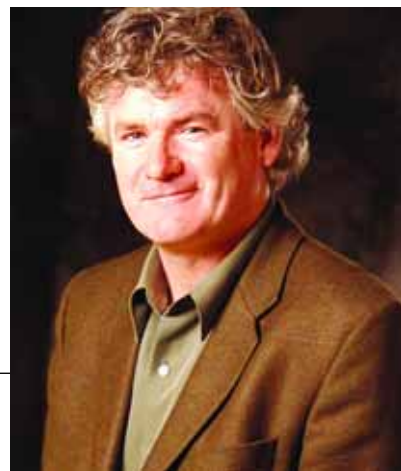


A FAMILY CHRISTMAS

Five-time Juno nominee John McDermott joins special guests Lawrence Gowan, Ron Sexsmith and Gemini Award-winning funnyman Colin Mochrie for a one-day performance that's guaranteed to entertain.

McDermott, who hit stardom after the release of his album *Danny Boy* in 1992, has worked tirelessly over the years and has a number of accolades under his belt. The legendary singer brings his music to the stage with some of the country's best acts in this special Christmas show.

December 23. Performances at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., at the Royal Alexandra Theatre, 260 King Street West. \$30-\$68. 416-872-1212 or visit www.mirvish.com



PUPPETRY BRINGS CINDERELLA TO LIFE

Puppetmongers' *Cinderella in Muddy York*, by Ann and David Powell, stars young Ella of Muddy York coping with life in her squalid cabin at the edge of civilization. Ella's newly landed stepmom and sisters might crush her as they attempt to reduce her to servitude. But, when an invitation arrives for a ball at the Government House for the city's renaming to Toronto, hopes are high of meeting the eligible bachelor son of the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada. Follow Ella's adventures as she battles deep family and makes her way through the deep mud of the new town's unpaved streets.

December 26 to January 1 at Tarragon Theatre's Extra Space, 30 Bridgman Avenue. \$12-\$25. 416-531-1827 or visit www.puppetmongers.com



LAUGH IN THE NEW YEAR

Ring in 2007 at Massey Hall with its 6th annual *New Year's Eve Comedy Extravaganza*, hosted by comic David Foley.

Jumpstart the New Year with a comedy laugh blast curated by Yuk Yuk's funnyman Mark Breslin. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll kiss the year goodbye. Plus you'll be at your next party before the clock strikes twelve.

December 31 at 8 p.m. at Massey Hall, on Shuter Street just east of Yonge Street. \$39.50-\$59.50. 416-872-4255 or visit www.masseyhall.com

LIFE SHINES AS MEMORIES FADE

Poetic and compassionate, *Half Life* portrays the relationship of an elderly man and woman in a nursing home, and how the unconventional and unexpected affair affects their respective middle-aged son and daughter. The Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play looks at what shines when memory fades away. The portrait of the nature of memory, aging and true love is produced and written by John Mighton, winner in 2005 of the Governor General's Award and Siminovitch Prize, and directed by Daniel Brooks.

January 8 to February 3 at CanStage — Bluma Appel Theatre, St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, 27 Front Street East. \$20-\$95. Mondays pay what you can. 416-368-3110 or visit www.canstage.com



ADVENTURES THAT LIE BEFORE THEM

A darkly comic look at man, mountains and meaning of life, *What Lies Before Us* is a brilliant trip from two-time Governor General's Award winner Morris Panych. Set in 1835, a pair of British railway surveyors and their Chinese servant set on an adventure in the Canadian Rockies. As the snow begins to fall, the men's discussion of colonialism, women, faith and the future, descends into petty and hilarious squabbles.

January 15 to February 24 at CanStage — Berkeley Street Theatre, 26 Berkeley Street. \$20-\$55, Mondays pay what you can. 416-368-3110 or visit www.canstage.com

ARTISTS JAZZED AT GLENN GOULD

Acclaimed as one of the greatest percussionists in the world, Alessandra Belloni leads guests on a fiery journey of mystical-erotic trance rituals, ballads and haunting songs of Southern Italy in *Canzoni del Sud - Sicilian folkmusic with a Jazz kick*. Joining her is guitarist Michael Occhipinti — winner of the 2002 National Jazz Award and a six-time Juno Award nominee — with his Sicilian Jazz Project.

January 13 at 8 p.m. at the Glenn Gould Studio, main floor of the Canadian Broadcasting Centre, 250 Front Street West. \$30.50 - \$35. 416-205-5000 or visit www.glenngouldstudio.com





JAZZ ARTIST CELEBRATES JEWISH MUSIC

Multiple Juno nominee David Buchbinder brings his intense trumpet playing to life in a celebration of the diversity of Jewish music. *A Lid Un A Tfile: An Evening of Jewish Music* will feature traditional doinas and Yiddish songs as well as original music, including Osvaldo Golijov's *Tenebrae*, John Zorn's *Kol Nidre* and Sergei Prokofiev's *Overture on Hebrew Themes*, plus more original Yiddish songs by David Wall and Marilyn Lerner.

January 18 to 19 at Harbourfront Centre Theatre, 235 Queens Quay West. \$36. 416-973-4000 or visit www.harbourfrontcentre.com



ROCKING THE HOUSE WITH THE LITTLE BIG BAND

Six-time Juno winner Colin James brings his soulful voice to Massey Hall for one night with his Little Big Band. One of the most artistically creative forces on the Canadian blues scene, the guitar virtuoso is back in the spotlight with the release of his tenth album, *Limelight*, a stunning blend of soul, rhythm and roots.

February 9 at 8 p.m. at Massey Hall, on Shuter Street just east of Yonge Street. \$29.50-\$49.50. 416-872-4255 or visit www.masseyhall.com



EXPRESSIONS OF ASIA

Expressing the diversity of pan-Asian dance, the CanAsian Dance Festival features cutting edge contemporary forms and rarely seen traditional dances from around the world. This year's festival, led by artistic director Denise Fujiwara, includes contemporary Korean dancer Soojung Kwon, accompanied by Korean music group The Opaque Ensemble. Also featured is an international collaboration by Dora-nominated, butoh artist Kinya "Zulu" Tsuruyama and contemporary dancer Keiko Ninomiya.

February 22 to 24 at the Premiere Dance Theatre, 207 Queens Quay West. 416-973-4000 or visit www.canasiandancefestival.com

RICH CULTURE THE CANVAS FOR EMILY CARR

Inspired by the landscape and First Nations cultures of British Columbia and Alaska, Emily Carr stroked her way to creative genius with the canvas as her palette. In the 1920s she was invited to submit her works for inclusion in an exhibition with the Group of Seven. She was inspired and admired by the Group, and was invited to take part in art shows — a radical invitation for a woman at that time — but Carr was never an official member. Explore new insights into her work and life through the most comprehensive exhibition of Carr's work to date at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

March 3 to May 20 at AGO, 317 Dundas Street West. 416-979-6648 or visit www.ago.net



A WINTER WONDERLAND, NIAGARA IS HOST TO THE WORLD'S GREATEST ICEWINES AND DESSERTS

icy pleasures

BY HIMANI EDIRIWEERA

As frigid temperatures hit the Niagara escarpment in the winter, crystallized grapes – awaiting to be transformed into sensuous icewine – decorate vines of some of the world's most renowned wineries.

Handpicked in their natural frozen state, ideally at temperatures of -10°C to -13°C , and sometimes overnight to take full advantage of the temperature, icewine is a result of freezing and thawing of the grapes, which intensifies the flavours.

Genuine icewine must follow Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) regulations that prohibit artificial freezing of grapes. The frozen grapes are pressed and the resulting nectar casts aromas of apricot and honey with a balance between fruit flavours, acidity and sweetness that caress the palate for the perfect finish.

"The uniqueness of grapes frozen on the vines catches a lot of attention, and certainly we are blessed with cold weather in Canada," said Canadian wine pioneer Donald Ziraldo, president and co-founder of Inniskillin Winery. "People can really get why we can do it because icewine fits with Canada. Somehow there is a psychological connection with Canada and we have the best (icewines)."

Inniskillin has captured a number of gold awards on the international stage for its icewines, including its greatest international accolade at the 1991 Vinexpo in Bordeaux, France, for its 1989 icewine. This Vidal Icewine, judged by an international panel, was granted the fair's highest award, Le Grand Prix d'Honneur. With less than a couple hundred bottles available today, the 1989 Vidal is a highly coveted bottle of wine. Connoisseurs can try the Vidal at select restaurants around the world, including Toronto's Canoe, for a modest \$700. Here's a taste of some of Niagara's best:



INNISKILLIN

Inniskillin is the leading icewine producer in Canada with production varying each year. The first successful harvest was in 1984 after birds ate the grapes during co-founder and icewine maker Karl J. Kaiser's first attempt in 1983.

Its icewine has won gold medals in competitions around the world, including Austria, Belgium, Italy, Australia and France, for its Riesling, Sparkling and Pearl Vidal Icewines.

Inniskillin wines can be purchased at the winery boutiques or Wine Rack Stores throughout Ontario. A range of wines is also available at the LCBO and selected products at the LCBO's Vintages. Visit www.inniskillin.com

CHÂTEAU DES CHARMES

Capturing the gold medal and Ontario Wine of the Year at the 2006 Ontario Wine Awards for its 2002 Riesling Icewine, Château des Charmes created this famous dessert wine from its Paul Bosc Estate Vineyard. Château des Charmes' renowned icewines have won numerous national and international awards, including the International Wine and Spirit Competition Trophy in London, England, where it was judged Best Icewine Worldwide.

Wines can be found at most LCBO stores or at Château des Charmes boutiques. For more information or to order online visit www.chateaudescharmes.com

PILLITTERI ESTATES WINERY

A silver-medal winner of the 2006 Ontario Wine Awards, Pillitteri's Cabernet Franc boasts a light salmon colour, which is typical for its red icewines. The aromatic icewine will fill one's senses with light wild honey, maple syrup and subtle floral notes of purple violets. Pillitteri won a gold medal at the 2006 Bacchus International Wine Competition in Spain for its 2004 Vidal Icewines and a Grand Gold in 2006 for the same wine at Vinitaly, an international competition in Verona, Italy.

Family owned, Pillitteri wines can be purchased online at www.pillitteri.com

HENRY OF PELHAM

The winner of a bronze medal at the 2006 Ontario Wine Awards, Henry of Pelham's Riesling Icewine is perfumed with a citrusy and rich flavour. This deep, yellow-gold icewine will cellar for at least 15 years. Henry of Pelham Family Estate Winery is a premium-estate winery located on the Short Hills Bench at the base of the Niagara Escarpment in St. Catharines.

Available at most LCBO stores or visit www.winerytohome.com. Call 1-877-PELHAM-7

JACKSON-TRIGGS

Nestled in the heart of wine country is the Jackson-Triggs Estate, which boasts a number of award-winning wines, including its Niagara Region's Proprietors Reserve Vidal Icewine and Grand Reserve Gewürztraminer Icewine. The Gewürztraminer Icewine has rich tropical aromas of guava and mango, underscored by distinct floral notes. Honeyed flavours of apricot and pineapple are balanced with spicy acidity with a finale of a luscious finish, while the Vidal Icewine offers bold fruit flavours with an exquisite silky finish.

Wines can be purchased at the winery, Ontario location Wine Racks or at the LCBO. Order by calling 1-888-702-8527 ext. 377

a little cup of sugar

Using up to 60-kilograms of chocolate in her decadent pastries a week, the Food Network’s Anna Olson transformed the quaint harbourfront village of Port Dalhousie in St. Catharines, into a cocoa lover’s paradise.

In the heart of Niagara’s grape-growing region, sits the 2 1/2–year-old Olson Foods and Bakery, a little café on Lock Street that serves up delectable treats to satisfy even the pickiest of palettes.

“We really like the challenges,” Olson said. “People will walk in and say we had this olive oil in Italy, and we’ll find them that olive oil.”

The shop boasts an open kitchen with fresh salads, sandwiches, soups, hundreds of different types of cheese, and her signature desserts.

And, being in wine country inspires Olson with her culinary delicacies.

“I live in Niagara so (in the fall) we’re harvesting a lot of fruit. It’s a mecca of fruit, pumpkins — everything comes fresh from the market. That is my inspiration,” Olson said. “Then it’s infused with chocolate or caramel — that is my hook.”

Once the snow blankets her culinary playground, her motivation for recipes is inspired by an array of new tastes.

“Tropical fruit in equatorial countries are at its peak — blood oranges, pineapples, mangos. Just when people are craving sunshine,” Olson said.

Some of her winter specialties include grapefruit pistachio tarts, and blood orange cakes. Whether fruity or chocolate-based, people love her sweets and leave their waistlines at the door.

“We have never been asked for low-fat, low-carb anything. We can accommodate sugar-free, but people aren’t wanting to deprive themselves. They come in here for decadence,” she said.

Wrapping up her fifth seasons, and 157th show on the Food Network’s *Sugar*, Olson also just released her second cookbook, *Another Cup of Sugar*, which covers the third and fourth seasons of the show.

Not only does she satisfy sweet cravings on her show, but her new 200-page cook-book invites her fans to whip up more than 100 of her fantasy desserts.

Her favourite recipe?

“I can’t do that, I am a seasonally motivated baker, so I just can’t do that,” Olson said. “But, I am a cookie monster — I love cookies.”

OLSON JOINED FOOD NETWORK CANADA AFTER SEVEN YEARS AS PASTRY CHEF AT INN ON THE TWENTY, WHICH HAS A REPUTATION FOR ITS REGIONAL CUISINE.

LEMON CRÈME BRÛLÉE

From her most recent cookbook, *Another Cup of Sugar*, Anna Olson shares secrets to her most prized desserts. And, now you can make a delicious crème brûlée without using a blowtorch or broiling it in the oven. Pouring liquid caramelized sugar over chilled brûlées coats the custard beautifully, and gives the brittle, glazed finish of a true brûlée.

LEMON CURD: • 2 large egg yolks • 2 large eggs • 1/3 cup (75 mL) sugar • 2 tbsp (30 mL) finely grated lemon zest • 1/2 cup (125 mL) fresh lemon juice • 1/2 cup (125 mL) unsalted butter at room temperature • 1/4 cup (60 mL) full-fat sour cream • 2 tbsp (30 mL) table cream (18%)

CRÈME: • 1 1/2 cups (375 mL) whole milk • 1 1/2 cups (375 mL) table cream (18%) • 3 large eggs • 3 large egg yolks • 1/3 cup (75 mL) sugar • pinch fine salt • 1 tsp (5 mL) orange liqueur optional

BRÛLÉE: • 1/2 cup (125 mL) sugar • 1/4 cup (60 mL) water

- For lemon curd whisk egg yolks, egg, sugar, lemon zest and juice in a bowl over a pot of gently simmering water until thick (you should be able to spoon it, not pour it). Remove from heat and scrape into a food processor. Pulse in butter, sour cream and table cream until smooth. Scrape curd into a bowl and cover surface with plastic wrap. Chill for at least three hours.
- For crème heat milk and cream in a saucepan. In a bowl, gently whisk eggs, egg yolks, sugar and salt. Ladle about half cup (125 mL) of milk mixture into eggs, whisking in. Continue adding milk and whisking until it has all been blended in. (Do not whisk too vigorously.) Stir in liqueur, if using. Strain and chill completely.
- Preheat oven to 350° F (180° C). Arrange eight six-ounce (175 mL) tempered glass dishes or ceramic ramekins on a tea towel in a baking dish with a two-inch (five-cm) lip. Carefully pour the chilled custard over the lemon curd, dabbing off any bubbles with the edge of a paper towel. Pour boiling water around baking dishes or ramekins. Cover pan loosely with foil and bake for 35 to 40 minutes, until custards are set but centres still jiggle when tapped.
- Remove from water bath and let cool for 20 minutes, then chill completely, at least four hours.
- For brûlée, place sugar and water in saucepan over high heat and boil, without stirring, until it is a light amber colour. While cooking, occasionally brush down the sides of the pot with a clean brush dipped in water. Immerse pot in a bowl of cold water to halt cooking, then spoon a thin layer of caramel of each cooled custard, swirling cup to coat evenly.
- The crème brûlées can be returned to the fridge and served up to three hours later.



THE ARTS COMMUNITY GATHERS TO HONOUR THOSE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT THE 2006 ARTS AWARDS

BY CRYSTAL WOOD



ACTOR-WRITER-DIRECTOR DON MCKELLAR



CLAIRE HOPKINSON, BLUMA APPEL AND PETER CHIN



BLUMA APPEL

A visionary and philanthropist to the arts community, Bluma Appel was humbled as hundreds of guests at the Mayor's Arts Awards Luncheon in October received her announcement with a standing ovation.

Informally dubbed the Warriors Award, Appel, a renowned patron of the arts, surprised Toronto's arts community when she gave \$1,000 to each runner-up in five categories to those who made significant contributions in the arts last year. She called the runners-up "future winners."

"Canada is not an easy country for artists to succeed," Appel said. "They face more difficulties now than they have in years."

Warrior Award winners included playwright d'bi young.anitafrika, renowned piano group The Gryphon Trio, and world-renowned percussion virtuoso Trichy Sankaran.

"There should be no losers," Appel said.

"One thousand dollars is not insignificant...It's meaningful as many have to make a huge financial sacrifice. I couldn't be more delighted," said Claire Hopkinson, of the Toronto Arts Council Foundation that sponsors the event.

Award winners included music director Jeanne Lamon; dancer-choreographer Peter Chin; actor and art director of Soupepper Theatre, Albert Schultz; producer-director Natasha Mytnowych, who won the first RBC Emerging Artist Award; and CIBC Mellon, which accepted an award for its continued support of arts organizations. ☺



NATASHA MYTNOWYCH



CLAIRE HOPKINSON, DAVID MILLER WITH MEMERS OF CIBC MELLON



MEMBERS OF THE GRYPHON TRIO AND MC JIAN GHOMESHI