

EVENTS

DRAG TIME

The DQ divas intend to go out with a bang. G3

LEARNING

BROADWAY BOUND?

Summer camp preps kids for the Great White Way. G5

# what's ON

## Staging success



Stage West has come a long way since its early days employing old sitcom stars. As it prepares for its 100th show, the only thing that hasn't changed is the red hot bar

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

When it comes to celebrating the 100th anniversary of the musical 'The Full Monty', the cast members are all in for a special night. The show has been a hit since its debut in 1993, and the cast is proud to have reached this milestone. The show's success is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the cast and crew. The show's popularity has led to a successful run on Broadway and a film adaptation. The cast is excited to continue to entertain audiences for many years to come.

Through some changes a lot of things have changed since the show first opened. The show has been a hit since its debut in 1993, and the cast is proud to have reached this milestone. The show's success is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the cast and crew. The show's popularity has led to a successful run on Broadway and a film adaptation. The cast is excited to continue to entertain audiences for many years to come.

However, the show's success is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the cast and crew. The show's popularity has led to a successful run on Broadway and a film adaptation. The cast is excited to continue to entertain audiences for many years to come.

The cast of 'The Full Monty' is proud to have reached this milestone. The show's success is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the cast and crew. The show's popularity has led to a successful run on Broadway and a film adaptation. The cast is excited to continue to entertain audiences for many years to come.

By [Author Name]

Stage West has come a long way since its early days employing old sitcom stars. As it prepares for its 100th show, the only thing that hasn't changed is the salad bar

**RICHARD OUZOUNIAN**  
THEATRE CRITIC

When the six leading men of *The Full Monty* finish their final number tonight at Stage West and rip off their last piece of apparel, the roar from the crowd won't just be celebrating the guys and their grand unveiling.

No, this isn't just one more premiere for the popular Mississauga dinner theatre; it's the 100th opening night in its 21-year history.

That's a lot of prime rib sliced up at the buffet and a lot of Spanish coffee flowing under the bridge. Close to 2 million patrons have enjoyed the offerings at Stage West over the past two decades.

But things have changed a lot in the world of dinner theatre since that night in 1986 when Stage West Mississauga opened its doors with a production of Andrew Bergman's comedy *Social Security* that starred Beth Howland (Vera on *Alice*) and Ray Buktenica (Benny on *Rhoda*).

Back in those days, the formula was simple: pick a small, one-set comedy, then cast it with some people who had been on a TV series not that long ago.

For a while it seemed like everyone who had ever played a role on *M\*A\*S\*H* found their way onto the stage of the theatre on Dixie Rd. just south of the 401 to entertain the crowds in

between the caesar salad and the cherry cheesecake.

It was a concept that businessman Howard Pechet had already been honing to a fine edge for the previous decade in the Stage West operation he began at his family's Mayfield Inn in Edmonton.

"It's a wonder we're all still here," laughed Pechet on the phone from the West Coast. "I knew so little in those days, I managed to screw up in every possible way.

"I opened up with Gloria DeHaven in one of the few flops Neil Simon ever wrote, something called *The Gingerbread*

► Please see **Stage West, G9**

The cast of *The Full Monty* bare it all in honour of a milestone: the 100th production at Mississauga's Stage West, which started 21 years ago as a spinoff of an Edmonton success story. Today, boasts owner Howard Pechet, the theatre is "one of the three largest employers of Canadian Equity actors in the country."

# 'It's a wonder we're all still here'

## ► Stage West From G1

*Lady,*" he recalled. "Our first night, the temperature outside was 40 below and we had 40 people in the audience.

"And then Miss DeHaven proceeded to rewrite the entire script as she was going along on opening night. Oh, it wasn't dull, let me tell you that!"

The hardest part on Pechet in those opening years was that he could only run shows for 2 1/2 weeks. "That meant," he groans, "that I had to have another one ready to go into rehearsal the Monday after the last one opened." Now each show runs eight weeks, which makes things a little easier.

Pechet also had more than his fair share of nightmares with stars who showed up "and promptly started pouring triple vodkas down their throats, until they didn't just forget what play they were in, they forgot what country they were in."

I witnessed one of those disasters personally back in the early 1990s. A celebrated screen star (no names, please, she's still alive today) showed up for the opening night of the musical she was supposed to star definitely the worse for wear.

At first, we all just thought she was acting a little odd, but it was when she crossed the stage, sat down on the floor and said to the conductor, "Honey, just play my first note and everything will be fine," that I knew we were in big trouble.

She never made it to a second performance. I think they said she had come down with the flu.

But then there were the good stars. "I can't say enough about the people like Jamie Farr and Gale Gordon," stresses Pechet.

"They showed up and worked like solid professionals, were kind to their fans and kept everybody happy."

Things were moving smoothly and at one point, there were five theatres in the Stage West empire. Now it's down to two: Calgary and Mississauga. "It was too many venues to run effectively," Pechet came to realize.

He also noticed that the overall dynamic was changing. "I wasn't able to get stars right after they'd finished their TV series any more. Why not? Because they were now making a million dollars an episode and they didn't need what we could pay them."

And as long as he stayed rooted to the old-style plays with the old-style names, "I'd be playing to an ever-shrinking demographic. We all know that older people like to go to the theatre, but what appeals to the 55-year-olds today isn't what appealed to them 20 years ago."

And so he switched: away from fading Hollywood stars to up-and-coming Canadian talent. Nowadays, Pechet, the man who used to boast about signing Joyce DeWitt, takes more pride in announcing that he's "one of the three largest employers of Canadian Equity actors in the country."

With the change in talent came a change in shows as well. Where comedy once was king, the musical is now the monarch.

At first, Pechet went in for the classic Broadway shows like

*South Pacific* and *My Fair Lady* and he still leans on them to a certain degree.

But more and more, the pendulum has swung to hipper titles like *The Rocky Horror Show* (which he produced two years ahead of CanStage) and musical revues like the popular *British Invasion* and *California Dreaming* series, which he co-authors.

"We're bringing in a much younger audience now," says Pechet. "Our matinees these days are more likely to have groups of students than seniors."

And although some people roll their eyes when they hear the term "dinner theatre," Pechet can justifiably point to the fully professional calibre of all the shows he produces. Sure, not every one is a hit, but then every other professional company in the GTA has its ups and downs.

Some things haven't changed in 21 years: the salad bar, the prime rib carving table, the crowd that surrounds the desert buffet like vultures, the "specialty cocktails" created for each show.

"Those things provide a comfort element for people," says Pechet. "And it must be working, because we're currently up to 18,000 season ticket holders and growing."

It's also one of the city's better entertainment bargains: a five-show subscription starts for as little as \$223 — and that includes your meal.

So when you go to see *The Full Monty*, feel free to raise a glass and toast the ongoing success of Stage West. And if the cast don't join you, never mind; they need their hands free to cover certain parts of their, er, onstage personalities.



Stage West brought back *The Rocky Horror Show* two years before CanStage's recent hit.

## Stage West celebs

Some of the great (and not-so-great) stars who've trod the boards at Stage West over the past two decades:

- Gale Gordon, *Corpse* (1987)
- Jamie Farr, *Weekend Comedy* (1989)
- Elke Sommer, *California Suite* (1990)
- Ann B. Davis, *Cemetery Club* (1991)
- Elliot Gould, *Rumors* (1991)
- Joyce DeWitt, *Leader of the Pack* (1992)
- Robert Vaughan, *I Hate Hamlet* (1992)
- Loretta Swit, *Same Time, Next Year* (1993)
- Richard Kline, *Jake's Women* (1993)
- Mickey Rooney, *The Mind with a Naughty Man* (1994)
- Don Knotts, *Harvey* (1995)
- Helen Reddy, *Shirley Valentine* (1997)
- Margot Kidder, *Sylvia* (1997)
- Cloris Leachman, *Over the River and Through the Woods* (2000)

### Just the facts

**What:** The Full Monty

**Where:** Stage West, 5400 Dixie Rd., Mississauga

**When:** Until July 8

**Tickets:** 905-238-0042