



centre

STORY BY CATHY MINZ

STAGE

*Durham Theatre Festival founder
Michael Khashmanian mixes
business with pleasure*

Photo: Jason Chow



COVER

Photo Courtesy of Herongate Barn Theatre



Photos courtesy Sylvia, Ajax Community Theatre



Photo Courtesy of Herongate Barn Theatre

WHEN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY TOOK A NOSEDIVE, waves of concern reverberated throughout Durham Region. What did Whitby actor/writer Michael Khashmanian want to do in the face of companies downsizing, people losing their jobs and businesses closing? He decided to throw a party. A very big party called **Durham Theatre Festival**. While some might think of him as a madman, there is a method to his madness. Michael's goal is to create a positive cultural and financial impact in Durham Region and to stimulate the remarkable culture of community theatre.

From May 5 to 16, his hard work and determination will finally pay off when the inaugural Durham Theatre Festival takes the stage throughout the Region. Networking tirelessly for over a year with help from Adrienne Dankel, event planner and owner of Pumpkin Event Planning, the festival was built from the ground up. Joined later by Cathy Minz, owner of Vivid Media Communications, the team is enjoying plenty of support from »

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professional people who are volunteering their services to create a successful festival.

“We’re learning as we go because this kind of thing has never been done before in our area,” explains Michael. “We have just added Durham Tourism and Durham West Arts Centre to our list of sponsors and with their help, we see a phenomenal future for the festival.”

Why is a festival promoting community theatre important to the region? With a background that includes over 31 years in business, Michael knows that when consumers spend their money locally, the regional

economy will enjoy a boost. “When someone goes to see a play, they may also have dinner, hire a babysitter or stay in a hotel,” explains Michael. “They’re spending money again and infusing life into local businesses. But the Region will experience more than just a financial gain, it’s a boost to our local culture as well.”

Why does culture matter to the average person? Michael explains: “Among other definitions, culture is the set of values and characteristics of everyday existence or a way of life. Canadians have a unique way of looking at the world because our culture

is different from others. Theatre not only exposes us to stories about our own culture but other cultures as well.” Throughout the year, in Durham Region you can see British-style comedy, classic ‘who-dunnit’ stories and the play written by Michael Khashmanian being performed for the festival by St. Mark’s Players is a comedy with elements of religion and Canadian politics, a very unique premise. “These are the stories of our lives and our world. Stories we want to pass on to future generations. And, seeing live theatre is just plain fun,” continues Michael.

Actively involved in the theatre scene in Durham and Toronto for the past five years, Michael has written several plays and performed with numerous local theatre groups. He knows from his own experience that the Durham Theatre Festival will “showcase the amazing actors, writers and producers as well as the beautiful venues throughout the region.” And, it’s an affordable night out for pretty much everyone. We don’t need to go to the big city and spend hundreds of dollars for a great theatre experience,” explains Michael. “People can spend \$20 on a ticket and enjoy fabulous entertainment close to home.”

Opening with the “Golden Age of Broadway” Gala Celebration at Tosca Banquet Hall on May 5, the festival includes Improv and Character Development workshops with Nathalie Toriel and guided tours of Oshawa Little Theatre while they prepare for their next production. The well-established Herongate Barn Dinner Theatre and Class Act Dinner Theatre will be included in the festival as well as community favourites like St. Mark’s Players, Backwoods Players, Page to Stage and Ajax Community Theatre. The talented youth from J. Clarke Richardson Collegiate will also be taking part in this major event.

Those who attend the “Golden Age of Broadway” Opening Gala on May 5th will have a chance to win two ‘Golden Tickets’ that will give them access to any theatre production during the festival. Along with the draw, some of the area’s talented vocalists will perform Broadway’s most memorable hits and the audience will hear from keynote speaker Rocky Varcoe, actor/director/cool guy from Class Act Dinner Theatre. It will be a night to remember.



Photos courtesy of Herongate Barn Theatre

The Durham Theatre Festival is just the first part of Michael’s master plan to infuse new life into our Region. He believes wholeheartedly that, “living in Durham Region is fantastic. We can play here, too!”

For more information and tickets visit www.durhamtheatrefestival.com
1-877-828-9282.