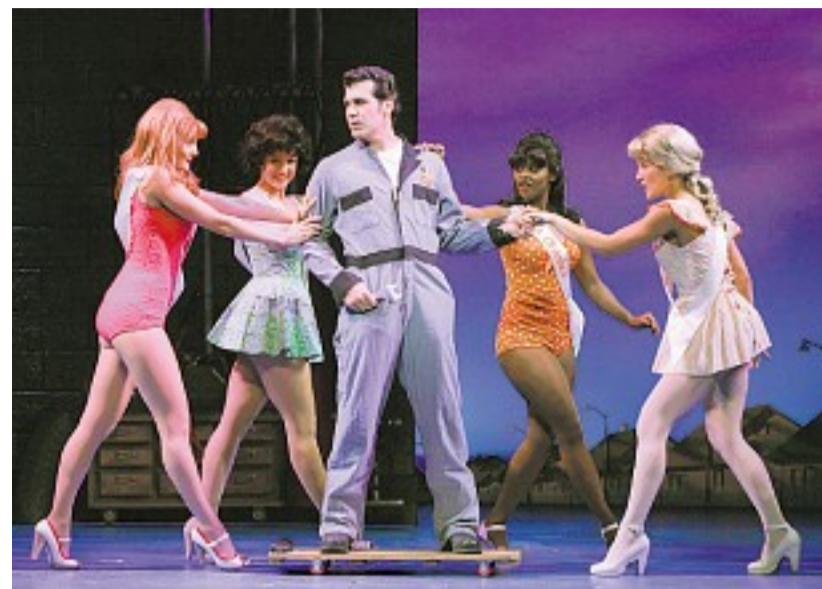


mustdo

Robert Cushman slicks his hair, dons his leather jacket and meets up with the Fonz. And if musicals aren't your thing, take your love to Niagara

THEATRE

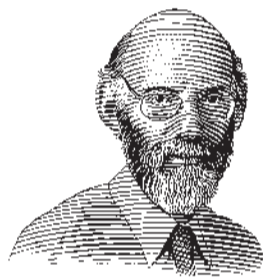


GERRY GOODSTEIN / DANCAP PRODUCTIONS

The Fonz is the star of *Happy Days*, but that wasn't always the case.

Nostalgia squared, but it doesn't add up

The Fonz and his *Happy Days* crew best seen on TV



ROBERT CUSHMAN

The defining moment of *Happy Days*, *A New Musical* comes just after the beginning of Act Two when somebody says "Fonzie has never been the same since he jumped that shark." It tells you everything you need to know about the show, and I'm not talking exposition. It's a pathetic attempt at self-satire that tries to be knowingly ingratiating, but plays as desperate. Maybe, the giveaway line is intended to disarm all the critics, this one included, who have been polishing their own shark-jumping references ever since the show was announced. Again, too late: Right from its opening number this production presents an unmissable slowly moving target.

Basics: This "new musical" is an attempt to recapture the supposed magic of a 1970s attempt to recapture the supposed magic of the 1950s. That's nostalgia squared, which is more than anyone needs. (And even in its time the TV *Happy Days*, with its happy nuclear family, must have left some people wondering why they didn't just re-run *Leave It to Beaver* and have done with it.) Second Basics: The TV original was one of those occasions on which a secondary character steals the show. But if he's going to work that larcenous magic again, he has at least to start out secondary. This show gives star billing, and what there is of story and conflict, to Arthur Fonzarelli, a.k.a. The Fonz, the leather-jacketed garage mechanic whose official billing is hero's best friend. However, it retains just enough of its prototype's rope to hang itself. Richie Cunningham, the ostensible protagonist, still gets to introduce the story and to narrate it. He also has a sort of trajectory of his own. But it's a measure of his and the show's ineffectuality that when he rounded off the evening by proposing to his girlfriend at the senior prom, we'd all forgotten that she even existed. Memo to whoever may currently be at work on *Seinfeld The Musical*: Don't build it around George.

Meanwhile the resources of the Fonz, whose most celebrated if contradictory characteristics are imperturbability and a short fuse, are tested by the return to town of his own former squeeze, the eponymously dressed Pinky Tuscadero, now some kind of star with her own entourage (total number: two, female, also in pink. I must say, for a homecoming celebrity, she makes a remarkably low-key entrance). Pinky's advent coincides with a developer's threat to Arnold's malt-shop, everyone's favourite hangout. The entire community, meaning Richie's friends and family, bands together to defeat this, their principal money-raising scheme being a televised wrestling-match between the Fonz

and a pair of preening jailbirds, recently ex, called the Malachi brothers. The Fonz, however, has a bad knee, and rather than have this shameful fact revealed, he leaves town. Town, by the way, is Milwaukee, which is hardly a village, but apparently everybody in it notices his absence and is stricken by it. Anyway, somewhere on the road to Damascus or wherever he's headed, he has a visitation from his twin gods James Dean and Elvis (though in a world full of Elvis impersonators, this production has managed to unearth one who can't do it) and heads back. Meanwhile ... actually, there isn't a meanwhile. A very thin story has to be stretched over two hours. As Richie says, in the show's one genuinely bright moment of self-reference, usually he can get his problems sorted out in 30 minutes.

While I'm paying the odd compliment, I should acknowledge that Paul Williams' score isn't bad, especially the words, which were always this veteran popsmith's stronger suit. A number for the recidivist Malachis has them recalling their practice days when "we terrorized the playground on our stolen trikes." Williams' lighter lyrics are full of bright touches like that, though, typically of his generation, his ballads are gummy and vague. What does his songs in, though, is the extreme predictability with which they're placed. Everybody gets an Establishing Number; you just know that, after Richie's dad has taken himself off to his day's work at the hardware store, his stay-at-home wife will start singing about her dreams as an everyday housewife. But it's the book, Garry Marshall's attempt to cash in on his TV original, that's irredeemable. It parades the characters in a sustained bid for the applause of recognition, padding things out with increasingly hopeless anachronisms: jokes about the price of gas, about some crazy new business called "computers," even a skateboard. The energy-level is so low both on stage and in the auditorium (I've seldom heard so tepid a response at a musical) that when the second-act curtain went up on Arnold's "going out of business" sign, I thought for a moment that it meant the show.

The actors don't exactly suggest they're in a hit, but they throw themselves in and mostly come up floating. Felicia Farley's Pinky is a squawker; but Joey Sorge has the Fonz's moves down pretty much perfectly, Steven Booth bobs engagingly up and then down again as Richie, and as his mom Cynthia Ferrer, who has a twinkle that's nearly a sparkle, surprises everyone with a tap-routine — everyone, at least, who's never seen a strait-laced lady in a musical before. Even by musical standards, this number is hideously unmotivated, but we take what we can get, and the cast do the same. ■ *Happy Days* continues at the Elgin Theatre through Feb. 15. Visit dancaptickets.com for details.

National Post

T.O. DO THIS WEEK

1 When Women Rule the World: *Judy Chicago in Thread* brings together works by the iconic textile artist that have never been seen in Canada. Feb. 11 to Sept. 7. Textile Museum of Canada, 55 Centre Ave. \$12. For details, visit textilemuseum.ca or call 416-599-5321.

2 Kathleen Edwards' country-rock twang is girded by a voice so heartfelt that it's easy to understand why the Ottawa native was nominated for the Polaris Prize last year. Feb. 13, 7 p.m. Trinity-St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor St. W. \$27.50. Visit ticketmaster.com or call 416-870-8000 for tickets.

3 In *Miss Julie: Freedom Summer*, Caroline Cave brings to life a character struggling through class and gender strife in 1960s Mississippi. Feb. 9 to Mar. 7. Bluma Appel Theatre, 27 Front St. E. \$20-\$90. For more information, call 416-368-3110 or visit canstage.com.

4 So You Think You Can Dance Canada's Nico Archambault and the rest of the Top 10 crew are looking to woo T.O. with more than a two-minute waltz. Feb. 13, 7:30 p.m. Air Canada Centre, 40 Bay St. \$39.50-\$59.50. For tickets, call 416-870-8000 or visit ticketmaster.ca.

5 The Drake Hotel is celebrating with a **Fifth Anniversary Exhibition** displaying energetic works that have made Jeff Stober's Queen West space a creative maelstrom. Through April 19. Drake Hotel, 1150 Queen St. W. Free.

DAYTRIPPING

HEART ON THE VINE

Go out on a limb this Valentine's Day by getting out of town. Who wouldn't love Niagara wine and food?

BY REBECCA TUCKER

Valentine's Day, February's mid-month non-statutory holiday, is one week from today. If this is news to you, you may be in a predicament. Think your favourite restaurant will be able to squeeze in another table for two? You're mistaken. So instead of contending with the hustle and bustle of romance in the city, get out of town next weekend.

This year's Valentine's Day program at Peller Estates Winery, an hour and a half outside of Toronto in the heart of Niagara's wine country, is an ideal option for city-dwelling couples.

"We have a lot of fun designing these packages every year," says Jason Parsons, executive chef at the Peller Estates Winery restaurant. "We have a lot of successes and a lot of disasters putting them together, but I'm very happy with the way it's turned out this year."

Parsons has designed two six-course, Valentine-themed tasting menus — one of which he describes as "adventurous" and another featuring such staples as lobster bisque and beef tenderloin. Both menus have Peller Estates wines paired with each course. The Valentine-

themed tasting menu is being served only on Feb. 13 and 14.

"One of the things I'm really interested in is deconstructing the wine and matching it to our food," Parsons says. "We have couples usually ordering both menus, to have 12 courses, and they're sharing each other's food and wine. It's rather romantic."

Also on the Peller Estates agenda this month is an art of wine and food seminar program, for which Parsons has designed a three-bite menu made up of aphrodisiacs paired with wines: oysters paired with iced cuvée; cocoa-braised shortribs with a 2006 cabernet sauvignon; and an icewine

with a spiced chocolate cake.

"We find people tend to get a bit more adventurous with what they're eating around this time," Parsons explains. "It may be because they're trying to impress their dates, but we put some things on our menus that people really seem to go for this time of year."

And, from Feb. 13 to 15, Peller will be sampling its newly released 2007 Pinot Noir accompanied by canapés designed by Parsons. The release of this wine, too, ties in with Peller's Valentine's events, since the fruit from which the wine is made is commonly known as the "heartbreak grape" due to the difficulty with which it's grown and harvested.

"We just really get into the spirit this time of year," Parsons says. "The food is great, the wine is great. We hope that people get a little adventurous with the food, and maybe go home feeling a little more romantic as a result," he laughs.

■ Peller Estates Winery's pinot noir sampling and Valentine tasting menus run next weekend; the art of wine seminar program, with aphrodisiacs, runs until the end of February. Call 1-888-673-5537 or visit peller.com for reservations.

National Post



COURTESY PELLER ESTATES

Chef Jason Parsons knows what Cupid would order.

SPECIAL MARKETING FEATURE



Food safety from ground to table

Agricultural economist Dr. Andreas Boecker from the University of Guelph is at the social sciences end of food safety and authenticity research. While his natural scientist colleagues at Universities of Guelph and Saskatchewan develop molecular tags for tracing foods and natural health products, he studies consumer acceptance and supply chain impacts of this innovation.

In another project, now in the planning stages, he will look into combining this technology with electronic traceability systems and tamper-proof packaging to ensure the legality of fresh caught sturgeon from Lake Huron. Half a province away in Ottawa, the Canadian Horticultural Council is guaranteeing the safety and traceability of Ontario's food from a different direction. The council, which represents 25,000 growers who raise 120 different types of fruits and vegetables, has been tackling on-farm and processing plant safety and traceability since 1999, points out executive vice-president Anne Fowlie.

Today, it runs eight different such programs under the banner, On-Farm Food Safety. Each is directed toward a specific fruit or vegetable type — potatoes, bulb and root vegetables, asparagus, sweet corn and legumes, small fruit, tree and vine fruit, greenhouse production, fruiting vegetables such as peppers and cucumbers, and leafy vegetables and cruciferae such as broccoli and cabbage.

The programs offer not only templates for farmers and processors to follow to ensure safety but also third-party audits that lead to certification, independent proof that buyers and consumers can count on where food safety is concerned.

"It is an ongoing process," Ms. Fowlie says. "We already have high standards for food safety but there will always be ways to make them a bit better, a bit more cost-effective, a bit more precise." And the uptake among both farmers and processors is rewarding, she adds.

"Companies such as McCain's were among the first to join the program to ensure and track the safety of its potatoes," she says. "As an added benefit, the certification program provides great support for our farmers and processors in an increasingly global market for Canadian foods." One of the challenges is in finding new, safe, cost-effective ways to provide traceability — to be able to easily track the path foods taken from fishery or farm gate to grocers' shelves, Dr. Boecker says. Molecular tags do have this potential. They can be inserted into foods by processors and then tracked at any stage of their journey to the consumer.

For his proposed work with sturgeons, both industry and government look for complete traceability to battle poaching of high-value fish; criminals, he points out, have limited concern for conservation, quality or safety.

"The Ontario commercial fisheries point out that by 2010, the European Union will mandate that all imports of fish must come from safe, sustainable operations," he says. "They want to ensure that Lake Huron sturgeon remain sustainable and among the safest high-value fish in the world."

For more information, visit www.growourfarms.ca

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