The play’s the thing... in Cleveland

Though there are no dramatic arts classes available at Cleveland State University this summer, there will be no lack of theater experiences. Though it’s been a couple of years since I visited the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Canada, the opportunity presented itself this summer, and I jumped at the chance. Seven plays in five days is the plan!

In the Spring of 1954, Marianist Brother (now Father) William Berringer, took our freshman English class at Cathedral Latin School to see the Cleveland Play House’s production of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night. The antics of Sir Toby Belch had me in stiches. That’s the day I fell in love with the theater.

At the Stratford Festival, I’ll relive that experience when I see renowned actor Brian Dennehy as Sir Toby. The picture at the right hints that the play will be as much fun as it was nearly 60 years ago!

Also on the bill for those five days will be Moliere’s The Misanthrope: an edgy Canadian comedy, Hosanna; Shakespeare’s Richard III; Lerner and Lowe’s Camelot; and Harold Pinter’s “masterpiece of family warfare,” The Homecoming.

(Continued on page 2)

Women in early Christianity

With no theater or drama classes available locally this summer, I stumbled upon the schedule of classes in Religious Studies at Cleveland State University. One course in particular attracted my attention: Women in Early Christianity. Though a six-week course that meets every day for two hours, the course description and the reading list intrigued me, so I enrolled.

This course examines the attitudes toward, and roles of, women in the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds; in the teaching of Jesus; in Paul; and in early Christianity through the second century.

Teresa Swan-Tuite, a young instructor on loan from Oberlin College, has an engaging teaching style and takes pains to satisfy students’ questions, many of which are admittedly often off point, but which she honors nonetheless.

In addition to about a dozen scholarly journal articles, her reading list includes:

- Bruce Chilton, Mary Magdalene
- Elaine Pagels, Adam, Eve, and the Serpent
- Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her
- Karen Jo Torjesen, When Women Were Priests

The course began with discussing the PBS TV series From Jesus to Christ, which provided the foundation to understanding the history and culture of the early Christian centuries.

Though I won’t be able to attend all the classes (another perk of age!), it nonetheless promises to be an interesting summer!
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(Continued from p.1)

In the last couple years, I have been intrigued by single actor performances, so the final day at the Festival, I will see the Stratford’s production of Shakespeare’s Will, starring Seana McKenna. “On the eve of William Shakespeare’s funeral, his widow, Anne Hathaway, recalls her life with – and without – the enigmatic poet. As she prepares to read her husband’s will, she reveals the enthralling story of a wife and mother who has made tremendous sacrifices for love, and who still grieves over an event of the more distant past.”

Winding up several Broadway Series productions at the Palace in Playhouse Square this summer will be the winner of three 2009 Tony Awards and the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, Next to Normal.

Also this summer, as a subscriber to the Porthouse Theater, a Kent State University undertaking on the grounds of the Blossom Music Center, three great shows will be presented: Chicago, The Sunshine Boys, and Hello Dolly.

From The Wall Street Journal, May 4, 2011:

After New York’s Lincoln Center, Playhouse Square is the second-largest performing arts center in the country by audience capacity. Home to 10 performance spaces with a total of more than 9,000 seats, it attracts more than a million visitors to its approximately 1,000 performing-arts events annually.

Obviously, in Cleveland, the play IS the thing!