

# Alex Mustakas

When Alex Mustakas walked into a restored 1902 opera house in a small rural Ontario town, the beauty of the place literally made his heart skip a beat. But the longtime director knew architecture alone wasn't going to fill seats in a town better known for farming and Mennonite furniture than theatre.



Mustakas had his work cut out for him in 1991 when he took a position as artistic and managing director of the new Drayton Festival Theatre. He worked sixteen-hour days with only three volunteers and in that first season the company sold 14,500 tickets.

The company prospered under Mustakas' leadership and today Drayton Entertainment puts on shows in five venues across southern Ontario, selling more than 200,000 tickets. It has become the third largest non-profit professional theatre company in Canada after the Stratford and the Shaw festivals.

With summer theatre venues already in Drayton, Grand Bend, Penatanguishene and the Schoolhouse Theatre in St. Jacobs, Drayton Entertainment opened its first year-round theatre in a renovated St. Jacobs winery and cidery. The 400-seat St. Jacobs County Playhouse had its inaugural season in 2005-06.

"I like the concept of regional theatre," Mustakas said once. "I truly believe you do not have to be in Toronto."

Born in Cyprus to Greek parents, Mustakas moved to Canada when he was six-years-old. He discovered his passion for theatre while working on shows at Eastwood Collegiate in Kitchener and later as a student at Wilfrid Laurier University.

After receiving a B.A. in economics from WLU, he worked as a manager of a student employment centre. However, he quit his government job to pursue a career in theatre, traveling across Canada

In 1988 he moved to England to study arts administration at London's City University. Locally, he has been the director of the Waterloo Regional Gilbert and Sullivan Society and Kitchener-Waterloo Musical Productions, before taking the post in Drayton.

During the early days Mustakas did everything from hiring performers, to lighting and directing plays. The Drayton Festival made Canadian history by selling out its 1993 and 1994 seasons. For three years in a row, starting in 1996, the Drayton Festival was awarded the Lieutenant Governor's Award for the Arts. In 1993, Mustakas won the K-W Arts Award for performing arts. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Wilfrid Laurier University in 2004.

Mustakas opened the Schoolhouse Theatre in St. Jacobs in 1997 and three years later Drayton merged with the Huron Country Playhouse in Grand Bend. While many hours are spent on the administrative side, Mustakas has managed to keep his hand in the artistic side of the company - directing more than twenty-five productions and writing a few since the company started sixteen years ago.

His drive to make Drayton Entertainment a success is rooted in his belief that theatre entertains but that it also changes people and transforms communities.

“Theatre plays an integral role in our quality of life. By introducing more people to theatre, we will enable them to expand their minds and develop a better understanding of the ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of people throughout history.”

*Photo courtesy of Drayton Entertainment.*