



Paradise by the River  
a timely well done production

## Description

# Play captures the injustices to Italian-Canadian citizens during WW II

By Byron Toben

September 22, 2022

Vittorio Rossi's revived play, *Paradise by the River*, the third in a Rossi series organized by **Barry F. Lorenzetti's Magjusjen Entertainment**, is a timely well done production.

It was first seen at the rented **Centaur Theatre** in 1998 and then produced by the Centaur in 2010. Now at the beautiful **Leonardo da Vinci Centre's Saputo Theatre** with its 522 seats, it features ten actors playing 20 roles before an imaginative set, all fine-tuned by director **Harry Standjofski**.



The ironically titled *Paradise* is a Canadian government internment camp overlooking the touristic Petawawa river near Petawawa, Ontario. Internment camps are not new in Canada, or the U.S. Some go back to World War I, others to WW II. Citizens of German, Italian, and Ukrainian ancestry were rounded up as “enemy aliens”, possibly saboteurs or spies. Fair enough if such were the case. However, mere association, remarks or personal envy, or takeover of assets played into the accusations.

Mr. Rossi has a way of introducing telling details into the depiction of individuals caught up in forces beyond their control.

Mr. Rossi himself again plays Romano, a respectable businessman so entrapped. **Lisa Palmieri** plays his wife, Helena. **Louis Tucci** has two roles, one as a fascist sympathizer, and **Adam Racine** as another internee.

These four have all appeared in earlier Rossi plays. Among the other six actors were the often in demand **Marcel Jeannin** (five roles, two as RCMP officers), **Sara Scarfo** as Helene, Romano’s pregnant daughter, and **Massimo Cannistraro** (two roles, one as an internee who claims that he was wrongly rounded up as he is not Italian but Sicilian, a line that brought down the house with laughter.)



Watching this production brought to mind Julie Tamiko Manning's 2018 play, [The Tashme Project](#), based on Japanese internees, apologized 40 years later by former prime minister Brian Mulroney and indeed, in 2021, present prime minister Justin Trudeau did likewise to the Italian community, as highlighted in the closing visual at the end of this gripping drama.

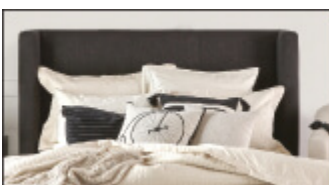
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*Paradise By The River* continues at the Leonardo da Vinci Centre from Tuesday to Sunday **until October 9** at 7 pm, with additional matinees on Sundays at 2 pm.

[magjusjenentertainment.ca](http://magjusjenentertainment.ca)

Images: Nicolas Bondu

**Byron Toben**, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.



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