

Theatre Orangeville is bringing back Norm Foster for three days of staged readings

By Joshua Drakes

Theatre Orangeville is set to launch its 2025-26 season with a rare theatrical experience: The Norm Effect, a three-day series of performances featuring Norm Foster himself, featuring staged readings of his own plays, alongside an accomplished cast of performers.

Audiences will get the unique opportunity to watch Foster's best works in a different way, delivered by the man who wrote them. While the playwright has largely stepped away from performing on stage, The Norm Effect offers a special chance to see him breathe life into his own characters.

Theatre Orangeville Artistic Director Jennifer Stewart said that it will be an honour to have Foster – the most produced playwright in Canada – back in Orangeville, where many of his plays first debuted.

“I’ve been a long-time admirer ever since theater school,” she said. “To hear him read these plays and just to share the plays with the audience in Orangeville, it’s super exciting. It’s going to be a great weekend. I think both new audiences and fans of Norm will love it.”

Three plays will be performed by Foster: *On a First Name Basis* on Sept. 17, starring Foster and Sheila McCarthy; *The Writer* on Sept. 19, starring Foster and Jamie Williams; and *Jonas & Barry in the Home*, starring Foster alongside longtime friend and fellow actor David Nairn and Mairi Babb on Sept. 21.

On a First Name Basis follows an older man and his long-serving housekeeper as an ordinary evening turns unexpectedly intimate. After 26 years of working side by side yet knowing little of one another, the two finally share a drink and open up. What begins as a casual conversation deepens into genuine understanding, culminating in a surprising twist.

The Writer is a father-son drama unfolding over seven years, with each scene marking a new chapter in their evolving relationship. After a painful family split, a father starts over in his own apartment, and his son visits annually to talk through the aftermath. Their conversations circle around the mother, the sister, and the life they’ve lost, but at the heart lies an unspoken family secret the father refuses to reveal.

Jonas & Barry in the Home is a comedy about friendship, aging, and finding purpose in life’s next chapter. Inspired by Norm Foster’s own stay at Orangeville’s Chartwell retirement residence, the play imagines two best friends – Jonas and Barry – navigating the transition into retirement living. As they settle into their new home, they grapple with questions of identity, self-worth, and what it means to step away from the workforce.

Unlike full productions, these presentations will be staged readings – actors at music stands, scripts in hand, drawing audiences into the words themselves. Organizers say the format creates an intimate, immediate connection between performer and audience, allowing the humour, heart, and humanity of Foster’s writing to shine.

Stewart said that the goal was to find a way to perform these plays with Foster taking a leading role.

“The idea behind the stage reading was that, how do we get Norm Foster on stage again? Because he’s 77 now,” she said. “He’s not acting anymore, but he has this wonderful body of work, and some of these plays have never been performed on the stage. I was thinking about how we can do this play without, you know, actually doing the play and putting that pressure on them?”

Stewart added that when the idea was pitched to Foster, he was immediately on board – something of a relief to the theatre, which

had placed its big bet, the opening of the season, on making this collaboration happen.

"Norm really loved it and was fully on board," she said. "I think he was excited not only to be involved in the theater again, but also to have a reason to get back on stage in a safe way for him. He loves Orangeville and he's looking forward to seeing everyone again. So, we were thrilled that he said yes, because if he had said no, this wouldn't be happening."

With three performances scheduled, The Norm Effect promises to be an unforgettable kickoff to Theatre Orangeville's new season.

For audiences, it's not just a chance to see beloved plays - it's an opportunity to experience the wit and heart of Norm Foster through the playwright's own voice, right here on the Orangeville stage.

Tickets are available through the Theatre Orangeville box office at 519-938-7584 and online [?theatreorangeville.ca ?](http://theatreorangeville.ca) with subscription packages on sale now for multiple performances.