

My Fair Lady to open Orangeville Music Theatre's 40th season

By Constance Scrafield

Community theatre in this area is remarkable for both the quality of the productions and the loyalty of the audiences.

In 2018, Orangeville Music Theatre (OMT) is celebrating 40 years. Now a two-part organization, one might say, producing two performances in the same time frame – one performed by adults and a different one by the children, rehearsed at the same time and produce one after the other – pretty impressive.

This year, audiences will be treated to *My Fair Lady*, played by the adults of the group, and *Peter Pan Jr*, performed by the children. Each has its story for the journalist and each provides entertainment for the public.

My Fair Lady opens at the Opera House at 87 Broadway (the Town Hall) tomorrow (Friday) and runs until Jan. 21.

Peter Pan Jr is on for six shows on the weekend of Jan. 26 at Westside Secondary School.

Welcome back to Kat Anderson in the role of Eliza Dolittle in *My Fair Lady*. A total delight on the stage, both a fine singer and a convincing actor, one is always aware that she is very happy to be on the stage. Opposite her, as Professor Higgins, is Desmond Baxter, also a regular with OMT.

He had a chance to really dig into who his character is during rehearsals.

‘He’s self-centred, pompous and he ends up on a journey he doesn’t know he’s on,’ he said. ‘He’s taken on this experiment and she’s teaching him as much as she’s learning. He never felt anything for anyone, but this has brought a transformation.’

For those who do not know the story, it’s a classic. Eliza Dolittle is a poor lady, living in the East End of Edwardian London, who sells flowers out of her basket to the wealthy people coming and going to the opera as they pass on the steps of Covent Garden Theatre.

Her speech is marked by a strong East London (Cockney) accent, replete with harsh vowels and strange use of words. One rainy evening, a gentleman hears her speaking and starts to make notes, to which she objects strongly. Her speech delights him with its crudity and roughness. The gentleman is Professor Henry Higgins, a phoneticist.

At the same time, he meets, as a coincidence, Colonel Pickering, played by Mark Ladouceur, a linguist who recently arrived from India. They discover that they have heard of and been looking to meet each other.

Listening to Eliza, Higgins boasts that he could change her speech so profoundly that she could pass for a lady within six months. He invites Pickering to stay with him at his London home.

The following day, Eliza goes to his home, asking to take speech lessons so that she can get a job in a shop. Pickering, offers to pay for the lessons and challenges Higgins to prove his claim. The two men make a wager over the matter.

There follows a story of more than one transformation and many endearing characters.

‘This is a show that shows a lot of levels and imagination,’ Anderson said. ‘There’s transformation – depth – sass. She goes from selling flowers and ragged edges to being fine tuned. She sees a future for herself and she hopes it’s her way out of her prior life style.’

‘There’s yelling – shouting – laughter,’ she added

The cast members spoke out about the characters and the show: ‘There’s a lot of character in these characters.’

‘It’s got some guts to it.’

‘It shows that relationships are so complicated.’

Sibbelina Mullis plays the role of Mrs. Higgins, the professor’s mother, who in large part, takes Eliza under her wing.

In her second appearance with OMT, she remarked, ‘It’s a wonderful experience to be associated with OMT. I’m amazed on how everyone makes it happen all the time.’

As to what would bring people to see the show, they declared, ‘It’s funny, very funny.’

‘There are a lot of characters in this show – you’ll relate to someone.’

‘It’s relatable – about confidence, relationships between diverse members of the community.’

‘This is not a typical relationship – but there mutual respect at the end – which comes as a surprise.’

It is also a great choice for the 40th Anniversary.

For tickets, go to the Opera House at 87 Broadway or the Information Centre on Buena Vista Drive at Highway 10, or by telephone at 519-942-3423.

For the first time, this time around, there is also a dinner/theatre package with SteakHouse63 – dinner and theatre for one price.

Check out www.orangevillemusictheatre.com for those details.

Lucinda Silva has been directing the youngsters for the past several years, and likewise, this year with Disney *Peter Pan Jr*.

“We have a cast of 43 members, ages 6 to 16,” she said calmly. “I’m so used to those numbers now, it’s good. This is a darker Disney – we’re usually more fluffy. It’s a pretty full story – still a musical.”

Her praise for her young cast was fulsome.

“This cast is so great – actually blown me away with this show,” she said. “It’s getting to the point where I’m nit-picking. They take the advice and come back even better. It’s so great to watch them grow.”

“Some of the little ones, they just didn’t get it,” she added. “Where we started to where we are now is miles. Everyone has taken ownership of the show – it’s awesome.”

Peter Pan Jr is playing over the weekend of Jan. 26 for six performances. For tickets to that production, go to OMT’s website.