

Christmas Comes to Theatre Orangeville with A Christmas Story

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

You may very well have seen the movie, A Christmas Story; you may have come to Theatre Orangeville for the last two times the play of the movie was produced here.

However, Jeremy Lapalme assures us, "You haven't seen this production."

Welcome to Mr. Lapalme for his debut appearance here in Theatre Orangeville, playing the role of Old Man, the father, for the third production of A Christmas Story, opening Nov. 29 and playing until Dec. 23.

A Christmas classic, a family favourite, A Christmas Story is about young Ralphie, who only wants a Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas, a wish that everyone tells him he shouldn't have "because you'll shoot your eye out." Even the department store Santa says so.

Ralphie's family is comprised of his two parents and his younger brother, Randy. As it turned out both the actors for these siblings are actually named Liam: our family favourite, Liam MacDonald is playing the role of Ralphie and new comer to the main stage at Theatre Orangeville, Liam Sourtzis, is in the role of Randy.

Mstr. Sourtzis informed us when asked about his acting so far, "I was in a TV commercial about Cheetos. I remembered my lines perfectly and everybody else messed up theirs."

Liam MacDonald has taken time out of his extraordinary acting schedule to return to his home theatre in Orangeville, having auditioned for and got the part of Ralphie, his sixth production with Theatre Orangeville. These appearances here include A Christmas Carol, Miracle on 34 Street and The Last Christmas Turkey.

During this year, he was with Mirvish, performing in Fun Home from March until May.

During July, he played a role in the new Christmas movie, Christmas With a Prince.

"I'm working on a horror movie now," he told us. "I shoot somebody in it. It's pretty graphic. Surprisingly, everyone's so kind. The director is really nice. Everyone is."

In response to our query, Mr. Lapalme remarked, "I have heard about Theatre Orangeville from friends who have acted here and I'm really excited to be here doing this play. It's nice seeing the main street of town - it's really pretty."

Like most out of town actors, Mr. Lapalme is being billeted here.

Great to see Jamie Williams back in town. Mr. Williams is here to play the parts of Ralphie as an older person whose is reminiscing about his past and, breaking the "fourth wall," as narrator to the action otherwise.

A delight always, to welcome Jane Spence, playing Mother's role and so happy to be doing this show and being back in Orangeville. She said, "This play makes me feel I'm living in a Bing Crosby song."

The charm of this play, according to the actors in it, is "It keys into a nostalgia that removes it from the now and what Christmas means to the kids."

Mr. Lapalme recalled from his own childhood, "We can remember the one gift we wanted - ties into a real yearning to be a kid again."

Said Liam MacDonald, "It's not really common in a Christmas play - a perfect definition - just how fun it is to be Ralphie.

Sometimes, the main character is a bit dull. With this role, I can be creative. I love the humour of it. It's a very funny play in places."

David Nairn, directing the show, added, "In many ways, in the play, there are things on stage that can't be done and done on stage that can't be done in films. This is the film on stage with exceptions. The Narrator doesn't exist in the film, for example."

The movie, A Christmas Story, was first aired 35 years ago and, as Mr. Nairn told us all, "It bombed, like White Christmas. They didn't become hits until they were on television.

"The Narrator makes a difference, sharing his perspective in a different way; he engages the audience directly."

They commented that the play has been brought forward from the late 1904's/early 50's somewhat.

"The time doesn't matter," was Mr. Williams' take on it, "it's a memory play."

Joining in these memories but not present at the time of our meeting with the cast is Debbie Collins, as Miss Shields. Ms Collins is a very familiar face on the main stage here, not only for her roles in a number of plays, like her very convincing portrayal of Spartacus, the Owl, in last year's Last Christmas Turkey, but also for her "tour de force" one woman show, The Judy Garland Show. Of the younger actors, there is Wyatt Ellacott as Flick, coming to us from the fine arts Alton Public School, who also loves tap dancing and snowboarding.

Abby Ayranto, playing the role of Helen, has previously been in seven stage performances, most recently as Mary, in The Secret

Garden. In her own time, she likes to ?draw, sing...and play with her dog.?

Hayden Reynolds is on with the show, playing the role of Scut Farkus.

Sarah and Sophie Warren are sisters with similar ambitions.

Sophie, the elder of the two, doing the role of Schwartz, has been with Theatre Orangeville's Musical Young Company for six productions including last year's Secret Garden. This is her first professional theatre engagement and she is very excited and happy about it.

Sarah Warren, as Esther-Jane, has been impatiently waiting to be old ot begin on the same road as her sister. She too has been with Theatre Orangeville's Musical Young Company for five seasons, naming her role of Toto in the Wizard of Oz as her favourite.

Both of these ladies love yoga, voice lessons, playing musical instruments and swimming with the Orangeville Otters.

Mr. Lapalme reckons, ?This play hearkens in the holiday to bring everyone to the room to memories. Why do people sing carols [they've been singing all their lives]. It's that time of year and this story gets everyone into the mood for it.?

From Mr. Nairn, ?It comes and goes so quickly. Christmas Story is vey secular with no religious overtones and so, it's more inclusive. It's just the way it is.

?It's about family and a kind of coming of age for a young boy, especially with his relationship with his mother. There's that special relationship between mother and son.?

Mr. Williams summed it up: ?It's fairly simple. What's important and bringing you to be so happy. Being that simple.?

A Christmas Story opens November 29 and run to December 23. Tickets as always at the Box at 87 Broadway and the Information Centre on Buena Vista at Hwy10. By telephone on 519-942-3423; online tickets@theatreorangeville.ca.

Check as well to see if there are a few tickets left for this weekend's Victorian Christmas Gala, Theatre Orangeville's largest fund raiser of the year and the best first Christmas party you have experienced. These are not available on line. Just give the theatre a call.