

Classic Agatha Christie play at Caledon Town Hall Players

By Constance Scrafield

A Murder is Announced opens this weekend at the Caledon Town Hall Players (CTHP) in Caledon village.

Based on Agatha Christie's book of the same title, and adapted for the stage by British playwright Leslie Darbon in 1985, originally as a screen play for the BBC, this play holds all the twists and turns for which the wonderful Christie was famous. She wrote the novel in 1950 and it was promoted as her 50th book, receiving recognition and praise in both Britain and the U.S.A.

In brief, the story begins with an ad in the morning paper of an English village, Chipping Cleghorn, that announces a murder will take place at Little Paddocks at 6:15 in the evening of Friday the 13th. This comes as a considerable surprise to the assorted characters who live in the Victorian home Little Paddocks, owned by Letitia Blacklock. She shares this home with five other residents, including the maid, none of whom admit to placing the ad. Naturally, the villagers are all agog to be present as witnesses to what they (presumably) hope is only a joke.

What follows is mystery and confusion for the characters in the play until . . . you will never guess the culprit.

We spoke to Kim Blacklock, director of the play, who told us that she is coming into her 27th year with CTHP. With her husband, they have (typically of the many hats most people involved with community theatre wear) ?built all the sets of every play I've directed. We've built 25 sets in all over the years.?

With a cast of 11 people, one of whom handles two roles, this production, rehearsed since late last year, has seen its fair share of illnesses, time off for the Christmas holidays and ?this wonderful cold that has gone through the cast twice.?

It is not always easy ?to work around people's lives,? she quipped: ?The joys of community theatre.?

Just two years past its 50th anniversary, CTHP is proud of the long-term participants who bring the plays to the stage year after year. Additionally, as Blacklock said, ?We are also blessed with our newbies who have come to us over the last five years. We find it hard sometimes to keep it up ? people don't always understand the idea of volunteering ? some of the young people want to be paid. You can't blame them, really, but it's not possible.?

What keeps people volunteering after 27 years?

?I'm a bookkeeper,? Blacklock remarked. ?It's nice to be creative ? it's nice to have an outlet. All the hard work, the blood, sweat and tears ? but, in the end, it's nice to see the cast on the stage having a good time and the audience having fun.

?For our next production (Always a Bridesmaid), I am back in the play. I'm looking forward to that. I haven't been on stage for five years.?

Of course, CTHP is very fortunate to have its own building in Caledon village, the Old Caledon Township Hall, built in 1865.

?Thank goodness we have our own building,? Blacklock remarked. ?We're lucky to have the Town. They have been supportive since we had the building in '63.?

The expenses of up-keep and maintenance are shared by the Town of Caledon and CTHP, with the Town pitching in for major repairs.

One of the joys of A Murder is Announced is that it is one of the few plays in which Miss Marple, the much loved detective of so many of Christie's novels, appears. In this one, she assists Inspector Craddock and his aide, Sergeant Mellors, to solve the mystery. This guarantees an element of whimsy and humour so specific to Christie's dialogue, which is quite unmatched, in our opinion. This year, for the first time, the group has opted to back off their performances to two weekends, rather than three. This is a financial decision. It is all for the sake of the royalties, payable for each and every performance. If the number of patrons increases per show in order to accommodate the shortened run, they will know that their audiences have understood and are making the point to see the show. All the plays at CTHP are accompanied the first Saturday by dinner at Knox United Church, a short walk from the theatre. This has been a tradition for many years.

A Murder is Announced features Miss Marple, a large cast and the details of the plot are forever interweaving. Praising the CTHP production running this weekend and next, Blacklock commented, ?This is your typical Agatha Christie, plenty of humour, everything is up in the air until the last scene. This is one of her best plays but one of the least done plays.?

As she put it, ?After all the hard work, it's nice to be able to watch the patrons when they leave. It's all for them, after all.?

CTHP's production of A Murder is Announced opens today (Thursday) for an evening performance at 8:15 p.m., running this weekend (Friday and Saturday evenings) and Feb. 26 and 27. Next Saturday will see both a matinee at 2:15 p.m. and evening performance.

Tickets may be purchased at the door, or can be ordered through www.caledontownhallplayers.com or by calling 519-927-5460.