

The Last Christmas Turkey ? Great laughs, song and dance

By Constance Scrafield

You have to love Dan Needles.

A funny man, he mixes fine humour gently with somewhat silly stories and lots of heart. This is the case with this premiere production of his *The Last Christmas Turkey*, the musical, on at Theatre Orangeville until Dec. 23.

The opening scene is a tender song written by Clive VanderBurgh, beautifully performed by the entire cast ? such a lovely start. VanderBurgh wrote all the music for this show, giving us charming and, sometimes, very humorous songs. Musical Director John Hughes is the accompanist on the piano.

The tale is told us as reminiscence by Braden and Nancy as adults, cleaning out their parents' attic.

The story synopsis is a turkey, bound for the Church Christmas dinner, is left on his own in the turkey barn. Young Braden and Nancy, brother and sister, find this turkey and decide to make him their own pet. Braden has been longing for a pet, preferably a dog, which his father absolutely denies him. Dad is in a funk because he has lost his job and is terrified of the future. Luckily, Mom has procured a couple of part time jobs to keep food on the table.

So, no dog.

?Let's name him Tom,? says young Braden as he and his sister trot Tom the Turkey back to the shed behind the house to live with Cleo the cat, Petunia the skunk and Spartacus the brain damaged owl.

Let the fun begin. Once the humans are out of ear shot, the animals begin to talk to each other. A group therapy of sorts ensues, during which the sorry facts of a turkey's life are outlined for poor Tom. Right away, Tom and his new friends begin to plot how to rescue him from the roasting pan.

Meanwhile, the humans learn the story of a missing Christmas dinner turkey from several points of view: the children are suddenly guilt ridden and afraid: the turkey, intended for the Church Christmas dinner, belongs to God! Yet, they don't want their new found pet to be anyone's dinner. He has a name ? he is Tom.

The adults are outraged that anyone would steal such a prize, set to have the honour of being the church dinner. There is chaos and dashing all round. With music and dancing and the laughs, it is just fantastic. Kudos a thousand times to Needles and VanderBurgh for putting this together.

Let me briefly introduce you to the cast.

Jill Agopsowicz is simply marvellous as Cleo the Cat. She is condescending and foreign, making an unforgettable feline debut here at Theatre Orangeville.

Playing Spartacus the Owl and Milly is Debbie Collins, back to the theatre and so much fun, as always, with the big voice and the great talent.

A fresh face young to Theatre Orangeville is Kyla Johannis in the role of Young Nancy, sharing the anguish with her brother, delightful.

Having the time of his life, making films and commercials, back to the theatre for his fifth Christmas show is Liam MacDonald as Young Braden.

Welcome back to Leah Oster as Older Nancy and Mother, singing like an angel for the first time here.

Tom the Turkey is played by Trevor Patt, delicious and having a wonderful time for his debut appearance here and first role as an animal. ?Something different,? he commented in a brief conversation, ?really fun.?

Father and Older Braden, now tired of Christmas, for his debut here, is Justin Stadnyk, striking just the right balance between worry and light in his characters.

Ken James Stewart rounds out the comedy with his rendition of Petunia the Skunk (stand back) and Horace with his dog, Sniffer-dog, on the hunt for turkey.

Add the brilliant set design, the gorgeous lighting, the costume design, particularly the animals, with choreography by Jenee Gowing. It is wonderful. ?Don't miss it ? bring everybody.

Needles calls the play, ?A childhood incident, fondly remembered.? So, based, as they say, on a true story.

Congratulations to David Nairn, director of this production, the man with the vision to fill this theatre with the best and the newest marvels.

For tickets to this adorable show, go to the Box Office at 87 Broadway and the Information Centre on Buena Vista at Highway 10; by telephone at 519-942-3423 and on line at www.theatreorangeville.ca