

The Last Christmas Turkey: ?Humour and heart?

By Constance Scrafield

The Last Christmas Turkey by Dan Needles is ?about an owl,? according Debbie Collins, who plays the role of Spartacus in the Theatre Orangeville play that opens later this month.

Collins is an old friend of Theatre Orangeville, having played most recently in Sexy Laundry, as well as bringing us her own one-woman extravaganza, The Judy Garland Show.

This musical collaboration between Dan Needles and Clive VanderBurgh, who wrote the music and lyrics, opens as a World Premiere Nov. 30 and runs until Dec. 23.

In essence, it is a story about a brother and sister, Braden and Nancy, who, while cleaning up their parents' attic, find themselves wandering through Memory Lane and recalling a particular Christmas. That year, as children wanting a pet, they discovered a turkey on its own in a barn.

With youthful wisdom, they claim the turkey, both to have as their pet and to rescue it from its solitary situation, as they imagine that it was left behind by a mistake on the part of the farmer who was selling his turkeys for Christmas.

Complications set in when the news hits that someone has stolen the turkey meant for the church's Christmas dinner and the children realize the true identity of their new pet. Now comes the struggle of a dozen emotions, always so sharp-edged in our youth.

A familiar face and a newcomer to Theatre Orangeville play the roles of the children. Liam Macdonald, now in his fifth appearance on TO's main stage, is young Braden and Kyla Johanis, making her debut here, is his sister, Nancy, as a child.

?He (the turkey) needs the help of the children not to be Christmas dinner,? Trevor Pratt, who plays the part of Tom the Turkey, observed. ?A wonderful part of this show is its use of the children to show what's important. As children, you use your heart to show the way.?

Macdonald, always there with the mot juste, as it were, commented, ?This is really an amazing, super-original show, super Magic of Christmas. The songs are great. And it's the premiere, so we get to decide how it's going to be played.?

?Christmas shows ? movies ? plays ? it's one of those feel good things ? a family comes to see it and they're always busy. Then, it really opens them up,? he added.

Talking about cleaning out the attic at the beginning of the musical, Ken James Stewart, who has the dual roles of Petunia the Skunk and Horace, remarked, ?Purging can be really therapeutic. It can allow to you to let go of things and make space (in more ways than one).?

Playing the adult role of Braden and coming to Theatre Orangeville for the first time, Justin Stadnyk talked about how Christmas got a bit lost for Braden.

?Work, a family, life ? we move on so quickly ? it all gets in the way of remembering,? he said. ?Cleaning the attic ? there are these little things that really bring back the memories.?

Young Kyla, so happy to be making her first appearance here, was emphatic about the show.

?It's the magic of Christmas in this show, really original ? it's tradition to come to see the Christmas show,? she declared.

Leah Oster, happy to be back since her latest role here in The Ladies' Foursome, is the older Nancy.

?We chose our own ways,? she said about the theme of this Christmas entertainment, ?remembering the past good times and use the moment to really enjoy it.?

?This show is about the significance of family and friendship,? added Jill Agopsowicz, in the role of Cleo, also coming to Theatre Orangeville for her debut performance.

New to theatre in general, and to this theatre is the Relaxed Performance evening. This is open to everyone but, in particular to those people of any age who might have a hard time staying still and quiet, as is generally desirable during performances.

The Relaxed Performance is offered especially and will attract people with children who, because of their special needs, are unable to remain comfortably seated throughout the time of the show.

Likewise, with people of any age, who, for similar reasons may need to leave the theatre and then return, who call out, have some fear of the dark and so on, this is for them to see the show and enjoy it as they are best suited.

In order to facilitate their needs, the doors to the theatre are left open and the lights are not dimmed as much as usual. The theatre wants everyone to come and enjoy this wonderful show and thus, the Relaxed Performance is scheduled for one show only; Dec. 19 at 7 p.m.

Tickets are available at 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

As Macdonald, young Braden, summed it all up: ?Let's enjoy Christmas and love each other.?