

The murder's announced: Find out who did it at Townhall Players

By Bill Rea

Murder isn't always bad: In fact, it can be entertaining, albeit a little confusing, as the Caledon Townhall Players are currently demonstrating.

They are putting on *A Murder is Announced*, an Agatha Christie thriller and mystery, featuring an assortment of characters who seem (and sometimes are) suspicious.

There are 11 characters, meaning 11 possible suspects (any devotee of murder mysteries of course knows better than to eliminate the cops from suspicion), and a lot of the characters are not who they appear to be. The fact is if murder mysteries were simple, they wouldn't be any fun, now would they?

The stage in the theatre is small, but as is always the case with the troupe, that doesn't stand in the way of the story. The set, designed and constructed by Chuck Blacklock, Kim Blacklock (who is also the director), Brian Molleur (producer) and Heidi Kachel, is the sitting room of quaint English Victorian country home, Little Paddocks, complete with all the usual trappings, including a portrait on the wall. It seems an almost cozy setting for a murder. Actually, the set is designed as two rooms that had been converted into one, as is explained as the play progresses.

The scene is set Friday the 13th (naturally) with an announcement in the local newspaper (the Gazette) that a murder will take place that night at 6:30 p.m. at Little Paddocks. No one knows who placed the item, and the action unfolds as the people who live in the house react. The owner Letitia (played by Marg Argall) tries to shrug it off. 'We'll all laugh about it tomorrow,' she says. Her niece Julia (Lia Strazzeri) says it's a joke and Letitia's nephew Patrick (Bryson Landriault) cracks jokes, as he tells his sister at one point that he's 'laced your drink with cyanide.'

Meanwhile the lodger Bunny (Sharon Ching) finds the whole thing upsetting and the servant Mitzi (Sabrina Valteau) hovers between being fearful (that she's the intended victim) and paranoid (that she's a possible suspect). There are drop-ins, like Phillipa (Leah Simeone), Mrs. Swettenham (Andrea Gaynor) and her son Edmund (Mahaffey Khan). And what would an Agatha Christie play be without Miss Marple (Susan McLay), who coincidentally makes her first entrance when one of the characters utters the words 'murder mystery.'

Eventually, there is a murder, as Rudi Scherz gets bumped off, and Inspector Craddock (Mark Ladouceur) and Sergeant Mellors (Steve 'Red' Redford) appear on the scene to try and sort everything out. Some of the best scenes revolve around the byplay between the Inspector and Miss Marple. There are times he's patronizing to her, and other times when he clearly wishes she would just get lost.

And remember what you were told before? a lot of these characters are not what they seem to be.

Good community theatre depends on its veterans, and several of the people involved in this production have many years of service stripes with the troupe. But there's also been room made for new blood. Strazzeri and Landriault are both students at Robert F. Hall Catholic Secondary School in Caledon East.

That's how you keep these things going.

Incidentally, you will have noticed you've not yet been told who the killer is, and you're not going to find out here.

No, you have to go and see the play to find that one out.

A Murder is Announced will be performed tomorrow (Friday) at 8:15 p.m. and Saturday, with a matinee at 2:15 p.m. and an evening performance at 8:15.

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

Check it out.



The cast of A Murder is Announced consists of (standing) Sabrina Valteau, Mark Ladouceur, Steve ?Red? Redford, Andrea Gaynor, Mahaffey Khan, Bryson Landriault, Leah Simeone, (seated) Sharon Ching, Marg Argall, Susan McLay and Lia Stazzeri. Photo by Bill Rea