

Theatre Orangeville's Gift of the Magi is a world premiere

By Constance Scrafield

Take two O. Henry stories, weave them into one solid play and then add the music and songs an audience will go home singing and you have this year's Christmas play, starring a cast of world-class actors and written by Leslie Arden.

It is Theatre Orangeville's world premiere of *The Gift of the Magi*.

During a preview to the production interview with the entire cast, Arden commented, "I earn my living writing musicals and I have to work mainly in the States, because it's really rare to do a new musical in Canada. So, I'm excited about doing this one."

Joining us this year, as is always the case for Theatre Orangeville, are a troupe of first-class performers coming to Orangeville with long lists of credits that include the Stratford and Shaw festivals, Mirvish.com and so many great Canadian theatres.

Mairi Babb, playing the role of Adeline, worked for more than two years touring with *War Horse*. This summer, she appeared in *Hilda's Yard* with David Nairn for Drayton Entertainment, as well as other great roles.

Born in Montreal and raised "all over Ontario," Cyrus Lane has been cast at Stratford Festival, showing his versatility with Shakespearean performances and playing in *Peter Pan*, as well as other theatres.

Glynis Ranney has worked with Arden before in a production of her award winning *The Happy Prince*. She too has performed at the Stratford Festival, along with many other venues.

A man ready to "wear many hats" for *Gift of the Magi*, Cory O'Brien is back to Theatre Orangeville, where he was last in *18 Wheels*. Returning to next year's Stratford Festival for his seventh season, O'Brien has also played in the World Premier of *The Lord of the Rings* and other impressive roles.

As for Mark Uhre, returning to Theatre Orangeville where he did *Nightlight*, to play opposite Babb as the love interest in the play, he has been with the Shaw Festival and working in many other productions.

Orangeville's Lindsay Scheel is back on the stage as May in this year's offering for her third Christmas production, in addition to the many other shows in which she has participated.

In her first Christmas show, Hayla Howat is the youngest member of the cast this year. This is her second production under Theatre Orangeville's umbrella, having played Young Company's *Mary Poppins*.

It was Uhre who remarked, "To do a world premiere with the composer is pretty rare."

"Not only is she working with us on the production, she is also going to accompany the show," Ranney added.

"This is an awesome collection of people which is not always the case," Lane said with real feeling.

When we began to ask about the content of the musical, there was the usual close-to-the-chest attitude about giving anything away, to encourage everyone to come and see the show and discover its many joys that way.

However, Lane admitted, "It's a "great show "helpful in a way "it shows people's potential to change."

They all had a good deal to say about the music.

"People want to hear the tunes they know, but these are beautiful melodies and people will go away with the music in their heads," O'Brien said.

Directing the show is David Nairn, who told us, "The music and the play draw you in. It's an old story but interpreted "it goes in different directions."

The actors talked about how good it is to work with Theatre Orangeville.

"I can remember hearing from actors that I really respect coming to work at Theatre Orangeville and I kept thinking, "What is this Theatre Orangeville they all like so much?" O'Brien said.

"These are world-class actors," Nairn pointed out. "It is very much a company of equals."

Clearly, this new musical, *The Gift of the Magi*, has captured the enthusiasm of the players.

They have worked in the top theatres and festivals in the country, but had only praise for this theatre.

"This is one of the most exciting processes I've ever been involved in "I have ever done," Uhre remarked.

Of course, it is less the venue than the play that matters, as Adams said, "No matter where we are, we tell the story as well as we possibly can."

Withal, their passion for their craft stands out; their determination to give the best they can wherever that craft takes them; these are the elements for superb entertainment, for the best an audience can receive. If they are shy of disclosing the elements in the tale, this is your invitation to come and enjoy the fruits of their dedication to the telling.

As Nairn said, "Lesley and I have often said a number of times how blessed we are to have this theatre where we can bring in the wonderful artists that we do to put on world class performances."

The Gift of the Magi runs until Dec. 20. Tickets, as usual, can be obtained from the box on Broadway and at the Tourist Information Centre, by telephone at 519-942-3423 and online www.theatreorangeville.ca