

Theatre Orangeville's Midsummer Night's Dream just a week away

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Theatre Orangeville's monumental production of A Midsummer Night's Dream is being performed on the Amphitheatre on Island Lake. There will be five performances from next Thursday, August 22, through into Sunday, August 25.

To call this presentation of Shakespeare's 'most endearing comedy,' monumental is to barely express the truth of it. The largest budget since the founding of Theatre Orangeville itself, this production has a cast of 24 actors, a 30-strong choir (the Sweet Adelines) and a set on that stage standing in the water that is quite original and goes well beyond everything ever done for this play.

So, we sat in with the cast of the play, along with Director, Colin Simmons and Assistant Director, Dan Reale, to hear their take on the show, its marvels and their own parts in it. They are a very mixed collection of actors. Professional [members of Equity], first time young actors coming into Young Company; returning members of Young Company; there are members of C.P.O.S. It was David Nairn's vision to make this play an collaborative, fully inclusive cast.

In fact, in a bit of a turn-about, Colin Simmons cast David Nairn as Duke Theseus and he was one of the cast included in the interview with the Citizen.

All the actors, bar four, are each performing a single role, with the four having smaller parts in one of their double duty.. Nothing is simple; everything is fun.

Said Director Simmons, 'On the very last day of the first week, was the worst production but what was remarkable in those first days how we just moved along with the text.'

The text, of course, is Shakespeare's words, his clever, surprising, wonderful words. The interview took that turn 'how to learn to speak Shakespeare.

They told us randomly, 'It's really hard, like learning another language but then, you can and it's really great.'

'I've done a quite a bit ' this is a little more. But I really like it.'

'I studied quite a bit since I was a little kid, since I was eight. I've seen Hamlet four times. So, it's easier for me but there are still some things I have work with.'

Said one young man, 'This is Yoda before Yoda ' a higher class of writing.'

'I thought I knew and I came to it. This is definitely a challenge but very enjoyable.'

'There is the text, Dan and Colin are trusting that if you play the notes on the page [the punctuation] then the greatest story teller brings you home.'

From another, 'It's very different ' it's wonderful.'

There had been workshops before the beginning of rehearsals to help the actors understand the rhythm and flow of Shakespeare.

The comments reflected the benefit of that extra work: 'The workshops before taught us some of the words. I know what that means ' it was helpful. Now, it's really good.'

?At first, it's hard to get into the mode ? it's so much easier if you turn it into your words.?

?There's the learning process ? how the heck am I going to do this ? then it becomes like your own language ? then it's beautiful and a real pleasure.?

?Just reading it was fine, understanding what it meant ? it all came together.?

They brought their challenges of learning how to deliver Shakespearean dialogue to the idea of their audiences enjoying it as much as they do and all the reasons there are to be sure to come to this production.

?Considering it's so archaic but it still makes sense to the wider audience ? these are universal ideas and feelings.?

One of them pointed out: ?With the internet, we have unlimited resources for totally understanding.?

?When I first got the script, I wondered but Colin and Dan have done a great job getting us there.?

?I first started Shakespeare when I was three years old. Shakespeare comes from your heart. The play is all about that. I do have people coming to see the play.?

?This is not my first time. You still have to do a lot of work. The work that we have put into this has been so much fun.?

?Everybody understands love.?

?This production is so much fun. I've had the best time ever rehearsing a play. It's so much fun to do ? it'll be so fun to watch.?

Being on the stage at Island Lake, ?How it's staged, the audience is another character ? there's no fourth wall.. it's right amongst them.?

?This is the biggest production ever.?

?So many people have come together to make it happen.?

?You can't watch this on Netflix!?

?It's so funny ? it's hilarious.?

?It's wonderful ? it was written 500 years ago and it's still being told today.?

?Even the stories being told that are taken from Shakespeare, none of them are being told as well as this..?

??People get scared about not understanding ? don't be afraid ? there are so many elements to this, so much going on, you'll have a wonderful time. There is nothing to fear.?

?It's absolutely brilliant ? there's never going to be another show like this.?

?This is an amazingly diverse cast. I'm not sure if I've ever been in a room with so many talented people.?

?I think even if you don't understand everything, the faeries, the action will keep you involved.?

?Understanding the whole reference is timeless.?

?Shakespeare was writing for a wide spectrum of people.?

And the truth is that ?even 500 years ago, that audience didn't know all the references. It was obscure in its own way. They didn't know it all but they made sense of it and loved it.?

David Nairn is the instigator for the size and complexity of this production of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

We wanted to know why he thought it was important to produce it. In a telephone conversation with the Citizen later in the day, he explained it.

?Well, it's never been done.

?I wanted to create something that was truly inclusive, where anyone and everyone, who wanted to come out [to audition] and do a show and work with professional actors and embrace that chance, and that opportunity, to do it. To create a work that just brings together the hugely divergence talents of our community.?

He wanted it clearly understood: ?It was born completely through this community; the support for the theatre, not just with purchasing tickets but involvement in many other ways and the connection with every aspect of the community.

?I believe that no other theatre in the country could do this because of the support of this community to the theatre.?

How well has the actual production lived up to his vision?

He told us simply, ?It has so exceeded my dreams, hopes, aspirations and imaginings that it leaves me speechless. It's only because of younger, talented, more passionate and more brave people, who could take that on and make it their own. It's so far beyond my energy and I think that's great.?

He added, ?Dan and Colin are so creative, so bright, so adventurous. ? They were given the opportunity ?and they took it and ran with it, brilliantly.?

Further than that, ?the generosity of corporate and private donors, some with money, some with in-kind, it's unique. It's kind of like the (CLD/TOV) building. It was a unique partnership. I don't think there's partnership between a theatre and a social service anywhere else in Canada.

?Whenever people see that and they get it, this community is unique in this country. There's a sensibility in the community that's open to embrace it. To do this on the scale that we're doing, to bring together divergence parts of the community. It's unique.?

Personally, he was happy to admit, ?It's so gratifying to be part of it. I've learned more in the last two weeks about what my craft is as an actor than I have in the last 20 years, working with young creative talent. It's a new experience. There's so much instinct, such great talent.?

This grand, once-only production of A Midsummer Night's Dream is playing on the Amphitheatre on Island Lake, in Island Lake Conservation Area.

This very special and amazing event is running from Thursday, August 22, to Sunday, August 25, with five performances.

For tickets, go to the box office at 87 Broadway or the Information Centre on Buena Vista Drive at Highway 10; by telephone at 519-942-3423; online at www.theatreorangeville.ca.