

TO's ?Miracle on 34th Street? opens next Thursday

By Constance Scrafield

Although there are villains in the story *Miracle on 34th Street*, opening next Thursday (Dec. 1) at Theatre Orangeville, in the main the characters are charming, delightful and what a wonderful cast we have for this production.

Ten people in the cast playing 20 parts; most of them with multiple roles, save the actors playing Kris Kringle, Doris Walker, Fred Griffiths and young Susan. In a pre-show interview with the cast, we discovered a group of individuals having a great time and coming together as a unit, so necessary for successful production.

In brief, for those of you unfamiliar with the plot, the real Kris Kringle happens to be in 1940s New York for the American Thanksgiving and Macy's Santa Claus Parade. On sighting the prospective Santa who, rather being ready for the parade was drunk and a disgrace, Kris Kringle is outraged.

He rushes to report to the dilemma to the event organizer, Doris Walker, and, recognizing an excellent substitute while not accepting his identity, she persuades him to replace the reprobate. Further, she offers him a contract to be Macy's Santa Claus for the whole season, which he likewise accepts.

However, being Santa Claus really, he has a different perspective on how the job should be done, flying in the face of the rampant commercialism that became the hallmark of Christmas during the 20th Century.

Walker is a bitterly divorced mother to a single child, Susan, who is precocious, bright and as cynical as her mother. They do not believe in Santa Claus: ?no point filling a child's mind with fantasies that later will simply be shown to be untrue.?

What is truth? That is the universal question and it is given a run in this wonderful tale.

A big welcome back to several of the cast, beginning with Walter Learning, not surprisingly, portraying the part of Kris Kringle. No doubt, the driest of you will believe by the time he is finished the story.

Starting his career in Orangeville at the age of six, playing Tiny Tim in a production of *Christmas Carol*, Liam MacDonald, now 11 years old, is performing two roles, Mortimer and Tommy. He is a big fan of this show: ?It teaches us a lot about believing in what's not shown.?

So happy to see Mairi Babb back, playing the lead role of Doris Walker, emotionally crippled by her sense of what is real and what is not, dealing with those who would lead her into the world of the unprovable.

Jesse Griffiths, playing the role of Fred, Doris' suitor (did she but understand it), is also returning to Theatre Orangeville. Poor Fred, torn between normal career aspirations and doing the right thing, takes his chance on life with interesting consequences.

Offering up several roles in *Miracle on 34th Street*, Terry Barna is back to us and says, ?I love Christmas in general. This is a great show about it.?

With a long list of characters to account for, welcome back to Debra Hale who did the tour with *Freedom 85!* that began at Theatre Orangeville.

Coming to Theatre Orangeville for the first time is Robert (Bobby) Clarke. He has performed in this play with Learning two other times and there was some joking on his part ? ?I wasn't coming without him!? he declared.

Commenting on the play, Clarke said, ?It's great doing it in a different theatre.?

Young Hanubae Carlos, at Theatre Orangeville for the first time, when asked why we should all come to see the show, said, ?Well, a miracle happens. The girl and her mom meet a man who makes them believe he's Santa Claus.?

Said Director David Nairn, ?This is the first time we've done this ? why do I watch this and *Christmas Carol* every year ? it's tradition and tradition is important to us.?

?Each person gives their own idea of the holiday,? remarked Dov Mickelson, making his debut here as well, ?for those who have never seen it, it's a great story ? teaches a good lesson that's not so complicated.?

Playing most of the villains is Sam Rosenthal, making his inaugural appearance here and ?so thrilled (he) is to be here?. There's no story without one villain or more, so they say. Certainly, they provide many of the pivots to this tale.

We were invited for a quick preview of the set, which is quite fabulous.

?The set is the biggest we've ever done,? Nairn informed us.

As there are no fly tracks (to raise and lower backdrops) in the theatre and there are 18 locations in the play. Beckie Morris, set designer extraordinaire, has naturally risen to the occasion, creating the front of Macy's as it is and other set faces which will appear and retire as needed.

?I didn't want to do a revolving set again ? we've done that a couple of times. This has been an evolution. There are simple sets for the vignettes ? the background is so grand.?

Young Master MacDonald set the final tone for enticement to come and see this beautiful production: 'We have a responsibility to our audiences coming for the first time ? those kids who have never been to the theatre before. It's in the play: 'faith is believing what common sense tells you not to.'

It was the first time we've seen a cast give a standing ovation at an interview...

So, wonders all round; come and see *Miracle on 34th Street*, at Theatre Orangeville, opening Dec. 1 and running until Dec. 23. For tickets and information, visit the box office at the Town Hall, 87 Broadway, or the Tourist Information office at Highway 10 and Buena Vista Drive, phone 519-942-3423 or go online at www.theatreorangeville.ca