

Victorian Christmas Gala celebrates Theatre Orangeville

By Constance Scrafield

Every year, toward the end of November, a couple of hundred nicely dressed people assemble at the Best Western Hotel and Conference Centre to enjoy one of the happiest parties of the season: The Victorian Christmas Gala.

A great many people spent a lot of time preparing for this evening, for it is the premier fund raising event of the year for Theatre Orangeville.

There is a champagne and oyster bar and several servers with trays of hors d'oeuvres to open the festivities, followed in the ball room by a fine dinner with wine, all included in the price of the ticket. There is great entertainment throughout the evening, including Mark DuBois and his Studio Singers. Most importantly, the mighty silent auction is spread along all the hallways and small dining areas. This is one of the cornerstones to the fundraising aspect of the evening.

The accumulated load of treasures for the silent auction is compiled by many months of approaching businesses all around the area for their contributions, and most are happy to make donations to the theatre in return for the many contributions it makes to the community.

Great efforts are made to present this large collection of beautiful items and the myriad of gift certificates for services, treats and dining in an attractive and clear way.

There are boards on which photocopies of each gift certificate is displayed, which are all decorated with explanations and pictures. There are baskets with small collections of goods and boxes of wine lined up on the tables.

There are small and large items of every sort and every price.

Additionally, there are the live auction items, for which Artistic Director David Nairn takes on the role of auctioneer during the course of the dinner.

The items on this list are luxurious accommodation in beautiful holiday spots, trips to the theatre in Toronto and Stratford with Nairn, a day at the spa, wooden platters ? chargers ? made of wood rescued by Jim Lorrinan during the recent renovations to the theatre, a day of riding with a famous author, a dinner at home with a famous playwright, etc.

Complementary to all this is the fabulous aquamarine and diamond ring, crafted and donated by Anne Marie Warburton, who has her Gallery Gemma at the Alton Mill. There are bobbles being sold to win this ring, with volunteers offering them for sale all during the evening. It is on view in a display case to see at the Gala.

So, we wanted to discover exactly why all these people give so much to this event, this annual chance to raise funds to support the work that Theatre Orangeville does.

?The real reason I got involved is because of my kid,? commented Roger Simmons, chair of the Victorian Christmas committee for the last six years, as well as being a member of the theatre's Board of Directors. ?It gave him a new lease on life. Colin found that excitement in theatre arts when it was the most important time of his life. He was in the Young Company and studied singing with Mark (DuBois) until he went to college.?

Colin Simmons is very well known for his participation in many activities with the theatre, especially his work in the Young Company young actors, who are coming along the very path he has travelled.

?I really appreciate the theatre's commitment to the community, especially of the youth,? Simmons said. ?It's mind-boggling how dedicated those people are.?

?It's fun ? the Victorian Christmas committee and the Board, there are people from all walks of life but they are all interested in the arts,? he added, referring to the work of the committee.

?I asked 10 or 12 people last year if they enjoyed themselves at the Gala and they said it was the best party of the year,? he remarked. ?It's a phenomenal event, very low-cost and you can certainly do some Christmas shopping. Bev (Mrs. Simmons) takes 90 to 110 boards (for the silent auction) that she decorates for the certificates, for three to four weeks, three or four hours a day. It's a lot of work. Everyone puts in a lot of time and dedication.?

Anne Marie Warburton echoed these sentiments when asked why she was so willing to donate such a valuable piece of jewellery to the event.

?Theatre Orangeville is one of the most important cultural aspects of this area,? she said. ?It gave so much pleasure to my children when they were younger. It says so much to the community. It gives so much to us ? I want to give back to them.?

There are a few tickets still available to the Gala, which takes place Nov. 23 at the Best Western Hotel on the east side of Orangeville.

For more information or to purchase tickets, contact the theatre at 519-942-3423 or online at theatreorangeville.ca