

Victorian Christmas Gala is back at Theatre Orangeville Nov. 21

By Constance Scrafield

One of the best parties of the season is back again Nov. 21.

Theatre Orangeville's Victorian Christmas Gala is its biggest fundraiser of the year.

With all the entertainment, the great food and the premier schmoozing, this is a not-to-be-missed event.

First, something about the occasion itself. It is held annually the third Saturday of November, at the Best Western Hotel and Conference Centre. The Victorian Christmas Gala begins at 5:30 p.m. with a complimentary champagne and oyster bar, set amid the beautiful silent auction that runs throughout the main halls and areas outside the dining room.

Humber Jazz Trio will supply the ambience and TOYS (the Theatre Orangeville Youth Singers) will begin the entertainment by singing from the curved staircase in the centre of the hotel foyer.

It is a time to chat, to meet and greet, to truly tour the silent auction, have a look at the handmade jewellery by Anne Marie Warburton that can be won by buying a 'bauble,' and the fabulous dining chargers, hand-crafted by Jim Lorriman, which will be part of the Live Auction during dinner.

The silent auction is the accumulation of a great many things, meals, experiences and services by a great many people.

The stalwart members of the regional business community do give large and small items from their pantries, as it were, to many organizations, as well as the theatre, and their purpose is for all to come to the parties and bid with largess. Their generosity is and should be matched by everyone ' through attendance at the event and enjoyment, for this is an evening designed to be a real pleasure.

Central to the festivities is Theatre Orangeville Artistic Director and MC David Nairn, who will get the place lively with his Live Auction.

Those who have never been to a live auction should not miss this one, for hilarity and unusual options. Those who have been to one shouldn't miss it either, for they have never seen one quite like it for originality and best results. It is so much fun. Nairn is mirthful and quite merciless in his pursuit of the best bid for his precious items.

If he is central, then the backbone of the operation, the absolutely essential human element, is the volunteers.

Many volunteers begin as ushers at the theatre. That is a lot of fun, as long-time volunteer Barbara Bailey explained.

'For us (her husband, Ross, also volunteers), it is the social interaction, meeting people,' she said. 'I sometimes usher three or four times. This last show (Jonas and Berry in the Home), after four times, I was still laughing as hard as the first night.'

'This is our fourth Victorian Christmas as volunteers,' she commented. 'It's fun to take part in the event. I love to see the smiles on peoples' faces after the shows and at the Gala.'

Their son is working full-time at Milton Theatre, 'doing whatever,' after completing a bachelor of applied arts at Ryerson and a few years of freelancing, which certainly peaked their interest in the theatre.

Baillie has acted as 'child wrangler' during the extensive rehearsal weeks of the theatre's Christmas show, which usually includes child actors. It is under her watchful eye that they 'not abused in any way, behave themselves, do their homework.'

'They are so great,' she added. 'They really know what they're doing (about balancing the show with school work).'

As for the big fundraising Gala, Baillie is happy to volunteer, not only for the social fun of it, but also for its monetary importance to the theatre, which, as she remarked, 'the theatre affects a great many people ' we've gotta keep it.'

Laura Austin, whose son Danny has been in several of Theatre Orangeville's Young Company productions, is a passionate supporter of the theatre and volunteers any way she can be helpful.

The law requires that a volunteer sits in with Nairn while he is auditioning young people. There have been occasions while watching an audition she has seen the difference the experience makes to a youngster, to his or her confidence and self-esteem and heard Nairn say to her, 'That's why we do this.'

The important changes that theatre make to any young person, so many of whom are struggling with social and/or personal disadvantages, has impressed Austin very deeply.

'Just to be part of all that,' she commented, matters.

'The theatre is like a family,' she added. 'People want to support the theatre ' David calls it your theatre. It's infectious, they way people comment on the shows 'how much they love them.'

'We're very fortunate to have so much talent in this area and the theatre supports all of that.'

Her analogy: 'If the community is like a human body, then this theatre is one of the main organs.'

The Victorian Christmas Gala is Nov. 21 at the Best Western.

The evening is replete with wine and good food throughout and the entertainment will dazzle. Tickets are still available at the theatre box office on Broadway and at the tourist information centre on Buena Vista Drive at Highway 10; by telephone at 519-942-3423 or at www.theatreorangeville.ca