

Follies is 100th time in the director chair for Aurora's Sarah Langford



By Brock Weir

Sally Durant Plummer is not necessarily a woman who lives in the present. A theatrical woman both by nature and career, she and her former cohorts have gathered to wax sentimental about making their mark in a venerable old theatre that is soon fated to meet a wrecking ball.

In many ways, it is the end of a theatrical journey, but for Sarah Langford, who is slated to bring Sally to life this month in Wavestage Theatre's production of 'Follies', it marks a new step in the upward trajectory of the Aurora-based group, as well as a personal milestone.

Adding to the challenge of bringing Sally to life, is Ms. Langford's doing so while seated in the director's chair for the entire production. This is one of the final productions in Wavestage's 20th season and, as fate would have it, the 100th show she has produced for the group she founded.

'It is kind of reflecting on a lifetime's body of work and seeing all these different performers that have come and gone on your stage, where they have ended up and what they are doing,' says Ms. Langford. 'Follies is a reflection of the past and it just fits so perfectly in my life as well.'

This idea of reflection is one that can be applied to just about every character in Follies, but Sally Durant Plummer is a person all her own. According to Ms. Langford, she 'ensnares people' with her nostalgic view of the world, all the while maintaining a fragility that is common in everyone.

'She just gets to play it on the outside and people get to see that,' says Sarah. 'It's almost like a stark warning against the distorting dangers of nostalgia. In a brief, fleeting moment she thinks her dreams come true but they vanish through the cracks of her memories.'

'Although she is delusional in her belief that her husband really looks at her and only her, as if she has never changed, it is a wonderful moment for people to hope and dream that the partner they have chosen will always look at you as if you were forever the princess and the prize. She loves someone so deeply and believes they love her, but she wonders if it is real' and I wonder how many people just have those moments where they just want to believe in something so badly they lose their sense of reality. I think it is more common than not, but it is neat to play both sides of that in one character.'

These character studies through song is key to Ms. Langford's ' and Wavestage's ' attraction to the works of Stephen Sondheim. It is the latest in a long line of Sondheim works the group has tackled over the last two decades and two more ' Into the Woods and Gypsy ' are in store for their 21st season.

Although Ms. Langford says she once believed Rodgers and Hammerstein to be the epitome of musical theatre, Sondheim has since replaced them in her affections due to the 'genius' of his music.

'You can find a little bit of Mozart, a little bit of this and a little bit of that, but here it is Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Rodgers and Hammerstein and all these fabulous composers, and you can feel the history of a great composition and it is a gift to sing,' she says. 'There are so many things that are written out there that are bland to the voice and Sondheim just understands human voices so well that with the rises and falls and the harmonies he has chosen.'

Some theatrical companies shy away from tackling the works of Sondheim, she says, due to the complexity of the songs, but with the talent Wavestage has on hand for the upcoming production, there should be no problem. On the flipside, the idea of tackling Sondheim draws out a lot of talent to audition to take on the challenge, a particular bonus for this director.

'I think in life there are not a lot of opportunities to make changes in the world,' says Ms. Langford of the evolution of Wavestage. 'When you do good, maybe you donate to charity, do a drive, or change something that is easily tangible, but theatre changes emotion; it changes the audience for a fleeting moment or maybe for longer. You don't know the tiny little drop you give as a performer can become an epic tidal wave in somebody else's life.'

'Being in this chair in the 100th production for the 20th season, it has been a gift to be able to make a little wave in somebody else's life, and just make a difference from a performer's side or the audience's perspective.'

Follies runs at Newmarket Theatre from January 30 - February 1. For more information, visit wavestagetheatre.com.

'I really think in York Region there won't be anything like this for quite a while and it would be a shame to miss this,' she concludes. 'It is the middle of winter, nothing else is going on. Take the opportunity to get out of the snow and slime and come into a beautifully changing, epic night.'