

Kitchen Witches is welcome homecoming for local theatre, local actor

Denise Kennedy still remembers sitting expectantly in her seat in a Los Angeles auditorium to see Sandy Duncan take flight in Peter Pan.

It left a lasting impression on the girl, who had a love of theatre immediately sparked inside her.

Although musicals were her first love, the singing chops, by her own admission, did not love her back, so the King resident focused on comedies and dramas.

‘It’s like you get to go and play in the sandbox,’ says Ms. Kennedy of stepping onto the stage.

Opportunities to do just that, however, have been few and far between since the start of the pandemic, but that is all about to change next week as Theatre Aurora lifts its curtain for the first time since the Winter of 2020 with *The Kitchen Witches*, a comedy written by Caroline Smith.

The Kitchen Witches, described by Theatre Aurora as a ‘comedy with food’, is directed by Kay Valentine and runs at the theatre, located at 150 Henderson Drive, from October 28 through November 6.

Ms. Kennedy plays Dolly, one of the two female leads, who are well-known and rival domestic divas who are brought together for one final challenge.

‘The play is so funny and I get to play at least two different characters,’ she says. ‘I missed my theatre terribly since everything shut down and this is the first audition notice I had seen in a while. So, I went out and auditioned and was fortunate enough to be cast. I love the story. There is a lot of dialogue, a lot of action, there’s cooking and it’s just mayhem sometimes. It is a fun story and it is so well-done.’

Dolly steps into the kitchen with a few secrets under her belt, which slowly bubble to the surface over the course of the play. She’s the slightly over-the-top presence on the stage, a foil for her more conservative and ‘uptight’ rival Isabel.

‘She can sling the hash with the best of them,’ says Kennedy of Dolly, but just what kind of hash is going to be slung? You’ll have to purchase a ticket to find out.

Ms. Kennedy, who works in Bolton, grew up in California with a mother who would fundraise for her sorority by volunteering as theatre ushers with her fellow ‘sisters’ at many prominent productions. If the show she was working was family friendly, Denise would often come along.

‘It instilled in me the love of theatre,’ she says, noting drama was something she pursued in high school, picking theatre arts, perhaps understandably, over her other option: auto shop.

‘I auditioned for *Annie Get Your Gun* and you had to sing for your audition, which was pretty pathetic as I was scared to death,’ she says. ‘I don’t know how many plays I did in high school, but when I moved to Canada, I would take my boys downtown to see different shows at Mirvish and I have been following my bliss, which is exactly what this is.’

‘Getting back into the theatre was like going home because it is so familiar. The last time I was on stage was in February of 2020 in *Steel Magnolias* (in Newmarket) and I couldn’t wait to get back at it. It takes a lot out of you. I work full time, go home, memorize lines, and go back to the theatre, and it can be tiring in a lot of ways, but you miss the people because it is a family and very much like going home to play in the sandbox. I think everyone has had a good rest and they have had time to cool down. Now it is time to get back into the game and perform.’

Looking ahead to opening night, Ms. Kennedy says she hopes the audience ? which must be double-vaccinated in order to attend ? leave the theatre with entertained and ?with a smile if nothing else.?

?If I go into the theatre and forget work and everything else that is going on, being entertained and forgetting where I am for a couple of hours, my ticket is worth its weight ? and without our audience we wouldn't have the arts!?

For further information on The Kitchen Witches, including the purchasing of tickets and COVID protocols, visit theatreaurora.com or call 905-727-3669.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter