

Mother-daughter duo tackle 'A Little Princess' in time for Mother's Day



By Brock Weir

The story of Sara Crewe being separated from and searching for her father, has enthralled generations of readers since it was first published in 1905.

Movies have been made, plays have been written, but next week Aurora's Wavestage Theatrical Productions is putting a fresh spin on the musical it inspired.

And, working behind the scenes helping to make this father-daughter story a reality is the mother-daughter team of Pam Watson and Sam Cunningham.

'It's a lovely story,' says Pam. 'The music is fantastic and very different.'

Adds Sam: 'It wasn't what I had expected. I hadn't heard of the movie and thought it was just another 'princess' show, which is cool, but I was listening to the music and it was not like any other musical theatre experience. There are African drumbeats, the coming together of two cultures of musical theatre, and it is not like what you would expect.'

Wavestage's production of 'A Little Princess' runs from May 8 - 11 at Newmarket Theatre. Coinciding with Mother's Day Weekend, director and producer Sarah Langford, has made it a veritable Mother's Day event. For ticket holders, tea will be served by the cast - in Victorian costume - during the intermission for weekend matinees on May 10 and May 11.

'It is a fantastic family show,' says Pam. 'The whole story is about family and the surrounding community, and all the people who love this little girl. It is not just her father, it is her village, her group, and the girls at her boarding school. It is a fantastic way to spend Mother's Day to be together and see something that is family-rated, family-oriented, and a feel-good story.'

Over the course of their nearly 10-years with Wavestage, the opportunities provided through the program have provided plenty of chances for Pam and her two children to be together not just as a family, but also within the tight-knit family that comes with the theatrical company.

Sam was in Grade 4 and her brother in Grade 6 when they first became involved after meeting Sarah through their school. They loved it and learned a lot, and eventually Pam was drawn into the theatrical world as well. Well, 'coerced', is the word she used.

Pam hitting the boards was a move which 'shocked' those close to her as although she had been involved in church choirs, she was always more comfortable in the back row, reluctant to do anything close to becoming the centre of attention.

Taking to the stage also helped Sam, now a Grade 12 student at Aurora High School, overcome some shyness as well.

“It gives you a whole new perspective in meeting new people,” says Sam. “I used to be very shy when I was a lot younger and it helps in overcoming that being on stage. You can really do anything. It is such a life lesson. Oral presentations in school? I’ve got this!

“Growing up, it gave me a really good foundation to build yourself off of because everyone is so supportive, they are very, very caring and they are just such nice people all the time. There are always new people coming, people going, and you can always get new perspective on things. It builds your people skills and I couldn’t think of a better way to grow as a person than growing up in the theatre company.”

It is a growth which Pam watched with interest as her children developed, found their feet and their passion in life. This year, however, as exams approach and she turns her sights on St. Mary's University in Halifax to study environmental sciences, she planned to sit the season out. But, she couldn't stay away for long, eventually begging for opportunities to help be a part of the crew for their last production, *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Her decision to get back into the thick of it was a welcome one for Pam.

“I am thrilled and honoured to be able to work with my daughter,” she says. “She has got a heck of a voice and a great sense of artistry. [When we started] she'd be at one end of the room doing her thing and I would be at the other end of the room doing mine, but we were still in the same place together with a common goal and it was just wonderful to be able to do that. I don't know if I would have lasted this long if we weren't able to do it together, but I want to continue after she goes to University.”

For more on next week's production, including tickets, visit wavestagetheatre.com/a-little-princess.