

Rediscover the joys of live theatre as Theatre Aurora's 2023-2024 season takes shape

As Theatre Aurora's 2023-2024 season prepares to get underway this fall, it's a prime time to rediscover the joys of live theatre.

This is the view of Theatre Aurora Artistic Director Judy Cragg as she introduces the four productions planned for this season that tap into many elements of the human experience.

The season, as highlighted in last week's edition of *The Auroran*, begins this November with *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical*, a perennial Canadian favourite, followed in January by the theatrical adaptation of Agatha Christie's classic mystery, *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Leap in a ghostly direction when Noel Coward's slightly-spooky comedy opens on *Leap Day*, February 29, running through March 9, 2024.

One of the themes this season is human relationships and connections in their various forms, explains Cragg. It's about the different types as family bonds; certainly, the type of family Anne Shirley forms with Matthew and Marilla (in *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical*) is one kind of family and then there are marital relationships to look at in *Blithe Spirit*.

In *Blithe Spirit*, Madame Arcati, who fancies herself a psychic medium, hosts a séance on behalf of Charles and his wife, Ruth. Evidently her powers are more potent than she realized because, before anybody realizes it, Charles' long-dead first wife, Elvira, appears from the ether, causing comic complications for all concerned.

It is Noel Coward, so it is a very sophisticated comedy, says Cragg, who is directing this particular production. It's not slapstick, very quick-moving, and blending that with the supernatural is a challenge. People in the audience know she is a ghost, but I want it to come across that way so they can believe it, and it doesn't look silly or super-fake. It has wit and a historical context in that it is a classic English comedy, which is a genre of its own. I want to make sure I respect that and Noel Coward's work.

Family drama, although considerably less comedic, will be on stage from April 18 through April 27, when Theatre Aurora mounts Ernest Thompson's more modern classic, *On Golden Pond*.

Perhaps best known to today's audience thanks to the 1980 film starring Katharine Hepburn, Henry Fonda, and Jane Fonda, Cragg describes the characters as a very long-standing family relationship, not necessarily all good.

The setting, being at a cottage, is a very Ontario kind of thing and we have purposely put this as our last show, just before the cottage season starts, she says. The themes are universal themes of family, aging, and love it doesn't all come out the right way all the time, though! I think probably out of all of these shows that it is the most relatable for people. We have all had people in our families that we have had difficulties with, or we have been estranged from. We don't know how to get back to them but we want to, so all of those things that are worked through. But of course, with some humour in there, too. I think it is going to resonate with people from all walks of life and spark some discussion and it is hopefully a more profound theatre experience.

We really want people to rediscover the joys of live theatre. There is nothing like it, especially in a theatre like ours and the size that it is. You can really experience things in a smaller theatre and I love ours it's a beautiful size and you can see everything, you can hear everything, you can experience everything so close up to the actors. I want that joy.

We're trying to also get people back into the theatre of all ages. Everybody in community theatre knows that our audiences anyway tend to skew a little bit towards people who are perhaps retired but we are trying to get younger people in, trying to get kids in. Last year we managed to get quite a few younger people in shows and behind the scenes getting involved, and they are coming back this year, which is wonderful.

For more information on Theatre Aurora's upcoming season, including ticket information, visit theatreaurora.com or call 905-727-3669.

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