

Temple of Fame will once again harness the power of local women ? 100 years on



By Brock Weir

A century ago, Aurora women were looking to their heroines.

It was a dark time in our history. World War One was still raging, thousands of Canadians had died, and suffrage was still something being fought for.

But where there is darkness, there is also light. By breathing life to their heroines ? women who led empires, changed the world through the written word, or exercised everyday heroism in the raising of their children at home ? they too were determined to shine a light onto the world around them.

The result was The Temple of Fame, a stage play featuring monologues from women throughout history, all vying for a place in a pantheon of goddesses. Showcasing the acting prowess of many of Aurora's leading society lights, it was first mounted in 1900 and, with a few minor tweaks, mounted in 1918 for the Red Cross Auxiliary.

100 years later, thanks to a grant for the Federal Government, the play is being dusted off, modernized, and getting ready to be staged once again by the Aurora Museum & Archives.

Spearheaded by curator Shawna White and rewritten by Aurora-based actress Corrie Clark (Little Women, The Twilight Zone), it is ready to roll just in time for Mother's Day 2018 ? but, in order to make it happen, they are looking for the acting talents from today's leading lights, women and men.

Open auditions will be held at the Aurora Cultural Centre's Brevik Hall on Saturday, January 14, and the following Wednesday, January 17, open to all who are interested in lending a hand, whether it is taking on a stage roll, building a set, or even spreading the word.

The curtain will rise at Trinity Anglican Church on Mother's Day Weekend, just a stone's throw from where it was originally mounted at Mechanic's Hall. Performances will take place on the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday and include special associated events with community partners, ranging from a Mother's Day Tea co-hosted by the Aurora Historical Society to a Women In Business Excellence reception co-hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

?In 2015, we were gifted the original scripts and a lot of materials [from historian John McIntyre] whose grandmother actually organized it in 1918, and we thought with 2018 being the 100th anniversary, let's remount it!? says Ms. White.

The original script for The Temple of Fame sees women, through a series of monologues, plead their respective cases to the Goddess on why they should be ?crowned? with fame and elevated to the temple.

?Because it had been updated from 1900 to 1918, we felt we had the creative license to be able to update it again,? says Ms. White.

?Corrie was brought on board to update the script and we all thought it would probably be better for a modern audience to turn it into an actual play rather than a bunch of little speeches.?

Some ?new? women have been added in, some of the previously featured women have been removed for issues that would today be best described as ?problematic?, all with a modern eye.

?The play itself was put on by women back then as a showcase of the achievements of women,? says Ms. Clark. ?It was a novel thing, but we're still struggling with the same issues. There are those issues that anyone who is courageous enough, whether it is for

the abolition of slavery, involved in politics, or even inventors, they suffered greatly for it. I think women still suffer with having a sort of ego, and a voice too. If this play were a bunch of guys trying to get into the temple of fame, it would be like a big chariot match or a drag down fight. This is actually kind of a sporting event for women to be famous.?

In the larger context, 2018 will also mark 100 years since the Women's Movement hit its zenith in Canada. For Ms. White, the question on her mind is how much has actually changed in that intervening century.

?We tend to get a little complacent, although it is building up again, that in the 80s, 90s, and 2000s, the Women's Movement was seen as something that happened in the 60s or earlier, 'feminism' was a dirty word,? says Ms. White. ?[It is important] to see this wasn't just about women's rights, it's about equality for everyone. Whether you're male, female, trans, everyone should be treated fairly and equitably. This is focusing on women and that the struggle continues. There is a responsibility on every single person to do their part and everyone has a role in ensuring this is not left for other people.?

For more information on the upcoming auditions for The Temple of Fame, contact Shawna White at swhite@aurora.ca.