

Theatre Aurora explores human connections in season of favourites

Canada's most prominent literary heroine and Agatha Christie's most prominent sleuth might not have much in common, but the stories surrounding them tell important tales of human experiences, interactions and relationships.

These relationships will be explored in detail this fall as Theatre Aurora (TA) launches its 2023-2024 season.

TA's latest season launches November 16 with *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical*, a popular spin on the classic Lucy Maud Montgomery tale of orphan Anne Shirley who finds family and stability on Prince Edward Island.

This classic slice of Canadiana will be followed in February by Ken Ludwig's adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express*, one of Christie's most enduring works.

A month after the mystery is solved on stage, things get just a little bit spookier ? and funnier ? when Noel Coward's perennial favourite, *Blithe Spirit*, takes over the Henderson Drive stage, before the season wraps in April with Ernest Thompson's play, *On Golden Pond*.

?We just finished auditions for *Anne of Green Gables* and I think we have an amazing cast,? says Judi Cragg, TA's Artistic Director. ?When we were looking for shows to do [for this season] we wanted to begin with our musical, which is kind of a lynchpin for the other shows. It's a story I have personally always loved and I find it very moving and heartwarming.

?All of our shows this season are about the human connection, relationships and how we deal with people. Anne is a kid who has not had a good beginning to life and people have not treated her well. She comes into this community where, at first, she is kind of an outcast and with her indomitable spirit, people love her and she becomes an important part of that community ? and, with Matthew and Marilla, she finds a family which she hasn't had before and, of course, the love of Gilbert, eventually.?

With music Cragg describes as ?absolutely lovely,? she says it is exciting for Theatre Aurora to ?bring kids into the theatre both in the cast and with many in the audience as well.?

Building on the informal theme of human connections, *Murder on the Orient Express*, directed by Theatre Aurora president Neill Kernohan, is ?about how people who supposedly didn't know each other begin to deal with each other in stressful situations.?

?We wanted a mystery,? she says. ?People always enjoy seeing them and even something like Agatha Christie, which many people already know the story, it is interesting to see. Poirot is wonderful and Neill and I had a lot of discussion about a lot of different plays, and this one with all the interesting characters and the wonderful setting of a train just appeals to us. As soon as we announced the season, when we mentioned *Murder on the Orient Express*, people were excited ? I don't think you can go wrong with Agatha Christie!?

Unlike last year's season theme of ?The Mighty Heroine,? this year's overarching banner of the human experience is a bit loose and deliberately so ? the aim of the 2023-2024 season was to ?help bring audiences back to the theatre.?

?Certainly since COVID, it has been very tough to get people back,? she says. ?Last year in our last two or three shows, people were really coming back which was wonderful to see and we want to make sure we continue that. We were looking for shows that would bring audiences back, perhaps things that were familiar to people, but not necessarily those that have been done over and over again, and maintain the quality of productions that Theatre Aurora is known for.

?Whether it is comedy, tragedy or a musical, it is there to hold up a mirror to us. We see, as human beings, how we behave and deal with things.?

NEXT WEEK ? The human comedy and the human drama help close out the 2023-2024 season with Blithe Spirit and On Golden Pond. For more information on the upcoming season, including dates and ticket information, visit theatreaurora.com.

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