

Theatre Aurora presents a 'Grand' season of firsts for 2025-26

Despite entertaining Aurora residents for more than 60 years, Theatre Aurora has managed to conjure up some firsts and fresh offerings as they prepare to mount their 2025-2026 season.

The season ahead, which begins September 19, combines a musical revue, some time-honoured classics, and one production five years in the making – all building off the 2024-2025 season which saw record numbers flock to the Henderson Drive theatre since the global pandemic shuttered its doors.

'It's a multifaceted kind of bringing people in,' says Theatre Aurora Artistic Director Judi Cragg. 'We want new people on our stage, we love the people who come back, but we want new people as well – and I would say in the last two years, we've brought a lot of new people to the theatre. It was a great season, we really enjoyed it, and we're really looking forward to the next season as well.'

As Cragg and Theatre Aurora President Neill Kernohan began laying the groundwork for the 2025-2026 season, they wanted to make sure there was something for everyone, including younger audiences and younger performers alike, who so embraced last year's production of *The Music Man*, and *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical*, a highlight of the previous season.

'I think it's important to always remember we are a community theatre and in order to be a vital theatre and keep going, we want to do well,' says Cragg. 'We want audiences to come in and we want them to enjoy what we're putting on, but we also need to really remember our cast and crew and all of the people who go into putting on our shows – we want it to be great for them as well. In addition to the children, we have quite a number of actors who are in their 60s and 70s, and at least one in her 80s who are wonderful performers, and when we're thinking while we're choosing shows we're looking at all of these people. We want them to be happy – it's an avocation for everyone.'

The season begins in earnest on September 19 not with a play, and not with what Theatre Aurora audiences might expect from a traditional musical, but a musical revue celebrating the works of Rodgers & Hammerstein.

Rodgers & Hammerstein's *A Grand Night for Singing*, which runs on select dates and times through September 27, looks at the dynamic Broadway duo's works, great and small, and features selections from such shows as *The King & I*, *South Pacific*, *Me & Juliet*, and *Allegro* – among others.

It signals an earlier-than-usual start to the Theatre Aurora season.

'We wanted something that would be fun, but with a smaller cast and easier to produce – not a full-scale musical,' says Cragg.

Kernohan adds that Rodgers & Hammerstein were, 'the Lin-Manuel Miranda of their time,' referring to the accomplished creator of such musicals as *Hamilton* and *In the Heights*.

'Their shows were innovative, new and exciting, and people just clamored to see every new show they did,' he says. 'We don't remember that as much anymore, that's kind of gone away, but the songs are beautiful, they're timeless, but there are twists and turns here and there. Here, the songs are sung in a different way – there's one old song from *The Sound of Music* that doesn't have nuns singing it, but someone else! It does play around a little bit, but it's really accessible, it's uplifting, and I think it's going to showcase our talents.'

Music will also be in the air in their second offering for the season – but in a very different way – as Theatre Aurora presents its first ever Pantomime just in time for the holiday season.

Totally Scrooged! A Christmas Carol Pantomime by Caroline Smith runs November 28 to December 6, brings the Christmas

tradition to life ? fulfilling a long-held desire by Theatre Aurora to stage a family-friendly favourite like this.

?We wanted to get more kids in to the theatre and we love the fact Panto is so interactive,? says Cragg. ?It's just going to be great for the whole family. I used to take my daughter, when she was young, down to the Ross Petty pantomimes in downtown Toronto and it was so much fun for everybody, not just the kids. I remember my daughter, her friend and my friend sitting there and we'd be laughing like crazy at the innuendo-laden lines. The girls who were five would be looking at us like, ?Why are you laughing?' and we'd say, ?Never mind. Never mind.' There's stuff in there for adults, there's stuff for kids, and everybody gets involved in the crazy characters and just-for-fun mayhem ? it's not a classic kind of music, but there's lots of music.?

Totally Scrooged! loosely follows the Charles Dickens classic but is imbued with the music of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, rewritten to fit the story.

Auditions for the Panto are set to begin next week and they hope to bring in some of the kids who trod the boards in Anne of Green Gables and The Music Man, along with some newcomers, into the production.

?We're hoping it is going to be big and people are really going to enjoy it,? says Cragg.

NEXT WEEK: The New Year kicks off with a time-honoured and long-loved comedy that has entertained audiences across three centuries.

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

By Brock Weir