

## Theatre Orangeville promises to bring 'wonder' to stage for the 2025/26 season

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

At Theatre Orangeville's recent Starlight Gala, associate artistic director Jennifer Stewart announced 'the wonder' - the full season of shows coming up for 2025/26. A selection was made between Stewart and artistic director David Nairn with Stewart's theme of presenting 'wonder' to this season's schedule of delightful shows.

The annual 'add-on' show is called 'The Norm Effect,' for which Norm Foster is coming to town to read three of his own plays, with other actors, in three separate performances from Sept. 17 to 21.

A Zoom interview with Stewart, Nairn and Theatre Orangeville's marketing strategist Amanda Doerrie, touched on these great plays.

'On a First Name Basis' features a crotchety but successful novelist, David, and his maid for the last 25 years, Lucy. Both have some news they are keeping from each other. One evening at the end of her shift, it occurs to David that he knows nothing about Lucy while she knows all about him. When he invites Lucy to stay for a drink, the ensuing conversation changes all that.

'The Writer' is a play that was slated to be produced in 2021 at Theatre Orangeville. When the pandemic put that on hold, Nairn and Foster agreed that it was too much for an online production. This is the story of how a playwright's father and travel writer's son cope when the aging father begins to fail.

'Jonas and Barry in the Home' is a play Foster wrote for himself and Nairn, of two very contrasting seniors meeting in a retirement home. Nairn plays Barry, a retired dentist and Foster plays Jonas, a bon-vivant, with the dentist's daughter, Rosie, trying to keep up with them. Foster and Nairn are back together reading this one. Happy days...

A rare treat is this, for professional readings are quite diverse from acting the play out on a stage and a very novel way for audiences to appreciate the plays.

Best of all is having Norm Foster on stage reading his own work.

'The Wonder of it All,' running from Oct. 9 to Oct. 26, by Mark Weatherby was highlighted for us by Jennifer Stewart, directing the play by saying, 'After 25 years of marriage, this couple have lost the joy in their relationship!'

The husband, a gardener, retreats to his garden to see where he got lost. He is reminded the garden needs constant attention in order to thrive. Are there lessons here to heal what is lost with the wife he still loves?

'This is a poignant, funny play with a lot to connect,' Stewart assured us.

This will be a world premiere at Theatre Orangeville.

Returning to Theatre Orangeville, from Nov. 27 to Dec. 21, its growing traditional holiday time Panto. Written by Debbie Collins and David Nairn this year for their take on the story of 'Rapunzel' - a Braid New World. It comes to your theatre with a guarantee of 33 and 1/3 per cent more hi-jinks! Come prepared to laugh, love the songs - boo where demanded, cheer like crazy and have fun.

Please note that all the hair and products used in this production are Canadian, including the shampoo, conditioner and the moose!

In addition, the cast of last year's Panto had so much fun they begged to come back for this Panto too, which was agreed! David Nairn is directing.

Moving into the New Year, 2026, following the seasonal holidays' celebrations, we are back to enjoy the humour of 'Common Ground' by John Spurway, from Feb. 5 to Feb. 22.

After merely four years of marriage, Pam's husband leaves her a note, saying he is leaving her for another woman; devastated, with her pal Lizzy to lean on, Pam is surprised again when she gets a call from Jake, the husband of the woman for whom her husband left her.

Stir all these emotions with laughter as the spice to see just how much humour can come of such a soup. Jennifer Stewart is back directing this comedy about love.

From March 12 to March 29, 2026, 'Murder at Ackerton Manor' by Steven Gallagher promises a despised Lord Ackerton, murdered on a stormy night yet, the rule of law must come first. This Agatha Christie murder mysteries spoof 'with a tinge of Mel Brooks we were told - delivers all the twists with three actors portraying seven 'zany characters,' including the only cool head, Detective Pierre Pierotte.

Stewart blessed it as 'typical cliché fun about new money, old money.'

Who could possibly resist?

Last up for the mainstage productions of this 32nd season at Theatre Orangeville, feel free to wear your best 'bib and tucker' for 'The Wedding Party' by Kristen Thompson, The play is about the wedding we all love to dread of two families with opposing ideas about almost everything. Still, for the sake of the wedding, they try to get along. A riotously funny romp, with a myriad of hilarious characters could see them dancing in the aisles, as the actors play multiple roles, including a dog. Jennifer Stewart is directing this production, which was Dora Nominated for Outstanding New Play in 2017.

As the associate artistic director, coming fully into the role on July 1, Stewart wanted this season to be full of laughter.

'Laughter puts things in perspective,' she said. 'If we can laugh with family and friends.'

Stewart added, 'All of these plays have moments that are very profound 'that's what makes them wonderful. Right now, after the isolation the pandemic put on us, we need to be in a room with other people.'

Directing three of these plays, Stewart is looking forward to being in the rehearsal hall.

As to why should we fill the halls for this new season, beginning in September, Jennifer Stewart was clear, 'They are new, exciting, proudly Canadian with fantastic artists on and off the stage. They'll make you laugh and feel alive and remember: Theatre Orangeville is where everything is special.'

'This season is about laughter, love and heart,' said Jennifer Stewart.