

Creative Partners On Stage Festival returns to Theatre Orangeville next weekend

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Creative Partners on Stage (C.P.O.S.) is a theatre company made up of neurodiverse adult actors and artists, in a partnership between Theatre Orangeville and Community Living Dufferin (CLD).

C.P.O.S.'s initial production within this unique union between Theatre Orangeville and CLD took place in 2003 and proved forever that theatre can be surprisingly redefined by who stands on the stage.

The Creative Partners On Stage Festival is back for its second year from April 11 to 13. Three days featuring two great shows per day make up the scheduling for this wonderful festival. Each day, between the shows, is an extended intermission for the sets to be re-figured for the next performance and allows time for patrons to visit the artisan marketplace in the Orangeville Town Hall Atrium. This is a chance to marvel at the beautiful artwork created by these artists and also to shop for items that are as unique as the people who made them.

Then, back we go upstairs to the theatre for the second show.

Kait Gallant, program coordinator at Theatre Orangeville, spoke to the Citizen about the festival and how excited she is to be involved with it and C.P.O.S.

"We have been super busy," she said. "It felt really good last year when we did the first festival and we felt we wanted to do it again. This is their big show. After it last year, we stopped for a break and C.P.O.S. took the summer off."

Theatre Orangeville still had the Young Company shows to do but there was time to talk about the festival with the creative teams and they were back in September, working with CLD and C.P.O.S.

Now, 23 years after the beginning of C.P.O.S. Kait Gallant said, "There are definitely some familiar faces back this year and some people who have aged into C.P.O.S. from Theatre Orangeville Exceptional Players (T.O.E.P.), which includes young people from grades 7 and up. Being able to see them coming up is really exciting."

Gallant is coming to her fourth year in May at Theatre Orangeville; her third full season. She explained that C.P.O.S. was one of the first things she worked on with Theatre Orangeville, having had experience working with the neurodiverse community before.

Her enthusiasm for her job is compelling. Gallant assured us that even when she has had a stressful day, when she comes into the rehearsal hall, there is a constant state of joy "she is filled with joy being with that group of actors."

She laid it out: "These groups do the work that they do, I see how passionate they are, it's courageous."

The Creative Partners On Stage Festival in partnership with CLD is offering two original shows, written for the festivals and performed by C.P.O.S.

First up is "All You Need is Love," written and directed by Chandra Pepper. Peaceful Piper Reef is disrupted by a sudden surge of competition and "selfishness," which causes "mayhem and discord." When two buddies, Oscar and Marlin go looking for someone to help quell the trouble, they make an amazing discovery about where the answers really are.

"All You Need is Love" is co-choreographed by Chandra Pepper and Kait Gallant.

Following the extended intermission is "Cruise Control," a saga written by Elizabeth Glenday and Kristen Gamache.

A voyage on board a cruise ship takes us through ?love, adventure and sometimes rough waters!?

A laugh-out-loud comedy, we are promised, that will have us joining in with the songs and dancing in our seats.

Cruise Control is directed by Elizabeth Glenday, and the choreography is by Kristen Gamache.

The pre-production for this festival began in August, while rehearsals started at the end of October.

The cast and creative team ?work very hard and they deliver a dynamic show,? Gallant said.

?What was hard about it was definitely all the bad weather this past winter, which meant fitting in what they had to fit in yet, all the joy has been persistent; they never allow those feelings of frustration to halt their process. There stays a positive space in a positive room,? Gallant told us.

?They support each other and the community and ensemble,? was her comment, ?That allows us to push forward. It's so easy when things are busy; when things are stressful, I am quickly reminded how much joy theatre is.?

She keeps coming back to the word joy: it is very inspiring.

C.P.O.S. participants are keen and committed to having the opportunity to do what they love.

Theatre Orangeville supports the program through its professional team to the same calibre as any program on its main stage.

Gallant said they are not shy of pushing the actors to excel, as the actors want that too. Their input is wanted as well.

The shows are open to anyone to come and see them, with the purchase of a ticket.

?It's quite spectacular,? Gallant praised the new shows.

During the extended intermissions, members from their community will be there to display and sell their artwork, to celebrate their art and there is real excitement to showcase these artists in all their work.

For artistic director David Nairn, who initiated the partnership between Theatre Orangeville and CLD and the formation of C.P.O.S. back in 2003, what makes these shows special is how they ?touch my heart more deeply and honestly,? he said. ?You'd have to have a heart of stone not to be moved by them.?

Commenting on some of the cast for C.P.O.S. shows, Nairn said, ?Some of them have been with us for more than 20 years; they have developed considerable talent.?

He noted that audiences ?kind of? don't know what to expect. They come with diminished expectations and encounter a production of laughter, hope and joy. Everyone comes away changed, he is sure, ?entertained, enlightened, enchanted.?

For more details and to purchase tickets, go to www.theatreorangeville.ca or call the charming folk at the Box Office at 519-938-7584. You can also stop by at 87 Broadway.

Tickets are sold separately for each show, ?All you Need is Love? or ?Cruise Control.?

There is one price for both at only \$35.