

?The Neverending Story? comes to Theatre Orangeville this weekend

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

What a thrilling spectacle there will be this weekend, Aug. 22 to 24, at the Orangeville Opera House when Theatre Orangeville's Young Company Drama brings *The Neverending Story* to the David Nairn Stage. They are performing the on-stage version of this tremendous story, with the script by David S. Craig.

Fantastica (Fantasia), the land of stories, is in danger!

In brief, *The Neverending Story* begins when young Bastian happens upon a strange book of the same name and hides in his school's attic to read it. Yet, this is not a simple few hours of leafing through a curious book ? this is an all-in adventure, a quest to save our very valuable imaginations.

It seems the ?Nothing? has come to steal all the stories and bring an end to imagining, to blank out those stories and leave behind sad emptiness where wondrous tales once lifted our spirits.

Somehow, the Childlike Empress chooses young Atreyu as the hero who must make the quest to save Fantastica. Atreyu is the same age as Bastian. How the story intertwines them and introduces the many characters they face and deal with are among the many reasons we should be filling the theatre to see this amazing production.

Lucas, playing the role of Atreyu, commented, ?Atreyu is sent to go on this quest and he has to figure how to and attempt to save Fantastica from the Nothing.?

The production's 11 actors and director Pat Rundell took a 20-minute break to talk about the show with the Citizen late last week. They outlined many interesting things about the stage production. Primarily, there are many changes to the characters from the movie to the stage.

?The surprise is the difference on our stage from the movie,? the cast said variously. Some of the beloved characters are different, but the new characters are endearing and make up for the change, adding that this script has been performed in many other professional theatres.

The character, Falkor, looks more like a dog in the movie, but on stage, he is a Dragon, ?upbeat and comical.?

Bastian, with Kevin in the part, can see Atreyu, but Atreyu never sees Bastian.

The question of how they began to get into the show was answered by Charlotte saying, ?We started by learning how to be absolutely more focused.?

The setting is a magical place, one that invites the audience's own imaginations to travel with the storytellers and the creation of it, along with the many, many characters. There was a sort of role call as they made clear that two actors are supporting five characters each; another three; one with four, and so on, until the quick changes backstage will definitely be in sequence and ready.

Sophie explained that a lot of the set comes from fabric: ?We use our imagination so it looks like a process of fabric.?

At the time of this interview, they were still at the rehearsal hall and commented that there would be ?lots of discoveries? once they were in the theatre this week, but their assurance was that they are very confident of all being well.

?This show is completely different from anything else Young Company has done, never had so many people involved,? she noted,

with the exception being the 2019 open-air production, which included actors from Young Company and Creative Partners on Stage, on the waterfront amphitheatre in the Island Lake Conservation Area.

There are 11 puppets in the story, and one, designed and made by Wendi Speck and her team, that takes all 11 of them to carry it!

When asked who among them looked forward to taking on a life of acting and theatre, several hands went up, grounded as they are in the professional experience the Young Company has given them.

When further asked what brought them to audition and want to be part of this production, once again, they took turns answering, and the room rang with their affection:

Simon expressed his view, "We come into a warm environment of opportunity to grow and develop our skills."

"We become a tight community," Mickey added.

"This story shows the importance of imagination."

"New friendships are made by working together."

"We are learning the importance of persevering on doing what you're trying to achieve."

Time was nearly out, and there was room for one more question: Why should people definitely come to see this remarkable show?

Payne said, "People aren't using their imaginations." and Avery added, "It's magical and scary about bringing an end to the world of imagination."

Sarah is sure, "People will really connect with the characters," with Madeline offering that "they will appreciate the creative skills it took to build the show."

Madeline made the point, "We have worked really hard."

Scarlett wrapped it up by saying, "There is so much emotion."

To catch tickets for one of the four performances of The Neverending Story this weekend, Aug, 22 to 24, you can go to www.theatreorangeville.ca or call the lovely people at the Box Office at 519-942-3423.

A warm welcome at the Box Office invites you to purchase tickets at the Opera House, 87 Broadway.