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Theatre Orangeville presents first play of new season, Tip of the Iceberg

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Could an iceberg be the fountain of youth? Or at least reinvigoration? These are the questions posed by Archie to his pal of 70 years, Gordon, in Theatre Orangeville's first play of its 31st Season ? Tip of the Iceberg. The production opens Oct. 17 and runs to Nov. 3.

The problem is, even if a person lives in a small fishing village in Newfoundland, as do Archie and Gordon, where icebergs are commonly seen as they float by at a safe distance, they still present a danger to ships and boats that risk going near them.

Not until Archie decides from his research on the internet, that he can restore his aging body to a younger version does the idea of drifting up close to an Iceberg sound like a good one. Archie's source for this wonder comes from the waters of an iceberg.

As luck would have it, there is one available for such a venture well within sight. Friends in all things, Gordon opts to join Archie for the venture and they make their plans.

The whole play basically takes place in their dory, a dear little boat only accustomed to fishing, but now must be a brave conveyance to dare the waves ahead.

For his debut here at Theatre Orangeville, Sweeney MacArthur plays the role of Archie and Stephen Sparks, a great favourite here, returns as Gordon.

Yet, for such a tale of magic as Tip of the Iceberg is, three is best and the story is rounded out by musician and one of the playwrights, Chris Rait. Mr. Rait travels in the dory with the other two, a one-man band, so to speak, a store of musical instruments in his pack, bringing folk songs and sea shanties. Audiences may well sing along!

The Citizen joined a virtual meeting with these three gentlemen and the play's director, David Nairn, who told us early in the conversation, ?The fourth character in the show is the boat.?

The authorship of the play is shared by three, Chris Rait, Mark Williams and Jeannine Bouw.

?The story was Mark's idea,? Mr. Rait told us. ?We met every Thursday for a year and a half and just wrote for a few hours. It was fun.?

First and foremost, perhaps, for Stephen Sparks was to acquire the Newfoundland accent which seems to have gone well. Stephen Sparks has trod the Theatre Orangeville boards many times, including Norman Bray in the Performance of his Life; the Gentleman Clothier and Screwball Comedy. Both he and Sweeney MacArthur have had roles in Murdock Mysteries, to which every Canadian actor aspires, so we have been told.

David Nairn commented there is a large Newfoundland community in Orangeville and said, ?We hope they will come and see the show.?

Of the play's characters, Mr. MacArthur remarked, ?These two are good salt-of-the-earth, hard-working men. They have been best friends all their lives in a village that is a close community.?

?The boat is a full sized dory, an amazing piece of engineering,? Mr. Nairn informed us but the cleverness of it was not revealed.

Patrons will have to see the show to appreciate the workings of the dory, born of the stunning ingenuity of Theatre Orangeville's creative team. While the premise and the play are very funny, it is extremely touching and an amazing story.

?I think the play embraces these two older men who have lived their lives and tell some stories of a life lived,? Mr. Sparks said.

The Citizen learned that the play has a local connection, for Chris Rait comes from Adjala and has family there. He is a singer-songwriter who was the lead singer with the folk-rock group The Treeline. With them, Mr. Rait has performed in festivals not only in Canada but also as far away as the Whare Flats Folk Festival in New Zealand.

During the writing of the play, one influence was that the writers knew each other's stories. The challenge was when COVID-19 kept them from going to each other's homes, they had to meet online.

?I asked my friend, Derek, [Ritschel, formerly artistic director of Lighthouse Festival Theatre] if he would read the play,? Mr. Rait told the Citizen. ?He wanted to do the show but there was reading and editing to do. A lot of the stories are from Newfoundland.?

?It's a first time for an iceberg experience in the theatre,? Mr. Sparks commented. ?Chris has really captured the essential feeling of it.?

As for Mr. MacArthur, he has played in many Canadian theatres and has globe trotted to theatres in the U.K. and on a tour with The Rocky Horror Show in Germany.

Premiering at the Lighthouse Festival Theatre in Port Dover to another production at the Globus Theatre in Bobcaygeon, Chris Rait is excited be bringing Tip of the Iceberg to Theatre Orangeville.

The storytelling is like sitting around the ?kitchen table with mugs.? Why will we fill the theatre to see this show? It is fun and Mr. Sparks promised, ?It is a remedy from the dark days of Covid we're still coming out of. They are thinking about their lives and maybe there's something to add, to re-invigorate.?

For tickets and more information go www.theatreorangeville.ca or call 519-942-3423.

You can also purchase tickets at the Opera House's Box Office (87 Broadway).