

Theatre Orangeville presents second Panto: Sleeping Beauty ? a Fairy's Tale

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

There is such joy in Theatre Orangeville's upcoming Sleeping Beauty ? a Fairy's Tale, the second Panto co-written by artistic director David Nairn and actor/comedienne Debbie Collins. So well known by Theatre Orangeville audiences, Collins plays the role of the fearsome Maleficent.

Opening on Nov. 28, Sleeping Beauty ? a Fairy's Tale runs to Dec. 21.

It was a real pleasure for the Citizen to sit down with the show's cast of six to talk about how much fun they are having rehearsing it. In the first minute of the talk, they were laughing and in such high spirits, with David Nairn, director of the show, telling us, ?I am happy as a lark,? and with comic irony, exclaiming ?this is no fun ? Debbie Collins got it wrong when she said there'd be 30 per cent more shenanigans...? and they all agreed ? ?There will be 45 percent more shenanigans!?

All the elements of Panto are in the show. A mix-up of very bad villains, at whom we must all boo as audience and heroes whom we can cheer and encourage. The beautiful heroine, Bella, played by Annika Tupper, brings much cheer and love as the princess; Bella is budding to become a veterinarian.

Without any real hints as to how the Collins/Nairn duo have bounced the story around, to brief the old tale, Sleeping Beauty, a princess is born to her royal parents, who host a grand celebration of their daughter's christening. They invite the good fairies in the land to come to bless the baby. A bit unwisely perhaps, they neglect to invite the wicked fairy, the terrible Maleficent. She arrives anyway, in a fury at being excluded.

To vent her ire, she curses the child, saying on her 18th birthday, she will prick her finger on a spinning wheel spindle's needle and die! Then she departs, triumphant in the hideous shadow she has foretold.

Yet, one of the fairies still has her gift to give and, while she cannot entirely undo the curse, she can ease the the pain. The baby will unavoidably prick her finger but she shall not die, only fall into a deep sleep of 100 years.

At the end of that time, the old story tells, a handsome prince will revive her and all her kin with a kiss or maybe not! When we asked how this long sleep would also interfere with Bella's ambitions to become a vet, they would not reveal that secret.

?Come to see the show and find out,? was the unanimous return.

By the second week of rehearsal, everything about the show was coming along so well that they deemed themselves as close to ready.

Said David Nairn, ?We're bringing such heart and laughter with this show.?

As these actors have done a number of Pantos, rehearsals can come together when they are spending less time explaining how the genre works and ?more time selling tickets.? Ticket sales are doing very well, with some matinee seats selling out already.

Collins is delighted to see tickets going so well. This ensemble are incredibly talented actors, bringing in all the ?triple threats? of acting, singing and dancing.

Tupper commented that this is her first Panto but, as it appeals to her ?ridiculous nature, this has proven to be such a wonderful experience.?

Through rehearsals, the cast has been able to contribute to the content of the show and Tupper has appreciated another outlet for her talent as a collaborator, as well.

Panto can look quite spontaneous on stage but the action is carefully choreographed (Candice Jennings, choreographer). None of the zaniness is off the cuff.

However, there is interaction with the audience, when the actors actually

come off the stage into the audience and these are moments of improv, one might say, within the actors' ability to read the audience's reaction to the fun.

Welcome back to Ben Skipper who joined the Panto last year as Buttons and claimed he has been itching to be back.

‘There is no more such a fun show to do,’ he declared. ‘We’re creating this on the basis of the script, with physical comedy, voice, interaction ? you never know what you’re going to get.’

People ‘laugh their heads off’ at the antics and in the tradition of Panto, teasing local celebrities, politicians and whoever comes under the prod of their jokes.

A marketing inspiration has seen the show promoted on the sleeves in local coffee house cups.

Since Skipper is staying in town, and getting to know the community a bit, he told us, ‘This community is unparalleled to experience the joy and kindness here.’

Christina Gordon is joining the company for her debut performance at Theatre Orangeville and, Coloratura that she is, promises some wonderful singing ? very exciting.

‘I have a wonderful time doing Panto,’ she remarked. ‘Getting all my tricks on the table.’

‘We are thrice blessed,’ was Nairn’s praise, renaming ‘triple threat.’

Gordon loves this Panto rehearsals, as she put it, ‘I’m really enjoying everything here.’

She is particularly pleased to see the accommodations made for the disabled in the Town Hall building, as she has family members with disabilities.

The role of Sophie is played by Andrew McGillivray, also his debut on this stage and his sixth panto.

His comment was ‘I always play the Dame. The first time, once I figured it out, I loved it ? it was for me, my zaniest self. I just feel at home.’

William Lincoln performed one of the Silly Sisters in last year’s Cinderella ? if the Shoe Fits but a dress is not for him this year, when he will save the day ? perhaps! as the Prince.

Of Panto, Lincoln said nothing puts him more in the holiday spirit, ‘not just to watch but to watch. My favourite is to see how the children react.’

The fabulous costumes and amazing sets will embrace the action, the songs and the story, which Collins and Nairn have tossed and turned as pleased them and will highly entertain us. The creative team at Theatre Orangeville are sparing no effort to make this show memorable in all the best possible ways.

From Tupper, "Families sit together and laugh and enjoy live theatre."

Gordon told us, "This is everybody's journey. We're a cast of six but sometimes, it feels like many more."

Nairn offered, "This is joy, love and kindness. This is the antidote to the woes of the world."

For more information and to hurry to buy tickets, go to www.theatreorangeville.ca or call the festive folk at the box office: 519-942-3423. You can visit them at 87 Broadway in the Opera House.