This page was exported from - Shelburne Free Press
Export date: Fri Oct 30 2:12:12 2026 / +0000 GMT

Theatre Orangeville?s Tip of the Iceberg ? Three men in a boat

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Take two lifelong pals, and we're talking about 70 years ? odd, living in an unnamed fishing village on the Newfoundland coast, spinning tales and memories, enough to make you laugh all the way ? these two are on their way to find the fountain of youth.

It is at the sea surface level of an Iceberg. The third man is the story's one-man band, and he is fun too.

Tip of the Iceberg is Theatre Orangeville's first play of its 2024-25 season, which opened on Oct. 17 and is running until Nov. 3. A different sort of play, it features Sweeney MacArthur, marking his debut here at Theatre Orangeville as Archie, whose idea it is to make the voyage to an Iceberg. Our well-loved Stephen Sparks is his best friend forever, Gordon does not exactly volunteer to sail and row the distance, but he does not resist either.

They depart the shore, rattling off the memories and yarns they share, reminiscing like any old sods might and mixing in the folk poetry and music such an adventure ought to invite.

Chris Rait, as that one-man band, is as well, one of the three playwrights, with himself, Jeannine Duwyn and Mark Williams who, as one might say, strung this story together. Mr. Rait sits to the side of the boat with guitar and bodhrán, providing music and songs throughout the play. Some he sings solo; in others, he performs with the two mariners in unpretentious harmony. The audience is invited to join in when the shanties are familiar. They do too, laughing and clapping.

While the plot of the adventure is its own original tale, the stories Archie and Gordon remind and tell each other are, in large part, remembrances of Newfoundland families the playwrights themselves know. All the quick back and forth, the rapid relating of wit and sagacity passed between the two are quirky and very amusing.

What else to say about the dialogue is the dialogue itself, which seems straight from the Atlantic coast. It seems Stephen Sparks has taken the required elocution lessons and has pretty well caught the tone and feel of Newfoundland speech.

Almost as a character in itself is the remarkable, beautiful lighting design by Chris Malkowski, telling the background story as a pure delight. The wonderful set by Beckie Morris is the Iceberg only, a geometric form, so cleverly put together as to almost hold forth while it changes and blends with the subtlety of the lighting.

During the exchanges, these two adventurers tell us a lot about their lives, the successes Gordon has achieved and the recent near ruin into which Archie is at risk of falling. He has a plan, though for his own rescue; sounds crazy to start with and it includes an offer to his pal.

They tell us about their families and the places and opportunities they have missed and yet long for. They are endearing. Constantly on stage for the whole performance, Messrs MacArthur and Sparks keep us completely engaged and even wish we could visit the village that birthed them.

Directing this watery tale, David Nairn has pulled the story together to a natural flow keeping the audience happily listening to the dialogue which maintains the distinctive flavour of the Newfoundland accent without getting carried away, as is sometimes the case in real life.

Archie and Gordon are simply loveable and the musical element is charming: adding Stephen Sparks on harmonica, with the MacArthur spoons dancing.

Chris Rait, music director of the show, also here for the first time, has had success with two other productions with this play. As a

singer/songwriter, he has shared the stage with such luminaries as Burton Cummings and Ron Sexsmith. The Big Book of Irish Songs came into his life as a teenager, and brought a passion for ?catchy melodies and the power of rhythmic lyrics.?

Sweeney MacArthur has had a long career in Canadian theatre as well as performing in several famous theatres in the UK. In Germany, he toured with the Rocky Horror Show. Was it he who brought Stephen Sparks to the whimsy of Newfoundland speech?

In all, the real questions are what happened after a drift, really, to the Iceberg with all its mystery and risks? Could a person die there or learn the meaning of life?

Tip of the Iceberg, ?a folk play,? Mr. Rait calls it, is a terrific beginning to this new season. On now and running to Nov. 3.

For more information and tickets, go to www.theatreorangeville.ca or call the Box Office at 519-942-3423.

You can drop into the Box Office at 87 Broadway, Orangeville for tickets as well.

While there, you might also like to make a tap with TipTap Pay technology to tap a donation of any size to the ?I Love My Theatre Orangeville? fundraising campaign.