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Theatre Orangeville?s Young Company prepares for latest play, ?The Neverending Story?

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

?The NeverEnding Story? is about the end of stories, of wondrous fictional characters and places ? the end of people's imagining them. Theatre Orangeville's Young Company Drama has chosen to tell this story on the weekend of Aug. 22 to 24, with four performances on the David Nairn Stage at the Orangeville Opera House.

The NeverEnding Story is a considerable challenge ?fully embraced? by this year's 12 Young Company members, each playing many characters and making us all want to remember the thrill of imagination and the Land of Fantasia.

Pat Rundell is back from Victoria as director of the show, as he did last year for ?Mean Girls? here at Theatre Orangeville.

He took some time this week for a Zoom interview with the Citizen to praise the young actors, the creative team and to talk about producing this amazing show.

?The ambition has been to portray the 37 characters with 12 actors wearing many hats. This is old school theatre magic. This is using your imagination and not letting go,? Rundell said, adding that the show is a whimsical play.

Kevin May, who has been in many productions, plays the role of Bastian, the shy young boy who, by running away from bullies, dashed into an old bookstore. The owner is reading a strange-looking book called the NeverEnding Story. He advises Bastian not to read it, but the boy takes the book and hides in the school's attic to read it. He falls into such a strange adventure, partly inside and out of the story.

Rundell commented, ?This is a different style ? larger than life. It is quite unrealistic and none of them knew the story as kids. Falkor is a dragon that doesn't need wings.?

All the cast made a point to see the movie or read the book beforehand.

It is good to have some nostalgia. The reason the story works, as Rundell explained, is not forgetting that Fantasia exists only because people in the world believe.

Rundell said, ?This is appropriate to produce this show in these times. It is so important to bring these messages of very strong imagination and creativity. Theatre gives people hope and inspiration.?

Rundell brings along his experience of working on The NeverEnding Story 12 years ago as a stage manager.

When asked about the trickiest part of this tale, he said, it is a quest where the characters travel to many fantastical places. To bring those to life, the set design has been created by Theatre Orangeville's production manager Beckie Morris, technical director Lisa Lahue, and their creative team, for whom Rundell has huge respect and appreciation, saying Casey (McDowell) and Hannah (Alvarado) are the show's dream team, ?so creative and collaborative.?

Working her own magic for so many characters is Wendy Speck as the costume designer, while Alyssa Campbell has designed the lighting, and Brian Bleasdale is in charge of sound.

Speaking of taking on challenges, Arlen Otten is the stage manager,

It was clear that no matter where Rundell goes in Canada and mentions Theatre Orangeville, the response has been consistently

positive. Actors and directors ? whoever come here to participate in a production on the David Nairn Stage ? find a very cordial welcome and a theatre company keen on producing the best in live theatre.

Audiences appreciate the high quality of the entertainment, loving the fact that they do not have to go to the city for such a fine couple of hours of live theatre right here in their own town.

Remarking on the sets for this production, Rundell pointed out, ?This is a very ensemble piece and everyone on the dream team has worked hard on this wonderful world. As for the actors, never was it more true in this story than the old adage, ?there are no small parts.'?

The NeverEnding Story has many layers, and Rundell hopes audiences will walk away believing in the power of the imagination.

?We have the capacity to bring big change to our own worlds,? was his opinion.

As to why people should fill the theatre over the Aug. 22 to 24 weekend for the show, Rundell said, ?The audiences are going to see remarkable young artists and see them now before they move on to bigger opportunities and careers.?

For those who have seen the movie, maybe more than once, or read the book, this will be another marvellous chance to experience it on stage and understand the tremendous experience it must be for the young participants on and off the stage to be a part of it.

If you are wondering just how they portray the wonderful guiding light that is Falkor for those who remember it well, Rundell urges us, ?Come and see it.?

For more information and to purchase tickets, go to www.theatreorangeville.ca