

OMT starts year with Beauty and the Beast & Mary Poppins



By Constance Scrafield

Orangeville Music Theatre, the town's long-running community theatre, is opening the New Year with two shows: the adult group is doing *Beauty and the Beast* and the juniors will perform *Mary Poppins Junior*. Both are very ambitious projects.

As usual, many members of the cast and creative team of *Beauty and the Beast* are old friends to the group. However, the two lead roles of this musical are played by Sarah Ching, in her first role with OMT, and Jesse Price, occasionally a member of the cast and coming in this time, rather later than usual.

"I was worried about coming in to a group that all knew each other and I was the stranger," said Sarah Ching of her joining OMT to play the role of Belle. A recent graduate of Toronto's Randolph College for the Performing Arts, where she did the "triple threat" of acting, singing and dancing, she discovered that her fears of being treated like an outsider were unfounded. "Everybody was so welcoming," she told us. "They have been really great."

Ms. Ching, a resident of Erin, is looking forward to expanding her acting career into working on screen and stage.

Jesse Price is back with OMT, playing the role of the Beast and coming late into the rehearsals by special invitation.

Said he, "I'm fussy about what roles I do. I haven't been acting here for six or seven years. But we're having a lot of fun doing this. I've only been rehearsing with the cast for the last couple of months."

The cast told us that there is a big "step up" in the choreography, this time designed by Treisha Dinsdale, and they are very excited to be dancing it. Several members mentioned how great the choreography is in this show.

A brief synopsis, as Mr. Price outlined it, in part, "It's a show about a prince who refused to give an old beggar lady shelter, then found out she was a witch who punished him by turning him into a beast. She gave him a rose and told him if he didn't find true love by the time the rose died, he would remain a beast forever.

"Then, Belle came to the castle and he fell in love with her but, for the spell to be broken, she had to love him in return."

That is barely the main theme of the tale but there is much more to it, with her father whom she tries to rescue, the bully lover who insists she will marry him; the village buffoon, and many other adorable characters.

Inside the castle, once the prince is turned into a beast, all his staff are also punished by becoming utensils, plates, a teapot, candlesticks and a little boy cup.

Co-director Amanda Laughlin, another long-term member of this community theatre group, along with Jennifer Bartrum, were emphatic about the talent pool of ?this community.?

?Come and see the show,? Keilagh Healey (Mrs. Potts) invited one and all, ?cast of talent in our community is insane ... in this show is amazing.?

Jesse Price commented, ?Also, it's good themes; taste of something they've never seen in Orangeville ? these people are good.?

Variouly, the cast told us, ?This is the passion of the community at work.?

?You need a break from the holiday break ? this is a good way to start off the New year.?

?It's about not judging a book by its cover...?

?Beauty is found within, using your heart, not just your eyes.?

Des Baxter (Maurice, Bells' father), who has been many years with OMT and usually builds the sets informed us, ?This is the best set we've every done.?

Ms. Laughlin mentioned as well, ?This year, we want to give back by taking a beautiful piece of the set ? it's a separate piece of art, and raffling it off and giving the money to the Food Bank.?

The junior gang of OMT, rehearsing at the same time, this year at the Academy on Broadway for both casts, are performing Mary Poppins under the direction of people doing much of this work for the first time, keeping it fresh for the acting, music and choreography.

This is the famous tale of a rather magical nanny who comes to work for the rather unhappy Banks family, bringing a mixture of discipline and fun and befriending Bert, a street entertainer.

We heard from the youngsters in the lead roles concerning how they felt about the characters and the show. Hannah Park and Zak Russell, playing, respectively, Mary Poppins and Bert, both felt their characters are ?sassy, fun and wacky.?

Said Hannah, ?Mary Poppins is ... confident in herself and it makes the part very fun to play.?

Zak encouraged people to come and see the show, ?because this is a unique way to experience this classic show with a cast full of kids.?

Keira Broom as Jane Banks loves ?..how magical things happen when Mary Poppins is around.?

Says Lucas Nguyen, playing Michael Banks, ?I love that anyone of any age would enjoy this show and how we have become such good friends on and off the stage.?

Lots of reasons to go to the theatre in January. Beauty and the Beast is showing at the Opera House for the weekends of January 11, 12 13 and January 18,19 and 20, 2019.

Mary Poppins with the ?cast full of kids,? is playing, also at the Opera House, for the weekend of January 25, 25 27.

For tickets go to www.orangevillemusictheatre.com