

Clicking her heels for luck



Diane Regan, Shawn Jolemore and Aislin Flynn rehearse a scene from *The Drowsy Chaperone* at Pond Playhouse in Halifax. (PETER PARSONS / Staff)

AISLIN FLYNN will be missing on opening night of the Theatre Arts Guild's performance of the hit Broadway musical *The Drowsy Chaperone*.

But director Jacqui Good isn't upset — she's thrilled.

Flynn will be in Toronto attempting to earn a spot on a CBC-TV reality show called *Over The Rainbow*, from which someone will be selected to play Dorothy in Andrew Lloyd Webber's Canadian production of *The Wizard of Oz*.

The 18-year-old, who just finished her Grade 12 exams at Sacred Heart School in Halifax, is one of 100 young women from across the country selected for the next round of auditions.

Ten will move on to a weekly show beginning in September in which they will compete live, singing a mixture of Broadway and pop songs. The public will vote on its favourites in an elimination format. The winner will be the lead in *The Wizard of Oz*, opening at the Ed Mirvish Theatre in Toronto in December.

Flynn, who was the Mayor of the Munchkins in the *Wizard of Oz* at Festival Antigonish in 2005, was encouraged to attend the June 10 Halifax auditions by her *Drowsy Chaperone* castmate Shawn Jolemore.

Those auditioning at the Westin Hotel were called in groups of four for a pre-screening in which they sang *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*. After making it past pre-screening, they sat outside the audition

room.

“It was the most nerve-wracking thing I’ve ever been through,” says the petite Flynn. “You’d hear these fantastic singers and then they’d come out crying.

“I convinced myself I would be awful and the woman in charge stopped me after the first line. I thought that was it, but she told me not to look at her because she wanted to see what my face looked like while I was singing. She asked me some more about myself and said thank you and reached down into her bag and said, ‘I think you could be Dorothy.’ I don’t remember what I did, but I was really excited.”

Flynn and her mom, Denise MacDonell, who is helping with costumes for *The Drowsy Chaperone*, will fly to Toronto on Wednesday, missing dress rehearsal as well as opening night, but will be back in Halifax for Friday’s show.

The Tony Award-winning “musical within a comedy” tells the tale of a stage star about to be married and the producer who tries to derail her wedding. It celebrates the glory days of movie musicals with dancing and songs performed by a cast of 18.

Karen Myatt, a graduate of the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York, is Janet, the bride. Flynn, who is understudying Janet, will perform on July 4. She is a wedding guest for other performances.

Flynn was Janet in Sacred Heart’s production of *The Drowsy Chaperone* when she was in Grade 11.

The actress made her Neptune Theatre debut in *Annie* when she was in Grade 4. She also appeared in *Oliver* at Neptune when she was in Grade 7, was in *Oliver*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Hobbit*, *Honk*, *Godspell* and *Lost and Found* at Festival Antigonish, and performed in LunaSea’s *Twelfth Night* and in *Saints Alive’s Into The Woods*.

“I loved *The Drowsy Chaperone*; the music grabbed me,” recalls Flynn of her high school show, which she says had a lot of people in the chorus and big dance numbers as opposed to the TAG version, which is more intimate.

“I don’t know how to express how much I love *The Drowsy Chaperone*. There are so many different stories to take away. It’s really unique. There’s wit and a comic aspect. It’s also sad at times.”

Good and husband Leon Cole, who will play piano for TAG, saw the show in New York and have a personal connection. Son Allen Cole and his wife, actor-director Melody Johnson, are friends of Bob Martin and Janet Van De Graff, whose wedding inspired the musical.

The Drowsy Chaperone began life in 1997 as a spoof created for a stag party. It went on to the Toronto Fringe Festival, was picked up by David Mirvish and ran at the Winter Garden Theatre in Toronto, then opened on Broadway in 2006, running for 674 performances. It has been staged in London’s West End and in Japan and Australia, among other places. It won five Tonys, including best book and best score.

“It started as a fringe show and we’re aiming for that sort of intimate show with a glitzy look,” says Good. “There are lots of glittery costumes and terrific lighting.”

She is impressed by the smart writing in the show she describes as a kind of pastiche of 1920s musicals and the “ironic back and forth” between characters, which makes *The Drowsy Chaperone* seem different from a traditional musical.

Good is thrilled to have Flynn in her cast and wishes her well in her Dorothy quest.

A champion debater who competed at the World Schools Debating Championship in South Africa in January, Flynn is heading to the University of Toronto to study ethics and law — unless she wins a spot on Over The Rainbow.

THE DROWSY CHAPERONE

PRESENTED BY: the Theatre Arts Guild at the Pond Playhouse, 6 Parkhill Rd., Halifax.

SHOWTIMES: Thursday to Saturday, June 27 to 30 and July 4 to 7 at 8 p.m.; July 1 and 8, 2 p.m. matinees. June 27 is dedicated to the memory of Nancy Marshall, who directed musicals for more than 25 years in Halifax.

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY: Lisa Lambert and Greg Morrison

STARRING: Sherri Bezanson; Karen Myatt; Brian Hart; Matthew Power; Diane Regan; Shawn Jolemore; Jolene Pattison; Jonathan Tyson; Mike Chandler; Lyndsay Anderson; Valerie MacKenzie and Margaret Champion and Lise Renault. Chorus includes Dan Boland, Aislin Flynn, Lisa Hackett, Heidi Turner and Ashley Grant.

DIRECTED BY: Jacqui Good

MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Diane Regan

PIANIST: Leon Cole

CHOREOGRAPHER: Melanie Abramson

COSTUME COORDINATOR: Cathleen Niedermayer

TICKETS: \$16, \$13 for members, students and seniors, at Ticket Atlantic box office at Halifax Metro Centre and participating Atlantic Superstores, 451-1221. \$2 per transaction charge if ordering at ticketatlantic.com.