

TOP 12 LOCAL THEATRE PRODUCTIONS | The Chronicle Herald

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Burgandy Code, Kirsten Howell and Alexis Milligan in *Lysistrata*, on system. *Lysistrata* begins previews Tuesday and opens Saturday at Two Planks and a Passion Theatre at Ross Creek Farm near Canning. Photo by Lindsey Cory. Thanks Andrea

Theatre reviewers Andrea Nemetz and Elissa Barnard look back on a year of plays that took them from *Antigonish* to *Chester* and points in between. They pick the 12 best of 2012. In chronological order, they are:

The Monument: LunaSea Theatre, Bus Stop Theatre, Halifax, Feb. 25-March 4. Starring Stewart Legere and Martha Irving. Directed by Mauralea Austin.

Colleen Wagner's Governor General's Award-winning drama was an intense and disturbing production. The actors — Legere as an enigmatic war criminal who may have raped and murdered the daughter of Irving's character, and Irving, who radiated cold fury — were mesmerizing in a challenging play that raised questions about the toll that war exacts and whether the truth can set one free. Evan Brown's wondrous set and lighting created a chilling tableau.

Intimate Apparel: Neptune Theatre, Halifax, March 2-25. Starring Raven Dauda, Halifax actors Jeff Schwager and Lesley Smith, Bridget Ogundipe, Kevin Hanchard and Satori Shakoor. Directed by Philip Akin, artistic director of Toronto's Obsidian Theatre.

New York playwright Lynn Nottage's award-winning 2003 drama was a highly satisfying, traditionally told tale of race, class and love in 1905 New York City staged on Sean Mulcahy's two-storey set.

Slowly I Turn, A Parlour Vaudeville in One Act: Zuppa Theatre Co., the living room of Ben Stone's Halifax home, March 13-31. Starring Ben Stone and his father, John Stone, as themselves. Directed by Graham Percy.

The intimate and beautiful 90-minute show, created for an audience of 20, was homey and homemade in design but ultimately a sophisticated and artful exploration of the universal themes of love, family and mortality. Set designer Leesa Hamilton's papier mache planets were a highlight.

The Drowsy Chaperone: Theatre Arts Guild, Halifax, June 21-July 7. This production of the five-time Tony Award-winning musical set a new standard for the Halifax community theatre group.

Director Jacqui Good, working with musical director Diane Regan, who starred in the title role, surely manipulated a huge cast of 19, clad in exquisite black, white and silver costumes by Cathleen Niedemayer, on the tiny stage of the Pond Playhouse. Accompanied by pianist Leon Cole (father of singer Holly and composer Allen), the voices were lovely, the acting accomplished, the dancing, choreographed by Melanie Abramson, dazzling, and the comedy spot on. Most performances were sold out. Lisa Lambert, winner of the 2006 Tony for best original score, thrilled the cast when she made a surprise visit to see the show on Canada Day.

Alice in Wonderland: Shakespeare by the Sea's all-ages collective creation, Cambridge Battery, Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, July 1-Sept. 2. Starring Tom Smith as the Queen of Hearts, Riley Raymer as Alice, Kathryn McCormack and Kimberley Code as the Mad Hatter/March Hare duo, Jacob Sampson, Sebastien Labelle, Doug MacAulay, Drew O'Hara, Chris George, Emma Laishram and Simon Rainville. Directed by Jesse MacLean with music by composer and musical director Jeremy Hutton.

This two-hour version of Alice, grounded in barbershop music, was a raucous piece of tightly controlled creative insanity. It opened to big audiences and kept packing them in throughout the sunny summer.

Lysistrata: Temptress of the South: Two Planks and a Passion Theatre, produced as its outdoor Theatre Off the Grid drama at Ross Creek Centre for the Arts, Canning, July 10-Aug. 11. Starring Burgandy Code as Lysistrata, Graham Percy, Jamie Konchak, Alexis Milligan, Jeff Schwager, Chris O'Neill, Benjamin Irvine, Ryan Rogerson and Mary Fay Coady. Directed by Ken Schwartz with musical director Allen Cole.

Two Planks and a Passion Theatre adapted the 2,000-year-old Greek classic and set it during the American Civil War for a hilarious musical comedy performed outdoors and in exquisite period costumes. The costumes were designed by Leesa Hamilton and constructed by students in NSCAD University's textiles/fashion program and Dalhousie University's costume studies program.

Same Time, Next Year: Festival Antigonish Summer Theatre, July 12-Aug. 25. Starring Joanne Miller and John Fitzgerald Jay. Directed by Ed Thomason.

Bernard Slade's 1975 romantic comedy was as charming as ever. It was a treat to see skilled Halifax comedic actor Miller, absent from Nova Scotia stages for a few years, as Doris, and Jay, returning to Festival Antigonish, as George. Aided by costume designer Adam MacKinnon, Miller took Doris convincingly through her many life stages.

Educating Rita: Valley Summer Theatre, Al Whittle Theatre, Wolfville, July 12-Aug. 25. Starring Andrea Lee Norwood and Todd Duckworth. Directed by Pamela Halstead.

Willy Russell's hit 1980 comedy got a new life in this delightful, heartwarming and genuine production. Norwood delivered a feisty character as delicious as the Just Us! cafe cookies in the

theatre building. Ottawa actor Duckworth was a match for her fire. Costume designer Janet MacLellan amply signalled Rita's dramatic changes.

Hawk or How He Plays His Song: a Onelight Theatre production in Neptune's Studio theatre, as part of the Prismatic Festival, Halifax, Sept. 14-29. Starring Daniel Knight as Hawk, P.J. Prudat, Monique Mojica, Gordon Patrick White, Richard Taylor and Sarah-Jean Jones. Directed by writer Shahin Sayadi, Onelight's artistic director.

The first professional play in Nova Scotia to look at the contemporary Mi'kmaq experience, Hawk is about a young man torn between two worlds. An unusual, technologically innovative design put the actors under a large white tent for a play of music, projections and storytelling. Hawk goes on the road from fall 2013 to spring 2014.

Kill Shakespeare: produced by Hal-Con, Kill Shakespeare, Lions Den Theatre and Vile Passeist Theatre, at the Bus Stop Theatre, Halifax, Oct. 30-Nov. 4. Starring Holly Arsenault, Heather Beresford, Christine Daniels, Pasha Ebrahimi, Eric Fitzpatrick, Daniel Gervais, Shawn Maggio, Robert Murphy and Jesse Robb. Co-directed by Dan Bray and Christine Daniels, with original music by Jonathan Goud.

Using 800 slides of Canadian comic book art by Andy Belanger projected on a rear wall, the two independent Halifax theatre companies brought an epic action story of Shakespearean superheroes alive as if it were a movie but used radio drama techniques. Kill Shakespeare co-writers Conor McCreery and Anthony Del Col chose Halifax as the first place to put this hybrid into a mainstream theatre because, as McCreery said, the city is known for supporting the arts.

Elf: The Musical: Neptune Theatre, Nov. 20-Jan. 6. Starring Mark Uhre as Buddy, Blair Irwin as Jovie, Marty Burt, Liz Gilroy, Elijah Mackenzie Smith, Sheldon Bergstrom, Geordie Brown, Patrick Cook, Jenny Hall, Alana Hibbert, Andrew McAllister, Karen Myatt, Nicole Power, Andrew Scanlon and Shelley Simester. Directed by artistic director George Pothitos.

Uhre is a fantastic Buddy in this visually sumptuous, musically delicious and heartwarming production. The musical has a jazzy, big, Broadway-style score performed by an invisible live band, a cast that sings rings around the snow globe, and dynamic sugar and spice visuals. Choreographer Jim White shines.

This is What Happens Next: a Necessary Angel Theatre Co. production presented by Eastern Front Theatre at Neptune's Scotiabank Studio Theatre, Halifax, Nov. 21-25. Written and performed by Daniel MacIvor. Directed by co-creator Daniel Brooks.

MacIvor gave an amazing, manic performance, full of electric hand movements and speed-of-light speech. The intense 90-minute show, with dynamic light and sound, is about divorce, addiction, death and how hard it is to get a cup of coffee.

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