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Monday, June 18, 2012

## The Drowsy Chaperone!



Starting this Thursday night, the Theatre Arts Guild presents *The Drowsy Chaperone* at The Pond Playhouse in Halifax; a "gem of a musical that manages to be fresh and original while also being thoroughly nostalgic. It is a homage to the golden age of musicals yet also an affectionate spoof." Recently, AE spoke with Ann Miller (producer) and Jacqui Good (director) about the production.

### How long have you been involved with theatre and in what capacity?

*Jacqui* - I feel like I've been involved in theatre for most of my life...in grade 2, I attempted writing a play but not knowing the conventions, I wrote each person's part on a separate piece of paper and had to cue them for their entrance...so I guess I was preparing to be a director. I have a degree in theatre (and English lit)

from Queen's University - I acted and directed and produced and cajoled after that. But I also loved journalism. After founding a children's theatre company in NB, I ended up with a career on radio, mostly as an arts reporter and critic at CBC Winnipeg. It's a sad fact that you can make more money talking about art than you can actually creating it. So now that I've left Winnipeg and the CBC, I've had a grand time directing, producing and acting. I'm married to another former broadcaster, Leon Cole. He hosted a classical music show called RSVP and is now our pianist for Drowsy. Three of our 4 offspring work in theatre (Holly Cole is a singer, Allen Cole an award-winning composer and Austin Cole a hard-working stage manager - Ted is the sensible one with a career in computers)

*Ann* - "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" has been my mantra since the eighties when my sailor husband got back on stage with The Savoy Society of Ottawa, during a shore posting. After selling out a 12 show run of the Mikado, I was hooked on backstage challenges and have since produced shows for The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Nova Scotia, Theatre Arts Guild and Nova Voce, among others. My work life was as varied as the 14 moves I made following my sailor, including teaching, life-skills training and running a bed and breakfast. Producing a play is like childbirth, lots of pain but for enormous gain. You'd think after 15 productions, I would know better.

### Why the decision to produce *The Drowsy Chaperone*?

*Jacqui* - I've loved the Drowsy Chaperone ever since I saw it on Broadway way back in 2006. It is so much about why we love musicals. Which I do. You should see my record (yes, record!) collection of old and obscure musicals. Some folks at the Theatre Arts Guild were also enchanted by the show, so when they asked if I'd like to direct, I said "Yes!" I revel in the style, the sound, the feeling of the old musicals. I've even decided to make the look all black and white and grey and glitter like an Rogers and Astaire movie. I'd live there if I could.

### What are the challenges involved with putting on this particular production?

*Ann* - Biggest challenges are time and morale. I imagine this is the case in professional theatre but in community theatre where everyone is working for love not money, morale becomes very important. Also cast and crew have day jobs and some, as in this production of *The Drowsy Chaperone*, are professionals who love this show and want it on their resumes but are trying to schedule our rehearsals around paying gigs. Maintaining high performance standards but keeping it fun are the goals up until opening night

when we face our final challenge - putting bums in the seats to appreciate the talent and the hard work. The Drowsy Chaperone is a charming show with a recent high profile so we are feeling confident of mostly sold out shows.

### **What are the rewards?**

*Ann* - The biggest reward for me by far is nurturing up and coming talent. For example, our star, Karen Myatt, who plays Janet, the leading lady in *The Drowsy Chaperone*, was first introduced to me while she was still in high-school. She was in the chorus and the understudy to Casilda in *The Gondoliers* in 2004. During one show the actress playing Casilda was struck with food poisoning and Karen had to come on after intermission. The transition was so flawless that many in the audience did not even realize there had been a switch. Karen went on to study voice and musical theatre in Toronto and New York City. She is now a professional, starring at Chester Playhouse in *Broadway Without Borders* with Stuart Hiseler this summer. We are very fortunate to have her in our production. In some respects I feel like she and so many others are my kids. It is lovely to see them grow and become successful in a brutal business.

### **What can audiences expect to experience during the run?**

*Jacqui* - Audiences can expect an intimate show, closer to the fringe theatre roots of the production than the lavish Broadway production I saw a few years back. In our 90 seat theatre, Aldolpho will seduce and Janet vamp close up and personal. Our costumer, Cathleen Niedrmayer has created an elegant, glittery look...and the performers are over-the-top talented. This show is extremely well written and sung. And ever so funny. This is one strong cast.

### **The June 27 show is dedicated to Nancy Marshall - can you speak to her contributions to Halifax's theatre scene?**

*Jacqui* - Although Nancy worked for many years directing musical theatre and I admired her work, we didn't actually meet until a couple of years ago. I wanted to produce *Out of Lunenburg*, a wonderful musical she had written with Jim & Laura Bennet. We clicked as colleagues and friends and that world premiere at the new Spatz Theatre is a personal highlight. We also enjoyed a competitive game of Scrabble. Nancy inspired so many performers -- and was a great actor herself. I originally thought of her as the ideal Woman in Chair, the narrator who loves musicals and holds it all together in *Drowsy*. It was not to be. But, I'll always think of her as inspiring this show. And on the 27th we'll take the time to remember Nancy after the performance.

### **What's on tap in the coming months for The Pond Playhouse and the Theatre Arts Guild?**

*Ann* - Theatre Arts Guild launched its 2012/2013 season on June 4th at the Pond Playhouse. Shows include *God of Carnage* by Yasmina Reza, *Camelot*, *The Panto* by Ben Crocker, *The Death of Me/My Narrator* by Norm Foster, a *Man for all Seasons* by Robert Bolt, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, music and lyrics by William Finn, based on the book by Rachel Sheinkin, as conceived by Rebecca Feldman. I am pleased to be producing the last show next summer.

### **What are your thoughts on the state of theatre in Halifax and Atlantic Canada?**

*Jacqui* - The theatre scene seems so vibrant -- I love the upstart creativity of Two Planks, Lunasea, 2B and so many more. Neptune continues to entertain and we have more and more interesting work from community theatres. But there's a definite a chill in the air and I fear that there will continue to be less and less government and corporate support for the arts. Fingers crossed. Toes too.

*The Drowsy Chaperone from June 21-July 18 at The Pond Playhouse in Halifax*

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Sunday, June 17, 2012

## **A Yorkshire Tragedy**

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*Vile Passéist Theatre*

June 19-24, 2012

Bus Stop Theatre, Halifax

*Vile Passéist Theatre* presents *A Yorkshire Tragedy* by Thomas Middleton (1608), opening this Tuesday night at the Bus Stop Theatre in Halifax. The haunting, Jacobean era drama is directed by Dorian Lang, an alumnus of