

20th Anniversary of Pantomime for Canada's oldest continuous community theatre

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Pantomime at TAG: Puss'n'Boots, 2013. Contributed by Theatre Arts Guild (TAG) - Contributed

You've never seen Oz look like this

What do you get when you cross a well-known fairytale with characters from other fairytales and a cast of comedians bent on making the audience laugh? A not-so-traditional, British pantomime, of course.

A pantomime, or panto for short, is a musical stage play featuring a twisted fairy tale and plenty of interaction with the audience.

"Every scene begins with a character coming out to say 'hi' or to ask for help with something," says Angela Butler, long-time member of the Halifax Theatre Arts Guild (TAG) and the director of this year's pantomime.

Originally designed for an adult audience, Butler says the traditional British pantomime can be quite "risqué."

"We tame that down," says Butler, "we still have adult humour, but no bad language." The community theatre group pokes fun at local politicians, for example, and references adult television shows to make their point. While half the matinée audience is children, aged 3 and up, the evening show audiences, notes Butler, are predominantly adults.

To celebrate the 20th year of pantomime at TAG, the steadfast group of volunteers will recreate The Wizard of Oz and invite characters from previous pantomimes to play. Puss'n'Boots, the crocodile from Captain Hook, the princess from Sleeping Beauty and other surprises will make appearances on the "red" brick road.

The play called The Wizard of ... Oz? was written by Adrian Barradell, and the score and lyrics are the work of local artist and music director Ralph Walton-Bone Urquhart.

"Original music is so much better because it can be anything we want . . . it's created to help tell the story and help the characters move."

For Butler, having someone at TAG writing the music and lyrics is very fortunate and it results in a one-of-a-kind, must-see, production.

Butler notes there are 15 community actors playing 33 characters in this year's panto, but adds there are probably 30-35 volunteers in total responsible for the show. For example, there are 10 or so "sew and sews" – volunteers who create all the costumes. There is the producer, director, stage manager, lighting designer, and people who volunteer to do publicity, collect props and create sets.

The Theatre Arts Guild is Canada's oldest "continuously operated" community theatre. In 1931 two theatre groups in Halifax Regional Municipality merged to create TAG. Since the 1960s, TAG's home base – lovingly referred to as the "jewel of Jollimore" by Butler – is The

Pond Playhouse, located just off Purcells Cove Road. The theatre seats 90 and the team at TAG have added more dressing room space, a lovely front of house with a cash bar, and most recently a new and bigger parking lot. Special needs seating is available; be sure to book ahead.

The Wizard of ... Oz? plays from Nov. 21 to Dec. 7, 2019. The play runs two hours with an intermission. For more information, visit [**www.TAGTheatre.com**](http://www.TAGTheatre.com).