

Solange De Santis

Blyth Festival Announces 2001 Season

By Solange De Santis

The Blyth Festival, an established summer showcase in Blyth, Ontario for Canadian plays and musicals, will be staging six shows this season, ranging from a story of mass murder to the tale of a legendary Newfoundland ghost.

The season opens June 15 with "The Outdoor Donnellys," a dramatization of a true story about the Donnelly family who settled in the London, Ont. area in the late 19th century. "They ran a stagecoach business," according to festival director of communications Christine Kemp, "and were so hated that one night a local mob murdered the family and burned down their house." The script, which is currently being developed in a workshop by the actors who will appear in the play, will be staged throughout the town of Blyth and the audience will move with the play to various indoor and outdoor locations, Ms. Kemp said.

At each performance, a structure representing the family's home will be burned, she said. This, of course, puts a good deal of stress on the festival's scenery resources and the play will run just two weeks, closing on July 1. The Outdoor Donnellys will be directed by Paul Thompson.

A more conventional proscenium setting is in store for a revival of "The Passion of Narcisse Mondoux," by Gratien Gelinas, a well-known French Canadian playwright. Ted Johns stars as a rural plumber determined to win the hand of the mayor's alluring widow. This comedy will be directed by Linda Moore and runs from July 3 to Aug. 24.

Romance is also the theme of "Cruel Tears," described as a "country and western opera," written by Ken Mitchell, with music by an entire group – Humphrey and the Dumptrucks. Originally produced in 1970, it is the story of a daring young truck driver who woos his boss's daughter, only to run into jealousy and betrayal. Blyth Associate Artistic Director Eric Coates directs Cruel Tears, which runs from July 12 to Sept. 2.

Canadian actor Gordon Pinsent, whom American television audiences may remember as Constable Benton Fraser's father in the show "Due South," has written a play called "Corner Green." Drawing on Mr. Pinsent's Newfoundland roots, the play's protagonist is Garland Moyle, a man haunted by the legendary spirit Hagge. Moyle can only free himself from Hagge if he discovers the truth about his true love's disappearance 50 years ago. Directed by Diana Belshaw, the professional premiere of Corner Green runs from July 17 to August 11.

"McGillicuddy," by Keith Roulston, is a world premiere comedy that follows the fortunes of a small-town cop as he battles an arch-criminal kid named Moriarty. Directed by Layne Coleman, it runs from Aug. 8 to Sept. 15.

The season closes with "Sometime, Never," a new play from Norah Harding that continues the saga of a British war bride (also named Norah). Distinctly autobiographical (the playwright is in her 80s), Sometime, Never finds Norah returning home to Britain for Christmas, wiser about marriage and life in Canada. Harding's 1996 play, "This Year, Next Year," introduced the character of Norah. Directed by Terry Tweed, it runs from Aug. 22 to Sept. 9.

Blyth, Ont. is about 130 miles west of Toronto and about 150 miles northeast of Detroit. Travel and ticket information can be found at www.blythfestival.com or by phoning 1-877-862-5984. Tickets go on sale April 2 to festival members and April 17 to the general public.

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