



Play combines the fun of a musical within a comedy

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BRACEBRIDGE - Side-splitting laughs and toe-tapping music — just what you would expect from a play described as a musical within a comedy.

The Rotary Club of Bracebridge presents its 34th annual production *The Drowsy Chaperone*, beginning Feb. 25 at Rene M. Caisse Theatre in Bracebridge.

A spoof of old musicals, *The Drowsy Chaperone* is a Canadian play written by friends as a wedding gift for two actors. The bride and groom liked it so much they got on board, as producer and writer/actor, respectively. The show made its debut in 1998 at the Toronto Fringe Festival and opened on Broadway in 2006. Since then it has gone to the West End in London, the Broadway of Australia and is now in the process of being made into a movie.



QUIRKY CHARACTERS. Aldolpho (Mike Pearse) introduces himself in song and with great pomp and flair, a manner in which only the great Aldolpho (a.k.a. the King of Romance) can in *The Drowsy Chaperone*. *Submitted photo*

"It is truly a Canadian success story," said Tia Pearse, director/choreographer for the Rotary production. "Every time I watch the cast perform it I'm proud to be a Canadian. It's a really, really great entertaining show and I don't think we're known for that."

The rights to the Tony Award-winning play have just been released, said Pearse, having finished its run on Broadway in 2007 and its national tour closing just a year ago.

"It was important to me that I do a show that nobody had ever seen before," she said. "It's fresh and fun and it makes me proud."

The play revolves around a lonely New Yorker known only as the man in chair. Whenever he is feeling blue, he cheers himself up by playing the album for his favourite musical, *The Drowsy Chaperone*.

"The musical comes to life in his living room," explained Pearse. "He knows the show inside and out. He interacts a little bit with the characters, he can tell you what's coming next, explain what is politically incorrect for the time because the show takes place in the 1920s and he's in the present ... he's the audience's guide through the adventure, so to speak."

Ideal for community theatre, *The Drowsy Chaperone* has 13 lead roles, said Pearse. The complete cast of 25 comes from across Muskoka and includes Bracebridge doctor Terry Bridle as the man in chair, up-and-comer

Katie Minnis as the bride, OPP officer Peter Juneau as a gangster and Tracy Hoehner-McEwen as Katie.

This is a Muskoka directing debut for Pearse, who has been involved in all aspects of theatre, both community and professional, since the age of 10. Her husband Mike is also an actor and has performed in many Rotary plays, including the parts of Bill Sykes in *Oliver* and Horton the elephant in Huntsville's production of *Seussical*. He takes on the role of Aldolpho in *The Drowsy Chaperone*.

As a musical, the play includes a 10-piece orchestra, which will be situated in the balcony at the Rene Caisse, a first for the theatre.

With the sound coming from behind, the audience will be fully immersed in the theatre experience. However, it also means there will be 55 fewer seats available for the show each night, so tickets will sell out faster than ever.

"I feel like this is one of those shows that if people don't get to it they're going to be left out of all those water cooler conversations," said Pearse. "It is a romp. It's an hour and a half of fun, high energy. It's very funny. The characters are very engaging. They're kind of quirky. The music is uplifting. It's toe-tapping. I guarantee everyone will leave the theatre humming something."

The Drowsy Chaperone runs Feb. 25, 26 and March 3, 4 and 5 at 8 p.m. at Rene M. Caisse Theatre in Bracebridge, with a matinee Feb. 27 at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$18 or \$15 for the matinee and are available at the Box Office at 705-645-8400 or online at renemcaissetheatre.ca.

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