

NHIP partners with Spirit of Maud Theatre Company to raise money for new build



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

North Hastings Inspiration Place is partnering with Toronto's Spirit of Maud Theatre Company to raise money for the new library complex build, which will be breaking ground later this year. According to a July 26 Facebook post, they will be staging three plays based upon the works of Lucy Maud Montgomery on Sept. 9, 10 and 11, with the net proceeds going toward the NHIP build fund. Marion Abbott, the founder of the Spirit of Maud Theatre Company, Cheryl Easton, the capital campaign chair for NHIP and Kim McMunn, the CEO and head librarian with the North Hastings Public Library, all comment on this upcoming event.

On their Facebook page on July 26, NHIP announced this partnership with the Spirit of Maud Theatre Company to raise money for the new library build. They'll be putting on three plays, all based on the works of Lucy Maud Montgomery, on Sept. 9, 10 and 11. The plays to be presented are; All About Anne, Anne & Maud and Conversations with The Ladies of Lucy Maud Montgomery. Tickets will be \$27.50 each or they can be purchased in a bundle of three tickets for \$75. Tickets can be purchased at <https://bancroftvillageplayhouse.square.site/inspiration>.

Abbott, who founded the Spirit of Maud Theatre Company in 2018, says that she and Easton have been friends since childhood, playing dress-up together, and stayed in touch since through social media.

"When I saw she was part of the fundraising efforts to build the new library, I reached out and suggested that these plays be an event, since the tie-in with Lucy Maud Montgomery and Canadian literature was just golden. Cheryl was immediately on board and set it up a few days later," she says.

McMunn says that they're so encouraged when people reach out to them.

"It's nice when they come to us as opposed to us going to them. It's great to have the support of the community and even beyond. The Spirit of Maud Theatre Company is out of Toronto, so people are really picking up on it. As much as it's a local build, it serves a broad community. So it's nice when you see a broad community coming together for something," she says.

Bancroft holds a special place in Abbott's heart.

"I've been coming up here since I was born and then more often once my parents purchased their cottage on Lake St. Peter. I have

always wanted to somehow be part of the theatre community there and to also get to support the build of the new library is such a delight! I'm so honoured to work with Cheryl and her team and be a part of this exciting event," she says.

Abbott directed and produced her first show when she was sixteen years old and hasn't stopped in the 30 years since. She has primarily worked in musical theatre and her favourite shows include Jekyll and Hyde, All Shook Up and Oklahoma! and she also created The Confidential Musical Theatre Project which led to her being part of shows all over Canada and the United States. She says that the Spirit of Maud Theatre Company has possibly given her the most "soul satisfaction" when it comes to her work.

"[This is] thanks to the rich work of Lucy Maud Montgomery. The company has two goals; to celebrate the work and legacy of Lucy Maud Montgomery and to create as many roles and performing opportunities for female artists as possible," she says.

Conversations with the Ladies of Lucy Maud Montgomery was the first "Maud" show Abbott created in 2014. During lockdown in October 2020, Abbott filmed and streamed a version on her website. Anne and Maud debuted in 2014, while All About Anne: A Celebration of Anne Shirley debuted this past April as a test project to see what live theatre felt like after the hiatus brought on by COVID-19. She says she has since expanded the first version to include more material.

The three plays that are being staged at the Village Playhouse in September just opened up this month in repertory in Norval, Ontario, where Maud lived from 1926 to 1935.

"People love hearing her words performed and connecting with her in a place she spent so much time. Audience members have been moved to tears by the beauty of the performances and laughed a lot too! Many have commented on how watching these shows inspires them to revisit their favourite Lucy Maud Montgomery books and how current her writing is," she says.

In addition to the plays, there will be a silent auction that will keep up with the time period the plays are set in. Easton says they've already received a quilt, a couple of hand-painted saws and some artwork. They'll be accepting donations at the NHPL until Sept. 8.

"So, it's quite exciting. It's coming along quite nicely," she says.

Abbott reveals that Avra Fainer, Brianna Taylor and Gabrielle Bauman appear in all three productions, while Alice Malakhov appears in All About Anne: A Celebration of Anne Shirley, Diana Lavelle appears in Conversations with the Ladies of Lucy Maud Montgomery and Heidi Ross, Paul Barker and Stephanie Rose appear in Anne and Maud. A full cast list can be found at www.marionabbott.com/spirit-of-maud-theatre-company.

McMunn wanted to thank the Village Playhouse, which she called one of the biggest catalysts for the potential success of this event.

"We were looking for a venue to have this and we approached them to see if it was possible and they jumped all over this. Our dream was to be in the theatre and they granted that to us. They've been extremely gracious and kind to us and we're so thankful for that partnership," she says.

Abbott says that if anyone has ever enjoyed Anne Shirley in any form; the book, the movies, the television show, then they'll love these plays that will be showing at the Village Playhouse in September.

"They are heartwarming, soul-affirming goodness in a world that is very much at odds these days. You will leave the theatre inspired by Anne's imagination and the genius of Canada's own Lucy Maud Montgomery."