

this WEEK'S focus on
Lincoln



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It's not just theatre — it's history

Annual Lamplighter Tour brings Lincoln County Fair's past to life

BY JOANNE MCDONALD
STAFF

Lincoln fairgoers may be the salt of the earth, but it was the liberal peppering of their gossip that flavoured 150 years of Lincoln County Fair history and a delicious serving of theatre for the Rotary Club of Lincoln's fourth annual Lamplighter Tour

The hearths of stately and historic downtown Beamsville homes set the stage for five plays where audiences tasted the common and the divine of conversations that have connected the generations through the thick and thin of competition and companionship.

The creative sensibilities of producer Jennifer Southward, artistic director Bev Haskins, assistant artistic director John Ripley, marketing coordinator Jennifer Turner and playwrights (Catherine Albers, David Fanstone,

John van der Beek, Sheila Laundry and Neil Galloway) moved the audience through the twists and turns of life's midway.

And it was a breathtaking view from what felt like the top of a ferris wheel that peered over the generations as it turned the county's rich agricultural heritage.

Eavesdropping on a party line, Dottie Walker, played by the outrageously funny Jeannette Heil, was horrified to find out the gossip was about her in a 1973 conversation between Irene Banks, played by Katherine Cooke and Ruby Comfort, played by Sharon Fecik. All three brought outstanding performances to the play 'Party Line' written by playwright Sheila Laundry, and staged at the United Church manse, circa 1881,

owned by Trinity United Church.

The galloping horses that once ripped up the mud on Hixon and Ontario streets have long bowed to technology. But actors craning their necks towards the sound effects of thundering hooves were really convincing -enough to make audience members look out the windows at the Beam House, circa 1870, owned by Corrin Naylor, for the first play 'It Happened on King Street' 1873, by playwright John van der Beek.

John O'Laughlin, played by John van der Beek was a sight to behold staggering with a bottle through the downtown knot of tut-tut-ting women.

Great performances were delivered by Megan VanWeelden as Elizabeth Marlatt;

Maria Toye as Mrs. Marlatt; Carolyn Hansen as Mrs. Magdelene Fretz; Rob Murre as Mr. Culp; Mike Cipryk as Mr. Jacob Fretz; Ben Cipryk as Samuel Culp; Kristiaan Hansen as Christian Fretz; and Carola Hicks as Mrs. Culp.

Zealously guarded through the generations, it was one tablespoon of cherry juice - the secret ingredient - that made Martha's plum jam a shoo-in for the red ribbon event year in the fifth Lamplighter play 'Plum Jam' 2007 written by playwright Neil Galloway and Staged at the JD Bennett House circa 1846 owned by Dr. Verster.

Martha, played by Joan Edwards and Sam, played by Ron Murre had sealed their fate 60 years earlier with a kiss at the top of the ferris

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wheel but long harboured jealousies of other girls who may have caught his eye aJong the midway were filtered through the intense competition for the prize winning jam.

Only this particular year Martha was in line to judge and you can be sure it may not have been with the most objective eye.

"Make sure Norma doesn't win. She was almost your grandma," Martha told her grandchildren who arrived to join three generations on their way to the fair. Great performances graced the stage from John Murre as Luke; Caron Edwards as Wilhelmina; John Ripley as Johnny; Jonathon Kotwa as Geoffrey; and Laura Harkness as Jennifer.

Forty years of sitting at the fair gate entrance paid off for Old Jeny (it's all relevant) played by Pat Young in the third play 'Are You Going?' 1955, with flashbacks to 1915, written by playwright David Fanstone and performed at the Armstrong-Wray home owned by Terry and Kevin Bond.

Old William played by John Young had left for the war but Jeny never gave up the hope of finding him and sure enough, he was 'fair' game once again. The younger version of the couple was played by Bailee Malivoire and John Hendricks in a touching show of budding romance. John Young played the stage manager and the young Jeny's father.

Dust on the furniture was unsettling enough for Mary Grigg, played by Sheilah Lake when she came to visit her brother Loyal Davis, played by Jason Swenor and his wife Ina Davis, played by Kathy Willms in the second play 'Lucky Lindy comes to Beamsville:' 1927, written by playwright Katherine Albers and staged at the Latham House, owned by the Plant family.

You can imagine the scene when her long-awaited out-of-town son Brian Grigg played by Lome Gretsinger showed up with his 'flapper' flame Sarah Bradshaw who was the bee's knees in her role as Ruby White.

Mrs. Grigg had been worried she'd be overwhelmed by the fair.

Fat chance. This girl was hip to the jive, the cat's meow and knocked the socks off her boyfriend's family with her 1920s slang.

Elaine Hooker was a hoot as the elderly Boarder who peered out from behind her copy of the Great Gatsby to lob zingers into the scenario.

Every winning recipe has a secret and cherry juice must've been poured by the gallon into the sweet success of this year's tour that wrapped up its four-day run Sunday.

"There is a richness of heritage sites and stories to tell from our past, right here in Lincoln," said producer Southward.

The production was written, produced and performed by local community members supported in their efforts by community-minded businesses that saw the vision and helped make it happen.

Touring the rounds Friday night with the two Jennifers' made it extra special. They were as delighted as the audience at every bend of the play.

Behind the scenes, volunteers made it all happen, Southward said. Bob Bujas made the 'one long, two short' ring tone that would've cost the production \$300 to purchase.

Mike Haskins was indispensable in ensuring the audience of 400 crossed the road safely between play venues.



Above left, listening to the thunder of horse hooves in the play 'It Happened on King Street' written by playwright John Van der Beek are: Megan VanWeelden, Rob Murre, Mike Cipryk, Maria Toye, Carolyn Hansen, Kristiaan Hansen, Carola Hicks and Ben Cipryk. Meanwhile above, one table spoon of cherry juice was the ribbon-winning secret ingredient in 'Plum Jam' written by playwright Nell Galloway.

Front from left are: John Ripley, Joan Edwards and Ron Murre. Back: Jonathon Kotwa, Laura Harkness, John Murre and Caron Edwards.

At left is the Inimitable Lamplighter Tour team of producer Jennifer Southward and marketing coordinator Jennifer Turner.

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