



COMPANY NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #13: FIRST QUARTER 2012

SEASON THREE: THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS

Merlyn Productions Theatre Company enjoyed a strong close to its third season of plays with Lewis Carroll's **"Through The Looking Glass (And What Alice Found There)"** at the Ellice Theatre in December.

While already delving into the exciting prospects of season four, we take this brief opportunity to reflect back upon the 2011 Season as a "season of firsts", with every one of its productions signalling a new record or milestone for the company...



"SUNDAY COSTS FIVE PESOS" (February 2011): This feature – later expanded to also include the 10-minute one-act play *"A Matter of Husbands"* and an opening act on the theme of love, marriage, and

relationships – set records for the highest number of new members to debut with the company (eight out of eleven cast), and for greatest overall attendance at the Ellice Theatre, surpassing 200 patrons.



"THE BOY COMES HOME" (March 2011): This re-mount from the 2010 Season – which also included an Opening Act of other works adapted from A. A. Milne – was part of the first annual Thaw Festival

organised by *Marketplace Players*, as well as the company's first production staged at Aqua Books.



"DRAMATIC SHOWCASE 2011" (June 2011): This inaugural edition of a new, yearly theatrical variety show fund-raiser was accompanied by the public announcement of a theatre school being officially

established at *Merlyn Productions*. The first half of the programme was the company's first student showcase – as presented by the Spring 2011 *"STAGE ONE: Adult Theatre"* class – while the second half, presented by

company members, marked its first foray into melodrama: playing *"Hearts and Flowers"* to excellent audience reception.



first time participating in Gimli Summer Theatre.

"SUPPRESSED DESIRES" (August 2011): At the kind invitation of *R-G Productions* to partner with them for a double-feature, this re-mount from the 2010 Season was *Merlyn Productions'* first touring show, and



for largest overall cast size, and for having ten out of its fourteen performers making their first mainstage appearance with the company.

"MORALITY PLAYS" (October 2011): This evening of drama marked the company's first-ever triple feature, presenting one-act plays *"The Curtain"*, *"Confessional"*, and *"The Game"*. It set new records



It signalled a landmark business shift for the theatre company, from being solely a producer of plays for general audiences, to a producer for both general and young audiences, with the Artistic Director's announced intention to schedule shows for both audience types in each season that followed.

"THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS" (December 2011): This first foray into theatre for young audiences under the *Merlyn Productions* banner was one of the highest-attended productions of the season.

During its first three seasons of plays, *Merlyn Productions Theatre Company* staged a total of nineteen plays in thirteen productions, resulting in opportunities for more than 60 new members from the local theatre community to fill over 125 roles and 100 production staff and crew positions.

In 2011, the theatre school received more than two-dozen enrolments of students ages 10 to 60 during its first year of operations.

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TWO PRODUCTIONS CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED

THE **UNITER**

In late 2011, *Merlyn Productions* received critical acclaim from *The Uniter* in their "**Top Ten Theatre Productions of the 2010/2011 Season**", which placed "*The Boy Comes Home, And Other Works by A. A. Milne*" at number 5, and "*MORALITY PLAYS*" at number 6.

The editors took into account theatres both large and small, and *Merlyn Productions* has the distinction of being the only company that made the list twice.

We are grateful and humbled for the recognition of our work from the previous year, but nevertheless agree with reporter DEREK LOEWEN, who said of the entire list in his header: "*It has certainly been a fulfilling year for theatre in Winnipeg . . . This is just a small selection from an infinite amount of marvellous plays that entertained and enlightened this year.*"

The Uniter's full series of 2011 "top ten" lists are published online at: uniter.ca/view/7011/

NEW WARDROBE MISTRESS

We are pleased to announce that Ms JENN HARDER has been instated as Wardrobe Mistress on the permanent Company Staff as of January 2012.

Now acting as the primary Costume Designer for *Merlyn Productions*, Jenn brings with her a certification in costume cutting and construction from *Red Deer College*, plus a wide range of past costuming experience that includes theatre, dance, and television, as well as the making of wedding apparel.

Our patrons first saw Jenn's design work in "*Through The Looking Glass*" (December 2011), for which her created costumes included the comical and much talked-about Humpty Dumpty mascot.

This appointment signals the first major change of Company Staff personnel since 2009. The outgoing Wardrobe Mistress, Ms LEILA MARSTON, is recognised as one of the theatre company's three pioneering staff members alongside Artistic Director JOHN CHASE and Technical Director KEVIN HAMILL.

We express our extreme gratitude for Leila's unwavering service in the Company Staff and a multitude of other positions throughout the first three seasons, and look forward to working with Jenn on the productions to come!

A NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ELLICE CAFÉ



Merlyn Productions has always been a great proponent of the "come for dinner / stay for a show" experience that the unique pairing of the Ellice Café and Theatre has to offer.

We are pleased that our collaboration is stronger than ever, as we announce an official cross-promotion partnership with the Ellice Café for 2012!

As just one of its perks, patrons on our e-mailing list are receiving an Ellice Café "buy one / get one free" entrée coupon prior to each production we stage at the Ellice Theatre this season, for valuable cost savings on an evening out on the town.

The *Merlyn Productions* E-Mailing list can be subscribed to at MERLYN.BIZ, while the Ellice Café's menu is online at: www.ellicetheatre.com/menu/

Keeping updated with the café's excellent specials year-round is also now easier than ever – simply "Like" their new Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/ElliceCafeandTheatre

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AUGUSTUS DID HIS BIT

Merlyn Productions Theatre Company opened its fourth season with **"AUGUSTUS DOES HIS BIT"** by George Bernard Shaw - playing January 31 to February 4 at the Ellice Theatre.

The uproariously funny one-act comedy that George Bernard Shaw called his "true-to-life" wartime farce marked the company's first participation in MTC's Master Playwright Festival, during which Artistic Director JOHN CHASE also appeared in the ShawFest2012 "Discovering Shaw" Directors' Panel at the MTC Warehouse on Saturday, January 28.

The cast of three local community theatre veterans featured MITCH KROHN making his Merlyn Productions debut as Lord Augustus Highcastle, TIM BEAUDRY as The Clerk, and ELIZABETH WHITBREAD as The Lady. Stage Managed by ANNA WOODWARD and BRIAN DOUGHERTY, with scenic design by KEVIN HAMILL, and costume design by JENN HARDER.

While doing its bit, "Augustus" broke several company records for the Ellice Theatre, being the first production in that venue to run for five days, have six performances, or surpass 300 patrons (including over 100 ShawPasses sold through MTC).

In official media review, *Winnipeg Free Press* Theatre Reporter KEVIN PROKOSH afforded the production 3 stars, praising its direction and cast performances whilst questioning the 96-year-old script's continued relevancy. *UMFM 101.5* Theatre Reporter JUSTIN OLYNYK wrote "This one act play succeeds not only as a witty comedy full of one-liners, but also as a surprisingly good farce", while NICHOLAS FRIESEN of *Uptown Magazine* observed that "Merlyn Productions, it knows its audience. People were wiping away tears at the jokes, gasping and commenting at the plot twists and thoroughly enjoying every minute".



ANNOUNCING THE WINNIPEG THEATRE SCHOOL



Merlyn Productions is pleased to announce that its theatre school has been officially branded the **Winnipeg Theatre School (WTS)** as of February 2012.

While the name may be newly-created, the logo design and the credo that "some companies use professionals - we create them" will be recognised as having a decades-long presence within the Winnipeg theatre community:

"With the closure of Fantasy Theatre for Children and The Theatre School in 2011, numerous returning students selected Merlyn Productions as their new training grounds", says Artistic Director JOHN CHASE. "The Winnipeg Theatre School was established with the aim of continuing in FTC's three-decade tradition of quality instruction for all ages, and we are thrilled to be able to also carry forward The Theatre School's logo and motto - to continue fostering the visibility of a 30-year-old brand within the city of Winnipeg."

The WTS **Youth Showcase** took place on Thursday, March 22 at the Ellice Theatre. Fifteen Junior and Teen Acting students from the Autumn & Winter performance classes, ranging in age from 10 to 17, presented their scenes and monologues in a year-end programme open to the general public.

As a special project this year, the *Winnipeg Theatre School* also presented children's theatre classic **"The Beast In The Bag"** to a crowd of 60 patrons on Saturday, March 24, as directed by Youth Theatre Instructor TONY FROST and featuring Teen Intermediate Acting students and FTC/TTS alumni SCOTT AUSTIN, SAMARA BOUCHARD, JAZMYN SHELL, and SARAH VANDALE.

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MERLYN MEMBER NEWS

Many members of *Merlyn Productions* fill diverse roles in the local arts community. We are pleased to highlight the following recent, newsworthy items:

- Welcome to new company Core Members **ANNA-LAURE KOOP**, **RYAN OFFENLOCH**, and **TRENTON TRUDZIK**, who appeared onstage in our December production of *“Through The Looking Glass (And What Alice Found There)”*, as well as to **YVONNE GRENIER** (Stage Manager).
- Welcome to new company Core Member **MITCH KROHN**, who appeared onstage in the title role of our January/February ShawFest2012 production of *“Augustus Does His Bit”*.
- With the creation of new company membership categories for 2012, the following Core Members have been reassigned as Emeritus Members: **JESSE BOULET**, **EVELYN CARRUTHERS**, **KEENER DOUGHERTY**, **LAURIE DUNCAN**, **VICTOR ENNS**, **EDWARD FINIGAN**, **JOHN DAVID GORDON**, **MATTHEW STEFANSON**, **ANDREW THOMAS**, **MEGAN WILSON**, and **CHACE ZELINSKY**.
- Also in ShawFest2012, **ERIC RAE** appeared with *Tara Players* as Eugene Marchbanks in *“Candida”*.
- In mid-February, **MITCH KROHN** performed with the *Crosseyed Rascals* in *“How I Met Your Rascal”* at the PTE Colin Jackson Studio Theatre.
- Early March saw **KEN STONE** performing with the *Churchill Park Players* in *“Kicked by a Duck”*: an original play by Richard Baschak, presented at the Churchill Park United Church.
- Later in March, **ERIC RAE** appeared at the Gas Station Theatre as John Wisenhammer in the *U of W Honours Acting* production of *“Our Country's Good”*, with properties assistance by **SAM KOWALUK**.

COMPANY STAFF

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
JOHN CHASE

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
KEVIN HAMILL

WARDROBE MISTRESS
JENN HARDER

SCHOOL INSTRUCTORS

YOUTH THEATRE INSTRUCTOR
TONY FROST

ADULT THEATRE INSTRUCTOR
JOHN CHASE

FAMOUS THEATRE QUOTE(S)

“Contrariwise, if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic.”
– TWEEDLEDEE IN *“THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS”*

“It would be strange indeed if I had not mastered the art of public expression. Even the Radical papers have paid me the high compliment of declaring that I am never more impressive than when I have nothing to say.”
– LORD AUGUSTUS HIGHCASTLE IN *“AUGUSTUS DOES HIS BIT”*

