



Live Theatre Returns for Drayton Entertainment

Holiday programming on stage in St. Jacobs and Cambridge

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – The curtain will rise again for Drayton Entertainment! After being closed for more than 20 months due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the not-for-profit professional theatre organization is cautiously reopening its doors to offer in-person holiday productions at two of its theatres in Waterloo Region this December.

“We are beyond thrilled to welcome audiences back to experience the magic of live theatre,” says **Alex Mustakas**, Artistic Director of Drayton Entertainment. “Everyone from audiences to artists has made it clear to us that they’ve missed Drayton productions immensely and are excited to come back. I think this is going to be a really special experience for everyone.”

The hit tribute musical *A Closer Walk With Patsy Cline* was slated to be part of the cancelled 2020 Season. Audiences will finally have the opportunity to see the popular production on stage at the **St. Jacobs Country Playhouse** from **December 1 to December 26**. Written by Dean Regan, *A Closer Walk With Patsy Cline* journeys through Patsy’s life, from dusty roadhouse gigs in her hometown of Virginia, to her rise to fame at the Grand Ole Opry, and beyond. The production features 21 of Patsy’s greatest hits including "Crazy," "Sweet Dreams," "Walkin' After Midnight," "I Fall to Pieces," and many more.

The show will star revered Canadian performers **Rebecca Poff** and **Wade Lynch** as Patsy Cline and radio DJ Little Big Man, respectively. Both actors have appeared in numerous Drayton Entertainment productions. Poff previously appeared as The Mother Abbess in *The Sound of Music* and Madame de la Grande Bouche in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, among other notable roles at theatre companies across North America. Lynch is well-known for his comedic turns in productions like *Shear Madness*, *Hairspray*, *Annie*, *The Music Man*, and many others.

The creative team for *A Closer Walk With Patsy Cline* includes Director **Max Reimer**, Music Director **Steve Thomas**, Set Designer **Dayton Taylor**, Costume Designer **Jenine Kroeplin**, and Lighting Designer **Kevin Fraser**.

Over in Cambridge, a special original production called *Back Home for the Holidays* will be on stage at the Hamilton Family Theatre from **December 1 to December 26**. Starring **David Rogers**, one of Canada's most beloved performers, this joyous holiday celebration features everything from festive favourites like "O Holy Night" and "Sleighride," to glorious, inspirational songs like "You Raise Me Up," and soul-stirring Broadway anthems like "Bring Him Home" from *Les Misérables*, and more. Rogers gained national notoriety after portraying the Phantom in Toronto's record-breaking production of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Since then, he has starred in many other major Canadian productions including *Tommy*, *CATS*, and *Evita*. Rogers previously appeared as Valjean in *Les Misérables* and in his acclaimed one-man show *Broadway Heroes* for Drayton Entertainment.

Rogers will be joined by **Jayne Armstrong** and **Alyssa Curto**. Armstrong has appeared in numerous Drayton Entertainment productions including *Holiday Inn*, *Rock of Ages*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Anything Goes*, *White Christmas*, *The Music Man*, *The Little Mermaid*, *The Sound of Music*, and more. Curto will make her Drayton Entertainment debut. With training in both opera and musical theatre, some of her past roles include Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, Esmeralda in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and Carmen in Bizet's *Carmen*.

The creative team for *Back Home for the Holidays* includes Director **David Connolly**, Music Director **Anthony Bastianon**, and Lighting Designer **Jeff JohnstonCollins**. Performer **David Rogers** came up with the set and costume concepts. Orchestrations and Vocal Arrangements are by **Mark Payne**.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Drayton Entertainment has made health and safety a top priority. The charitable arts organization was one of the first theatres across the country to close its doors in March of 2020 to prevent the spread of coronavirus. That commitment continues as the organization carefully considers its reopening strategy.

In accordance with the province's vaccine certificate program, all patrons will be required to provide proof of double vaccination upon arrival at the theatre. Exceptions will be made only for patrons who provide proof of exemption as required by the Province. Children under the age of 12, accompanied by an adult who meets all of the requirements, are permitted into the theatre.

Masks will be mandatory for everyone while inside all areas of the theatres and during performances. There will also be heightened cleaning regimens at all venues. As government guidance is rapidly evolving, protocols will be amended and updated as necessary to ensure the health and safety of everyone.

"Although the province has removed capacity restrictions, we recognize that people have varying degrees of comfort when it comes to physical distancing, so we have decided to offer a hybrid model," says Mustakas. "We hope that audiences will choose the performance that suits their comfort level."

The Government of Ontario, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, has expanded the capacity limits for live theatres, concert venues, and sports stadiums to 100%

occupancy without seating restrictions. Drayton Entertainment will take the extra measure of implementing a capped seating capacity of up to a maximum of 50% at select performances, which will allow for some space between seating pods. Audiences will have the option to attend performances at 50% or at 100% according to their preference. This gradual and incremental approach will continue to help protect people as the province cautiously lifts public health measures safely in all sectors.

Drayton Entertainment is also implementing a *2021 Holiday Season Worry-Free Guarantee* to give flexibility to patrons who book seats for the December productions. Audiences will be able to purchase tickets knowing that if a performance is cancelled or a health concern arises, they will have a number of options available to them including free exchange for an alternate performance based on availability, a credit on their ticketing account for future use, or a full refund for that performance.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made a devastating impact on live theatre companies throughout Ontario and around the world. For Drayton Entertainment, the entire 2020 Season encompassing 20 productions on seven stages across the province was cancelled last year. At the time, the theatre company was on track to reach a paid attendance record of 275,000, with an anticipated economic impact of \$82.8 million, positively stimulating many tourism and hospitality businesses in communities throughout Ontario.

“This has been an extremely challenging time for our organization, but we are very lucky to have such steadfast support from our patrons, artists, staff, and communities,” says Mustakas. “It’s going to be a long and slow recovery, but we’re still here, and we’re not going anywhere.”

For more details about Drayton Entertainment’s holiday productions including performance times, health and safety protocols, and more please visit www.draytonentertainment.com.

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About Drayton Entertainment

Drayton Entertainment is an award-winning, not-for-profit charitable organization (12591 1313 RR0001) operating seven live theatrical venues in five unique Ontario locations – the original Drayton Festival Theatre in Drayton, Huron Country Playhouse (Mainstage and South Huron Stage) in Grand Bend, King’s Wharf Theatre in Penetanguishene, St. Jacobs Country Playhouse and Schoolhouse Theatre in St. Jacobs, and the Hamilton Family Theatre in Cambridge.

With over 400 artist contracts issued annually, Drayton Entertainment is one of the largest employers of professional artists in the country – across all artistic disciplines. The organization’s sustainable theatre model has emerged as a powerful force for culture and tourism in Ontario and has been recognized by the office of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario as well as the Ontario Innovation Excellence Awards.