



Huron Country Playhouse Kicks Off 2023 Season with a Toto-ly Spectacular Family Favourite!

Thursday, May 25, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Toto, we’re not in Kansas anymore... we’re in Grand Bend! This June, follow the Yellow Brick Road to the **Huron Country Playhouse**, where one of the greatest tales ever told will touch down – with a brand new twist. The beloved family panto tradition returns with an unforgettable take on the popular story *Wizard of Oz*, on stage **June 7 to June 25**.

“*Wizard of Oz: The Panto* is pure family fun – it’s packed with outrageous characters, extravagant costumes, and lots of music and dancing that make it wildly entertaining for everyone, from kids to parents to grandparents,” says **Alex Mustakas**, Artistic Director of Drayton Entertainment. “We love seeing three generations of theatregoers enjoying the magic of live theatre together.”

You know the story, but you’ve never seen it like this! With its winning combination of incredible music, lively dancing, audience participation, and of course, a dash of theatrical magic, this fractured fairy tale brims with humour, heart, and adventure. A twisted take on the famed children’s story by L. Frank Baum, *Wizard of Oz: The Panto* follows Dorothy as she journeys over the rainbow and makes her way to Oz with the help of some newfound friends.

Leading this production down the Yellow Brick Road is Director and Choreographer **David Connolly**, who has helmed past hit productions at Huron Country Playhouse including *Jack and the Beanstalk: The Panto*, *Cinderella: The Panto*, *Disney’s Newsies*, and more.

Connolly is joined by Music Director **Jim Hodgkinson**, Set Designer **Jean Claude Olivier**, Costume Designer **Rachel Berchtold**, and Lighting Designer **Jeff JohnstonCollins**. The team also includes Stage Manager **Amber Archbell**, Assistant Stage Manager **Nadene Riehl**, and Apprentice Stage Manager **Kirstyn Keeble**.

Lia Luz takes on the role of the headstrong heroine, Dorothy. Luz's musical theatre résumé includes Janet in *The Rocky Horror Show* at the Stirling Festival Theatre, Princess Slumber-Lee in *Sleeping Beauty: Panto*, and Little Sally in *Urinetown* with Toronto Musical Concerts.

Dorothy would be lost without her faithful friends, the Lion, Scarecrow, and Tin Man.

Recording artist and Season 1 finalist of *Canada's Got Talent*, **Stacey Kay** displays her impeccable vocal range and comic timing as the cowardly Lion. Audiences may remember Kay's vivacious talent from past Drayton Entertainment productions including *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *Jack and the Beanstalk: The Panto*, *Legends of Rock'n'Roll*, *Legally Blonde*, and *Godspell*.

Teddy Moynihan takes on the role of the lovable Scarecrow in search of a brain. Moynihan most recently appeared as the Wizard in the 2022 production of *Wizard of Oz: The Panto* and Drayton Entertainment's 2022 production of *It Runs In The Family*. Teddy has also appeared in the Grand Theatre/Charlottetown Festival production of *Mamma Mia!*, and in *Kronberg* at the Charlottetown Festival.

Complete with his oil can, **Will Jeffs** takes on the role of the endearing Tin Man. An award-winning artist, Jeffs appeared in Drayton Entertainment's 2022 production of *Mamma Mia!*. He was part of the London and World Arena Tour of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and the UK Tours of *Love Me Tender* and *Blues Brothers*. Jeffs also has an extensive film and TV career, appearing in *Mamma Mia! The Movie*, *Harry Potter 6*, and more.

Justin Bott is sure to have audiences rolling in the aisles as Auntie Em. Bott is well known for his over-the-top panto roles including Widow Twaddle in *Jack and the Beanstalk*, step-sister Revolta in *Cinderella*, evil sorcerer Abanazza in *Aladdin*, and Nurse Tickle in *Snow White*.

Tim Porter returns to take on the role of Harry Trotter. Porter has appeared in many other Drayton Entertainment family pantos including *Sleeping Beauty*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Cinderella*, *Aladdin* and *Snow White*.

Paige Foskett is Glinda the Good Witch, out to foil the plans of the Wicked Witch, played by **Billy Lake**. This production marks Foskett's Drayton Entertainment debut. She recently appeared in the Toronto production of *Rock of Ages* at the Elgin Theatre, and has been seen in productions at the Hart House Theatre and Stephenville Theatre Festival. Lake has appeared in the Drayton Entertainment productions of *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*, *Beauty and The Beast*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Cinderella: The Panto*, and *Sleeping Beauty: The Panto*. Elsewhere, Lake has spent 10 seasons at the Shaw Festival.

Will Parry is Toto, marking a return to the Drayton Entertainment stage having previously been seen as Tootles in *Peter Pan: The Panto* as a member of Drayton Entertainment's youth ensemble.

George Absi, Dave Comeau, Kalie Hunter, Jaden Kim, Stephanie Pitsiladis and Ben Skipper, make up an impressive ensemble cast, which also features 24 local youth performers who appear in the show on a rotating schedule throughout the run alongside the professional company.

The children's chorus performers include:

- **Ocean Wuerth** of Ailsa Craig
- **Delaney Grover** of Alvinston
- **Finn Cofell** of Ayr
- **Miah McIntyre** of Exeter
- **Evelyn Den Otter** of Hensall
- **Mya Devereux** and **Noah Devereux** of Ilderton
- **Dilynn Campbell, Raya Campbell, Madilynn Laidlow, Danica Novo, Tessa Pritchett-White, Taylor Reaume-Cunning, Fiona Smith, and Danielle Trampleasure** of London
- **Daxton Scurr, E.J. Scurr, and Rowyn Scurr** of Parkhill
- **Sidney Gingerich** of St. Joseph
- **Nolan McKee** of Stratford
- **Junior Van Geffen** and **Alison Weeks** of Strathroy
- **Gavin Sitter** of Thedford
- **Claire Steckle** of Zurich

All traditional pantos include audience participation, and *Wizard of Oz: The Panto* is no exception. Families and young spectators are encouraged to join in the fun by booing the Wicked Witch and singing along with familiar chart-topping songs by artists such as Lizzo, Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, BTS, Alanis Morissette, Sarah Bareilles and many more.

Wizard of Oz: The Panto is proudly sponsored by **Best Cooling Systems**. The Design Sponsor is **The Garden Gate Gifts & Florals**. The Media Sponsors are **Country 104.9** and **AM980**. The Season Media Sponsor is **CTV**.

Wizard of Oz: The Panto is on stage from **June 7 to June 25** at the **Huron Country Playhouse's South Huron Stage**.

Regular performance tickets are \$55 for adults, \$34 for youth under 20 years of age. Tickets for select Discount Dates and groups of 20 or more are \$45, and small groups of 10-19 are \$50. HST is applicable to all ticket prices. Tickets may be purchased by calling the Box Office at **519-238-6000** or toll free at **1-855-drayton (372-9866)**, or online at www.huroncountryplayhouse.com.

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