



## *Life is a Dream for Neil Aitchison as he joins the cast of “Sh-Boom” this summer*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Neil Aitchison’s familiar, booming voice is returning to the Drayton Festival Theatre this summer as he joins the cast of jukebox musical *Sh-Boom: Life Could Be A Dream*. This joyous jive down memory lane is a hit parade of rock ‘n roll classics that will tickle your funny bone and touch your heart. *Sh-Boom: Life Could Be A Dream* is on stage at the **Drayton Festival Theatre** from **August 16 to September 3**.

It’s decades before “American Idol”, and a local radio station is sponsoring a band competition with a recording contract as the prize. Denny and the Dreamers are ready for their big shot at stardom, but trouble comes in the form of Lois, who arrives to put some polish on the boys. Denny falls in love, Wally falls in line, Eugene falls apart, and handsome heartthrob Duke sends the whole situation spinning.

Featuring 25 classics from rock ‘n’ roll’s heyday sung in heavenly harmony, including “Fools Fall in Love,” “Tears on my Pillow,” “Runaround Sue,” “Earth Angel,” “Stay,” “Unchained Melody,” “Lonely Teardrops,” “The Glory of Love,” *Sh-Boom: Life Could Be A Dream* will tickle your funny bone and touch your heart.

“This hit-parade review of chart-topping songs will bring back many memories for patrons,” says **Alex Mustakas**, Drayton Entertainment’s Artistic Director. “The cherry on top is getting to see Neil Aitchison return to a DJ booth where he spent so many years as a radio personality. Neil’s distinctive voice is a huge part of his public persona, so we’re incredibly pleased he’s joining this fun, toe-tapping musical.”



Helming this dream of a production is Director **David Rogers**. One of Canada's leading musical theatre artists, Rogers is the Co-Artistic Director of Victoria Playhouse Petrolia. He conceived and created *Fiddler on the Loose*, which played to sold-out houses at the Drayton Festival Theatre in 2018 and conceived last year's hit review *Good 'Ol Country Gospel*.

Bringing the songs of the 50s and 60s to life is Choreographer **David Hogan** who, along with Rogers, is the Co-Artistic Director of Victoria Playhouse Petrolia. Hogan has directed many Drayton Entertainment productions including *Man of La Mancha*, *Broadway Heroes*, *Hollywood Sings*, *Godspell*, and this season's *Fiddler on the Loose*.

Joining Rogers and Hogan are Music Director **Melissa Morris**, Set Designer **Douglas Paraschuk**, Costume Designer **Rachel Berchtold**, Lighting Designer **Lyle Franklin**, Stage Manager **Charles Russell**, and Assistant Stage Manager **Nadene Riehl**.

A spectacular cast has been assembled for this production, including the aforementioned **Neil Aitchison** as DJ "Bullseye" Miller.

**Kaden Forsberg** is the spotlight-loving Denny Varney, leader of the newly-formed doo-wop group Denny and the Dreamers. Forsberg appeared as Gerry Goffin in this season's production of *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, and has performed at the Citadel Theatre, Segal Centre, and the Chemainus Theatre Festival.

**Connor Meek** is Denny's best friend and co-conspirator, Eugene Johnson. Making his Drayton Entertainment debut, Meek appeared in *9 to 5* and *One Hit Wonders* with Stage West, was a featured artist on Norwegian Cruise Lines' World Cruise, and appeared in Starvox Entertainment's *Forever Plaid*.

**Jordan Goodridge** is the cheerful, loveable, and sometimes childish Wally Patton, who becomes the heart and soul of the group. Goodridge recently appeared as one of The Drifters in Drayton Entertainment's *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, and in the 2015 production of *The Music Man*. Elsewhere, he appeared in *Chicago* at the Stratford Festival, and Citadel Theatre's *Jersey Boys*.

**Michael Vanhevel** is bad-boy auto shop worker Duke Henderson, the new member of the group whose natural talent threatens to steal Denny's spotlight. Vanhevel has appeared in several Drayton Entertainment productions is currently starring in this year's production of *The Crooner* at the Huron Country Playhouse. Elsewhere, he has performed at Magnus Theatre, Thousand Islands Playhouse, Theatre Calgary, and Victoria Playhouse Petrolia.

**Jennifer Walls** appears as Lois Franklin, the former song leader who helps the band shape-up and prepare for the competition - falling in love with Duke in the process - and Denny's off-stage mother, Mrs. Varney. Walls appeared as Celine Dion in Drayton Entertainment's *Canada 151: Better Late Than Sorry* and has appeared in a number of productions at the Victoria Playhouse Petrolia, including *Dynamic Duos* and *Little Miss County Fair*.

*Sh-Boom: Life Could Be A Dream* is written and created by Roger Bean, creator of the long-running Off-Broadway hit *The Marvelous Wonderettes*. *Sh-Boom: Life Could Be A Dream* had a record-breaking 12-month run in Los Angeles, receiving the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award, the LA Weekly Theatre Award, and the Backstage Garland Award for Outstanding Musical.

*Sh-Boom: Life Could Be A Dream* is proudly sponsored by **R. J. Burnside**. The Design Sponsors are **Hahn Rentals** and **Elmira Golf Club**. Media Sponsors are **CKWR 98.5**, **The Wellington Advertiser**, and **1460 CJOY**. The 2023 Season Media Sponsor is **CTV**. *Sh-Boom: Life Could Be A Dream* is on stage at the Drayton Festival Theatre from August 16 to September 3.

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 **519-638-5555** or toll free at **1-855-drayton (372-9866)**, or online at [www.draytonentertainment.com](http://www.draytonentertainment.com).

### **About Neil Aitchison**

Aitchison is a beloved and critically acclaimed humourist, with an enviable knack for creating a rapport with his audience. His professional career began, he claims, after he became the first graduate of the Broadcasting Program (alphabetically) at nascent Conestoga College in the late '60s.

Born in Harriston, Aitchison was “released” from his local high school in 1967 and went on to pursue a degree in Broadcasting at Conestoga College. His growing popularity became clear when Aitchison was voted the first Class President of Conestoga College after a savvy political campaign asserting the charming slogan “I Promise You Nothing!”

During his unparalleled and illustrious career, he has been an actor, a radio personality, broadcast executive, and a motivational public speaker. Through his alter-ego of RCMP Constable Archibald F. Inkster, he’s brought laughter to thousands of audiences with his unique and humorous take on Canadian life.

Upon graduation, Aitchison worked for CKCO-TV, where he met his “first” – and only – wife, Helen. He then switched to radio, selling and managing advertising for 24 years, and then later gaining notoriety on local station NewsTalk 570 with his much-admired afternoon program “The Neil Aitchison Show.” He spent an additional three years at the station, entertaining audiences with his unmistakable humour and unique look at community news and events, as well as making numerous appearances as a keynote speaker at various fundraisers, political events and high-profile concerts.

As a much sought-after emcee, Aitchison's involvement in the community he loves has spanned over six decades, and he's volunteered his time – and trademark voice – to many local groups and organizations.

Aitchison's accolades include the 2015 Kitchener-Waterloo Citizen of The Year, the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for having made a significant contribution to Canada at home or abroad awarded in 2002, and twice being named a Paul Harris Fellow by the Kitchener Westmount Rotary, an honour he received for community service in 1991 and 1999.

Earlier this year, Neil was honoured by MP of Cambridge Bryan May with the Platinum Jubilee Pin in recognition of his tremendous service to his community. Aitchison has been involved with many charitable groups including United Way of KW, Waterloo Region Home Builder's Association, KW Oktoberfest, Cambridge Chamber Business Awards, rotary clubs, and more. He has also played a pivotal role in the Drayton Entertainment story.

"Neil has been a huge part of Drayton Entertainment's success through the years, as a founding board member, and early staff member and one of our biggest (and loudest) cheerleaders," says Alex Mustakas, Artistic Director of Drayton Entertainment. "This special recognition could not be more deserved."

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