



***St. Jacobs Country Playhouse Continues
Holiday Tradition with a Toto-ly New Panto!
Additional Dates Added to Meet Demand!***

Tuesday, December 6, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Toto, we’re not in St. Jacobs anymore! This holiday season, audiences at the **St. Jacobs Country Playhouse** will follow the Yellow Brick Road as one of the greatest tales ever told touches down with a brand new twist! Drayton Entertainment’s family panto tradition returns with an unforgettable take on the popular story *Wizard of Oz*.

With the original 5-week run – **December 1 to December 31** – virtually sold out before Opening Night, the production has already been extended to meet the incredible demand for tickets. An additional 8 performances have been added to the schedule, **January 3 to January 8**.

“*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. And now, with the extra performances, even more families will be able to make memories at the theatre this holiday season.”

Wizard of Oz: The Panto is a twisted take on the famed children’s story by L. Frank Baum. When Dorothy and her beloved dog Toto are whisked over the rainbow in a tornado, she must band together with some newfound friends to journey to Oz and defeat the Wicked Witch who is determined to take over the land.

Wizard Of Oz: The Panto is helmed by Director and Choreographer **David Connolly**, who is credited with several past Drayton Entertainment hits including Disney’s *Newsies*, *Annie*, and the popular pantos *Sleeping Beauty*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Cinderella*, *Aladdin* and *Snow White*, among other shows.

Connolly is joined by Music Director **Steve Thomas**, 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 **Kelsey Rae**, and Apprentice Stage Manager **Kirstyn Keeble**.

Making her Drayton Entertainment debut, **Lia Luz** stars as headstrong heroine Dorothy. Luz's musical theatre résumé includes Janet in *The Rocky Horror Show* and Princess Slumber-Lee in *Sleeping Beauty: Panto* (Stirling Festival Theatre), and Little Sally in *Urinetown* (Toronto Musical Concerts).

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

Recent finalist on Season 1 of *Canada's Got Talent*, recording artist (and Cambridge native!) **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*.

JJ Gerber, former finalist of *CBC's Searchlight*, takes on the role of the lovable Scarecrow in search of a brain. Gerber has entertained audiences in a number of Drayton Entertainment shows such as, *A Few Good Men*, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, and *Anne of Green Gables*.

Complete with his oil can, **Noah Beemer** takes on the role of the endearing Tin Man for his Drayton Entertainment debut. Beemer boasts an impressive résumé having appeared in numerous musicals including, Ricky in *Ride the Cyclone*, Sky in *Mamma Mia* at Tweed and Company Theatre, Tobias in *Sweeney Todd*, Jack in *Into the Woods*, Bosie in *The Judas Kiss* at Talk Is Free Theatre, *Finally There's Sun* at The Stratford Festival, and *The Adventures of Pinocchio* at Young People's Theatre.

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* and starred as Buddy the Elf in the 2019 sold-out hit *Elf: The Musical*.

Erica Peck as Glinda the Good Witch is out to foil the plans of the Wicked Witch, played by **Billy Lake**. Peck started her career as Scaramouche in the original Toronto production *We Will Rock You* and has appeared in the Toronto and National Tour productions of *Kinky Boots*. She has also appeared at the Stratford Festival and in the Drayton Entertainment productions of *Kinky Boots*, *Grease*, and *Sleeping Beauty: The Panto*. Lake spent 10 seasons at the Shaw Festival and was last seen in the Drayton Entertainment productions of *Kinky Boots*, *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*, *Beauty and The Beast*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Cinderella: The Panto*, and *Sleeping Beauty: The Panto*.

Will Parry, who was previously a member of Drayton Entertainment's youth ensemble, makes his St. Jacobs stage debut as Toto.

Nestor Lozano Jr, Tama Martin, Teddy Moynihan, Stephanie Pitsiladis, Ben Skipper, and Christine Watson 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:

- **Layla Jones, Elias Poulin, and Alli Wilkinson** of Cambridge
- **Abygail Rosenberger** of Elmira
- **Lily King** of Goderich
- **Mary Daly, Lily Fournier, Chloe Francis, Reese Goetz, Eamon Knell, Naomi Lofft, Eliza McCready-Branch, Sean Mendes, Chase Oudshoorn, and Violet Sutton** of Kitchener
- **Ava Voll** of Listowel
- **Evan Doerr and Danica Novo** of London
- **Taya Nero** of St. Jacobs
- **Nolan McKee** of Stratford
- **Leah Coupal, Alyssa Panda, Kira Panda, and Emmerson Roe** of Waterloo

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 and boo each time the Wicked Witch enters the stage and sing 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 **Anytime Fitness, Domino's Pizza, and Josslin Insurance**. The Media Sponsors are **CKWR 98.5 FM, Wellington Advertiser, and 107.9 Dave Rocks**. The Design Sponsor is **Holiday Inn Express & Suites**. The 2022 Season Media Sponsor is **CTV**.

Wizard of Oz: The Panto is on stage from **December 1 to January 8** at the St. Jacobs Country Playhouse. Regular performance tickets are \$53 for adults, \$32 for youth under 20 years of age and \$43 for groups of 20 or more and select Discount Dates. HST is applicable to all ticket prices.

Tickets may be purchased by calling the Box Office at 519-747-7788 or toll free at **1-855-drayton (372-9866)**, or online instantly at www.draytonentertainment.com.

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