

Cornerstone has it put together

It's hard to pick just one stand out in Cornerstone Theatre's production of Stephen Sondheim's *Putting It Together*.

And clearly the vocal performances of Karen Minish are a stand out. But so is the work of Parris Greaves in his "lesser" role as Man 3. Louisa O'Keane delivers and Joe Morris puts in a performance with real heart, while JP Thibodeau reminds audiences that he doesn't only direct, he can sing.

Yet for such a slick, retro production where the char-

acters use the minimal set design to sit and reflect out of the spotlight, it's the lighting itself that plays one of the most important roles in *Putting It Together* — as does the impeccable work of music director Debbie Rosen.

She's tightened up the sound so much so that percussionist Kent Macrae's sparkling work is clearly a star member of the team that puts out the show. Rosen's team of Hugo McLaughlin, and Jenna Strautman, Macrae and herself weren't on stage to take a bow this Saturday night, but they

very well could have been.

The first act swings through a modernist, perhaps 1960s-era Manhattan, cocktail party and establishes something of a scene on which the second act rests. In the first act, O'Keane nails Sondheim's seductive Academy Award winning piece, *Sooner or Later*, performed by Madonna in 1990's *Dick Tracy*.

While in the second act Greaves' take on Buddy's Blues (from *Follies*) had the audience roaring as did Minish in *Getting Married Today* (from *Company*).

But what makes Cornerstone's *Putting It Together* really satisfying is that it lives up to its billing as a touching performance, it's an exploration of relationships with substance, and without ever following a narrative it tells the story of love.

Putting It Together runs at Cornerstone Theatre until Feb. 6. Call (403) 609-0004 for show times and ticket information or visit atthecorner.ca.
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The summer season

A 'best of cast' for the ninth season of the dinner show has already begun singing and serving at Cornerstone Theatre

By Hamish MacLean
Canmore Leader

As the season starts, Cornerstone Theatre fixture, Joe Morris is excited about this season's Oh Canada Eh? Dinner Show.

Morris is in his seventh season and he calls this year's cast an amalgamation of the best people he's seen on stage.

"One of the beauties of this year, because everybody's returning, this has almost become a 'best-of' cast," Morris said. "We've picked these people out of all the years that we've done this show — and these people all really excelled at what they did — it's nice to have these people back here this year so we can really make this show everything it can be."

This year will see: Colleen Renne-Grivell — in a part-time role for most of the summer — Morris, William Petrie, Christine Stewart, Karita Mullins and Clayton Labbe tackle the two-and-a-half hour tribute to Canadian songs and themes.

"We knew at our first rehearsal, our first run through, that this was going to be great," Mullins said.

Auditions are held across Canada for the cabaret

or Vaudeville style show and some in this year's cast auditioned years ago and are now returning for another run at the interactive performance.

Petrie is in his third season and he's happy to be back.

"It's a lot of fun to do this show, to get into costume, to entertain these people," Petrie said. "Just having a great time every night and knowing that I really made someone's evening."

The night begins as the performers, who double as servers, get to know their tables a little bit, to find out if there are any special occasions, for example.

"We encourage cheering, we encourage singing and dancing," Mullins said. "They're on their feet."

The show includes over 70 songs written or made famous by Canadi-

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"The special part about this show people forget about what's going on in their lives, there's so much going on here, that they can't think about anything but what's going on in front of them," Mullins said.

Morris said that the theatre is trying to get the locals back, especially those who haven't seen it in five or six years as the show does change, he said. There's new material and new choreography.

"We're constantly evolving and changing the show," he said. "When they originally envisioned the show 18 years ago now, the demographic that they were writing for are considerably older and they're not really travelling anymore — so we've obviously updated for our demographic. And as the years go on, we'll continue to update."

"When we've got a permanent staff, a permanent artistic director, it's really easy for us. We know we're going to do this show every year and so we think, 'OK, what are we going to make better this year? Well, why don't we re-do the rock medley, why don't we re-do this....'"

This season one of the revamps is to include foreign translations for French, German and Japanese guests. And Cornerstone's artistic director, JP Thibodeau, has reworked the sound and lighting this year.

As part of the effort to win locals back to the show, there's a special for the duration of the summer as Cornerstone is offering a buy one, get the second one half-price ticket deal. While as always kids, 16 years old and younger, are free with a paid adult.

The cast of this year's ninth season of the Oh Canada Eh? Dinner Show will perform nearly 50 shows over the course of the season from April 23 to Oct. 20. Seating time is 6:15 p.m. on show nights. For more information, call Cornerstone Theatre at (403) 609-0004, or go to atthecorner.ca.

hamish@canmoreleader.com

ans, covering everything from World War One songs to something as contemporary as a Shania Twain medley.

"There is a plot, kind of, in a round-about sort of way," Morris said. "It's a night of entertainment is the best way to put it."

"It's beautiful, because this isn't the kind of show where you can go on auto-pilot," he said.

"The whole feel of the room changes every night."

Mullins said her favourite interaction in the show is when she plays the character Klondike Kitty.

"We generally have an idea of which particular men Klondike Kitty is going to flirt with for the evening," she said.

"And it's always fun to come off the stage and be face to face with someone."

"They always get a little red in the face and their wives always give them a new nick name after the show."

Oh Canada Canadiana onstage at Cornerstone

DAVE WHITFIELD CANMORE

It's about hockey (what could be more seasonable), about Our Anne and it's about what makes us tick as Canadians.

Yes, Oh Canada Eh?'s summer dinner show is back on stage in Canmore at Cornerstone Theatre and Restaurant.

Running every night but Thursdays until Oct. 20, the cast of six will serve up both cuisine and character sketches as they perform in three or four roles apiece.

The cast includes Joe Morris, Christine Stewart, Clayton Labbe, Karita Mullins, William Petrie and Melody Robinet, who joins in the fun this week.

"It's a two-hour tribute to Canada," said Morris. "There are 70 parts or whole songs by Canadian artists and it focusses on Mounties, Anne of Green Gables, saloon girls, hockey players - all things Canadian.

"It's an integrated dinner show with the cast both on and off stage."

Oh Canada Eh? dinner shows run from 6:30 to 9 p.m., with cast members, backed up serving staff, attending to tables, appearing on stage and encouraging audience participation - all amidst a flurry of costume changes.

Those costume changes can be tricky, said Petrie, who began performing in Oh Canada productions part-time in Niagara Falls. Petrie portrays a hockey player, which means appearing on the floor and on stage in skates. "You have to be versatile," he said. "It's challenging, but people will be able to come out and see my pirouettes."

All cast members have appeared in previous dinner shows and getting together for the 2010 season, said Mullins, "has meant fine tuning, we're not starting from scratch this time."

While the summer production has been staged in Canmore

previously, changes have been made to the musical selection and choreography.

"And we try to get everyone involved," said Stewart. "We see who can get the best cheers from the audience, get people singing and up on their feet dancing. It's really interactive."

The summer show was written and created by J. Sean Elliot, Jim Cooper and the original 1992 cast, with musical arrangements by Ross Inglis and a revised script and score by Morris, JP Thibodeau and the 2006 cast. The show is directed by Thibodeau, with choreography by Jodi Harrison, stage management by Gina Power, sound programming by Etienne St. Jacques and musical direction by Deb Rosen.

The dinner show began April 23 and, other than some less than full houses due to Iceland's volcanic ash spewing into the ozone and cancelling international bookings, all have been well attended, said Morris.

In an effort to make the summer production even more popular, a locals' special has been incorporated where for every ticket purchased at full price, a second can be had for 50 per cent off. Kids under 12 are free with paid tickets.

"That's a great promotion for locals," said Labbe, who arrived in town a few days ago to take up his role. "And for people who saw the show years ago, with the changes made, it's different this year."

Musically, the summer dinner show offers everything from the musical Hair to a Shania Twain medley, Anne Murray and Joni Mitchell. Specific songs include Gordie Lightfoot's "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald", Trooper's "We're Here For A Good Time and "American Woman" by The Guess Who.

Dinner is a four-course meal served family-style; with roast beef and chicken, Haddock, veggies, dessert and tea or coffee. A full bar is available as well.

A portion of the proceeds of the show go to KidSport Bow Valley.

For more information, or tickets, visit www.atthecorner.ca



Joe Morris finds himself up a creek without a paddle during the Oh Canada Eh? dinner show at Cornerstone Theatre.

CRAIG DOUCE PHOTO