

PREVIEW: ANNE OF GREEN GABLES - THE MUSICAL

By Brian Morton

The Hammer Monthly

February 1, 2026

Book by Donald Harron

Music by Norman Campbell

Lyrics by Donald Harron, Norman Campbell, Elaine Campbell and Mavor Moore

Adapted from the 1908 novel by L. M. Montgomery

Performances: February 13, 20 and 27 @ 7:30 pm

Matinees: February 14, 21, 22, 28 and March 1 @ 2:00 pm

Where: Hamilton Theatre Inc.'s Studio Theatre

Address: 140 MacNab Street North, Hamilton, ON

Tickets: 905-522-3032 or <https://hamiltontheatre.com>



I am the same age as ANNE OF GREEN GABLES – THE MUSICAL. The show premiered in 1965, the same year I was born, and that coincidence has always given it a particular resonance for me. For nearly six decades, this beloved play with original music, has quietly accompanied the lives of Canadians who have

grown up alongside it, returning again and again in new productions while retaining its essential spirit. Like Anne Shirley herself, it has aged without hardening, remaining curious, generous, and unashamedly sincere. To encounter it now, as part of Hamilton Theatre Inc.'s 67th season, feels less like a revival than a meeting with an old companion whose voice remains instantly familiar.

The musical's origins are firmly rooted in Canadian cultural history. The book and lyrics were written by Donald Harron, a writer and broadcaster whose career was defined by his commitment to Canadian stories at a time when they were rarely prioritized on major stages. The music was composed by Norman Campbell, a central figure in the development of Canadian television and musical performance through his long association with the CBC. Together, Harron and Campbell approached ANNE OF GREEN GABLES not as light source material but as literature worthy of careful theatrical translation.

Their adaptation preserves the emotional intelligence and moral complexity of the novel while shaping it into a musical form that is episodic yet cohesive, intimate yet expansive. From its earliest incarnation as a CBC television special in 1956, through decades of semi annual productions at the Charlottetown Festival beginning with its first stage outing in the summer of 1965, and on to its international success on Broadway and in London's West End, the show has long been recognized as something rare: an authentically Canadian musical that does not apologize for its scale or its ambition. This extraordinary continuity has made ANNE OF GREEN GABLES – THE MUSICAL, "Canada's longest running main-stage musical"; a distinction formally acknowledged in 2014 when, just prior to its 50th season, Guinness World Records named it the longest running annual musical theatre production in the world.

Over the decades, Anne Shirley has continued to be rediscovered through film and television, each generation encountering her anew. For many viewers of my age, the defining screen incarnation remains the 1980s CBC television adaptation ANNE OF GREEN GABLES, starring Megan Follows. Those productions were cultural events, watched collectively, and they fixed a particular image of Anne in the national imagination: impulsive, intellectually fierce, romantic without sentimentality, and shaped by early loss. More recently, the Netflix series ANNE WITH AN E revisited Montgomery's story with a contemporary sensibility, foregrounding trauma, gender expectations, and social exclusion. Each adaptation has emphasized different aspects of the character, but all confirm the remarkable elasticity of Anne's story and its continued relevance.

It is against that long cultural backdrop that Hamilton Theatre Inc. presents ANNE OF GREEN GABLES – THE MUSICAL, running February 13 to March 1 at the HTI Studio Theatre on MacNab Street North. The musical occupies a distinctive place among these adaptations. What has always drawn me to it is the way it allows Anne's inner life to exist openly in song. Where prose describes and film often internalizes, musical theatre externalizes feeling. Anne sings her longing, her anger, her delight, and her gratitude directly to us, and the effect remains disarmingly direct and emotionally accessible.

In this production, the title role is played by Lily Galivan, who takes on one of the most demanding parts in the Canadian musical repertoire. Anne Shirley requires vocal stamina, emotional openness, and a fearless willingness to embrace sincerity. Galivan is joined by Al Helsdon as Matthew Cuthbert, whose quiet decency and moral steadiness provide one of the story's emotional anchors, and Lyla Miklos as Marilla Cuthbert, a character whose apparent severity gradually gives way to profound tenderness.

Together, the three form the emotional core of the piece, charting Anne's journey from unwanted orphan to indispensable daughter.

They are supported by Gregory Sokil as Gilbert Blythe, Anne's intellectual rival and eventual ally, and Amanda Ramirez as Diana Barry, her first and truest friend. The surrounding ensemble creates the wider community of Avonlea, a place defined as much by its social constraints as by its capacity for kindness. In the musical, Avonlea becomes a chorus of voices that both challenge and ultimately sustain Anne, reminding us that belonging is something negotiated over time.

The production is directed by Mallory Toye, with musical direction by Jennifer Ferreira, whose work on Norman Campbell's score emphasizes narrative clarity and warmth. Scenic and props design by Maddie Merrill, costumes by The Muses, and lighting by Max Herman support a staging that balances simplicity with expressive detail. Choreography by Erika Bennett and movement coordination by Kayla Jensen give physical life to the score without overwhelming the storytelling. Producer Haleigh Wallace and stage manager Graham Clarke anchor the production from behind the scenes.

To watch ANNE OF GREEN GABLES – THE MUSICAL, now in 2026, is to be reminded that certain stories grow with us. They are reshaped by time and context, but they continue to speak. This production offers Hamilton audiences an opportunity to encounter Anne Shirley once again, not merely as a figure of childhood nostalgia, but as a living presence whose voice still rings crystal clear. I'm looking forward to seeing the production myself, and reuniting with the friends involved with it.

Brian Morton (www.theatre-erebus.ca)

From: <https://thehammermonthly.ca/theatre-1/more-theatre/>