

REVIEW: HTI'S "ANNE OF GREEN GABLES THE MUSICAL" IS A WHIMSICAL DELIGHT FOR ALL AGES

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Steel City Reviews



If you live in Canada, it would be difficult to imagine anyone not knowing the red-headed, pigtailed orphan Anne and her lessons in discovery, self-acceptance and found family. A beloved story penned by Lucy Maud Montgomery and published in 1908, the stories became a full-fledged musical that holds a world record for the longest-running annual musical theatre production. It has been

performed every summer at the Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, since 1965.



Now, Hamilton Theatre Inc. and director Mallory Toyne bring the musical from the shores of Prince Edward Island to their stage. In this two-act musical, we see young orphan Anne arrive at the fictional community of Avonlea near the turn of the 19th century. Anne isn't welcomed with open arms, as her adopters (brother and sister pair Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert) were expecting a boy to help with the farm work and the gossipy, judgmental community don't take kindly to Anne's quirkiness. Regardless, Anne's feisty yet kind spirit perseveres. As she grows up in Avonlea, we see her thrive while inspiring those around her and HTI's production delivers the whimsy and nostalgia of Anne's story straight into our hearts.

Toye has combined great heart and a keen eye for staging alongside a team of creatives that transform the small but mighty stage into a surprisingly effective space where transitions are quick and cues are near perfect, allowing the characters and their interactions to shine. The set (designed by Maddie Merrill) has some very clever reveals throughout the show and it certainly delighted the young audience members during the Saturday matinee, adding to the whimsical nature of it all. Last, but certainly not least, the costume designs are some of the best work The Muses have done to date with several beautiful period accurate garments from the early 1900's.



Alongside Toye's dedicated direction, musical director Jennifer Ferreira and her band excel at this musical's score. It's never overpowering and soars beautifully (and energetically when necessary) in the HTI auditorium, lending that sweet nostalgia to every song and scene. Ferreira also showcases her ability as a mentor to the new voices in the production and those efforts will certainly not go unnoticed.



In what must have been enormous pressure to cast this production when it is such a well-known story, Toye and her production team have exceeded expectations and Anne of Green Gables enthusiasts will be overjoyed to hear that this cast suit their roles impressively well. Allen Helsdon's portrayal as terminally shy Matthew is wonderful. His songs, like his character, are sweet and reveal his true feelings (like any good musical number should). Any scene he shares with Anne warms, and eventually breaks, your heart. Bravo.

Lyla Miklos is divine as no-nonsense Marilla Cuthbert and in her sweeter moments, we can see the care and concern she has for Anne and her brother Matthew. Miklos' powerful soprano is truly something to behold and it's a shame her character doesn't have many opportunities to sing which makes the moments she does have stand out.



Newcomers abound in this production of Anne of Green Gables – The Musical™ and two standouts come from our kindred spirit pairing of Anne and Diana. Lily Galivan as Anne is a casting choice for the ages. She is exemplary in the role and exudes the spirited energy of her well-known character with every line delivery and overdramatic flop onto the furniture. She is a delight from start to finish and her vocal prowess is truly incredible, especially as Galivan acts through her vocals which is difficult for even seasoned actors to do. It is no easy feat to join a production for the first time and have the pressure of expectation upon you but Galivan takes the challenge and, much like Anne, wins the hearts of everyone in the audience. Galivan is a community theatre gem that I hope to see more of in the future.

Amanda Ramirez is another gem in her role of Anne's best friend Diana Barry. She is more focused on in the second act and her comedic timing and line delivery is

deightful, especially during the infamous raspberry cordial scene. Galivan and Ramirez showcase a natural friendship on stage and their song “Kindred Spirits” is a lovey moment between them.



Finally, Gregory Sokil as Gilbert is having the time of his life on stage. No matter what is happening he is in character, fully committed, and while perhaps a bit strained in his performance vocally, is a confident addition to the newcomers in this production and his infectious energy is what makes community theatre so memorable.

The ensemble, as usual, does incredible work from the choreographed numbers to providing assistance with the quick scene changes. They also often act as

extensions of Anne's imagination which is particularly effective and a solid directing choice from Toye. Some standout moments include: "Back to School" (which cleverly utilizes props such as jump ropes into the choreography), "The Picnic," and the act two opening number "Summer."



As much as Anne of Green Gables – The Musical™ maintains a wonderful sense of nostalgia for “simpler times,” the core character struggles also suggests that life wasn’t necessarily more simple back then. Said struggles—insecurity, longing for acceptance, and staying true to oneself—are as timeless as the story of Anne of Green Gables itself. The artists involved in this show allow these messages to soar. Inspirational, thoughtful, and fun, Anne of Green Gables – The Musical™ is an imaginative and impressive adaptation for audiences of all ages. The gossip around town confirms that the rest of the run is sold out but if you manage to get tickets, consider yourself highly favoured. The rest? A tissue for helping you through the depths of your despair.

All photography by Kasey Bridges Photography (formally Kreation Photography)

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