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25 years ...

... of make-believe

The magic world of GLT



1981—Every now and then we each need a little bit of horror, right? The Georgetown Little Theatre performed Count Dracula in 1981 starring Keith Harris, the leading monster and Melissa Bell, who seems ready to fall for the count. (Herald file photo)



1975—Vera Macdonald and Neville Worsnop were two of the stars in the original GLT production of Move Over Mrs. Markham ten years ago. The theatre troupe decided to do the play again in celebration of their 25th anniversary. Most of the cast members from the first production have returned to star in the more updated version. Tickets are still available for the gala celebration Saturday night. (Herald file photo)

By Brian MacLeod
Herald staff

It's been 25 years since the Georgetown Little Theatre brought theatre lovers together for their first production, "Dirty Work at the Crossroads".

In their make-believe world of theatre, the GLT has never stopped providing suspenseful thrillers of side-splitting comedies.

But the early days were a struggle. "I can remember a time when there were seven people in the audience and three of them were usherettes," said actor Ron Hill.

Mary Goebel half-smiles as she sums up her feelings: "I don't think I could have lived through 25 years of every night."

These days the troupe enjoys the comforts of a luxurious auditorium at the John Elliot Theatre, but in the early sixties good acoustics and expensive props were hard to find.

The nucleus of the GLT cast in those pioneer days consisted of Vera Macdonald and Mary Goebel, and later Ron Hill.

Mrs. Macdonald and Mrs. Goebel decided to split from a night school class and form the GLT. Ron Hill brought his acting experience from Britain into the group a couple of years later.

During a break in the rehearsal for Move Over Mrs. Markham, President of the GLT Ron Hill talked proudly of the days when the troupe was in its infancy.

"We used brown paper for flats (set backgrounds) and painted backgrounds of trees with no leaves."

The results of a less-than-elaborate background set was not because of any lack of effort. "Everybody mucked in," he said. While sets for plays now are built in a warehouse, in those early days the members putting in time virtually every day, building the set on the stage in between rehearsals.

Often the members would rehearse the play two or three nights a week and spend their weekends building the set.

Props were hard to come by. The only money the group had came from ticket receipts. Mary Goebel talked

fondly about the days when cast members would donate their own lamps and sofas for productions. GLT is now sufficiently funded so they can afford insurance for such props, but years ago a broken prop was a personal loss for a cast member.

Listening to the older members of theatre-troupe, one cannot help but feel a sense of nostalgia in their words: Past President Dorothy Hunt, Ron Hill and Mary Goebel all re-lived the old days with tongue-in-cheek expressions. Never was there a hint that work put into the performance was not worth the effort.

Production costs were kept down to a minimum because any expenses usually came from members' pockets. Tony Lloyd, now the artistic director of Sudbury theatre, directed the first play which cost about \$13 to produce.

Costumes were a problem for cast members because no wardrobes had been accumulated. Members either made their own costumes or rented them. "Our budgets were very low and we were very creative with our costumes," Mrs. Hunt said.

As the mid and late sixties approached, Mr. Hill pointed out that color television kept people at home and attendance dropped.

As the turbulent sixties gave way to the somewhat calmer seventies, the group's subscriptions grew. Costumes became easier to come by as the wardrobe collection expanded. "It became easier to put on a play because of the work done before," Mr. Hill said.

In the late seventies the group began staging its productions at Sacre Coeur Hall. Members were very happy with this arrangement except for one problem: there was no access to washrooms from the stage except right through the audience or outside and around the building.

If a cast member became anxious before a scene he had to sit tight. After several nights of scurrying outside through the winter nights Mrs. Goebel said the group put their heads together and came up with a solution. They built a curtain along the wall so the audience could not see cast members as they hurried through the auditorium.



1966—A story told four ways by four different people is the premise for the Japanese play Rashomon which had a three-night run in the GDHS auditorium 19 years ago. At right the bandit (Ron Hill) threatens the wife (Vera Macdonald) as priest (Ron Hunt), woodcutter (Chris Fisher) and mother (Betty Fisher) watch. (Herald file photo)

'No Sex ...' rejected in place of Markham

Some of the actors are ten years older, the cramped stage of Howard Wrigglesworth Public School is now the expansive John Elliot Theatre, but the laughs remain.

Cast members say the laughs won't change when they perform 'Move Over Mrs. Markham' for the second time in ten years. The play was picked as a favorite for their 25th anniversary by patrons who answered a questionnaire.

"No Sex Please, We're British" was actually most popular, but the play was rejected because it was performed more recently, actor Ron Hunt said. "They're both fantastic plays," he added.

Ron Hunt, Derek Joyner, Ron Hill, Neville Worsnop (all the men) and Pat Joyner are from the original production in 1975.

Cast members made special efforts to be included this time around. Neville Worsnop plays effeminate interior decorator Alastair Spelow. "When the play was chosen I made sure my other commitments wouldn't interfere with being in it," he said.

Former Georgetown residents Pat and Derek Joyner drive 90 minutes, three times a week, to get to practices. "I thoroughly enjoyed working with Derek Joyner, Ron Hill and Ron

Hunt. I don't think I'm the only one who notices I'm ten years older than I was. Some of the antics and physical stunts I don't do as well," Mr. Worsnop said.

According to the producer of the show, Dorothy Hunt, ten years means more experience and a better show. But the actors seem unwilling to compare efforts other than to say, "It will be just as funny."

The play is a comedy of misunderstandings and unlikely circumstances "which all unravel and everyone lives happily ever after," Mr. Worsnop said.

Actors have to play the audience to get the best reactions through trial and error. Things that were consistently funny ten years ago may not be funny now, Mr. Hunt said. Last time the then popular song "Oh, Mein Pa Pa" was referred to in the play for a sure laugh, this time it is unlikely many will remember the song and the laugh will be only a subtle smicker, he said.

Line deliveries which actors remembered as funny may not work with a different director who can completely change a play, he continued.

The combination of a comedy that doesn't date itself and actors who have gained more experience over 10 years can only add up to lots of laughter. "Move Over Mrs. Markham" will be at the John Elliot Theatre Oct. 25, 26, 30, 31, Nov. 1, 2.



1983—It's been only two years since Fern Slawson had them reeling in their seats over her part as a naive, sweet and unpredictable author. Nurse Jane Goes to Hollywood had a good supporting cast which included (right) Rod Cook.



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