

The Gifts of Time

quaile reviews
WITH DEBORAH QUAILE



In Guelph's former Eaton Centre, the city has created a sort of indoor mews that mimics a streetscape of a town. And within this streetscape Eden Mills playwright Dale Hamilton has created *The Gifts of Time*, an all-inclusive promenade-style community play about life in Guelph in the past, present and future.

The Gifts of Time is directed by Jon

Oram of England and designed by Nicola Fitchett, also of England. The co-production is between Everybody's Theatre Company, Claque Theatre (England) and the Guelph Multicultural Centre.

The script moves from its opening at a fictional 200th birthday party for Guelph in the year 2027 and skips back and forth through time to portray how the clash of cultures still occurs in the new millennium. A cast and crew of about 200, most of whom are volunteers, recount the beginning of Guelph through the memories of Elizabeth Galt, the wife



Horse-drawn Wagon

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of John Galt who founded the city. Soon the clash of Catholics and Protestants supplies discord in the new land, and the scenes move forward to the last public hanging of a young Irish boy in 1847. Using video footage, original live music by James Gordon and an accompanying band, and a performance that moves from stage to stage around the audience, Hamilton captures the difficulties and opportunities in community development as well as in personal development.

Believing that one of the great gifts that time can give us is hindsight, Hamilton set out to document not only history, but the opportunities that can arise from mistakes therein. Using poignant scenes like *The Clash of Cultures and Tragedies on Eramosa Road, 1847 and 2004*, she vividly gives her audience something to digest: if we haven't learned from our mistakes, then why else would we be doomed to repeat them?

There are some intriguing costume designs and use of props, which of course must be kept to a minimum because of the continuous movement of characters. The deep dark tract of Huron forest comes to life by actors carrying bamboo poles attached together by vines and faux leaves, or by actors with elaborate headdresses that capture the essence of the outdoors. Musically created noises of the woods and water echo off the walls and surround patrons with a sense of being in the forest. In yet another scene, children glide through the audience with swirling fabrics and silken fish to simulate the deep waters of the Speed River. An ingenious snowball fight broke the final reserve of the atreagoers, many of whom may not have been in such an intimate play before, and had everyone laughing and tossing

"snow." Children who were acting and children who were visiting soon got into the action, and thereafter every time there was a change of scene from one end of the mews to the other, a wave of small folks would weave its way between the adults and scurry to the area of entertainment. To see such participation from the young audience was heartening.

Six intense weeks of writing, design, set up and rehearsal came together to produce this interactive play. *The Gifts of Time* is, according to the Ms. Hamilton,



Fire Flags

"an optimistic tragedy, holding out the hope and the belief that people can and do evolve and grow."

"Settlers" were planted within the audience to engage attendants in conversation about what was happening in each scene. The audience is urged to become part of the living movement of history around them and to take from the show more than just someone else's vision of what's happening: They are encouraged to make choices and learn for themselves why some damaging cycles continue.

"As a species, we've been known to make the same mistake many times, but maybe that too is part of the learning curve of time," Dale Hamilton says.

The Gifts of Time continues until November 6. Ticket information is available at 519-826-0722.





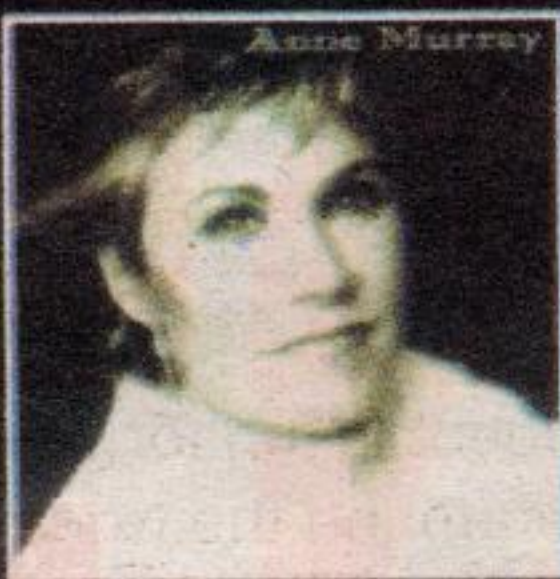

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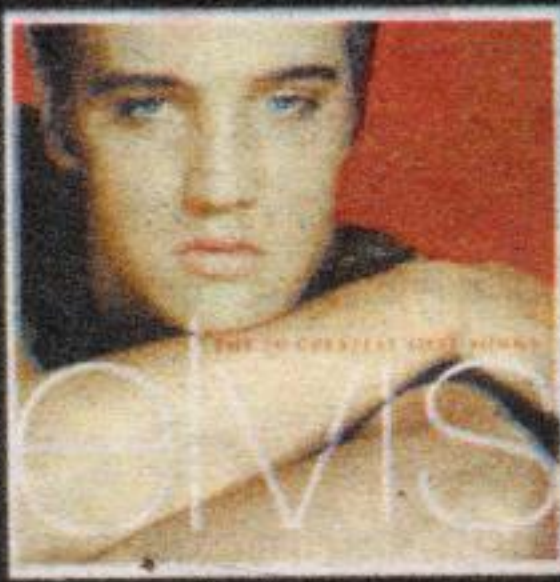

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