

Wassail comes alive in Georgetown

By DONNA DANIELLI

The word "Wassail" is derived from an old Anglo Saxon toast meaning, "be whole" or "good health", and from its beginnings in 1986 the "Wassail!" performers have saluted the holiday season with old English dances and songs. Their latest production took part on the stage of the John Elliott Theatre on December 11, and quite fittingly, this look into past was in support of another preserver of customs, the Halton Region Museum.

Rarely does an audience get to experience such a wide array of talent as was seen on that stage. Over two dozen performers re-created an English village celebration in a show that has to be commended for its painstaking attention to detail and obvious amount of research that went into the production.

The show featured the "Wassail Choir" as well as the "London Playford Dancers" who performed dances from the 18th century collection of dances pub-

lished by John Playford. The musical accompaniment was entertaining and historically accurate, with much focus on the concertina, melodeon and recorder.

There were 49 separate items listed on the program, which may have seemed daunting at first, but actually moved very quickly. Amidst the singing, dancing and general revelry were narratives from such historical figures as Oliver Cromwell and William Prynne. Characters wandered throughout the pub on stage, taking their turn in the limelight before melting into the background once more. The segues between the spoken words of the narratives and the singing and dancing were seamless as this talented and experienced group of performers worked their magic.

Audiences eyes could often be drawn away from the principal players to watch as, in the background, young men stole into seats besides flirtatious village

maids. The joy and love of the dance was obvious whenever the "Playford Dancers" were on stage, but it was the "Morris Dancers" who truly stole the show. From their first performance, decked in bells and striking one another's sticks to an intricate dance around two clay pipes laid on the floor, these dancers were a marvel to behold. Their dance "Bermuda Triangles", by Tom Siess, mesmerized the audience, as each of the six women dancers held in one hand the hilt of her own sword, and in the other hand held the point of her neighbour's sword. They formed a circle that remained unbroken as they danced, weaving and spinning around each other in an intricate and complex dance, until finally, they joined as one and wove their swords together to be held triumphantly as a perfect Star of David by a single dancer. It was easily the most amazing moment of the show, if the thunderous applause of an astounded audience is any indication.

Thus was "Wassail!"'s first performance in the Halton area, but it is hoped that the Christmas performance will become an annual event. Make sure to snap up tickets to this unusual and creative entertainment next year. You won't be sorry that you did.



PHOTO BY DONNA DANIELLI
Performers (clockwise from top left) Ryan Starkweather, Malcolm MacDonald, Tom Siess, Janice Mark and Anne Siess relax with a tankard after an energetic and entertaining "Wassail" performance. Held at the John Elliott Theatre, in support of Halton Region Museum, the performance is planned to become an annual event.



PHOTO BY DONNA DANIELLI
Campbellville artist Tom Dietrich recently opened his studio for one day to visitors. The acclaimed artist welcomed guests to his studio before he takes up his role as Artist in Residence for the Homer Watson Art gallery in January.



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