

Comedy classic 'A Christmas Story' spans generations at Theatre Aurora



By Brock Weir

Making her way through the first season of Theatre Aurora's theatre school 13-year-old Maria Neola has learned you should 'never be shy to give it your all when you are performing?' even if you're standing on stage surrounded by actresses playing 'sassy' girls and you're bringing to life the iconic role of Ralphie from the equally iconic A Christmas Story.

Maria leads the cast of budding young actors as the theatre school mounts their production of A Christmas Story next Wednesday, December 21, at 7 p.m. for two performances. It's their debut production after being re-formed over the summer.

'I think I am better at playing a boy than I am playing a girl!' says Maria with a laugh. 'I can act like a girl too, but I like that Ralphie is not very popular and not everybody wants to hang out with him. He is this average kid who lives a normal life, but he also has these cool experiences at home and school that are very usual.'

What was once an average, normal comedy about a 1950s family making their way through the holiday season 'and a wide-eyed boy who wants nothing more than a Red Ryder BB gun' has since morphed into a holiday classic that has transcended generations. 'When we were approached to do this, I was ecstatic because it is one of my favourite movies,' says Richard Varty, who co-directs the play with Sophia Bagnell and Kim Reihe. 'It has almost made the process a little easier because we could let the kids watch the movie and get an idea of the characters, but it is funny because there is a generational gap.'

'When I watch this story with my dad, I don't get some of the references because that was the time he grew up in. Now I am trying to transpose that into 21st century technology. Kids don't understand what a clinker is, or when a furnace screws up, or why it was a big deal going to the tree lot, but it has been an interesting experience working with different generations of people.'

But, after the directors gave the kids their homework to go and watch the movie, they felt themes really struck a chord with their young troupe.

'From the top of the show, it is all about remembering Christmases past and I think it is interesting looking back at our own Christmases or our own memories,' says Mr. Varty. 'We remember things much more vividly and differently than they probably were. It is very much a coming of age story, especially for Ralphie. It's about growing up, dealing with bullies. His relationship with his mother has also been an interesting topic. There is one really great scene where there is a line that 'from that day forward my relationship with my mother was very different.' I think everyone has that Christmas or that one moment that redefined how they saw the world.'

Adds Ms. Bengall, 'When [the theatre students] first read the script I don't think they really envisioned it as being in the past. It was just something every kid could relate to. I think something that resonated with them was it doesn't matter if it the 1950s, the 1980s, or almost 2017, kids are going to have their friends, the school bully, that one special thing they want for the holidays and I think those are just trends that span time.'

A Christmas Story runs Wednesday, December 21 and Thursday, December 22, both performances beginning at 7.30 p.m. Tickets are \$10 and are available through Theatre Aurora at 905-727-3669 or by visiting www.theatreaurora.com.