

The Picton Gazette

# Local News

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## Maritime show tempts audiences with strong performance

Visiting cast offers a lot with  
minimal set and effects

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**COURTING** Darryl Avalon Hopkins plays Angus Bennett and Deidre Gillard-Rowlings plays Myra in the award winning play *Tempting Providence* which is based on true events. The show was a hit among the theatre audience on Monday.. (Chad Ibbotson/Gazette staff)

Tempting Providence, the award-winning maritime play based on true events, took root in the hearts and minds of all who attended the show's opening night Monday at Fields on West Lake in Bloomfield.

Brought to the county by Festival Players of Prince Edward County, the play has been touring since it first came to the stage in 2002. It will be playing tonight and tomorrow night.

Festival Players artistic director Sarah Phillips said she's hoping people will take advantage of the opportunity to come see a professional performance based on an inspiring story.

"We're lucky to have them here. They've toured all over Canada, the U.K. and into the U.S. Having them right here in Prince Edward County is a coup," she said. "The show has won awards worldwide – it's a masterpiece."

Opening night of the performance was clearly a hit with the crowd as over 100 people who piled into the theatre stood up to give a standing ovation for several minutes.

Phillips said the performance deserved such an honour.

"It was beautiful," she said. "They do so much with so little."

With just four chairs, a table and a sheet, the four performers take hold of your imagination and don't let go.

"They travel with this show, they send the table and the chairs ahead of them and everything else they carry with them and that's the show and that can be a boat, a baby, a garden – whatever you name it," Phillips said.

The show centres on Myra (Grimsley) Bennett (played by Deidra Gillard-Rowlings) who came to Newfoundland from England in 1921 when she heard there was a severe need of services. She initially applied to go to Saskatchewan, but was persuaded to settle on an isolated Newfoundland community, which had no roads, electricity or doctors, and performed many tasks including setting bones, pulling teeth and delivering babies.

She signed up to cover the area on a two-year contract that paid \$75 per month, but she ended up staying for her whole life.

The play tells the tale of how Bennett became enamoured with the people, fell in love with ex-merchant marine Angus Bennett (played by Darryl Avalon Hopkins) and through sheer strength and heroism came to be beloved by the people along the 320 kilometres of coast for which she was responsible.

Bennett once estimated that she had delivered 750 babies and pulled 5,000 teeth. She had three children of her own and raised four foster children. Having officially retired in 1953, she continued to help people whenever she was asked. She also received an honorary doctorate from Memorial University, was awarded the King George V Jubilee medal, the King George VI Coronation medal, the Queen Elizabeth II Coronation medal, the Member of the British Empire medal and is a member of the Order of Canada. Bennett passed away in 1990 at the age of 100.

One of Bennett's most well-known feats is also one of the play's most gut-wrenching moments. In 1926 Bennett's brother-in-law Alex slipped and fell into the teeth of a lumber saw and almost severed his foot. Bennett cleaned the wound and stitched the severed foot back onto the leg. Performed expertly by Gillard-Rowlings, Hopkins, Robert Wyatt Thorne (who played several parts including the part of Alex) and Renee Hackett (who also played several parts) the scene casts a feeling of intense panic over the audience, drawing them together for an experience which is truly inspiring.

Phillips said it was a great opening night and it's nice to see so many people coming out to see live theatre. She said the buzz about the production has been floating around for a long time.

"It's been at festival after festival after festival. It was in Toronto, it was in Ottawa and everywhere it goes it wins awards and so on so I heard the buzz long ago, but this year we were finally able to get them to come," she said.

At approximately two hours *Tempting Providence* will take you on a heartwarming journey of simplicity, love, strength and humour.