



Less than three months after its spring theatre production, the Winding Rivers Arts & Performance Society is gearing up for its Christmas production, a pantomime called *Shaken, Not Stirred: The James Bond Panto*. At a table read of the play on July 5, cast and crew enjoyed a suitably decorated ice cream cake. (Photo credit: Richard Wright)

Theatre Diaries 1: Christmas in July as work starts on pantomime

Less than three months after its spring production, WRAPS starts work on a Christmas panto

[BARBARA RODEN](#) Jul. 11, 2023 5:00 p.m. [COMMUNITYLOCAL NEWS](#)

Christmas in July?

That's what it felt like recently when — less than three months after ringing down the curtain on the spring production of *The Game's Afoot* — cast members assembled to have a table read of the next Winding Rivers Arts & Performance production. *Shaken, Not Stirred: The James Bond Panto* will hit the stage in late November, which is only fitting, since pantos (short for pantomimes) are a huge British Christmas tradition, delighting young and old with a tried-and-true formula of jokes, songs, gags, role reversals, and audience

WRAPS has long discussed the idea of tackling a panto, and the time is finally right. Not only do we now have an authentic English person in the company to guide us through the finer points of pantos, he's actually written one. Richard Wright — whom audience members will remember played William Gillette in *The Game's Afoot* — is the author of *Shaken, Not Stirred*, which has previously been produced. With Richard on board to direct the production, the stars aligned at last.

At the table read he starts off with a brief history of pantomime, and some of the many traditions associated with it. For example, there is always a “dame” character; that is, an outrageous female character always played by a man in flamboyant drag (*Shaken, Not Stirred* has two dames, just for good measure). Good guys always enter and exit stage right, while bad guys enter and exit stage left. There is fast-paced wordplay, along with mistaken identities, *double entendres*, and topical references and gags. There are songs, usually popular, well-known pieces that will change from production to production depending on the actors involved, and dancing.

And there is audience participation, which is a key component of panto. Attendees can often join in with some of the songs, and are encouraged to cheer the good guys, boo the baddies, call out warnings or phrases of encouragement, and more. We all agree that in addition to the cues provided by the actors as the play goes on, we should include a “Panto 101” guide in the program, to let the audience know that they have key parts to play as well.

Pantos are often based (at least in part) on fairy tales, and *Shaken, Not Stirred* is no exception. It involves elements from *Sleeping Beauty*, with the Princess Aurora cursed by the evil Maleficent. To try to thwart her, the Kingdom of Londinium's secret government agency MI14.5¾ and its best — or at least best-known — agent James Bond are summoned to save the day. Various other characters from the world of 007 are also present, including agency head M, gadgets person Q, and the resourceful Miss Moneypenny, who is bored with her job and really wants to be a spy.

Most of the cast is at the table read, along with key backstage staff including stage manager/producer Jessica Clement, set designer/builder Jim Duncan, and costume designer/seamstress Margaret Moreira. There are a lot of longtime cast members from the WRAPS repertory company, including several who are returning after having been away for a time, and quite a few new faces, which is always great to see. A number of choir members from the Sage Sound Singers are taking part in singing roles, including choir director Michelle Reid, who is also the production's musical director. Newcomer Monique Kopanyas, who plays Princess Aurora, will be the choreographer, and I once again marvel at the many multi-talented people who make our theatre productions such a success.

I'm playing Q, and after directing or co-directing the last four WRAPS plays I'm looking forward to being back on stage for the first time since *Anne of Green Gables* back in 2017. The table read gives us all a chance to start to get familiar with the script, and judging by the frequent

peak, it's going to be another huge hit. We take a break halfway through to enjoy a specially-decorated ice cream cake, chattering excitedly.

There will be a handful of rehearsals for the principal cast over the summer, and a chance for people to learn their lines and for the singers to learn their songs. Full rehearsals will start in earnest in September, with five performances at the Ashcroft HUB in November.

Right now that seems a very long way off, but I know from experience that opening night will be here before we know it. Better get a start on learning those lines, and practising how to keep a straight face amid the jokes and craziness that is *Shaken, Not Stirred*. I have a feeling that's going to take a lot of acting skill from everyone.

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