(from l) Shaken, Not Stirred cast members Giri Fournier, Connie Walkem, Monique Kopanyas, Mavourneen Varcoe-Ryan, and Kevin Beenham during the Sept. 3 rehearsal. (Photo credit: Barbara Roden)

Theatre Diaries 2: Rehearsals get underway for fall production

With summer drawing to a close, cast and crew get down to work

BARBARA RODEN / Sep. 5, 2023 6:00 p.m. / COMMUNITY / LOCAL NEWS

September is here, which can only mean one thing. Yes: the Winding Rivers Arts & Performance Society is getting down to business, and rehearsals have started in earnest for the fall production of *Shaken, Not Stirred: The James Bond Panto*.

Saturday, Sept. 2 sees some 17 cast members assembled at the HUB to start the process of blocking the play; that is, letting the actors know where they enter and exit in a given scene, and where they move to and what they do while on stage. The TECK room at the HUB will be our home away

from home for the next three months, and the floor is criss-crossed with tape denoting different sections of the stage and where the entrances and exits will be.

Director Richard Wright — who is also the author of *Shaken, Not Stirred* — explains that while a lot of plays need to be blocked with excruciating minuteness, pantomimes are much more free and easy. We need to know where we're entering and leaving a scene, and where we need to be in relation to other characters or pieces of the set, but movement while we're on the stage will largely be dictated by circumstances such as what other characters do, or how the audience reacts.

One thing about blocking that never changes, however, is that it always changes: what seems fine in theory doesn't always work. It's why we're all given pencils to note down the blocking in our scripts, not pens.

Richard also gives a run-through of what the set will look like. Rather than a single-set production, such as spring 2023's *The Game's Afoot*, the panto will be more minimalist, with curtains running from left to right dividing the stage into three sections from front to back. It means that while action goes on at the very front of the stage, with a closed curtain behind, set pieces can be changed behind the scenes while the action continues. It's something new for WRAPS, and it's going to be exciting to see how this works out.

We go around the room and introduce ourselves, stating our first names and our role in the production. It's our first pantomime, but we're already getting into the spirit of things: when Nancy Duchaine, playing the villainous Maleficent, introduces herself, she gets loudly booed by everyone.
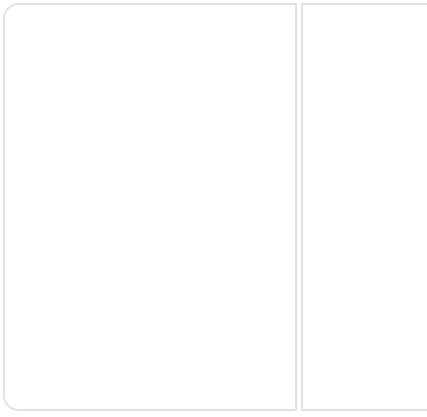
We hope there will be a lot of that during the actual performances. Much of the energy and excitement of pantomime comes from audience interaction with the cast and what's going on on stage, and Richard tells us that we'll need to harness that interaction and use it. Translation: Nancy had better get used to being booed, and use that to her (and her character's) advantage.

The blocking continues, with the focus on movement, not the lines: character development will come later. Already, however, actors are coming up with bits of "business" they can use. A reference to *Get Smart* prompts Connie Walkem and I — playing agents working for MI14.5¾ — to suggest a gag based on that classic comedy, and Richard says "Go for it."

This first rehearsal starts at 9:30 a.m. and ends some five hours later; there's another one the next day for some of the principal actors. Stage manager Jessica Clement updates us on the rehearsal schedule and takes notes of who can't make it to certain sessions. She reminds us, however, that once we get to dress rehearsals and performances at the end of November, we will have no life: "You're mine."

We all tumble out into the warmth and sunlight of a late-summer afternoon. Soon enough we'll be exiting in the evenings to autumn darkness and the sound of skittering leaves. Theatre season is here again: hurray!

Shaken, Not Stirred will be at the Ashcroft HUB for five performances from Nov. 23 to 26.

À vous la montagne

Arc'teryx