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The last act is the hardest

By **CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD-DANBY**
Columnist

But 'there is always more theatre to do': Nairn

For your information, the gorgeous news coming from Theatre Orangeville is that *A Christmas Story* was the most successful production ever staged in the theatre's 16-year history. In other words, the most tickets sold, ever, the most people attending, ever, came to this play with all its fantastic kids (oh yes, and the grown-up actors, too).

We received this information — the young actors of the play and I — as we sat for a brief get together at the theatre last weekend. Combined with how nice it was for them to see each other again, the news put a real shine on the moment.

They were all, bar Tyler Simpson, there to see one another and David Nairn. I was there to have a last word with them about the aftermath of such a time of devotion to the theatre.

They had been together six days a week, working in an extraordinary exercise of rehearsing and acting in a play for pretty well two months, from November 6 to December 20.

Six-weeks-plus is a long time to be concentrated on any one subject, dedicated to it with a number of equally dedicated people, for a person of any age, let alone a person with only 6 to 14 years under his/her belt. So, how did they handle coming down from that intensity, I wanted to know.

Christmas had been a help for each of them, to a greater or lesser extent.

For Samuel Grant ("Skut Farkas"), his sadness at finishing the play was increased by the death of one of his "closest buddies".

Playing the bully in the play had been fun but it was not so much fun at school, where the kids messed about: "they'd get scared and then they beat me up," as Sam told us, with almost a shyness that never showed in the play.

Jayde Lavoie ("Esther

Jane") went to Florida with her family which helped, although there was no denying those moments when she missed everyone. She is a great one for keeping touch on Facebook, though.

Likewise, Christopher DuBois ("Randy") travelled with his family over the holidays. They went to Victoria, B.C., where his father, Mark DuBois, was singing the New Year's Day Viennese concert with the Victoria Symphony. They took a five day trip, time to visit museums and places of interest. A good break and distraction. Now that he is back, though, Christopher misses "everything" about doing the play.

Alex Newall ("Flick") was "kind of depressed" but Christmas was fun. He was a little nervous about going back to school, wondering what kind of reaction he was going to get from the other kids.

Jacqueline Vandervart ("Helen") found the reactions she received once she was back at school a little strange. She told us that a couple of girls said to her: "Hey, you're famous — can I be your best friend?" Said Jacqueline, "It was weird." She had felt the slump of missing everyone and the work over the holidays.

Daniel Reale ("Schwartz") was really excited about how well his acting job was received by people at his school. His

principal, who had surprised him by being so supportive in the first place, made a point of coming to see the show. His attitude of support carried over into the New Year and he told David that David had done a "good job". His class had seen the show as well — they all thought it was "great".

Finally, our young star of the show, Adam Bartley ("Ralphie"), admitted that he was really sad after the show thinking that he might not see the others again. Christmas was good for him but the month after the play, it really hit him how much he missed the show and people in it. It had been such fun and, more than that, it had been a learning experience for him.

Adam reported: "David [Nairn] told us that there are no stupid questions. So, now at school, I ask questions and I participate much more in class. I can focus better and I'm getting better marks."

Adam's class had not been among the many students who saw the play with class trips. However, as Adam later learned, "My whole class came to see the play, not as a class but with their parents. That was really cool."

I had an obvious question to which I expected an obvious answer: would you do it all again? A resounding "Yes!"

Mr. Nairn, who directed the play, told them, "You guys were perfect. Sometimes, there can be a weak actor in a play, but not this time — you were per-

fect." He looked at them with affection. They had worked so hard for him; they had given him all he asked for, not only in the way of their performances but also in everything else — their good manners, their professionalism, their sincerity.

He said, "And don't forget, there's always another show and classes. There's the Young People's Theatre. There are dance and drama schools here, lots to do."

There was an agreement amongst them that the whole process had taught them a great deal about doing such a show but keeping up with their schooling. Sam Grant, being the only one of them in high school, had done homework every night to keep up his grades. There had been tutors at the rehearsal hall to assist them with their homework when they were not needed on stage.

Mr. Nairn commented, "It was a tribute to all of you that your school work didn't suffer." He added, "I hope you said thank you to everyone who helped you get through this — your parents for all the driving and bending their schedules to work with yours — your teachers — even your brothers and sisters."

They all said that they had. Jacqueline told us that her brother (Charles Vandervart who split the role of "Tiny Tim" in last year's production of *A Christmas Carol*) was making a movie at the same

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