

# PTC offers unusual but heartwarming take on a holiday classic

BY EMILY BURNHAM  
OF THE WEEKLY STAFF

The cast and crew of Penobscot Theatre Company's new holiday production of "It's a Wonderful Life" won't be offended if you close your eyes during the show. In fact, they'd quite like it.

After all, this version of the classic story was written specifically with only the audio in mind — it's a live radio play, adapted from the iconic Frank Capra screenplay by Joe Landry to be staged as an old-fashioned broadcast. PTC's production, which opens in previews on Dec. 3 and runs through Dec. 27, is a heartwarming take on a parable that anyone that watched TV in the 1980s knows by heart.

With a cast of five main actors playing multiple roles — including PTC mainstays Ben Layman and Mark Chambers, Bar Harbor-based Jen Shepherd, Washington, DC-based Blythe Coons and Atlanta-based Tony Larkin — a chorus comprised of area high school actors including Elizabeth

Budd, Lana Sabbagh and Robert Brangwynne, and young Bangor native Luke Cote as a live on-stage foley artist, it's an unusual but charming way to tell the story.

"We've certainly had people come to shows and close their eyes," said Coons, who has toured around the country with the Landry "Wonderful Life" production for four years. "It's part of the whole experience. It's a totally unique way of telling a story."

"You have to say things in such a way that they make sense if you hear them with the spoken audio only, with no visuals," said Larkin, who also has toured with the show for several years, playing lead character George Bailey, among others. "You have to introduce everyone by name, and say who they are and what they do. It can sound a little unnatural in regular conversation, but in this context, it makes perfect sense."

Cote, a youth theater veteran who graduated earlier this year from Bangor High School, is armed with a plethora of

things that go click, whiz, pop, creak, whoosh, squeak, crash and hundreds of other sound effects. He'll be stationed at his own foley table, set off to the side on the elaborate, jewel-toned set designed by Sean McClelland, which unfolds like a music box, or an old-fashioned Hi-Fi stereo. Costumes, designed by Kevin Koski, are set to the late 1940s/early 1950s period.

Music director Larrance Fingerhut, who co-owns ImprovAcadia in Bar Harbor with aforementioned actress Jen Shepherd, adds another totally new layer, an all-original musical score to the show as well.

"I find that Larrance's music makes us all move in a very intentional way, that's a little bit informed by musical theater," said Layman. "[The music is] such a wonderful addition to the show."

Layman, last seen as the main character in PTC's production of "Doctor Cerberus," has perhaps the most unique perspective on the show of all the actors involved — he managed to avoid seeing the movie "It's



PHOTO COURTESY MAGNUS STARK

**Luke Cote as Francois "Francis" des Bruits, the Foley Guy, in Penobscot Theatre's upcoming production of "It's a Wonderful Life," set for Dec. 3 through Dec. 27 at the Bangor Opera House.**

a Wonderful Life" until the point that he knew he was cast in the show.

"I don't know how, but I just never actually saw it," said Layman. "So when I finally sat down to actually watch it, I could just kind of enjoy it without any precon. And it's really such a time-

less, heartwarming story about good people, and about redemption. And I think, with the way things are in the world right now, it's just the right thing to watch."

PTC's "It's a Wonderful Life," has performances every day between Dec. 3 and Dec. 27, though there

are no performances on Dec. 7-8, Dec. 14-15, Dec. 21 and on Christmas. Tickets are priced between \$27 and \$37; buy them online, at the Bangor Opera House or by calling 942-3333. For more on this and other upcoming shows, visit penobscottheatre.com.

## Maine Indian Basketmakers holiday market set for Dec. 12

Four Native American artists who participate in the Hudson Museum's Maine Indian Basketmakers Holiday Market also have baskets showcased in the Portland Museum of Art's biennial "You Can't Get There from Here."

Penobscot artists Theresa Secord and Sarah Sockbeson and Passamaquoddy artists Jeremy Frey and George Neptune have artwork in the PMA show on exhibit through Jan. 3, 2106.

Those artists and about 50 others will be at the 2015 Maine Indian Basketmakers Holiday Market, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12, at the Collins Center for the Arts at the University of Maine.

The 21st annual holiday gathering of Maine Indian

artists has become the largest event of its type in New England, says Gretchen Faulkner, director of the Hudson Museum.

The free-admission market features members of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance who have received national awards as well as artists representing the next generation of weavers.

Sockbeson, who grew up hearing stories about her great-grandmother Elsie Tomer weaving baskets in early 1900s, is one talented member of the next generation. Earlier this year, she earned a first-place ribbon and a second-place ribbon at the Santa Fe Indian Market.

The 31-year-old embraces the modern world and enjoys combining natural elements with bright colors and original designs.

"I think as an artist there is always the desire

to push boundaries and innovate, no matter what medium you choose to work with," she says. "For me, I really like to use bold, modern colors in my baskets as I love the contrast between old and new, contemporary and traditional, natural and unnatural."

She also feels a responsibility to honor her ancestors who practiced the art of basketry long before she was born.

"As Native People, we have a long history of being resourceful and utilizing materials we have available to us in creative ways," she says. "Our art has never stopped evolving and continues to change with the times, as we market our work to current audiences and acclimate to our current environments."

Sockbeson says until the PMA show, most of the exhibits she took part in were Na-

tive American art exhibits.

"I am very excited and honored to have been chosen to be included in this particular exhibition at the Portland Museum of Art," she says. "I think it is another step forward having our Native American, traditional, cultural art showcased as fine art."

The Maine Indian Basketmakers Holiday Market is much more than a sale, says Faulkner.

"Visitors can learn about Maine Indian history and culture, hear Wabanaki languages and explore the museum's Maine Indian Gallery," she says. "It has been wonderful to see individuals who came to this event as children, who are now artists continuing these ancient traditions."

Sockbeson, who views herself as an artist and an educator, agrees.

"When I attend this show

I am not just there to sell my work, I am also there to educate and be a resource for people wanting to learn more," she says. "Educating as many people as possible has become a welcome and fortunate side effect of participating in various art markets in and outside of Maine," she says. "I can only hope that by extending the web of educated persons, I will be in turn, encouraging future artists, as well as aiding in the fostering of appreciation for contemporary native art in today's world."

At the holiday market, raffle tickets for a chance to win a basket created by Jeremy and Ganessa Frey will be sold. For more information and to purchase raffle tickets, contact Faulkner at 207.581.1904.

The Dec. 12 schedule includes: welcome ceremony with Penobscot Chief Kirk Francis at 10 a.m.; tradi-

tional Penobscot songs with Kelly Demmons, Penobscot, at 10:30 a.m.; brown ash-pounding demonstration with Eldon Hanning, Micmac, at 11 a.m.; children's beading workshop with Donna Brown, Penobscot, in the Hudson Museum Maine Indian Gallery, at 11:30 a.m.; fancy basket demonstration with Ganessa Frey, Penobscot, at noon; basswood fiber rope-making demonstration with Barry Dana, Penobscot, at 1 p.m.; children's workshop with George Neptune, Passamaquoddy, in the Hudson Museum's Maine Indian Gallery, at 1:30 p.m.; and a performance by the Burnwurskeek Singers at 2 p.m.

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