

Another musical adaptation of a Lucy Maud Montgomery novel, written while the author was living in Leaskdale, will kick off Uxbridge's winter theatre season this September.

*Rainbow Valley*, published in 1919, was the fifth in Montgomery's series about Anne Shirley, her husband Gilbert Blythe, and their children. By this time, the couple are in their early forties, and much of the plot centres on a widowed minister, Rev. Meredith, and his four lively children, as well as a runaway orphan named Mary Vance (LMM did have a soft spot for orphans), who all live near the Blythes in the village of Glen St. Mary on Prince Edward Island (or as the children call it, Rainbow Valley).

For his adaptation, Island playwright Hank Stinson decided to focus on the Merediths and Mary Vance; in fact, the Blythes do not make an appearance, and are not even mentioned.

"It's a bold choice, to leave out Anne and her family," says LMMSO's director Conrad Boyce, "but these children, and the four adults in the script, are fascinating Montgomery creations on their own. It's a wonderful story, and would have been way too crowded with all the Blythes."

The play, with music by Newfoundland composer Dean Burry, received its first production in Charlottetown in 2018. Mr. Stinson has waived royalties from the Leaskdale production in favour of a donation to the Red Cross for Ukraine relief.

"A very generous gesture on Hank's part," says LMMSO president Melanie Whitfield. "I'm sure we'll get a large audience, and will be able to make a big contribution to the Red Cross."

For *Rainbow Valley*, Boyce is joined by two of his collaborators from *Emily*: choreographer Sophianne Roberts and orchestra director Jane Loewen. The other key member of the creative team is designer Carlyn Raha Saar Routledge of Uxbridge, who has invented a lovely wooded environment for the play, and has selected many of the 1920s-era costumes from the racks at the Shaw Festival, where she is working for the season. The beautiful costumes are being loaned free of charge!

None of the play's nine cast members have appeared on the Leaskdale stage before, but they are all enjoying the church's intimate space, with room for only 100 in the audience. Sophianne Roberts, Tanner Ferris, Clay Elliott and Virginia Barry are all from Uxbridge. Jane McLaren, Emma Rowland, Eliana Hewitt and Eli Merrill hail from Scugog, while Cassie Hinds has been trekking to rehearsals all the way from Newcastle. Pianist Jane Loewen will be joined in the orchestra by violinist Caroline Fitz of Uxbridge.

"The Meredith children and the orphan, Mary Vance, are really the focus of the first part of the play," says Boyce, "so it's filled with their whimsical energy. Then the romance between their father and a local woman, who also lost the love of her life, take over, and there are some beautiful ballads in the second act. It's really a lovely show, infused with a maritime flavour, and we're so fortunate to be among the first to perform it."