BACKSTAGE PASS

Gabriola Players Newsletter

Fall 2026

Message from the President

Welcome to the 2026-2027 season and the first edition of Gabriola Players' new newsletter, *Backstage Pass.*

And what a season it was last year! From the sold-out success of our staged reading of *7 Stories,* by Morris Panych, to the locally-written One-act Play Festival, on to a new theatrical concept for us with *An Afternoon of Vaudeville,* and wrapping up with the sweet and spicy comedy *Five Alarm,* by Kristen Da Silva, we have been entertaining Gabriola and building a love of local, live theatre. We also organized a playwriting workshop with Nanaimo playwright Mary Littlejohn, and we're returning to the island audience favourite, the pantomime, this year.

It's been a busy year, but we couldn't have done it alone. Gabriola Players is all about participation from the community, and our recent AGM "with a Twist" attracted more than fifty members and friends who eagerly shared ideas in café-style conversation circles. More on this below.

Our coming season is another lively one. We are in rehearsals for our December pantomime, *Sherlock Holmes and the Hound of the Basketcases*, as well as planning a One-act Play Festival for early spring and a full-length Canadian play for June. We will be looking for more actors and backstage folk for both of them. We have also revived the First Draft Club playwriting group, and will conduct workshops for people interested in stage managing and directing.

I'm taking a turn as president of the organization after four years on the board and eight years as an actor and backstage crew member. Being part of this theatre group has been one of the best parts of my post-working life, and I tell anyone who will listen how much fun and excitement live theatre adds to my world. It's a pleasure to see the influx of new volunteers — from chorus members in our first panto in four years, to three new members on our board of directors — and Gabriola Players is riding a wave of enthusiasm that warms

my heart. We'd love you to join us at Gabriola Players, to volunteer in small or large ways, on stage or off, to support us financially, or attend our performances. We love our audiences! Watch for news and announcements in the *Gabriola Sounder*, follow our Facebook page, go to our website, or sign up for our mailing list.

Community theatre is about coming together, learning new skills, making new friends, and creating something together that's worth sharing. Along the way we challenge ourselves and each other, and explore a little about what it means to be human. Big goals for a little theatre group, but we're all about reaching for the stars.

Wendy Phillips



Photo: Bill Pope

Annual General Meeting

At the Annual General Meeting in September, we said goodbye, with thanks, to departing board member Johanne Dorais-Woodrow, who promises to stay involved in other ways.

Continuing on the board are Kerry Woodrow, Christine McKim, J-Bird Rutgers, Monica Knight, and Wendy Phillips.

We are excited to welcome the energy and talents of three new board members: Garth Axelson, known to Gabriola audiences for his performances in *A Life of Their Own* and *Five Alarm;* Ruth Shamai, who turned up at auditions for *Five Alarm* and got hooked on theatre; and Jodi Beaubier, who has been active previously with the Players and is well known around the island for her work in promoting the performing arts.

Responsibilities of the board members are as follows:

President	Wendy Phillips
Vice-president	Christine McKim
Artistic Directors	Wendy Phillips Kerry Woodrow Monica Knight
Treasurer	Christine McKim
Secretary	J-Bird Rutgers
Membership and Volunteer Coordinator	Garth Axelson
Sponsorship and Advertising	J-Bird Rutgers
Facilities Coordinators	Wendy Phillips Ruth Shamai
Communications Team	Christine McKim Wendy Phillips Ruth Shamai
Technology coordinator	Kerry Woodrow
Member-at-large	Jodi Beaubier

If you wish to contact any of us at any time, please reach out through our website, or email us.

The Board Meeting by Greg Blee

We set the stage for the AGM with a short, hilarious play *The Board Meeting*, written by Gabriolan Greg Blee and directed by J-Bird Rutgers.

About the play, Greg said: "It was an offer I could not refuse, when J-Bird asked, back in June, about performing my skit *The Board Meeting* at the Gabriola Players' AGM. A community theatre meeting would be a *perfect* venue for its first performance!

The idea was born from many eye-rolling moments at board meetings I've attended over the years. Writing it was a cathartic outlet, almost therapy, though I never thought it might actually be performed.

And then to see it suddenly brought to life, with lights, costumes, props... and an audience! It's a whole different quality of experience from script on paper, or story in my head. Thanks to the Players for elevating this novice playwright's artistic sensibility! And bravo to actors Christine, Ruth, and John, and director J-Bird for their work turning static word into lively action."

Watch *The Board Meeting* here, or search on YouTube for *The Board Meeting* Rob Robinson. Thanks to Rob for video-recording the play and to Greg Blee for allowing us to share it.

Courtyard Café

After the business segment of the AGM, we had a Courtyard Café - style discussion to gather the wisdom of the room in a less traditional manner. Each of the tables had a specific topic to be investigated. The tables were imaginatively decorated by J-Bird to highlight the themes and encourage creative thoughts.

The segment was fast-paced and lively, and the noise level indicated excellent participation. Topics included:

- how to increase youth involvement
- what Gabriola Players has done well and what areas need improvement
- collaboration on developing the Commons Goat Barn as a performance venue
- generating ideas about promoting community through theatre on Gabriola
- how we can attract other organizations that might coordinate and cooperate with Gabriola Players

Thank you to the wonderful MBA students from VIU who volunteered to act as notetakers at each table. All of the responses have been collated and will be handed to the Gabriola Players board to guide their vision for the future.

The Year in Review

7 Stories by Morris Panych (Nov 2025)

About *7 Stories*, the director, Wendy Phillips, said:

"I wasn't part of Gabriola Players when the group first performed *7 Stories* in 2005, but for our 20th anniversary, we were looking for a winner of a script and *7 Stories* stood out. I was aware of the play, both as a former teacher and as a theatre goer in the lower mainland, and I decided to throw my hat into the ring to direct it.

Experiencing the play as a director gave me a new perspective on the story—a dark comedy with flashes of profound depth. *7 Stories* dipped across the fine line between fiction and reality, and the surprising and charming ending left us buoyant with hope despite an uncertain future.

We chose to do the play as a staged reading, to encourage new actors and backstage crew. And did we get a response! Working with such an enthusiastic and talented group of volunteers was an enormous pleasure. Their energy and humour brought the stories alive, and the sets were spectacular, making the job a delight.

7 Stories reminded us what theatre is all about — creating a performance that made the audience laugh, think, and remember long after the curtains closed."



Photo: Bill Pope

Laurence Lee, Jenny Mangan, Drea Leed, Brenda Joy, and Denise Gillam-Gledhill in *7 Stories*

One-act Play Festival (March 2026)

Continuing with our 20th Anniversary celebration of the Gabriola Players Theatre Society, the One-act Play Festival in March featured three plays written by Gabriola writers:

- *Manufacturing Doubt* by Steve Earle and directed by Kerry Woodrow
- *Waiting for the Rector* by Kevin Crowley and directed by Christine McKim
- *A Life of Their Own* by Peter Danenhower and directed by Wendy Phillips

Twelve actors, many stepping into the stage lights for the first time, created lively characters in the three plays, which brought to life a range of subjects — from religion and personal choice, to corporate roles in climate change, to the nature of truth and imagination. Sold-out audiences raved about the excellent writing and fine performances.

Gabriola Players counts on the One-act Play Festival to encourage new writers, actors, stage managers, and directors to try their hand at short, entertaining scripts that stir audiences. Our First Draft Club (see page 8) sometimes provides scripts for the selection committee, and a workshop for stage managers is slated for early January.

If you're interested in dipping your toe into the theatre world in any way for the OAP Festival, let us know at gabriolaplayers@gmail.com.



Photo: Bill Pope

Tara Codrington, Joseph Argast, and Kyra Tannehill in *Waiting for the Rector*

For additional photos of the OAP 2026 and more plays, please visit our website.

An Afternoon of Vaudeville (May 2026)

In May, we performed *An Afternoon of Vaudeville*, captained by our own Jeannine (J-Bird) Rutgers.


Photo: Bill Pope

J-Bird Rutgers

Vaudeville was a cornerstone of entertainment from the 1880s to the 1920s.

Gabriolan performers dusted off their old dancing shoes, stretched out their juggling muscles and warmed up their vocal cords for an afternoon of delight for a sold-out audience.

Familiar songs from the 20s, 30s, and 40s, accompanied by a live jazz band, tickled our memories. Jugglers, comedians and surprise performers of all kinds brought a little circus to a feel-good variety show.



Photo: Bill Pope

The Ukeladies


Photo: Bill Pope

Vaudevillian chorus

FIVE ALARM by Kristen Da Silva (June 2026)

In June we performed *Five Alarm*; about the play and performance, director Kerry Woodrow said:

"Canadian playwright Kristen Da Silva skilfully drew us into the story with her delightful characters we can all relate to. They draw us into the tale as we engage emotionally with them and their goals, silly foibles, fears, and bravado. We often recognize a bit of ourselves peeking out behind their masks as they futilely try to present themselves to be far more confident than they really are. The story builds as our compelling characters are drawn into the main conflict, with its requisite obstacles, challenges, and setbacks.

Like us, their circumstances do not define them. It is their response to those circumstances that show us who they really are. As the mist clears, the audience can perceive the truth behind the curtain. That epiphany is the metaphorical mirror live theatre holds up — where we see ourselves or our society in a new light causing us to, hopefully, walk away with a new appreciation of the world and our place within it. We loved the play and hope to produce more of Kristen Da Silva's work in the future."



Photo: Bill Pope

Ruth Shamai, Garth Axelson, Shiela Ginn, and Wendy Phillips in *Five Alarm*

First Draft Club Playwriting Workshop

As promised at the Annual General Meeting, Gabriola Players is sponsoring a gathering of writers who work through the process of revising and polishing scripts. Kerry Woodrow, an experienced actor and writer and member of the Gabriola Players' board, will facilitate the workshop.

The workshop will be loosely structured. Writers will bring their scripts to be read aloud, and round-robin discussion will follow.

Experienced writers know that good writing means rewriting, and this process can provide valuable feedback.

Meetings will be held in the library on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. You don't need to attend every meeting, but we hope to develop a community of writers who support and provide feedback for each other. The only costs will be those for printing of scripts for reading days.

Interested? email us!

Looking forward to… THE PANTO!

Gabriola Players has had overwhelming support for the return of the panto after four years. Rehearsals are well underway for *Sherlock Holmes and the Hound of the Basketcases*, by Dave Crump, and adapted by our returning director Miranda Holmes (no relation to Sherlock).

"Elementary, my dear Watson" takes on a whole new meaning in this riotous, laugh-out-loud pantomime that brings the world's greatest detective crashing headlong into the gloriously chaotic world of the traditional British Pantomime.

Sherlock Holmes and the Hound of the Basketcases will kick off your holidays with delight. When the dashingly daft Canadian heir Sir Henry Basketcase arrives in London to claim his inheritance, he brings with him mystery, mayhem, and a very unfortunate suitcase full of underpants. It falls to the brilliant Sherlock Holmes and his bumbling sidekick Doctor Wat-son to unravel a web of villainy stretch-ing from the fog-filled streets of London to the eerie darkness of the moor, all while the evil genius Professor Moriarty schemes to build a criminal empire rich enough to afford hotel mini-bar drinks. Packed with classic panto ingredients—a memorable dame, a hero to applaud, a star-crossed romance to cheer on, and a villain the whole house will love to boo—this is a show that delivers everything our audience expects, wrapped in one of the most beloved stories in British culture.

Memories of Pantos Past by BJ Godson

Well, here I am, gearing up once again for another panto, *Sherlock Holmes and the Hound of the Basketcases*, my fourteenth one! I'm surprising myself at this advanced age that I will somehow muster the energy to be at my silliest, funniest, wise-crackingest character that a panto pulls out of me. Is it a lot of work? YES! Is it worth all the rehearsals (MANY), learning lines, new songs, and choreography, costume fittings etc.? YES.

I feel such joy in a role well-played, where I've made people smile, chuckle, even belly-laugh. One of the endearing aspects of a panto is that an absurd level of silliness is encouraged. Characters are meant to be over the top. Bring it on!

My favourite panto? That's a tough one because each one is unique with its own personality. Over the years our pantos have evolved into more elaborate showmanship, with songs, dances, amazing stage sets and costumes. I have enjoyed performing in every panto, and a few of my fav roles have been: Twinkie the Elf in *Short Pants and Tall Tales*, Rat King in *The Pied Piper*, Mr. Happy in *Ali Baba*, and Little Miss Muffet in *The Pirates of Nursery Rhyme Island* (which had me parading around in the BEST costume ever!!!).

Newsletter: Ruth Shamai with help from Wendy Phillips and Christine McKim.

A supportive cast and crew are drawn to Gabriola Players, and many folks have returned for multiple productions.

Welcome to the new cast and crew members (great to see some younger community members involved!) for our upcoming production of *Sherlock Holmes and the Hound of the Basketcases*.



BJ Godson as Twinkie the Elf

Attend. Laugh. Interact with the cast. Enjoy. Support your friends and neighbours who are working hard as cast and crew to give you a memorable show, where you go home with a warm, fuzzy feeling, still chuckling in the car... perhaps thinking you might actually get involved in the next panto.

Warning: **POSSIBLE ADDICTION!**

Gabriola Island Community Hall

December 3 to 6

Get tickets here.

See you at the show!