
'Trapped the Musical' is wicked good fun down to the Bangor Opera House

by **Judy Harrison**
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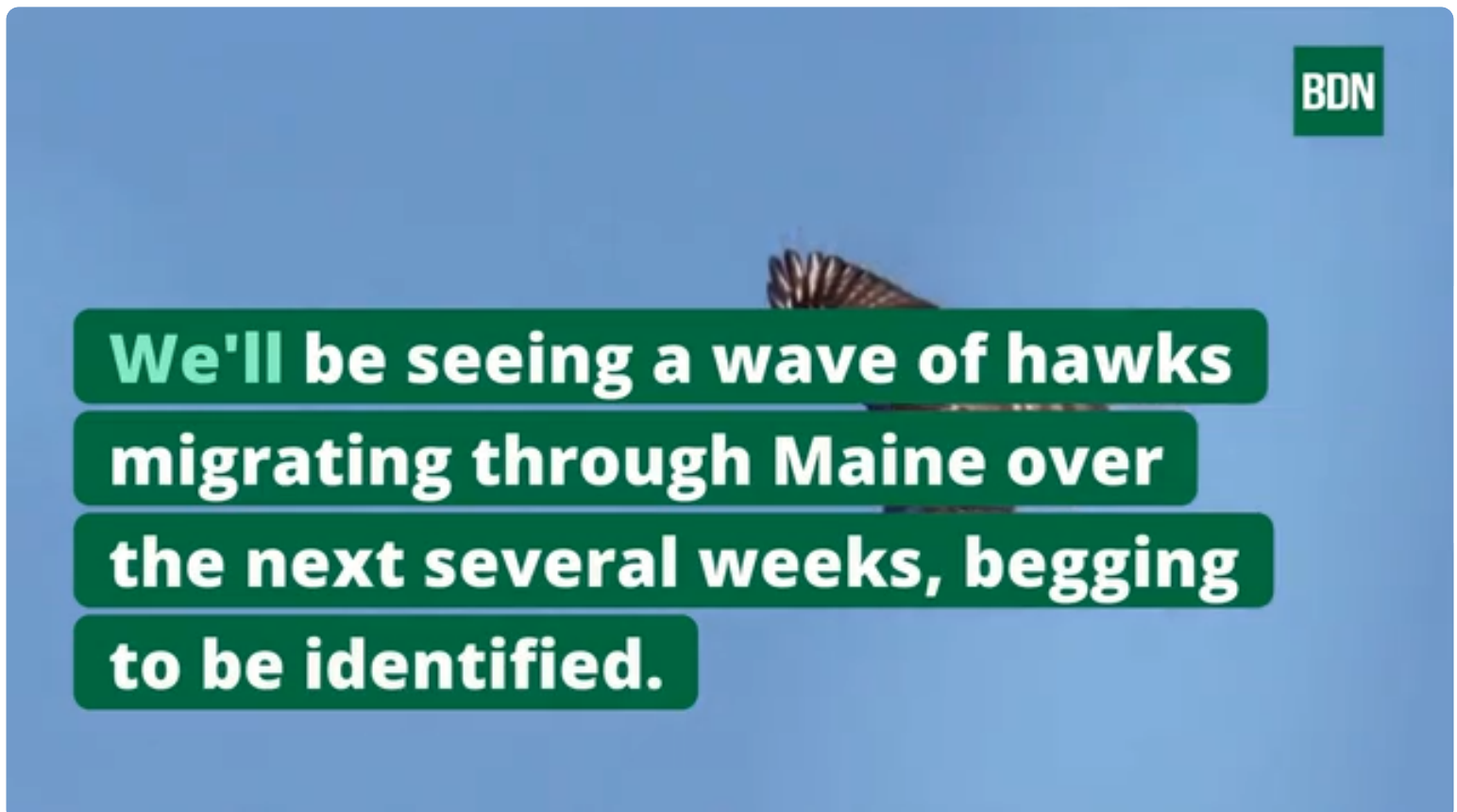


The giant lobster Titania (A.J Mooney) shows off her tap dancing skills a show stopping number in Penobscot Theatre Company's original musical of "Trapped the Musical: A Lobster Tale" at the Bangor Opera House. Credit: Bill Kuykendall

Ayuh! That there new show down to the Bangor Opera House is wicked good fun.

It's all about lovin' and lobsterin' and turnin' an island with a long history of fishin' for clawed crustaceans into a tourist trap for summah people. It's got singin' and dancin' and a guy in a great big, red lobster suit. It's so cunnin', it's worth a night out for sure.

Penobscot Theatre Company's world premiere of "Trapped! The Musical: A Lobster Tale" fills the Bangor Opera House with a funny, farcical take on how plans for a Disney-style theme park, coupled with a lobster research facility, affect Crusty Isle.



The fictional island and the people who inhabit it are coping with change and, as the song should have said, "It don't come easy."

This is a breezy, sometimes silly show written by Larrence Fingerhut and Andrew Eninger. The idea for the show hatched years ago, when Fingerhut, a longtime Penobscot Theatre Company collaborator as a music director and improviser, first read "The Secret Life of Lobsters" by Trevor Corson, a bestselling book about the Maine lobster industry published in 2004.

The book wove together the science of lobsters, the economics of the industry and the people who drive it into an entertaining, informative story. Fingerhut, who is married to PTC's executive director Jen Shepard, knew there was material for a theater piece there. It just took a pandemic for the writers to find time to focus on it.

Director Anneliese Toft allows her cast of mostly local actors to dish out equal amounts of charming and smarmy behavior from the seven characters in the show. She also keeps the action moving and uses the Opera House stage to great advantage, especially in the chorus numbers including “Crusty Isle” and the “Lobster That Need Catching Shanty.”

Ira Kramer as doubting lobsterman Harry Krabbe is delightful in the role. He proves his leading musical man persona is as perfect with new material as with the more traditional shows “Cinderella” and “Grease.” Kramer wears Harry’s longing for something more in life than lobstering as comfortably as he wears his yellow slicker.

Harry’s love interest, Izzy, is portrayed by Marie Anello, a New York City-based actor. Anello excellently portrays the researcher’s tightly wound persona as she juggles too many electronic devices and tries to resist a budding romance. As Izzy unwinds into Harry’s arms, Anello relaxes in the rhythm of island life the same way new Mainers embrace the local culture.

Nellie Kelly as Harry’s sister Kitty Krabbe and Michelle Zink-Munoz as Izzy’s assistant, Butch, are convincing as a couple determined to flee Crusty Isle. Kelly, who works for the theater’s Dramatic Academy program, wears the young woman’s frustration at not being able to captain her own lobster boat like leftover chum. Zink-Munoz of New York City gives depth to a character whose loyalties are divided but is determined in a love for Kitty.

Ben Layman as Seth is a delightful comic foil for his best friend, Harry. Layman has not looked so good in a costume as he does in his plush lobster suit since he sang an ode to the snowmobile suit in “Guys on Ice.”

As Billy Divagio, Doug Meswarb gives new meaning and depth to the word smarmy in his portrayal of the millionaire developer who brings change and modernity to the island.



Ira Kramer (lobsterman Harry Krabbe), Marie Anello (marine biologist Isabella Mundt, aka Izzy), and Ben Layman (best friend to Harry and Harry’s father before him) all suited up to portray the “super lobster” Titania, in the new Penobscot Theatre musical “Trapped!”. Credit: Bill Kuykendall



Seth (Ben Layman, left) argues with Harry (Ira Kramer) about the pros and cons of having a lobster theme park on Krusty Isle in Penobscot Theatre Company's original musical "Trapped the Musical: A Lobster Tale" at the Bangor Opera House. Credit: Bill Kuykendall

And then there's A.J. Mooney, a PTC regular, who is forceful as mama Caroline Krabbe, a woman trying to hold back the tide of change on Krusty Isle, and formidable as Titania, the giant lobster Izzy plans to make the focus of her research. Dressed in a red lobster costume and sporting feathers and claws, Mooney stops the show with her tap dancing in "Titania's Tango" at the top of the Second Act. It is awesome.

Once again, the theater's top notch technical team of set designer Dan Bilodeau, lighting designer Kyle Anderson, costume designers Janet Sussman and Alexis Foster, sound designer Neil E. Graham and props designer Mary Clark have collaborated to turn the Opera House stage into a quaint fishing village.

The lobster traps and buoys piled around the set give the show an authentic look and feel but without all the smells that go along with lobstering.

The opening night show on Saturday was essentially sold out with just a few empty seats. That is a truly welcome first for PTC this season. Audiences in northern Maine have been more reluctant than their southern counterparts to return to indoor live performances after the pandemic.

"Trapped" still needs some work before it is ready to hit the road in other venues. It is about 20 minutes too long for modern audiences with short attention spans. The Second Act takes on a farcical tone that is rarely hinted at in the First Act so, emotionally, it can feel like two different shows. The ending comes a bit too suddenly when a loophole is found in the lobster fishermen's contracts that would put the question in court on shore for a decade.

But the appreciative audience in the Opera House on opening let all that slide and went along for a delightful ride with the writers and the fine cast, most of whom are familiar to season ticket holders. “Trapped” is a fun ride as long as no one confuses the plot or the characters for real Maine lobster fishermen or the issues they are facing.

Penobscot Theatre Company's production of “Trapped the Musical: A Lobster Tale” will be performed through March 5 at the Bangor Opera House, 131 Main St., Bangor. For tickets, call 942-3333 or visit penobscottheatre.org.

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