

Marlborough theater group debuts



PHOTO BY ANGEL ROY for Wicked Local

From left: Jordan McCormack, of Fitchburg; Elyse Williams, of Sharon; and Jake Lewis, of Marlborough rehearse for this weekend's upcoming performance of "Almost Maine."

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MARLBOROUGH —

When the curtain rises on Ghost Light Players' inaugural show this weekend at the First Church in Marlborough, the audience will see the pattern of the Northern Lights projected onto the back of the stage.

The celestial lights are a major plot driver of the Players' show "Almost, Maine," a New England-based rendition of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." In the show, written by John Cariani, the lights encourage new romances — and a little intrigue — among residents of the fictitious Maine town of Almost.

Like the famous lights, Marlborough's newest theater troupe hopes to inject new excitement into the local arts scene.

“Our vision is to have the troupe put on interesting and creative productions, focusing on great performances,” said Artistic Director Kat Alix-Gaudreau, 36. “We don’t want to blow a lot of money on spectacle, so we hope to follow the old Vaudeville style, which stresses creating something out of nothing.”

Along with performing at the church, Ghost Light Players also plan to offer Shakespeare plays on the Marlborough Town Common, Alix-Gaudreau said.

Ghost Light Players is Marlborough’s first new theater troupe in at least a decade, since the Theater One troupe was discontinued. Technical Director Kim Beauchemin, a longtime collaborator with Alix-Gaudreau in other community theater projects, said both of them had been yearning for something close to home after driving as far as Andover and Wakefield to produce shows.

“Kat and I had done independent film projects together, such as the 48-hour film festival in Providence,” said Beauchemin, 38. “Then we moved into doing community theater for other towns.” Added Alix-Gaudreau: “The commute got to be a lot and we wanted to do our own thing.”

As luck would have it, the First Church in Marlborough also wanted to make its auditorium more of a center of community life and was looking for groups like Ghost Light Players.

“We’ve been sponsoring many community-wide programs in recent years, such as the fall festival, spaghetti dinners and our annual hand bell concert in December,” said Russ Goliger, the music director at First Church. “A lot of us remember the Theater One group and were hoping that somebody would take the lead and bring local theater back to Marlborough. We are thrilled that they’ve asked us to be part of that.”

Beauchemin and Alix-Gaudreau named their new theater troupe for the “ghost light,” which is a dim safety light kept burning onstage, even when nobody is there. Myth says that the light pacifies any ghosts that may haunt the theater.

Fortunately, the troupe has already attracted lots of interest and some seed money. A campaign via the online fundraising site kickstarter.com raised \$1,300; Ghost Light Players is also getting its 501-c3 designation, which means that all contributions to it are tax-deductible.

More than two dozen turned out for its first meeting; 126 are now on its email list. “We put out a call via email for a crew person, and within three hours we had somebody with experience,” Alix-Gaudreau said.

Cliff Dike, the troupe's producer, drives all the way from Methuen for rehearsals and meetings. "I love being involved in the start of a show, and seeing people who might not know one another come together," said Dike, 48, an attorney.

Alix-Gaudreau said that "Almost, Maine" was the ideal choice for the troupe's debut. "It combines the humor of real relationships with the magic of a starry northern night, and gives the actors wonderful material to work with," she said. The eight-person cast includes three Marlborough residents – Emily Goldfarb, Fred Haas and Jake Lewis.

Showtimes for "Almost, Maine" are at 8 p.m. Friday, March 23 and Saturday, March 24, and 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 25, at the First Church in Marlborough, Congregational, 37 High St. Tickets are \$15 for general admission and \$12 for seniors and children ages 12 and under. For ticket information, or to make tax-free contributions to Ghost Light Players, visit ghostlightplayers.com.