

Welcome back to Frogtown Hollow!

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The holiday season has arrived and so have all the lovable folks of Frogtown Hollow and nearby Waterville. We had to coax them back to Goodspeed Musicals with offers of free snake oil, prize money, and season subscriptions. They drove a hard bargain, yet we are delighted that they agreed to visit us and we hope that you are equally enchanted by their arrival.

For those of you who did not see last season's production, you may be wondering what kind of musical would be worth such a generous offer. This heart-warming story recounts the tale of poor Emmet and his Ma, two otters who secretly enter into a talent show with the intention of using the prize money to purchase a special holiday gift for the other. But the merits of the production are best expressed by Goodspeed Musical's Executive Director Michael Price: "Emmet and Ma's story of giving is one we are excited to share once again with audiences. The wonderful music, charming characters, and a cast of exceptional performers make for a festive celebration for all ages."

The Jim Henson Company originally aired the *Emmet Otter's Jug-Band Christmas* special in 1977 for HBO (penned by Jerry Juhl and produced and directed by Jim Henson). Then, it re-aired on CBS, ABC, and Nickelodeon in the 80s and 90s and had successful releases on video and DVD. Last year we presented the world premier of the musical stage production of *Emmet Otter's Jug-Band Christmas* and the response was overwhelmingly positive. Who could have guessed that our audience would fall in love with dancing otters playing down-home jug-band music? Director and Choreographer Christopher Gattelli helped explain why we should collaborate on this beautiful production.

Christopher was always of the firm belief that this classic holiday story would be ideal for combining the famous puppets from Jim Henson's Creature Shop with live actors and orchestra. Having worked here at Goodspeed on several projects in the past, Christopher also felt that our home here on the river would be the perfect place to work on the show. The musical is set in the woods, on a river, with an Opera House and a Riverside Rest. "Goodspeed audiences know this place," Christopher has said, "and they'll be surrounded by the atmosphere of Frogtown Hollow before they even walk in the doors of the theatre." We agreed with Christopher's vision and we were eager to begin collaborating on the production. Looking back on this decision, Michael Price shared the following: "Last year audiences experienced the joy and magic of Christmastime in this idyllic holiday setting. It truly is the perfect backdrop for such a timeless tale."

Co-book writer Timothy A. McDonald of iTheatrics and Paul Williams, who wrote the music and lyrics for the 1977 Henson TV special, worked with Christopher in this collaboration. Williams returned with all the original music as well as outstanding additions written just for our production. Director Gattelli also noted that Williams' score "ranges from Country, to Bluegrass, to Rock, to Vaudeville, even Gospel, and every song [will] stay with you long after the curtain has dropped." Williams previously wrote all the music for *The Muppet Movie* and *The Muppet Christmas Carol*.

The other essential partner in this theatrical endeavor was of course, the Jim Henson Company. Under the direction of the Company's chairman and Jim Henson's son Brian, The Jim Henson Company has been an integral part of the production process. Brian has gathered a team of extraordinary puppet creators and craftspeople to bring the Henson Company's well-known style of whimsy, warmth, and brilliance to the Goodspeed Opera House. Jim Henson's Creature Shop's puppets and costumes, created especially for this production, share the stage with talented performers as this heart-warming story unfolds once again.

The musical stage version of *Emmet Otter's Jug-Band Christmas* was adapted from Russell Hoban's classic children's book by the same name. Moreover, Hoban's tale was a twist on the famous short story *The Gift of the Magi*. Despite the multiple variations on the narrative, in each version a timeless lesson rings true: through the characters' struggle, we witness the desperation of those who live in poverty. However, despite their meager existence, we quickly learn that the love they share is more valuable than any tangible treasure.

Emmet Otter explores emotions that transcend rational thought. It touches our hearts to witness friendly otters sacrifice everything for each other because of their strong affection. The unassuming animals in *Emmet Otter* help communicate that self-sacrifice in the name of love is an enlightened gift indeed.

So sit back and enjoy Frogtown Hollow, where warm feelings, family, and the hope of the holiday season take the chill off a frozen river. It is a place where the exciting tune of a jug-band brings an infectious boost to the sprit, and where Emmet Otter and his friends will make a little bit of magic right before your eyes.

Happy Holidays!