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Kanata Theatre's New Season Begins With British Satire 'Lettice & Lovage'

Kanata Theatre kicked off its 2024-2025 season of community theatre with *Lettice & Lovage*. British playwright Peter Shaffer originally penned the play to create a robust female role for Dame Maggie Smith.

Smith went on to win a Tony Award for her portrayal of Lettice Douffet, a character with an interest in history that extends to food and a penchant for the theatre. Lettice, who should be relishing her retirement, serves as a tour guide for a preservation trust overseeing the historic London residence where she is employed.

Barbara Kobolak embraces the dual responsibilities of director and protagonist in Kanata Theatre's production of *Lettice & Lovage*, delivering a remarkable performance as the eloquent and exuberant Lettice Douffet.

When the plaster cornices and the number of spindles on the staircase fail to impress the visiting tourists, Lettice takes it upon herself to embellish the history of the 16th-century home where it appears nothing ever happened. She lives up to her theatrical late mother's motto: "enlarge, enliven, enlighten".

From dining on hedgehogs to the delicacy of puffins and other so-called Elizabethan cuisine to the tall tales of late queens and fair maidens, Lettice's imagination turns the dull old mansion into a thrilling narrative for visiting tourists.

Lettice retains a youthful spirit. She possesses childlike creativity, a quality that often diminishes with age. However, for Lettice, this quality abounds. Lettice finds comfort in the memory of her late mother; it's almost like a grounding force that gives her confidence and reinforces that there is a place for her in the world despite her seeming quite lonely.

The dialogue-driven play is ultimately about the relationship between Lettice and her supervisor, Lottie (Susan Monaghan), another woman of advanced age. Unlike Lettice, Lottie is devoid of creativity and finds comfort in following rules and procedures.


Lottie's job appears to be the centrepiece of her life, and while Lettice finds fulfilment in her creativity, Lottie, who tells her new friend that she is of German descent, does so by following the rules.


The two women are the perfect female odd couple, but in their differences, they also have similarities. Their combined discomfort with the stage of life they find themselves in, and their inability to fit into new ways of the world draw them closer together.


Despite the solid acting by the two main characters and the set design—a consistently strong feature of Kanata Theatre productions—the play does seem to take its time; however, the comedic brilliance of the third act makes the wait worthwhile.

Lettice & Lovage is being performed at the Kanata Theatre until Saturday, September 21. For tickets, please **visit the theatre's website (<https://kanatatheatre.ca/kanata-theatre-shows/>)**.

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Kanata Theatre opens 56th season with satire and technology in Lettice & Lovage

by Lesley McKay September 9, 2024



(Barbara Kobolak plays the role of Lettice Douffet in Kanata Theatre's 56th season opening performance of Lettice & Lovage that hits the stage on September 11, 2024. Photos: Alex Henkelman)

The Kanata Theatre ensemble are pleased to welcome theatre attendees to their 56th year of exceptional talent and memorable performances with the season's opening play – Lettice & Lovage – written by Peter Shaffer and directed by Barbara Kobolak.

Set in 1987, Lettice & Lovage has three scenes in which the play is performed – a mansion in Wiltshire, with two scenes set in London. Much research and thought went into the set when work started back in January of this year. The ingenuity of set designer Dean Flockton clearly shows what can be accomplished without taking away from the time period of the play and the stage technology available at that time. After much thought, his imagination addressed the situation – a stage that rotates like a turntable.

The play itself has its own history. Playwright Peter Shaffer was known for writing screenplays with men in the key roles such as *Equus* and *Amadeus*. Dame Maggie Smith, a British actress, approached Peter at the party one evening and asked him “when he was going to write great roles for women!”. He was intrigued by her suggestion and two years later, Lettice & Lovage was specifically written with her in mind as the lead Lettice Douffet. Opening in England in

1987, then on to Broadway in 1990, Dame Maggie Smith as the lead actress won a Tony Award for her work when the play was originally performed on Broadway.



So what can you expect from this satirical comedy? "You're in your dream job. You love history and being an unemployed actress, you now work as a historical tour guide in an English Country House. Bored of the repetitive tours, your sense of creativity from your stage time begins to challenge you. Would a few little embellishments of the truth hurt? What happens when the boss confronts you with the ambiguities....?"

And yes, there was a live cat in the original show – but there was also a backup stuffed cat, utilized when the real cat didn't feel like performing! So, Kanata Theatre has eliminated the real cat, and are working with the stuffed cat – and trust your imagination will fill in the gap.



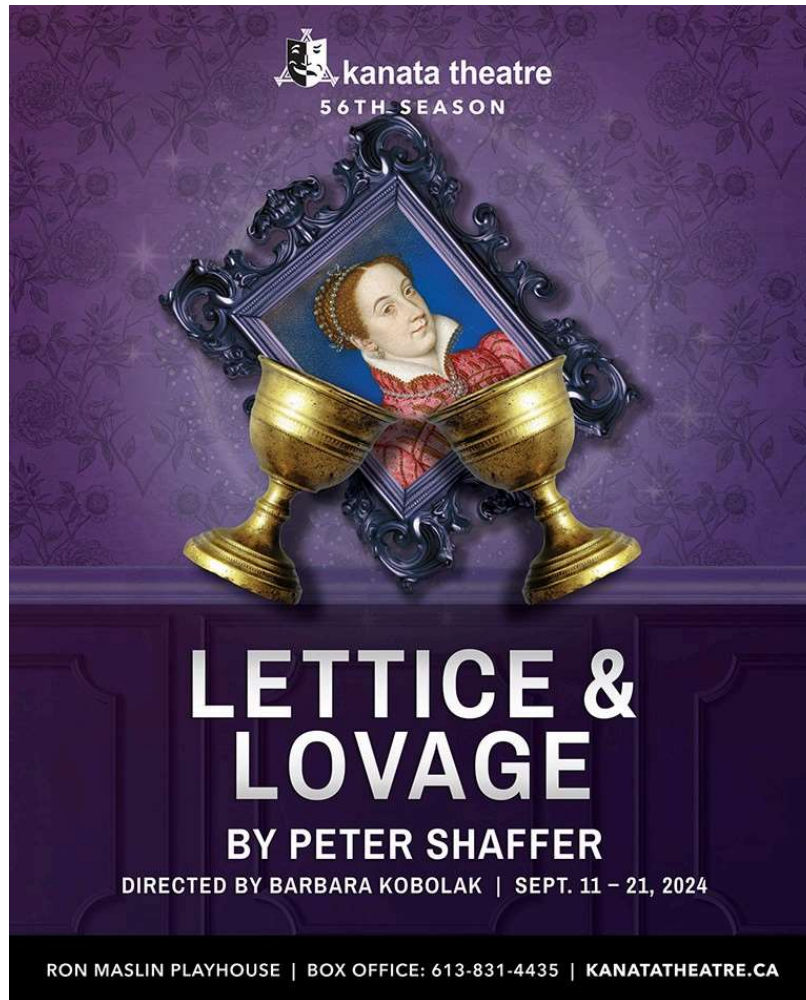
From September 11th to 21st, join the Kanata Theatre cast as they perform the first play of the Kanata Theatre 2024-2025 season – Lettice & Lovage, directed by Barbara Kopolak.

The cast for the satirical comedy Lettice & Lovage are:

- **Lettice Douffet** – Barbara Kopolak
- **Lotte Schoen** – Susan Monaghan
- **Miss Framer** – Ann Empey
- **Bardolph** – Timothy Foss

- **Tourists** – Ann Empey, Lindsay Endicott, Joy Forbes, Nicole MacLaren, Suman Roy, Tammy Southin

Showing at Ron Maslin Playhouse, 1 Ron Maslin Way in Kanata from September 11th to 21st, with an afternoon matinée on September 15th, tickets are available to purchase online at www.kanatatheatre.ca or from the box office at 613-831-4435. A subscription offer is also available that includes tickets for five plays.



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Lettice Douffet played by Barbara Kobolak and Lotte played by Susan Monaghan. Photo by Alex Henkelman.

Embrace your eccentricities with Kanata Theatre's performance of *Lettice & Lovage*

By Cristina Paolozzi on September 9, 2024

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Imagination, curiosity and storytelling abound in Kanata Theatre's production of *Lettice & Lovage*

playing from Sept. 11–21.

At the job she always imagined would be her dream, Lettice Douffet works as a historical tour guide, but becomes disillusioned as daily activities are more boring than she first realized. As her creative mind gets the best of her, she embellishes the script of her historical workplace much to the anger of her manager, Lottie Schoen.

“Lettice and Lottie Schoen discover that they have a mutual love of English history, and they form a friendship,” says Tom Kobolak, the performances’ production manager. “They begin to reenact trials and executions of famous persons long ago.”



Lottie played by Susan Monaghan and Lettice played by Barbara Kobolak. Photo by Alex Henkelman.

Kobolak says the piece has Dame Maggie Smith to thank for its conception.

“She had apparently gone to Peter Schaffer, who is the playwright, and said to him, ‘Mr. Schaffer, you create fabulous parts for men—why don’t you do one for women?’” he says. “The play is a

celebration of language, and it crackles with a dry, intelligent wit that many of us became used to from all those seasons of watching Maggie Smith in *Downton Abbey*."

Strong, curious and theatrical women, played by strong, curious and theatrical women. *Lettice & Lovage's* focus on comedy through language is also something that Kobolak believes audiences will enjoy the most.

"We like being able to twist, to see how people use language," he says. "We [Kanata Theatre] did Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and we sold the place out. So people in this city are willing to come and listen to language—I think that's something they will enjoy in this way."



Lottie played by Susan Monaghan and Lettice played by Barbara Kobolak. Photo by Alex Henkelman.

Kanata Theatre began in 1968 and has been running a fully community-based operation. This production consists of artists who have been with the Kanata Theatre for many years.

“We are blessed with a group of people who will come back season after season, play after play, and do the job because they love doing it,” says Kobilak.

With this sense of community in mind, Kobilak also wants audiences to feel like this community is accepting of all—especially those who are a little more quirky than others.

“This performance is a clever way of telling all of us to acknowledge the fact that we are, in some way or another, eccentric,” he says. “This play honours people who are eccentric.”



Lettice Douffet played by Barbara Kobilak and Tourists. Photo by Alex Henkelman.

Kobilak hopes that audiences take away that the relationships on stage are there to help acknowledge those little quirks and the creativity they bring within us.

“Lettice abounds in creativity,” he says. “And through her friendship with Lottie, also begins to find the creativity in herself.”

Lettice & Lovage is playing at the Kanata Theatre from Sept. 11–21 at 7:30pm on weekdays with a 2:30pm matinee on Sunday. For tickets, you can purchase them online, or call the box office at 613-831-4435. For more information about Kanata Theatre, visit their website.

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