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## FEATURES

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# Canada comes east for music

By Velina Nacheva

THE project Bulgaria and Canada Joined by Music is bringing young Canadian theatre performers to Bulgaria.

The Music Man - originally produced on Broadway in the 1950s and which ran for 1,375 performances - is arriving on the Bulgarian stage on Tuesday in the National Palace of Culture as part of the cultural festival Salon Of The Arts.

Bulgaria and Canada Joined by Music was initiated by Canadian choreographer Sonia Clarke who worked in the past with St. Luc School in Montreal and choreographed some of the performances of their musical seasons in the early 1990s.

Two years ago, Clarke worked with the Bulgarian State Ballet Arabesque and created the biggest show of their 1999-2000 season - Similar But Not The Same.

She said she fell in love with Bulgarian audiences from the start. The performance was very successful. In the opening night, the famous Russian Bolshoi Ballet had a show scheduled at the Sofia Opera House. It started 20 minutes late - the Russian performers were at the National Theatre watching Clarke's premiere. This success gave her the idea to create cultural bridges between Bulgaria and Canada.

The St. Luc School, which has the tradition of organising annual exchanges of students worldwide, was the perfect candidate. With the collaboration of Milka Miteva, director of the National Musical School in Sofia, she laid the basis of that journey that will start this Friday with the arrival of 62 Canadians from Montreal to discover the Bulgarian reality.

The project would have gone through more difficulties if it were not for the help of Georges Panitchersky, President of the Canadian-Bulgarian Business Council and Consul of Bulgaria in Montreal, and from the Bulgarian Culture Minister Emma Moskova and Foreign Minister Nadezhda Mihailova.

After the first phase of the project - the visit of the Canadians - young Bulgarians will be invited to go to Canada to display their talent to the Canadian audiences. The organisers shared with The Echo that they hoped it to be an experience they would never forget.

Robert Jodoin, artistic director of the musical, said: "Children expect a culture shock since most of them know little about Eastern Europe and even less about

Bulgaria. They will be shocked by the state of development of the country and its beautiful mix of modern and historical flavours, and its culture located at the convergence of the western cultures and the Middle East."

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien wrote to Clarke earlier this spring saying he hoped the event would be the first of a series of exchanges that would initiate young adults of the next generation into an era of prosperity for both countries and help cement future strong ties between the two countries.

Sixteen-year-old performer Karine Arsenault told The Echo: "I am very excited about visiting Bulgaria and having the opportunity of doing our version of the musical Music Man. I hope everybody will have as much fun watching it as I do acting in it! I am looking forward to meeting the people in Bulgaria for the first time, especially the students for the student exchange. This will be my first trip to Europe and I'm certain that Sofia will not disappoint me."

One reason Meredith Willson's great American musical The Music Man is appealing is the fast-paced, witty dialogue. However, there are a few terms and expressions used in it that would prompt most of us to run to dictionaries and encyclopedias.

The Music Man is the endearing story of travelling salesman Harold Hill and his visit to a small Iowa town in 1912 where he meets and falls in love with the willful, spinster librarian, Marian Paroo. With his fast-talking style, 'Professor' Harold Hill convinces the town that unless they adopt his revolutionary music programme, The Think System, the morale of the youngsters of River City will be forever doomed. He cons the parents into buying instruments and expensive uniforms in order to form the River City Boys Band. Chaos ensues as Hill's credentials are questioned and he is called upon to prove himself to the citizens of River City. This all-American family musical is guaranteed to entertain, featuring an entire score of classic hit songs including 'Til There Was You, Gary, Indiana, Lida Rose and of course, Seventy Six Trombones.

The musical will also be staged in Blagoevgrad and Plovdiv.

Miteva said: "We are going to present a concert in September in Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec. The orchestra of children will see their hosts. They already exchange correspondence and are extremely happy to be a part of it."

