

Get ready to scream at latest SJ Theatre Company play

SEAN MOTT
TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

SAINT JOHN • When Patrick Jeffrey hears someone let out a scream of fear at his show, he knows he's doing his job right.

"We had a fantastic crowd (on Thursday)," he said. "It was a joy of a show to do. We did get some screams, which is a delight."

Jeffrey is starring in the Saint John Theatre Company's production of *The Woman in Black* alongside veteran Canadian stage and screen actor R.H. Thomson. The show, which launched on Wednesday, is scheduled to run for the rest of the month.

"Stephen Tobias (executive director of the Theatre Company), a couple years ago, called me up to teach a course online during COVID," Thomson said. "After that he asked if I'd do a show."

Thomson is a major figure in the Canadian performance scene, acting in numerous productions across the

country. In 2010 he was inducted into the Order of Canada and in 2015 he received a Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Achievement.

"My role is to do a lot of acting," Thomson said, referring to his position in *The Woman in Black*. "I play five parts in it. It's great to be offered a part this challenging and fun. It's fantastic."

"It's a full workout for an actor. Who wants to sit on the bench for most of the hockey game? It's pretty much nonstop. There are some 45 second periods where I'm waiting in the wings. It's a full court press performance."

Jeffrey originally worked with Thomson during the COVID-19 pandemic when Thomson led the online course.

"We would go through poems and stories and traces the microns of storytelling," Jeffrey said. "It was a fascinating chance to do some work again. When restrictions loosed, the Atlantic Repertory Company was casting for *No*



R.H. Thomson and Patrick Jeffrey star in the Saint John Theatre Company's production of *The Woman in Black* this month. PHOTO: SAINT JOHN THEATRE COMPANY

Man is an Island and I was cast in that. Stephen Tobias called me a year and a half ago about *The Woman in Black*.

"It's been humbling and inspiring and joyful. There's an intuition that

actors who have been working on stage their entire lives cultivate. They work with abandon and without fear. I didn't know what it'd be like before we started. This is an actor who deeply

cares about stories."

The Woman in Black concerns a lawyer who becomes obsessed with a curse he believes hangs over him, later enlisting an actor to help him tell his story. Thomson said the show is defined by its intensity.

"It's a well-made tale machine," he said. "Pieces of a tale are pieces of a clockwork. Nobody's sitting on the furniture for three pages. It's not that kind of play."

Jeffrey said the show tackles numerous themes, but its primary goal is creating a sense of foreboding and terror.

"It's unnerving because you get inklings that there is this spirit looming over everything, but it takes time to eke that out," he said. "The story does come down to neglect and the traumas of not fitting into a community. In general the theme is fear. There is a through line of fear in the play."

The Woman in Black will run at the BMO Studio Theatre on Princess Street until April 29. Tickets cost \$30 for adults and \$20 for students.