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Theatre Aurora?s new season lays groundwork for anniversary ?rebirth?

By Brock Weir

It's an inevitability of any lifecycle, the ultimate end ? but, if done right, it can be one hell of a trip.
It certainly has for Theatre Aurora as they put the finishing touches on their latest season, which is the end of a very unique lifecycle all its own.
For the past few seasons, Theatre Aurora has been building its seasons on steps of the human journey, from making decisions, creating connections and, for its 2016-2017 season, focusing on a theme of ?borderless love.? Now, the 2017-2018 season is here, and its theme is ?In Memoriam.?
It's not, of course, the end of community theatre in Aurora, but merely setting the stage for what Melanie Hargan, Theatre Aurora's newly-minted Artistic Director says will signal a ?new beginning? for the institution as it gears up for its 60th anniversary season next year.
?I feel it is a new beginning,? she says. ?We're saying goodbye to one chapter of Theatre Aurora and opening it up to the next year and to the next 10 years. It is all going to be new and exciting.?
The role is a new and exciting one for Ms. Hargan, who takes over as Artistic Director from Sergio Calderon, who originally devised the four season lifecycle theme. She is not, however, new to Theatre Aurora.
?They are a great family,? she says of Theatre Aurora and, like any family, they keep pulling her back in.
She seized the Artistic Director opportunity to challenge herself to learn new things, stoking her passion for community theatre which has been burning bright for the last 13 years.
As she looks ahead to the jam-packed ?In Memoriam? season, she is looking to dig into her new role with gusto and, in fact, was on site at Theatre Aurora from the outset watching the very first rehearsal for their inaugural show, Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman which opens October 19.
?Each show is going to be different,? she says. ?As Artistic Director, you are working with the directors, you are making sure the directors are going towards the vision of Theatre Aurora, and you're making sure that the actors are happy with what is going on in the director process. I need to make myself open to each director so that they feel free to come to me with any questions and any advice. I am just going to try and lead them to make the best of each show and bring out the best in their directors.?
Not content, however, to simply act as Artistic Director, she is getting into the actual director's chair with a production of Next Fall, which will take place this autumn.
?I have started the whole process,? says Ms. Hargan. ?I read the play pretty much every day. You really have to as a director. You need to know the characters inside and out and feel the characters.?
In the meantime, however, she is familiarizing herself with the full slate Theatre Aurora is offering local theatre-goers.
After the classic visit with Salesman's Loman family, the season continues with a ?mysterious farce? entitled The Game's Afoot, which centres on an actor, renowned for playing Sherlock Holmes, who invites his cast over to his estate for a weekend. Needless to say in a season focused on ?In Memoriam? a corpse makes an appearance and the story unfolds.
Once the audience learns whodunit, the next production will be the Canadian debut of the Tony-nominated musical If/Then, which centres on a woman which shows the possibilities of all paths in life's road.
Next Fall follows If/Then.
?It is a drama, with some comedy thrown in about a gay male couple,? explains the director. ?One of them has not yet come out to his family, so it is about that and the pressure it puts on their relationship. I love this play! I have so many friends who are gay and lesbian, and I see the turmoil they go through sometimes if they haven't come out, or if their family members don't talk to them because they are gay. I want to bring that story to life and just show people that this is what is happening to someone inside and to their relationship.?
The season closes with the intriguingly titled play The Attic, The Pearls & Three Fine Girls.
?I want patrons who haven't been to Theatre Aurora in 10 years to come back and get excited, to see that our reason for the following year is great,? says Ms. Hargan of this, and the following anniversary season. ?I want the community to put Theatre Aurora on the map. There are so many theatre groups that a little one like Theatre Aurora can get lost in the mix and I want people to be talking about it and get excited.?
For more information on the upcoming Theatre Aurora season, and for tickets, visit www.theatreaurora.com.