

One Voice Project provides creative outlet for Theatre Aurora ? and entertainment for community



Theatre Aurora's doors might still be closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but there's still magic happening within its walls for the entire community to enjoy.

Over the last two months, the creative forces that have made Theatre Aurora a local institution for more than 60 years, have been hard at work creating the One Voice Project, a special online production bringing together four actors for four one-person one-act plays that are now streaming live at theatreaurora.com.

Produced by Sergio Calderon and Neill Kernohan, the One Voice Project was a labour of love for producers, directors and actors alike.

‘One of our taglines has always been ‘keeping art going’ in the theatre and trying to create as much art as we can,’ says Mr. Kernohan.

The initial concept was based on the ‘Talking Heads’ monologues by Alan Bennett originally produced by the BBC, but award-winning playwright Andrew Biss provided Theatre Aurora free rein to produce his well-known plays for an online audience.

Once they had secured permission from Biss, Mr. Calderon says it was a matter of making One Voice a cohesive project and one which had buy-in from Theatre Aurora directors, including those who had their productions cancelled as a result of the pandemic.

‘We started this back in June and we had officially just started coming out of our isolation, we weren't even really able to do patio meals yet, but the participation was there immediately,’ he says. ‘There was no hesitation from any of the participants to actually get out and do something creative they hadn't had the opportunity to do so since March.’

But getting out and doing something creative was easier said than done. Once directors are on board, an open audition call for actors typically follows. This audition process was cast aside for logistical reasons and directors were tasked with finding the perfect actors to breathe life into their assigned one-act works. This process not only helped Theatre Aurora overcome potential health hazards of an open call, but cast a wider net for actors.

‘Almost everyone was from outside Theatre Aurora,’ says Mr. Kernohan. ‘I didn't know anybody who was up on the stage. For us, it was nice we were able to bring people in we wouldn't normally be able to bring into the theatre.’

From there, technological realities set in. Lighting a live performance in a theatre is vastly different from the same process for a recorded production, editing was another challenge, and the learning curve was steep. But, in the end, it was a fulfilling process for the local theatre company.

“For me, it was fulfilling just being in the theatre and being able to put something on that stage,” says Mr. Kernohan. “For a little while, it felt really scary. The theatre was very dark and it felt like we were missing out on things. Putting it on stage was very fulfilling and for me it was just getting to do something different. We learned so much. Lighting is totally different when you’re lighting for TV as opposed to theatre. It is a totally different thing. We learned how to make people comfortable on the stage, how to work with them and get them going, calm nerves and we learned how to edit and we’re still learning how to edit better! We’re all a work in progress for that.”

Adds Mr. Calderon: “It was weirdly fulfilling in a different way. My two strengths in theatre lie in performance and direction, but in this particular instance, I had to take a step back from both of those and go into executive producing / project management / stage management roles just to be able to keep the whole process running, keeping us on time and on track. I was happy to assist and allow a platform for artists to actually create.

“For us to be able to share that creation with people” that has always been my ultimate goal: create something and have it available to share. It was great that from the beginning of the idea right to the very end we were able to deliver something we were happy with but also fulfilled that need for artists and creators.”

With the lessons learned and the first iteration of One Voice now online, they’re coming back for more. They are now putting the finishing touches on what they dub “One Voice 1.5” which will follow a similar format, but explore different areas of live theatre including cabaret-style musical episodes.

The producers expect “One Voice 1.5” to begin streaming within a month or so, but, in the meantime, One Voice can still be “rented” for \$4.99 and streamed through Theatre Aurora’s website at www.theatreaurora.com.

“Nothing will truly replace the live theatre-going experience. However, when we’re not able to or it is not safe for us to have those experience, there is still a need and a want to have sort of an immediate performance, which sometimes get lost in a film or television-style experience,” says Mr. Calderon.

Adds Mr. Kernohan: “It’s short. You’re only looking at about 25 minutes. You’re not committing to it forever. It is \$4.99 and you can watch it in your pyjamas!”

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter