

?Sherlock Holmes? faces identity crisis at Theatre Aurora



By Brock Weir

How do you introduce yourself?

You start with your name, of course, but what's your next angle? Chances are, you follow up with what you do.

Aurora resident Joey Ferguson, for instance, might come up, shake your hand and say, 'Hi, I'm Joey, and I'm a teacher,' but, he says, there's so much more to him than that.

So too, there is much more to Sherlock Holmes than just solving a whodunit and, even more still for an actor who is nearing the end of his run living, breathing and portraying the fictional detective.

That is the basis of the farce, 'The Game's Afoot' (or 'Holmes for the Holidays') which opens this Thursday at Theatre Aurora.

Written by Ken Ludwig, the play is set in 1936 when Broadway star William Gillette, an actor who has become synonymous with Holmes himself, finds life imitating art when he's at the centre of a murder at his isolated Connecticut estate.

'I first read the play about two years ago when I was on Theatre Aurora's play reading committee and instantly loved the show,' says Mr. Ferguson, 25, who first became involved with Theatre Aurora through its youth program at the age of 16. 'It is a holiday murder mystery farce with Broadway stars, fake blood, weapons and everything else you can expect. When I was away [teaching in the United Kingdom] I saw they needed a director, read through it again, realised I still loved it, and they were crazy enough to say yes.'

While Mr. Ferguson has extensive experience directing actors in the youth program, this is his first time sitting in the director's chair for an adult production for the theatre company which celebrates its 60th anniversary next year.

Mr. Ferguson says he was drawn to the play for its humour 'he has never directed a comedy before, so he was getting out of his comfort zone to try something new.

'What I liked is it is more than just a simple farce where you laugh and you go,' he explains. 'I felt this story actually had a message behind it. It is more about identity. Gillette is now trying to figure out who he is and Sherlock Holmes is so engrained in his life.

'Who am I?' is the major factor in this show. [Each actor] has their persona and the way people look at them but we find out during the show that they're not all maybe who they seem to be, that maybe there is a lot more depth to them.'

Making the leap from youth shows to the adult leagues is a big one, but a natural one for Mr. Ferguson. Tasked with his first full-scale production at Theatre Aurora, he says he wanted something 'extravagant' to really play up the grandiose existence of his main character.

There were a lot of aspects he says he had to 'wrap his head around' but he has relished the challenge.

'I thought at first it would be very different, but I don't know if it is just the actors I cast, but they are all children essentially!' he jokes. 'The fact I can trust them to go on stage willing to make fools of themselves, willing to try crazy things and willing to give me crazy things to try all ends up working together. They are not as conscious of what people are thinking; they are really willing to explore all those characters and explore the story.'

Despite starting in theatre at such a young age, Mr. Ferguson says he is drawn back time and time again because there is always a new challenge to explore. He grew up in the theatre, he says, and, in turn, the theatre has grown as well. Both have had a lot of growing up to do and have come into their own ? and those are the themes Mr. Ferguson would like audiences to explore as they relax for a laugh.

?I want everyone to have a good time and I think they will ? but I want them to think beyond their own lives and who we are as persons. We typically introduce ourselves by our job, ?Hi, I'm Joey, and I'm a teacher.' However, that is not really who I am. If I were to list 10 things about me, one might be a teacher but that is not really me. Who are we really??

The Game's Afoot (or Holmes for the Holidays) opens Thursday, November 30, running on select dates and times through December 9. For tickets and further information, call Theatre Aurora at 905-727-3669 or visit www.theatreaurora.com.