

TA's Kimberly Akimbo provides 'gritty' opportunity for actress



By Brock Weir

Actresses of a certain age begin to recognize there are only going to be certain types of roles that are going to come your way, says community theatre veteran Joanna Megraw.

The self-described 'theatre gypsy', and Bradford resident, says she is aging out of what she describes as the 'more prominent roles' that have punctuated her career in musical theatre over the past 25 years, but landing the lead role in Theatre Aurora's upcoming production of *Kimberly Akimbo*, she truly found a role she could sink her teeth into.

Kimberly Akimbo, a dark comedy by David Lindsay Abair, follows the story of a teenage girl with a rare condition which causes her body to rapidly age, opens at Theatre Aurora next Thursday, February 5, running through February 14.

'She is very cool, she is very pragmatic, she recognizes her own mortality and she is much easier about it than her family because she has lived it every day,' says Ms. Megraw, who got her start at Cookstown's South Simcoe Theatre Company, which was founded by her mother. 'They are all struggling so hard with the reality of what Kim has to face. What I like about her is that she stays very grounded. She still has lots of teen angst and emotionality and all that, but she is very clear about what her life is about and how little time she actually has. It makes her very interesting.'

Although Ms. Megraw finds those prominent roles more elusive as she matures, counting the 'Mame' and *Hello Dolly* on her to-do list, she says she is enjoying this change of pace and the opportunity to dig a little deeper and 'be more emotional and vulnerable on stage' than one has the opportunity to be in a musical.

In finding her inner Kimberly, Joanna sought out monologues intended for 16 and 17 year old girls, illustrating what they wanted, what they needed, 'broken hearts and all that.'

'I just really got into that place of many years ago, feeling passionate at that age about something,' she says.

As a teen, her passion lay in the theatre. At South Simcoe, her first significant role outside of the chorus was playing the Wicked Witch of the West to her mother's Scarecrow. As she grew up, she said she felt she didn't have the patience for the 'hand-to-mouth' lifestyle of theatre, and went to University, now working in the healthcare field. But, she came to realise she could still maintain her passions while pursuing her career.

In fact, her career experiences have helped her get under the skin of the characters she has played, particularly Kimberly.

?I find people at their most vulnerable when they are ill and suffering, and I am part of their journey of healing,? she says. ?Everybody is walking around wounded and in some kind of trauma. Sometimes they can get stuck there, it can make them ill, and I help them heal and discover some potential to recognizing their limitations and what they are capable of. I see humans in all their forms and I can call upon that experience for whatever roles I take on.?

As she looks forward to opening night next week, Joanna says she is looking forward to seeing how the audience takes in the entire experience, and the passion each member of the cast and crew brings to the production.

?I have had a plethora of directors and because doing a comedy or drama is new for me, I really like [director Harry Lavigne's] approach,? she says. ?He lets you do your own thing and now that we're off-book, he helps us layer the characters more and more, really assisting us find the potential of the character in each of us.?