

Theatre Aurora gets seriously fun with new theatre school



By Brock Weir

Getting up on stage and singing your heart out is one thing, but putting on an entire production is something else entirely.

But, behind the scenes work is just as important as what's happening on stage and, this fall, local kids can get a taste of both ? and maybe find their professional niche ? as Theatre Aurora launches its new Theatre Aurora Young Company.

A youth component has been part of Theatre Aurora's mandate almost since its inception half a century ago, but new directors of the Young Company are working on a new curriculum that will be launched this September that will give students a full flavour of everything it takes to put on a show ? a more serious take to what's been going on, perhaps, but one that is seriously fun.

?We really wanted to emphasize the development of skills in this theatre school as opposed to just putting them into a performance,? says Kim A. Reihe, the new director of the TA Theatre School, Young Company, and Theatre Kids. ?The hope is that some or most of these kids will eventually go onto post-secondary work or in a professional career. There is always a building of their skills, so as we go through the entire year they won't be starting at the base where they started before. We will improve on their particular skill.

?We are in the process of writing our curriculum right now and what we're going to do every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., the first two hours will be workshop and skills development and from 1 ? 3 p.m. we will actually have rehearsals for a full length production which this year will be A Christmas Story. We're trying to align the skills they learn in the morning and [put them into action] in the afternoon during rehearsal so there is a direct correlation between what they learn and how to apply it.?

Last week, Mr. Reihe, along with Richard Varty, Director of the Young Company, and director Sophia Bengall were on site as film crews shot a new commercial advertising the school with some of this past season's members of the Young Company.

Richard was on stage with the kids putting them through their paces as the crew filmed a movement exercise, familiar terrain for the director.

?As soon as I was done post-secondary, I found myself going out for auditions and professional parts and I didn't realise I wasn't trained nearly as well as I should have been to be thrown out into such a crazy field,? says Richard. ?There are experiences I have garnered over the last couple of years that I want to pass onto young and emerging artists to they are more prepared for the world that I wasn't!

?We're hoping to give audition workshops so they are a little bit more prepared for that, along with script analysis and things they can take with them as they move on with their lives, whether they want to stick with the arts or not. They are very handy skills they can bring into whatever professional capacity they are into.?

They also want to stress the fact, he says, that the end result will be a completely student-run production. They want to teach from the very start that young artist can be directors or lighting board operators, not just actors and people on the stage. They will be able to independently produce their own theatre, not just taking a script in hand and being told where to stand.

?It is taking their own work and adding their own creative flavour to it,? he says.

Adds Sophia: ?We're trying to make it a bit more formal in training but, with that said, theatre should always be fun, especially when you are working with kids or youth. You want them to be having a good time. Part of our program is to get them to feel comfortable amongst one another and to be able to let loose and be silly on stage, or whoever wants to be on stage. It is going to be more formal training, but we don't want to call it ?more formal' in the sense of it being rigid or less fun than it would have been.?

This year's Theatre School will have three sessions, the first one running from September 24 through December 22, which is the final evening of performance after 12 weeks of workshops and rehearsals.

A winter/spring section will run from January to May and include introducing young artists to drama festivals.

For more information, visit www.theatreaurora.com.