

Theatre Aurora kicks off 60th season tackling the complete Shakespeare ? all at once



By Brock Weir

Tackling Shakespeare is a rite of passage for any high school student, not to mention any actor who ever hopes to be on stage, but how about tackling all of Shakespeare's nearly-40 plays all in one go? It's no sweat for Theatre Aurora, which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year.

?The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged) (Revised)? kicks off Theatre Aurora's 60th season, a season that aims to boil down the entire theatre experience into just six shows.

The curtain rises on Shakespeare on September 20, and is followed through the rest of the season by two one-act plays by Daniel MacIvor, the hit Canadian musical *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Proscenophobia*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, and *Stepping Out*.

?It is a look at theatre in general,? says Joey Ferguson, who sits in the director's chair for *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged) (Revised)*. ?We want to show where we've been, and we will be doing a one act anthology show that one of our members is writing that is going to touch on every show that we have ever done ? it is going to be 300 shows mentioned in one hour, so we're tentatively calling it *60 Years in 60 Minutes*. The rest of the season is looking at all the different elements of the theatre, including *Proscenophobia*, which is stage fright.?

Over his time at Theatre Aurora, Mr. Ferguson has ticked more than his fair share of boxes on everything that theatre can offer. He started out as a member of Theatre Aurora's youth company, has acted in and directed a number of their mainstream productions, has been a lighting and technical director, and has returned to the youth program, this time taking the helm.

?I'm now teaching media and drama [in the York Region District School Board] and it has come full circle,? he says. ?Theatre is my biggest hobby and it is a hobby I wouldn't give up.?

In tackling all of Shakespeare's plays at once, Mr. Ferguson says his aim is to take theatre ?back to its basics.? Bringing everything to life are just three actors on a pretty open stage. There are few sets, few props, and very little in the way of special costuming.

?I had heard of the play, having read it last year before Theatre Aurora was looking for directors,? he says. ?I then read it again about three or four months later and realised I really liked it and there is a lot you can do with a show like this. It is not your typical theatre show. Whereas typically an audience member will come to see a play, this time they will be coming in for an experience. I have tried to ignore some of the theatre norms that audiences might be used to and breaking them in ways that work with the script and work with this idea of really understanding theatre. What I really like about this show is how it is breaking boundaries that in our modern society people are just kind of too used to.

?We live in an on-demand society. Whatever you want you can get with just a few clicks. Theatre remains something that you still have to go out to. You still have to get dressed up, go at a certain time, there is a certain procedure that follows. Even with this show, we're looking at how we can break this mold even more to show that you don't have to arrive at eight, sit in the seat for 45 minutes, have a 15 minute intermission and then sit down for another 45 minutes.?

Indeed, Mr. Ferguson says while evening performances officially begin at 8 p.m., the experience begins as soon as you walk through

their Henderson Drive doors. As to what that entails, Mr. Ferguson is reluctant to spoil the surprise.

?The first thing to keep in mind that this is looking Shakespeare as not something just for scholars; the way the show approaches Shakespeare and the way we approach Shakespeare is that it can be for everyone. The way the plays are presented, it is very easy to understand what each is about. It is not like a Stratford production where they are speaking in the Elizabethan style for the entire time. The show doesn't have all of that and it is very easy to understand.?

There is also an element of the unexpected. While the actors largely stick to Shakespeare's texts, improv is a big part of the show to keep things fresh.

?In the play, one of the actors complains that he will not do dry, boring Shakespeare and they kind of stick with that. He says how when he was studying Shakespeare in school, it was all boring and he would look out the window and watch other kids playing sports. The goal is to make Shakespeare interesting,? says Mr. Ferguson.

?We spend a bit more time on plays people are a bit more familiar with, but we also go into plays that people are less familiar with, but it is done with comedy and I feel that even if you know nothing about Shakespeare, you will come, enjoy yourself, understand and learn. I don't think someone needs to think it is a full-blown Shakespearian production and it is going to be like Stratford level. It is definitely a different show than that. And be prepared to experience the show as soon as you walk through the doors!?

?The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged) (Revised)? opens at Theatre Aurora on September 20, running on select dates through September 29. For tickets and further information, visit www.theatreaurora.com or call 905-727-3669.