

Theatre Aurora's 'Mother of the Maid' is historical exploration for director



Kay Valentine has always been a history buff.

In the theatre, they are the kinds of stories she tends to gravitate towards ? and if there are some unanswered questions that require a deep dive into research of her own, so much the better.

And this was the case with *Mother of the Maid*, which is on now through Saturday, October 29, at Theatre Aurora.

Mother of the Maid, a play written by Jane Anderson, is the story of Joan of Arc's mother, a peasant woman whose faith comes into sharp focus as her sainted daughter answered the call.

It's just the latest character exploration that Valentine has helmed for Theatre Aurora and it's the first production of their 2022-2023 season that is united by the theme of 'The Mighty Heroine,' where Joan of Arc certainly fits the bill.

'I thought I knew all about Joan of Arc, but here I realized that I didn't ? and for, me, that's the fascination,' says Valentine. 'I had to do some research myself to find out how accurate this play was based on [mother Isabelle Romée's] life. For the actress playing Isabelle, Janny Gogen Esch, it's the journey she had to take from the frustrated mother of a rebellious teenager to watching her child go to be burned and yet keep her faith. For her father, Jacques d'Arc, (played by Peter Shipston) he was not used to this rebellious girl. His boys were pretty obedient and he didn't believe in all the church. He was not as strong a Catholic as his wife was, so his journey was to come to terms with what his daughter was doing and, in the end, to try and support her as best as he could.'

'For Arin Hincer, who is playing our wonderful Joan, for her it was finding how to portray this rebellious teenager at the beginning who turns her back on her mother and sasses her, to facing death by burning and yet refusing to give up her faith. She is an incredible young actress and she did a really great job.'

Also doing significant behind-the-scenes work on the production, she adds, are several Theatre Aurora members who rarely get the credit that's due.

'I really wish the backstage crew would get more credit because you don't see them, but we have two teenage people who are doing all the set changes and there are a lot of things to do because of very quick scene changes and they have to make sure that the right thing is there at the right time. The lighting and tech people, without those people plays could not go on. The actors could not learn their lines but if nobody is there to turn the lights on, hit the music button, to bring them the right prop, they're helpless.'

As Valentine worked with her cast to bring the story to life, she encouraged them to look further into the time period and research what was going on in the world at the time.

In turn, with her focus on accuracy, she says she hopes audiences leave with a better understanding as well of "motherhood and mother love."

"This is really about a mother's fierce, fierce love of her daughter," she says. "This is a very strong female play. The mother and Joan are just very iconic characters, really."

For more information on Mother of the Maid, including tickets and showtimes, as well as further information on Theatre Aurora's 2022-2023 season, visit www.theatreaurora.com.

By Brock Weir
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