

Youth performers cap Theatre Aurora's season with Almost, Maine



By Brock Weir

Theatre Aurora's 2015-2016 was all about 'creating connections' and that theme continues, with a segue into the next season, with the youth theatre group's production of *Almost, Maine*, which opens this week.

The local theatre is working on their next season, which focuses on themes of love, and this play is a perfect bridge, according to youth theatre leader Joey Ferguson.

'I was looking for a show that was kind of well-known, worked with youth audiences, worked with a youth cast, but also had a lot of flexibility,' says Mr. Ferguson. 'I find that is very key with a youth group because we want to give everyone a chance to perform.'

And how! *Almost, Maine* focuses on 19 individual characters with nine individual stories. Quite a bit of the action takes place in a local pub, which Mr. Ferguson says he imagines as very similar to Aurora's Filly & Firkin.

'There is a big variety of different locations and it hits just about everyone you would expect to see in a small town,' says Mr. Ferguson.

When youth actor Maggie Street first moved to Aurora, her grandparents convinced her to sign up for the program as a good way to get to know people in her new hometown. Four years on, she is having a ball as one of the performers in this production.

'It is really fun,' she says. 'Everyone's really nice and it is super chill.'

Adds fellow youth program member ' and *Almost, Maine* stage manager Julia Clark-Farmiloe: 'I just thought it would be really interesting to get more involved in the community's drama scene because I haven't done too much out of my high school. This is my first venture into it.'

Also part of the production is Laryssa Paskaruk, who is taking on four well-rounded individual characters in this production ranging, she says, from one character just sitting down to chat with her friend, to a waitress.

'I have characters who are similar and seem almost more suited for a small town and then there is one who definitely belongs in a small town instead of a city, but it takes them a while to realise this,' she says. 'The character feels really good to me. I really like performing.'

Almost, Maine will be Mr. Ferguson's last production as youth coordinator for the time being as he prepares to pursue a teaching

opportunity in England. The theatre recently hired his successor who Mr. Ferguson says is focused on building "a much larger program" with more opportunities for the season ahead. But, in the meantime, Mr. Ferguson is focused on the task at hand: bringing to life a love story. Well, let him elaborate.

"The way I see it, this play is a love story, but not really, but kind of," he says. "You can have these really great, intense, cool love stories about these really developed characters in a short period of time. There is a lot more that goes on than you kind of see with people. It really goes into what goes on with people, their relationships with each other, and how that kind of affects the Town as a whole."

Almost, Maine opens this Friday, May 20 at Theatre Aurora, running with three performances through Saturday night. For times and ticket information, visit www.theatreaurora.com.