

Speaking in Tongues explores complex human connections



By Brock Weir

Jason Silzer is drawn to a good plot and well-drawn characters, but also a good challenge.

That is exactly what he encountered last fall when he cracked open a copy of Andrew Bovell's play *Speaking in Tongues*, knowing he would be helming the production as part of Theatre Aurora's 2016-2017 season.

Described as a psychological drama with "genuine suspense," *Speaking in Tongues* follows a police investigation that leads to an "uncomfortable and unexpected conclusion" about nine parallel lives, interlocked by four infidelities, one missing person, and a mysterious stiletto, illustrated through a fragmented series of confessions and interrogations.

The opening, however, presented director Silzer with an enticing challenge.

"The challenges of this play are what drew me to it," he says of the production, which opens this Thursday, March 2, at Theatre Aurora. "The first two scenes are done completely in overlapping dialogue. There are four characters, each having an affair with each other's spouse, and there is this wonderful exploration on how all affairs are the same affair, not all that different from each other."

This is realised, he says, almost immediately by having both couples having nearly the same dialogue.

"When you read it on the page, it is quite intimidating, but it comes along. I think the challenge is one of the things I got excited about. You have these two things and you have to deal with them. Let's figure out how to do it!"

Cast assembled, Silzer says they broke down the opening scenes, rehearsing the two halves separately before coming together.

"I trusted the writing was strong enough that when both sides came together, it would just run and the actors were comfortable in each of their moments - and it did," he says. "It was one of those wonderful ah-ha! moments. It was a little bit of a leap of faith, but it worked."

First becoming involved with Theatre Aurora three years ago, Silzer says he was fresh off a directing workshop at Tarragon when he was approached by Theatre Aurora artistic director Sergio Calderon with the chance to spearhead *Speaking in Tongues*.

What draws him to a show is a "good plot, a good through-line, and if there is depth to the characters," he says.

"I say that with a grain of salt because I also directed *Spamalot*, and loved it!" he says of the Monty Python musical. "Even there, the characters had a depth and humanity to them and I think that is what draws me. I am not particularly drawn to directing cotton candy shows like farces, I like a little bit of edge."

And that is exactly what audiences can find when they take in *Speaking in Tongues*. It is all about making connections, he says, why we fail at making those connections, and those connections between us that are unspoken and often unseen.

"I am hoping the audience leaves intrigued," he says. "I hope they end up talking about the intricacies of the show and leave with a discussion of how the characters, and therefore we, as an extension, are connected with each other almost in a Six Degrees of Separation kind of way. "It intrigues me how interconnected the characters are and I had to have a diagram to keep everyone straight - and I think that is actually reflective of real life."

"We are, ourselves, much more closely connected to each other than how we would normally would want to admit to ourselves on a daily basis."

Speaking In Tongues runs at Theatre Aurora at select dates and times March 2 - March 11. For more information, visit

www.theatreaurora.com or call 905-727-3669.