

Exit from Step Two is not an off-ramp for Theatre Aurora's No Exit

Performing arts venues are breathing a sigh of relief this week as they're once again able to welcome patrons, but local theatre-goers will still have a bit of a wait before they can settle into their seats at Theatre Aurora.

The curtain is still down at Theatre Aurora as they look to re-schedule their production of Jean Paul Sartre's play, No Exit, which was supposed to be in full-swing this week.

The pivot back to Stage Two caused Theatre Aurora to push back their January 27 opening date, but logistical issues coordinating cast and crew has pushed this opening night further into the spring.

'We realized with the latest restrictions we wouldn't be able to open as scheduled,' says producer Judy Cragg. 'I don't want anyone who has been involved with this show on an ongoing basis to miss out and that is very important for me, personally. We had an unfortunate thing at the beginning of COVID with Arsenic & Old Lace and they had already been rehearsing for well over a month, but we had to put that off again and again and ultimately cancelled the whole thing - we really didn't want that to happen again.'

A new date is being aligned to make sure that every cast and crew member who was in the thick of rehearsals prior to the pivot back to Step Two will be able to take part in the final production.

It's not to say they're not ready to go. Director D. Jay Elektra did some pivoting of her own to make sure actors kept up their 'muscle memory' when they could no longer rehearse in person. Things shifted to Zoom where actors and crew worked long into the night, sometimes into 12-hour sessions.

'The hard work is making sure that the lines are good, the work is good, the character interplay is good and you have all the theatrical elements but the physical one,' says Elektra. 'The challenge is going to be keeping those alive and fresh for X number of months. It is going to be an interesting challenge as a director and I am looking forward to it - with cautious enthusiasm.'

This is not the first time Theatre Aurora has had to re-tool a season due to public health restrictions.

The theatre troupe returned to the stage this past fall with the comedy The Kitchen Witches and were excited to tackle this new one-act production.

One of the reasons they chose No Exit is it has one set, a limited group of actors and, as such, they could quickly re-think the show so everyone on stage could maintain social distance.

This is one lesson they learned early on in the pandemic that Cragg thinks has kept Theatre Aurora in good stead.

'We have been working really hard all season to be able to re-open and we're really proud of that,' she says. 'There are some theatres who have not reopened at all. We're really happy that we had The Kitchen Witches and the audience was so excited to be there. When I was back stage preparing the food, as soon as I heard the audience laugh it was incredible. To have to shut down again has been tough, but we're working really hard to ensure the theatre is safe for people to come in.'

Adds Elektra: 'One thing that has really shocked me since the beginning of the pandemic is how many theatre companies were not immediately thinking outside of the box. There were a lot of companies that kept thinking, 'there will be a delay. We're going to do it the same way, and we'll return in the same way, rehearse in the same way,' and pivoting was actually something that was not intuitive to a lot of artistic companies at the beginning of the pandemic. I found that surprising because we are so creative in so many ways, yet from an institutional perspective, I think the arts sector has kind of become complacent, if I may be that bold, and COVID has been really good for it that way because it has been having to reinvent ways of doing things differently.'

?It's something new and challenging and now we all have a common challenge, which is COVID, that we all have to deal with as companies.?

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