

Explore the next phase of Love this season at Theatre Aurora



By Brock Weir

As a York Region paramedic, Sergio Calderon has experienced humanity in a way that is different from many people.

He has been present where a person takes their first breath of life, holding them when they breathe their last, and, he says, everything in between.

He has seen more than his fair share of grief, loss and tragedy, but there is also the joy of being able to save someone's life. Each day on the job is a new experience, and if he can help anyone feel these emotions in his off-duty job as artistic director of Theatre Aurora, he goes home feeling like he's made a good job well done.

Human emotion has been an overarching theme at Theatre Aurora since Mr. Calderon first took the helm as artistic director, assembling with their play-reading committee seasons based around 'Making Decisions' and 'Creative Connections'. Now, they are looking to take theatre-goers to the next phase of this human experience: 'Borderless Love.'

Love knows no borders and that is a sentiment Theatre Aurora has taken to heart this season, assembling a season of seven productions with international origins, all exploring the 'different shapes and forms' of love.

The season opens next Friday, September 16 with the perennial favourite, 'Love Letters' by A.R. Gurney, which runs through September 18. A fundraiser, 'Love Letters' is merely a prelude to the first full-blown production of the 2016-2017 season, 'Don't Dress For Dinner,' a French farce by Marc Camoletti, which runs October 13-22.

'Our audiences love comedy, so this is a nice way to enter the first full production of our season,' says Mr. Calderon, who directs the third offering of the season, the musical 'Spring Awakening.'

'One of my favourite musical directors out there called me and said they would really like to do the show and it would be a great feeling to go in on it together,' says Mr. Calderon of how he became attached to Spring Awakening, despite having his eye on another play later in the season. 'There was a bit of a competition to direct the show, which doesn't necessarily surprise me because it is amazingly on a lot of people's bucket lists. It speaks to a lot of artists and it fascinates me no end. One of our actors is coming in from Brampton, such is the commitment level to this production.'

A family musical, 'I Still Believe in Christmas,' a production staged by their youth company about a boy who loses faith and stops believing in Christmas rounds out the season, allowing Theatre Aurora to offer family fare, which is a bit rarer in recent seasons.

‘I feel this is probably one of the most bold seasons we have constructed because we actually have seven shows on the palate this year,’ says Mr. Calderon, an Aurora native. ‘But, we’re also going into some uncharted territory. We have become comfortable with North American content and, sometimes material-wise, when you look at texts translated from a different language, there is a very different cadence and vernacular you’re not necessarily used to. We’re trying to make that connect with not only our actors, but also our audience members. That is why I think it is a pretty bold step.

‘We’re ready for it. We have been priming our audiences for the last couple of years with some pretty great work that challenges the traditional construct of what theatre is. Taking this next step to more of an international flavour is a no-brainer because where do you go from there? Let’s look at some great, challenging work from around the world!’

There was a bit of trepidation at Theatre Aurora before taking this leap, he says, because most plays they read when building the season are exclusively North American. Finding a play that doesn’t necessarily connect with you is not a bad thing as it challenges you in a different way, he adds.

‘Because they felt they were successful in previous seasons, they were more than willing to take that leap and see what’s out there and share that material,’ says Mr. Calderon.

‘When I directed *The Laramie Project* several years ago, it was very different in Canada than producing that show in the United States,’ says Mr. Calderon of the play, which follows the murder of young gay man. ‘I prepared my cast for the longest time: be prepared that some people might be offended, you might get letters as this material hasn’t been done in Aurora. But, not one person walked out of the audience.

‘Wow, this was not the reaction I was expecting. I think it goes hand in hand with the idea that if it is good, if it is compelling, and if the work comes from an honest place, no matter what the subject matter, no matter what they are talking about, someone will sit and listen to you, be effected by it and continue the conversation. So long as the work is solid I think the audience will embrace it. It is a treat to explore more. You are satisfied with something that makes you laugh, but you can also be satisfied something that moves you, be it tears or anger. I would consider it a failure if someone leaves the theatre and never considers the work again. If something doesn’t stay with them we haven’t told the story well.’

For more on Theatre Aurora, visit www.theatreaurora.com. In part two of our interview with Mr. Calderon, we look at the second half of the 2016 – 2017 season as well as the future of Theatre Aurora as it approaches its 60th anniversary season.