

Fun Home shines musical light in the parent-child relationship



When you look back on your childhood, sometimes you have some unanswered questions ? especially if you grow up in a funeral home, or ?fun home.?

But lesbian cartoonist Alison Bechdel's experience growing up in her family's mortuary yielded more than just colourful memories; looking back on her life with a closeted gay father left her with more questions than answers ? answers she sought through the development of *Fun Home*, the Tony-winning Broadway musical which opens at Theatre Aurora this Thursday.

Directed by Sergio Calderon, Theatre Aurora's (TA) stalwart creative director, *Fun Home* takes pride of place in TA's 2022-2023 season, which is built around the theme of ?The Mighty Heroine.?

?Fun Home has been on a very clear trajectory of work we have been presenting in that it is contemporary, intimate, small-ish in scale,? Calderon explains. ?This is one of the shows we had scheduled before the pandemic, so having an opportunity to sit with the material for so long I had the chance to revisit some of my intimate thoughts and ideas to eventually evolve into what we're presenting now.?

One of the first questions he had to ask was whether his vision was technologically feasible.

He wanted a show that made creative use of projections, for instance, and the extra time to make *Fun Home* a reality paid off.

He says wanted to ?honour? the core work, which was Bechdel's graphic novel of the same way.

?At the core is really the relationship between a parent and child and how that influences their life, and all the periods of life,? says Calderon. ?I think there are a lot of elements I think audiences, just based on that relationship, will immediately resonate because it's a human interest story. There's also the element of artistry and how that gets influenced in your life. That really struck a chord with me because as I've developed, grown and evolved, each period of my life I have been able to define this is what I believed and thought theatre should be. That changed and it changed again. ?As *Fun Home* illustrates the life of Bechdel from her childhood on, this is a rare TA show that features youth among the cast beyond their youth program.

Calderon says he's thankful to have found three young actors who have flourished in their roles and, alongside their parents, have embraced the experience, including some of the more mature themes in the story.

?For them to really take on the roles and truly be a part of the main stage production has really been a blessing,? says the director.

?For many of the shows I've directed, when it comes to the type of vocabulary, the way you give direction, it comes from a very cerebral or mindful place and that generally can't happen or be translated to someone who is ten, for example, so it has been an awesome challenge for me to get back to the root of what I'm trying to convey as a director and take those ideas, boil them down into something that is universally translatable, without it having to be too academic [and] that is a whole new approach for me.

?We had really long discussions and the parents have been amazing [in that] there are topics that exist within the show and there are myriad ways we can approach it. They're (the young actors) are exposed to so much just by virtue of having information and the world at their fingertips at all times. It was never difficult to get into a scene, get into a moment?because they're extraordinarily supported by all of their parents and the material it is such that it's not gratuitous, not graphic?it's just exposing part of the true human experience. They are having a great time, which is interesting because it's not all fun song and dance. There's a lot of work with a cast of nine! They're in it to win it.?

When Fun Home opens at Theatre Aurora this week, Calderon says he hopes one of the things audiences leave with is the sense that ?time is precious? and nothing should be taken for granted.

?We've been travelling through this journey of constructing this piece and telling this story, the entire notion is the character of Alison trying to put these pieces together of her own father's journey and he's no longer around to sort of fill in the gaps. While there are a multitude of opportunities to have that discussion, that never happens. There's a lot of regret and resentment mixed into that part of her story and I think that is one of the things that is a constant reminder, which we always need: We're running around from place to place, not taking that phone call or taking the time to connect with someone, carving out a special time to connect is something we instantly take for granted and immediately regret when those opportunities have been taken away from us.?

Theatre Aurora's production of Fun Home opens this Thursday, January 26, and runs at select dates and times through February 4. For more information, visit theatreaurora.com or call 905-272-3669. Theatre Aurora is located at 150 Henderson Drive.

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