

No Exit challenges theatre-goers to embrace discomfort: director

Existentialist plays can be a hard sell in today's market, but as people get out of the house once again and return to the theatre, it's time to embrace discomfort, according to DJ Electra.

Electra is at the helm of *No Exit*, a 1945 play by Jean Paul Sartre that is on now through June 11 at Theatre Aurora.

Featuring three actors who are mysteriously sequestered together in a room in Hell awaiting their fate.

Being stuck in a room might be a subject matter that cuts close to the bone in such a short time after lockdown, but the timing couldn't be better? well, aside from the fact that a tightening of public health restrictions delayed the play's anticipated winter opening.

"It makes it even more special to see this play on its feet," says Electra. "As a director, I love when a piece gets to the stage when I am no longer needed and it can fly on its own. That is personal pride, I think? especially when it has been such a tough birthing process with this one, which was almost eight months. It is such a testament to Theatre Aurora and its artistic directors and technical team, and the cast to keep it together and to dedicate themselves to bring it to life.

"I hope it brightens the Town's rebirth post-COVID and I think it is a highly appropriate play for that."

The winter delay was both a blessing and a curse from the production. On the one hand, Electra says she revelled in the "embarrassment of time" they had to prepare for the show, but, on the other hand, all that time to rehearse and get everything letter-perfect also ran the risk of the material getting stale and the performances "rote."

"It was a conscious decision to not get into the theatre too early and not to block too early," she explains. "One can't be too comfortable, it loses some reality and there needs to be that bit of fear every time you go onstage."

One can't be too comfortable as audience members, either, she elaborates.

She wants audiences to be open to the idea of a revival of a 1945 existential play about three very individual characters, and to be open to the journey as well.

"It's going to be different for each audience member and I think the way in which this piece can reach across the decades from the time it was written to today and still touch an audience is one of the main reasons I thought it was a wonderful play to bring to people post-COVID because it is very much about isolation and being locked into a space and locked into a series of events that at one point the characters feel they have no control over and begin to understand the context.

"I think that is very parallel to the way a lot of us feel coming out of COVID: we have a series of experiences both as a population and as individuals that has been isolating, that has been beyond our control, been dictated by government and health authorities, our own health and our own perspectives. I think the value of an existential play at this point in time is to remind people that in all the chaos and all the notional out-of-controlledness that we experience, the hope that chaos, that is nascent in that chaos, is what we need to get through. As long as we stay locked up in our own individual and collective isolation, it is more difficult to find that hope, that liberating hope that allows us to say, "Now what? What are the other possibilities?"

This is why we go to the theatre, she says. Getting out, making the trip, getting the ticket, and committing to a time can be a lot to ask? and you have to put your faith in the team and the actors on what you'll see and hear, "whether or not it is delightful or acceptable to you."

"It still matters for that reason," she says. "In our lives, we seek easier roads and what I love about live theatre is it confronts us with

discomfort, it confronts us with ideas that may be provocative, new or distasteful, and I think that is so important for us as a society.

?I encourage Aurorans to indulge their discomfort and come see us.?

To be a part of the journey, the discussion, and, of course, the audience, visit theatreaurora.com or call 905-727-3669 for tickets.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter