

The Family Crow is pun-tastic murder mystery and Theatre Aurora homecoming



Byron Laviolette has always had a love for theatre.

As a youngster, he ?cut his teeth? as a member of Theatre Aurora's youth program in the 1990s and went on to direct his first full-length show on its stage as well. His career has continued to go from strength to strength with the Morro and Jasp company and, next weekend, he will experience something of a one-night-only homecoming with *The Family Crow: A Murder Mystery*.

The show, created by Adam Francis Proulx and directed by long-time collaborator Laviolette, is described as ?an hour-long theatrical comedy, puppet murder mystery? where ?a mysterious murder has occurred amidst the Family Crow and now Horatio P. Corvus (Sorter Outer of Murders) is on the scene to crack the case.?

With a teaser ending with the words, ?Eat your heart out, Agatha Crowstie,? it's not at all surprising that Laviolette describes the show as a ?pun-tastic? evening of fun.

?Adam has a deep love of puns and cleverness,? he says. ?He wrote down a whole list of crow puns and then wrote a show around it, funnily enough. He's also a big fan of true crime podcasts and things like that, so he has been really taken by the idea of a murder mystery and to transform it into a puppet show.?

A puppet show, indeed ? but this is definitely not Sesame Street.

Laviolette says that his own experience with puppets didn't extend beyond that particular thoroughfare of children's TV staples or their cousins on the Muppet Show, and hadn't previously envisioned working with puppets himself. But, as he had worked with clowns and drag artists, would helping a puppeteer bring their vision to life be that different? He didn't think so, and dove into the project.

?It was similar to some ways, but it is much more craft-focused,? he says. ?The characters go back in the box at the end of the day and I have really come to appreciate and enjoy working with the mechanisms, and everything from ? you have to worry about the puppet's eyeline to something called ?sympathetic movement,' which is why so many puppets have feathers or some sort of fur on them [so there is still some sense of motion] after the puppet has come to rest. In all the work that I do, I love that the audience goes into the experience knowing it is fake and, in the end, they are totally wrapped up in the make-believe, and that is a really big joy for me.

?In some ways it is trickier off the top because there is a mechanism, an artifice there, but I think as the show goes on, as a puppet

experience goes on, it gives the audience a kind of permission to pretend and a kind of permission that gives you permission to imagine. That permission, especially for adults, is very rare these days: be real, be realistic is sort of the slogan we're supposed to live by and I think these experiences show the adult audiences rediscover a sense of wonder, a sense of joy, a sense of imagination they don't really get other places.?

Proulx, he adds, stresses that he ?makes theatre with puppets rather than puppets with theatre? and while this might be, in many respects, an out-of-the-box presentation, is a true theatrical production in the end.

?People really love it. They get into the spirit of it, they always offer us their own crow puns at the end. The show is lousy with crow puns, sometimes even reviews, too. For the mystery itself, there are also groans and the occasional boo at the very bad puns and those are some of my favourite moments. There are some real groaners, but it is also about the murder mystery. There are people who tell us they got it (solved the case) at this point, at that point, or they had no idea and they were completely surprised. Adam is a fan of true crime and me, as a fan of the structure of the murder mystery, it is very satisfying for us to see when people clue into who the murder is.

?Adam really likes to leave the audience feeling smarter and more empowered than when they entered and I think this show does that totally. It really casts the audience in the role of co-investigator. There is no fourth wall per se, it is not an audience interaction-driven show but the audience is recognized and appreciated and I can promise that people have never seen anything like it!?

The Family Crow will take over the Theatre Aurora stage on Saturday, October 21, at 8 p.m. For tickets and further information, visit theatreaurora.com or call 905-727-3669.

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