

Theatre Aurora explores complex memories, closing season with 'That Summer?'



(After co-starring in the experimental musical *Songs for a New World* earlier this season, Sergio Calderon, above, returns to the director's chair with this week's production. Auroran photo by David Falconer)

By Brock Weir

If someone asked you what you were doing exactly one year ago today, what would you answer?

Would you remember what you wore, who you talked to, what you read and what you ate? Would you remember if it was sunny or cloudy?

You would probably have a vague idea, and be able to provide an answer, but you would probably end up second guessing yourself.

What if one year ago today you experienced a traumatic event? Chances are your memories would be crystal clear.

This was the mindset director Sergio Calderon asked his actors to harbour when he introduced them to characters in David French's play 'That Summer?', which opens this Friday at Theatre Aurora.

'That Summer?' follows Margaret as she takes a difficult journey back to a lakeside resort she went to as a young woman with her family. According to Mr. Calderon, her time there as a youth was a 'time of awakening and discovery?', and an idyll which came crashing down on a single day.

'One of my favourite quotations from the play is, 'Besides, there are some things in your life you simply never forget. Ever,' says Mr. Calderon. 'That was a starting point for me as a director to explore this notion of memory.'

'When I read a script, I have to be able to visualise it on stage from a start. If I can't picture even partial scenes or how it comes to life, I typically walk away from the project. When I was reading this, I could instantly start seeing in my mind the images I wanted to develop to tell the story, and it is the strong, vivid images the author gave me to work with.'

'That Summer?' closes the 2013-2014 Theatre Aurora season, but when the venerable local theatre company began laying the groundwork for the season program, this play ultimately became its cornerstone. Organizers planned a season of plays and musicals focused on people making decisions and how those decisions ultimately impact your life.

As David French's words came to life in Mr. Calderon's head, he came up with a game plan. Memories, he said, often gain a certain haze over time and he wanted this to be reflected on stage through lights and props. Things come out of the gate muted and blurred, as fleeting memories would, he said, but as they get closer to the singular event that had such an impact on Margaret's life, the set becomes sharper and more vivid.

"This is a coming of age story that takes place in cottage country during the summer," he says. "Coming out of a long winter, who doesn't have fond memories of the summer? That struck me as a universal experience, but what really struck me was the artistic challenge to develop and explore this idea of memory.

"If I were to ask you what you were doing exactly one year ago, you could potentially come up with some vague memories, but nothing would be clear and vivid. If I pose the question around a tragic event, you would likely be able to tell me in detail everything about that day, what time you woke up, how the air felt on your skin, the people that surrounded you. Somehow it becomes ingrained into your memory and it becomes such an important part of your life you never forget."

As the crew worked behind the scenes to make this transition between vague and vivid memories come to life, Mr. Calderon had one further request for them, something he describes as "insanity", namely building a lake on the Theatre Aurora stage.

It's a small pool, but it serves a very important purpose, he says. Throughout the play, everyone has a chance to interact with the water in some way. Sometimes it is just a splash, but it ultimately becomes a point of catharsis, something he predicts will be experienced differently by every audience member.

"There is a deeper sense of letting go of the past and forgiving yourself of the past," he says. "For all the decisions you feel may have affected your life negatively or caused pain, there should be that sense that it is okay, and it is okay to forgive yourself. You need to move on because there is a future that can always be bright and good.

"We offer the idea that all those decisions and those memories make who you are, and how you treat that and move forward from that point is what will continue to make you the person you were meant to be."

The curtain rises on "That Summer" this Friday, March 28 and runs through Sunday, April 13. For show times and ticket information, visit www.theatreauroran.com or call 905-727-3669. Theatre Aurora is located at 150 Henderson Drive.