

Theatre Aurora plans play reading for One Book One Aurora campaign

Over the last few weeks, Aurora readers have had the opportunity to all read from the same page as part of the One Book One Aurora campaign, spearheaded by the Aurora Public Library.

With each page of *Chasing Painted Horses*, the acclaimed 2019 novel by Drew Hayden Taylor, the vivid characters of Danielle, who found a creative outlet with her 'Everything Wall' and police officer Ralph, whose interest is stirred by a graffitied image of a horse on a wall, have come to life.

This fall, readers will be able to come face to face with them as Theatre Aurora unveils a staged reading of 'The Girl Who Loved Her Horses', the play that started it all.

Set to take place on the Theatre Aurora stage on October 2, it is unclear at this point whether the public will be allowed into the Henderson Drive performance venue to see the reading in person, or whether it will have to be a strictly streamed affair online, but Theatre Aurora is eager to get those creative juices flowing once again after more than a year in the dark.

'I was taken aback by the simple idea of how art is impactful and the creator can be - which is the loveliest gem for me in the book - as simple as a ten-year-old girl who can create something and it becomes a moving piece of art to many people,' says Theatre Aurora Artistic Director Sergio Calderon. 'That strikes a chord with me working in the theatre. We want to create art hoping it will move people. It doesn't need to be complicated, it doesn't need to be complex; it can be simple and sort of universal.'

'Everyone has their own experience from it. Not everyone has to have the exact same experience; some will be positive, some will be negative. Some will be confused or ponder, and I think that is ultimately the goal of what art is trying to create: the very beginning of a conversation.'

The conversations sparked by the words on the pages of 'Chasing Painted Horses' started out life as 'The Girl Who Loved Her Horses' and going through both pieces has provided Theatre Aurora with a number of threads to draw on - not only about art, but Indigenous persons and their histories.

But that has also provided a challenge. Unfortunately, Theatre Aurora does not have a regular roster of players of Indigenous ancestry and they have been reaching out to different groups for leads on how to make this reading as authentic as possible by bringing Indigenous actors into the fold.

'We produce shows and content and things that we're all comfortable with,' says Mr. Calderon. 'People continuously show up and do things, thus we have our local small theatre, we have our Indigenous theatre, our Black theatre, but it would be nice if a lot of those borders were broken down, a lot more diverse and we mix a little bit more into each other's worlds. We're reaching out and hoping this is not just a one-off but the beginning of a process where we can examine larger bodies of work to present on our stage and perhaps share experiences on both sides.'

As they still have a few months to bring everything together, having a representative cast to bring the play to life is not their only challenge; another hurdle is preparing for any and all eventuality due to the global pandemic.

'What we don't know is how we have to approach it,' says Mr. Calderon. 'We have to set it up and be ready and able to do this virtually at the end of the day because we have no idea where we will be in October with restrictions or if we're even going to be allowed audiences. All of that is left to the unknown. Our approach is we're going to start with the simplest, most basic and safest way, which will ultimately lead to four chairs on our stage where it will truly be a reading. In that format, then we can set up several cameras and we can easily switch from in-person to live-streaming should we need to. Then, as we get closer and more familiar with the material, and as we're told what the new guidelines are for performance basis, we might be able to augment a little bit with a bit of movement, but that will all be determined at some point in the summer when we start hearing what will this truly look like.'

?It is an all-in for us. Our biggest hope is we'll be able to welcome people back into our space. Hopefully it is our first event back in the theatre after COVID.?

If you or anyone you know might want to become involved in the reading/presentation of *The Girl Who Loved Her Horses*, visit theatreaurora.com, call 905-727-3669, or reach out to Mr. Caledon directly via social media. For more on the One Book One Aurora campaign, visit onebookoneaurora.com.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter