

Theatre Aurora serves up post-Thanksgiving treat for season opener

By Brock Weir

Thanksgiving is over, and while you look back on a weekend of family time and turkey time, how many of you actually took a minute or two to tell your loved ones how you feel about them?

That is a question on the mind of Aurora's Colleen Simm as she takes the helm of *?A Nice Family Gathering?*, the latest production from Theatre Aurora which opens its 58th season next week.

A Nice Family Gathering by playwright Phil Olson looks at family dynamics so many of us experienced over the holiday weekend, but with a slight twist. It focuses on the Lundein household as they hold their first family gathering since the death of their patriarch.

Their late father uses the occasion to come back as a ghost with a solitary mission: to finally tell his wife, after 35 years of marriage, that he loved her.

?Phil Olson wrote the play based on his family shortly after his father passed away,? explains Ms. Simms, who is directing the production. ?They are not characters; they are real people our actors are portraying and we wanted them to all be very relatable and believable. I think anyone who sits down with their family at Thanksgiving, Christmas or another holiday, the family dynamics don't go away. You feel the same patterns, the sibling rivalry, and we all revert back to when we were 10.

?This is a comedy with a universal message about how we neglect or forget sometimes to tell the people who are closest to us how we feel about them. What this play demonstrates as well is how we get older we come to understand our parents a lot more.?



Colleen Simm

Ms. Simm's own interest in theatre and acting was passed down to her through her mother who spent her late teens as a nightclub singer in Montreal, where Colleen was eventually born. Her mother introduced singing and entertainment to her and, from a young age, she set her sights on the stage, pursuing theatre school and gigs with the CBC.

Life, however, intervened, she says, and she took time off to raise her own children. After a 20 year absence, she inched her way back on the stage in community theatre. As soon as she began to tread the boards once again, it was as if she had never left and she knew this is where she belonged.

Her relationship with Theatre Aurora began in 2007 in the play *?Same Time Next Year?* While she works with community theatres throughout York Region, she regularly returns to the Factory Theatre on Henderson Drive.

?From an actor's perspective, Theatre Aurora does a really fine job of choosing quality plays that you either really want to be in or, as a director, you want to direct,? says Ms. Simm. ?They really do put on quality seasons. It is always a draw as an actor because

you're investing a lot of time and you want to make sure that, as you participate, you get something out of it.?

With just a few days left before the curtain rises next Thursday, October 22, the blocking is done, the actors know their lines, and it is now time for the director to sit back and make sure they are collectively telling the story.

?When we began the audition process I told everyone who came out my mandate was to create a family where people in the audience could say, ?I've been there, this feels like my Thanksgiving,' or ?there are things being said that I can relate to,'? she says. ?I wanted it to be honest. Everyone needed to interact honestly with each other and I believe that is what we are going to demonstrate.

?This play has one of those universal messages to remind ourselves to tell the people closest to us we love them and we appreciate them, because sometimes it may be too late and you can't go back.?

A Nice Family Gathering opens at Theatre Aurora October 22 and runs at select times through October 31. For more information, including tickets, visit www.theatreaurora.com or call 905-727-3669.