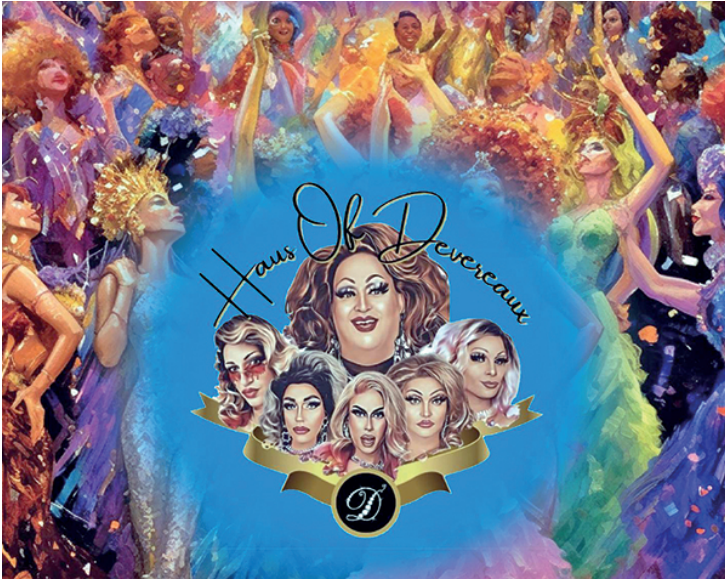


Theatre Aurora showcases Drag art as part of 'Our Stage, Your Story' mission



Theatre Aurora has rededicated itself to the local arts community with their mission of, 'Our Stage, Your Story,' and helping bring that mission to life next month will be a Theatre Aurora first - drag artists on their storied stage.

The fun will begin on Saturday, September 9, at 1 p.m. with a Drag Queen Story Hour, a family-friendly event celebrating 'the magic of storytelling' as an 'hour-long spectacle of enchantment, laughter and learning.'

The second chapter of the story will unfold on September 23 at 8 p.m. with Bright Lights and Bold Divas, a theatre show of 'glamour, humour and fabulousness' performed by the Haus of Devereaux, 'a celebration of diversity and self-expression that's sure to dazzle and entertain.'

'For a lot of people, and there are a lot who have never been to a drag show, I think for them it is going to be really fun and different for them because they have never seen anything like it and I hope it opens their eyes to this kind of entertainment and how wonderful it is,' says Theatre Aurora's Neill Kernohan.

'We're inspired by our mission and we're trying to celebrate diverse voices and experiences. We think storytelling is a great way to understand each other better and by hosting the drag queen story hour and a drag show, we're giving visibility to an under-represented community and, I think, providing a platform for folks, too, to share their stories and their talents.'

Leading the on-stage events is E'Claire Devereaux, 'mother' of the Haus, who has been instrumental in developing their Drag Story Hour concept and their new stage show.

When E'Claire finished university, she wanted to either go to teacher's college or 'travel as an entertainer.' The latter was their path, touring in theatre productions like 42nd Street. When she grew weary of being on the road, she was introduced to her first drag show.

30 years on, it's a primary passion.

'It's the entertainment itself. When you do drag, you get that instant response from the audience: the laughter, the clapping - whatever the response you're looking for, you're getting it immediately. It's the interaction with the audience I enjoy so much.'

With several Haus members having theatre backgrounds like E'Claire, the development of a theatre show was a natural progression.

?A lot of us would pull numbers from well-known musicals for standard stage shows anyway and we started realizing that drag has grown to the point where it is not just doing bar shows anymore; people are looking for all kinds of forms of entertainment and we brought in the drag queen story time. We started realizing that maybe it was time to go a little more. I sat down and wrote the theatre show, picked some numbers ahead of time, and on top of that we're building our Las Vegas revue headpieces for our finale.?

As of the end of July, the Haus of Devereaux has hosted and entertained at 15 drag queen story times, and they're booked right through the fall and into 2024 ? this, despite some backlash over the past year from people who think drag performances are inappropriate for families.

Over the last few months, Haus members have seen a few protestors show up ? a video of one Haus member engaging a protestor in conversation outside a drag queen story hour venue has racked up more than 1 million views on YouTube and TikTok.

Whenever they do a story time, E'Claire says they like to find out ?why they're so against what is going on.?Most of the comments are, ?Oh, strippers in front of our kids,' and my statement is always the same thing: every show has costumes appropriate to the audience. We're not going to take our bar costumes to a family event. Conversely, we're not going to bring Las Vegas headpieces into something like that. People have to understand that just like entertainment, we do things appropriately and that's why we're called back time and time again.

?We talk to the audience, we talk to people throwing the event, and we try to make sure everything is covered. We do take safety precautions and York Regional Police is very good about making sure there is an officer on site whenever we do the story times or other events that might have a challenge to them, but in all honesty, I think we have maybe had three groups of protestors over the whole season. We were just blessed.?

Theatre Aurora is confident this ?blessing? will continue as all comments related to the kid-friendly story hour and the more mature event later in September have been positive.

?I think everyone understands the different perspectives, and I respect those differences, but at Theatre Aurora we're not there to create controversy but we want to have open dialogues,? says Kernohan. ?It is important for us to grow inclusivity, so we believe in the power of the people to foster that, to foster and gain understanding and empathy.

For more on the upcoming performances, including ticket information, visit theatreaurora.com or call 905-727-3669.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter