

## Theatre's tough topics become more 'immediate' following Trump win



**By Brock Weir**

A few short months ago, debates over women's rights, abortion and sexuality seemed to be parts of our not-too-distant past but, for better or worse, in the world of the theatre everything is ripe for a revival.

These themes were slightly more remote when director Sergio Calderon sat down with his cast and crew to craft a vision for their next production, but the results of last week's American election have brought new 'immediacy' to their work.

Spring Awakening, an American musical set in the last decade of the 19th century, follows two teens as they grapple through their adolescence, discovering their bodies and minds and, most importantly, themselves, all the while struggling with issues ranging from sexuality to abortion.

For some, those are topics that have been discussed, dealt with, and put on the shelf, but is that really the case following the election of Donald Trump?

'We honoured the 1890s but sadly, and most recently, it is becoming apparent that topics and issues at hand are still quite relevant,' says Mr. Calderon. 'It was completely unfathomable that topics we were discussing in theory for a show almost overnight became a reality for a whole country.'

'The big ones would be women's rights and abortion; there is premarital sex and the mother has to illegally find a way to abort the baby in order to maintain integrity, and all of the sketchy things around that. We were talking a lot about rape culture, which has been impactful more in Canada because of recent trials and language around rape culture and consent.'

Inside or outside the hallowed walls of a theatre, these are issues Mr. Calderon says need to be talked about in order to address and break down the 'terrible stigma' surrounding so much of what is happening today.

'I have been supporting friends in the artistic community who have been doing classic pieces but I am kind of shocked and astonished that even though they are chestnut pieces we're still producing them and making light of such terrible things,' he says. 'In a snarky and sarcastic way, apparently misogyny is funny, apparently racism is funny, and apparently homophobia is funny. We just kind of white wash these things. No, these issues aren't funny and they need to be talked about.'

'Whether we make you enlightened in a happy way, a sad way, or an angry way, it doesn't matter; what is important is the conversation will continue. [Topics like] suicide, abortion, premarital sex or homophobia in a community theatre-type setting are great conversation starters out in the world because other people, I am hoping, will question why it might have made them feel uncomfortable. Why do we have to see Anything Goes 150 times? How does that make you grow? How does that help us evolve into a better society?'

In the end, Spring Awakening which is, at its base, a coming-of-age story, is a musical about personal growth. Based on a play of the same name, which was banned in Europe for decades because of its supposedly subversive nature, the show counters its dark topics with plenty of 'joyful, celebratory, and jubilant' material about self-discovery, says Mr. Calderon.

'There is a great juxtaposition between the dark moments and the light moments,' he says. 'Having a piece like this in the middle of our Theatre Aurora season [focusing on the theme of Borderless Love] you have to balance your consumption of culture, I believe. I

feel as a participant in society, if you're going to consume culture, you can't just have one flavour all the time because it just simply doesn't fuel the soul in the same way as having a different point of view being presented.

?It's a coming-of-age story: it's about love, it's about discovering who you are, with a tragic end. Despite having that dramatic undertone, people come away feeling satisfied with having a whole dynamic, three-dimensional story being told. I think that is why we get here; instead of your one-dimensional fluff piece, which is absolutely fair and great to have as the cherry on top of your big culture Sunday, sometimes you need a big ole' brownie in the middle to chew on a bit an feel satisfied at the end of that meal.?

Spring Awakening opens at Theatre Aurora next Thursday, November 24, running on select dates and times through December 3. Suitable for 18+ audiences, tickets are now available through visiting [www.theatreaurora.com](http://www.theatreaurora.com), or calling the box office at 905-727-3669.