

Tough topics tempered with laughter as Theatre Aurora prepares for The Melville Boys

Difficult topics are set to be deftly handled with laughter at Theatre Aurora next week as the local community theatre company launches its next production, *The Melville Boys*, on Friday, January 24.

Penned by Canadian favourite Norm Foster, *The Melville Boys* centres on a brothers' weekend fishing trip where Lee aims to break some devastating news to his brother, Owen, only to find their respective plans upended by two sisters in a canoe.

Bringing Lee and Owen to life in this season's production are Joey Nessuno and Christian Tribuzio, both actors with local roots.

Lee is the older of two brothers and he's sort of the responsible one who has been head of the family since their father died young. He has a terminal cancer diagnosis so his whole goal for the weekend is talking to his brother because he has been avoiding the subject of his illness, concerned he is going to be leaving the family without someone looking out for them. He's trying to rein in the brother who is very much a free spirit, very much an unserious person, and he desperately needs his brother to stand up in this moment, to hear him out, [and] acknowledge what is going on, says Joey.

Christian: Owen is rambunctious, very immature about certain things, probably sexually a little inexperienced as well, but tends to be more outgoing and childish.

In the sisters, who quite literally float by, the brothers each find something they were lacking at home.

They are roles most people can relate to, both on-stage brothers agree, and were part of the attraction in coming out for a role in the Kay Valentine-directed play.

I am looking for good roles I can sink my teeth into and get something to latch onto, says Joey, who has appeared on stage for Theatre Aurora in their recent productions of *Murder on the Orient Express* and *On Golden Pond*. What brought me back to Theatre Aurora was a friend who passed away, and all of us close to him looked at ourselves and thought, What do we want to be doing? He was a guy who did stuff that he enjoyed and appreciated and we were all really grateful he lived his life fully while he had it. Theatre is something I have always wanted to go back to, but you can only do so many things when you're raising a family, going to school, building a career, that theatre didn't make the cut in my 20s and 30s but I love it. The ability to work with the people at Theatre Aurora was so great.

Christian, on the other hand, grew up in King City with knowledge of Theatre Aurora from afar, making the company one he always wanted to work with.

These are shows I wanted to be a part of, he says. For me, it was a no-brainer to audition for *The Melville Boys*. I genuinely didn't expect to get a part; I just thought, what the hell, let's see what happens. As Joey can attest, my character never shuts up, so I got what I asked for there, I suppose!

It's a comedy, first and foremost. We're going to be entertained and to have a few 'yuks' as Owen would say. Despite the fact I think a lot of people are going to walk away from the show smiling from having laughed a lot, I also feel there is a lot of heart and a real core to the play where, by the end of the play, you might want to give your brother or sister a call. As funny as the play is, there's a lot of heart and a lot of drama and I think people will identify and connect with the fact that even in a perfect family there is sometimes drama, sometimes really impossibly difficult situations where, as a family, you have to overcome.

Adds Joey: It's a delicate subject matter, so I feel a sense of responsibility. I am sure there will be people they have recently lost to cancer or may be currently going through cancer, so first and foremost, I want to make sure I honour the role and that I honour the experience that anyone in the audience might be going through. Secondly, what I am hoping is that they do enjoy what is enjoyable.

I hope they come along on the emotional journey. There is an emotional journey. There is a joy and a joie de vivre that Owen brings, that Lee needs, that makes life kind of exciting and unpredictable. While Lee might not appreciate it, I am hoping the audience enjoys his company and I hope that the humour is?finding humour in these dark times, is what keeps you going. I am hoping they'll laugh when it's funny, they'll cry when it's sad, and clap when it is over.?

The Melville Boys opens at Theatre Aurora on January 24, running on select dates and times through February 1. For more, including ticket information, visit theatreaurora.com.

By Brock Weir