

WeeFestival set to wow youngsters with Paper Playground

Youngsters will be able to flex their creative muscles in brand new ways this month as the Aurora Cultural Centre partners with WeeFestival to bring a new immersive experience to the community.

The Paper Playground, which will be offered at the Aurora Public Library on May 25, is the brainchild of British Columbia-based Foolish Operations.

"Paper Playground is an immersive experience that welcomes children as true creative collaborators, where they become an essential part of the 'under the sea' performance," says the Centre. "Exploring the theme of water with boats, fish, crabs and sharks, the artists offer irresistible invitations to roll like a wave, fill with air like a cloud and draw the ocean.

"This is a stimulating experience set on a large paper carpet created especially for children six and under that is full of live music, drawing, colourful projections and movement. A playful and interactive dance performance where children are free to join in and explore "because that's what young ones do best!"

Foolish Operations' Artistic Director Julie Lebel, a dancer of more than 25 years, says she has always been interested in "intergenerational work" in the field of dance. When she had her twins in 2010, she started focusing on making work for "very, very young children" that put this interest into action.

"I think if you can breathe you can dance," she says. "I started working with people of all ages and I think when people discover their own power through movement it is a beautiful thing to watch."

Paper Playground was one of the very first works produced by Foolish Operations and with west coast success, they've long-dreamed of bringing the show to Ontario and beyond.

"When we started in 2016 and 2017, water was on our minds," she says. "The protection of water and it is still very dear to our hearts. We can't say this is an environmental piece in a way that we don't have a strong message of 'protect the water' but we are hoping to instill a sense of wonder about the water and little kids and in families that this will help them be more curious about water and hopefully make efforts to protect it.

"We started that with my children, an improvisation practice for parents and children together. The children are 0-5 and what I keep witnessing is we started with children who aren't verbal yet" and I am witnessing them growing in confidence "in their muscle, in their bones" as they are making creative decisions, exploring through dancing "outside of their main caregiver with other children. I am sensing we're all witnessing these children growing in confidence and that sense of safety and exploring, developing relationships with new people. They have this in their early DNA and I'm hoping as they grow through life they will be humans who will not be afraid, try new things, and express themselves and have a voice. I think that's what dance gives you "that confidence of being witnessed in your space and take your place in the world.

"We create this sense of play and joy, but sometimes we have parents tearing up because they are witnessing their child in a new way. That was surprising to us, it keeps happening, and I hope it will happen in Aurora."

Paper Playground, a Foolish Operations production presented by the Aurora Cultural Centre and WeeFestival will take place at the Aurora Public Library on May 25 at 11 a.m. (a production best for kids between the ages of eight months and three years) and again at 2 p.m., recommended for participants aged three to six. Admission is \$10. The show is presented as part of the Aurora Cultural Centre's Magic Carpet Series.

For more information, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

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