

Theatre gives insight by exploring lives we haven't lived

BY NOEL JONES

IN 2018, I had the pleasure of directing Shakespeare's Twelfth Night at Magnus Theatre with a group of students from Sir Winston Churchill CVI. It was an incredible cast of young people who committed themselves wholeheartedly to this hilarious comedy. The play explores love in all its forms: the romance of a love triangle, the bonds of friendship, and the reunion of family members estranged by circumstances. Everything is possible for the characters onstage, and the audience, willing to ignore the unlikelihood of the plot, is caught up in the magic of the performance.

This is the beauty of theatre: its ability to transport the audience into unfamiliar places and times, to explore situations they might never experience in their own lives, and to live vicariously through the characters onstage. The moment the lights go down and the actors appear, viewers enter new situations that they perhaps have viewed in the lives of strangers.

Every day, we encounter people with whom we interact but never know or, more importantly, never take the time to know. Viewing these characters onstage allows us to feel how others feel, to take joy in their triumphs, to laugh with them, to share their pain, and to be outraged at any injustice levelled at them. The people we never engage with in our daily lives are the people we connect with in the world of theatre; through it, we confront our own experiences in a safe and reflective manner.

When we are in the audience at



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

a production, we are given a direct window into the hardships and struggles of others. We see the basic conflicts that appear daily in the news played out in often shocking detail, in a way that helps us recognize how similar we are and how our challenges really are universal.

We love our children, we face obstacles that frighten us, we feel hopeless at times, and we seek always to be happy.

Just as the characters in Twelfth Night try to find true love, we are all searching for a place in our lives where we feel safe, where we can find success, and where we can feel valued. We are all different, and we are all the same.

I am honoured to have shared the experience of Twelfth Night with a cast as diverse as our community, in ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Their understanding of the script reflected such a broad background of perspectives that the play, over 400 years old, suddenly became as topical as if it had just been written. As a group,

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

A production of Twelfth Night staged at Magnus Theatre in 2018 featured a cast made up of students from Sir Winston Churchill CVI.

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they explored the universality of its themes. More importantly, they learned that the stage is a safe place to take risks and to share experiences that are both unique and ubiquitous.

As a city, we are fortunate to have Magnus Theatre at the heart of our artistic community; as it prepares to celebrate its 50th anniversary, I look forward, as an educator and enthusiastic supporter of the arts, to many more years of incredible performances that bring us together for conversation and reflection.

Finnish author and artist Tove

Jansson once said: "A theatre is the most important sort of house in the world, because that's where people are shown what they could be if they wanted, and what they'd like to be if they dared to and what they really are."

For young actors on stage, the possibilities and potential are unlimited. For our community, theatre continues to play a crucial role in building understanding.

Our capacity for empathy grows every time we share an experience; theatre provides us with endless opportunities to do so.

Noel Jones has been an educator in Northwestern Ontario for the past 31 years, most recently at Sir Winston Churchill CVI where she was the co-ordinator of the International Baccalaureate Program for 10 years, and where she also taught English, history and philosophy. Her current role is as the community-connected experiential learning resource teacher for Lakehead Public Schools. Noel is married, has one daughter who has been highly involved in theatre all her life, and own five cats. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.