

## **LAW PARTNERING THEATRE**

*Call for Theatre Partner – May 2020, May 2021 and May 2022*

I am writing to the members of Edmonton's not-for-profit, professional theatre community on behalf of the Players de Novo - a volunteer group from Edmonton's legal community that for the past 13 years has organized the production of an annual play with a cast made up of local lawyers and judges. The goal each year is to raise funds to be shared equally between the partnering theatre company and the Victoria School Foundation for the Arts, our host for the event.

Our theatre partners to date have been:

2006 – Workshop West, *The Mousetrap*, directed by Ron Jenkins;

2007 – Shadow Theatre, *You Can't Take It With You*, directed by John Hudson;

2008 – Free Will Players, *Arsenic & Old Lace*, directed by Troy O'Donnell and Julien Arnold;

2009 – Concrete Theatre, *Father of the Bride*, directed by Caroline Howarth and Jana O'Connor;

2010 – Catalyst Theatre, *Murder on the Nile*, directed by Jonathan Christenson and Michelle Brown

2011 – Edmonton Opera, *Lend Me A Tenor*, directed by Brian Deedrick and Kevin Mott;

2012 – Northern Light Theatre, *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940*, directed by Trevor Schmidt and Davina Stewart;

2013 - Theatre Network, *The Government Inspector*, directed by Bradley Moss and Troy O'Donnell

2014 – Varscona Theatre Alliance, *The Matchmaker*, directed by Jeff Haslam and Belinda Cornish

2015 – Kompany Family Theatre, *The Beaux Stratagem*, directed by Jan Taylor

2016 – Free Will Players, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Marianne Copithorne and Troy O'Donnell.

2017 – Workshop West Playwrights Theatre, *A Village of Idiots*, directed by Vern Thiessen and Troy O'Donnell

2018 – Catalyst Theatre, *Guys & Dolls*, directed by Greg Dowler-Coleman, Natalie Witte and Bruce Cable

2019 – Edmonton Opera, *Harvey*, directed by Brian Deedrick & Kevin Mott

To qualify - The theatre organization should be a professional, not-for-profit organization, with Canada Revenue Agency status to issue charitable receipts. We may entertain other applicants, but this is our primary target group for theatre partners. CRA status is critical. We review the proposals received from groups meeting the initial criteria and we make a selection. There are no hard and fast rules as to how we choose a partner. We receive a number of proposals and face the difficult task of choosing one. Generally, new applicants will be chosen ahead of returning partners, but we may also choose to repeat a partner. We know that every theatre company is in desperate need, but some suffer situations that were totally out of their control

and may result in the committee picking on company over the other. There is no formula to how we pick, we just do.

Our goals - (1) to raise funds for the theatre community in Edmonton and (2) to enhance good will and collegiality in the legal community. To do that, we rely on our theatre partner to provide the artistic expertise and organizational administration. The legal community supplies the organizing committee, the cast, ticket sales, advertising and sponsorships, and Victoria School provides some rehearsal space, the performance venue (its 692-seat, fully-equipped theatre), the technical and design team and the reception venue.

In our first 13 years, this project has been able to contribute over \$1 million to Edmonton's theatre community. For the past 11 years we have sponsored the awards for Outstanding Set Design and Outstanding Costume Design at the annual Sterling Awards night. And the benefit to the legal community? Since we started, we have put 250 members of our community on stage – some of them more than once, and some for the very first time in their lives! The average annual share for each partner – Theatre Company and Victoria Foundation in somewhere around between \$35,000 – 40,000 each, after expenses.

The theatre company must provide the director and assistant director (if needed). We have found historically that a co-director or assistant director is useful due to the long rehearsal period. It would also be up to the director to select the play, in discussion with the organizing committee. We prefer a show with a large cast (for sponsorships and ticket sales (12-18 - though we have had shows with as few as 8) and lots of humour for our audience. We prefer to stay away from 'lawyers' show' such as Twelve Angry Men, as the cast are here to have fun and learn, not just repeat what they do in their day jobs. The same applies to our audience. Our shows are usually held on the first Friday of May. The exact date is dictated by the School's need for the theatre in its own scheduling, but the School has been very accommodating wherever possible.

It is now time to find an interested theatre partner for MAY 2020, May 2021 and May 2022. Previous partner organizations have suggested to us that we make a call for partners 2 or 3 years in advance. We are a little late for May 2020. If your company would like to be considered, please submit a proposal to the writer no later than Monday, January 15, 2019 - preferably by email.

Both parties need to be aware that, when you plan this far in advance, things may change. At present our organization is comprised entirely of enthusiastic volunteers. We all hope to be around two years from now. We also understand that a theatre company may have a change of heart or scheduling for its own season.

Here is what our partners provide:

Theatre Company: The artistic direction, suggestions and ultimate decision of the choice of play. There is a budget line for directors. Not to ignore the role of the director(s), but the

administrative end can be quite a heavy task, particularly as we get close to the show date. As we aim for a sell-out every year, we are constantly seeking updates on ticket sales – not just the numbers, but who they are sold to, etc. The theatre partner must be confident that it can handle the admin support required. It may be beneficial to speak to past general managers to discuss the work involved. The organizing Committee members do almost all of the work on tickets, sales, sponsorships, advertising, but the theatre's administrator will coordinate and keep records of the efforts, look after all the incoming proceeds (in cash, by cheque and credit cards), the tax receipts where appropriate and, pay the usual bills. The administrator will prepare a budget (previous years are available for format and costing) and the organizing committee will review it at its (monthly) meetings. Following the budget format allows us to look at one year to the next in a consistent fashion. The theatre partner should have some way of processing credit cards. One previous partner used the services of Tix on the Square to process their credit charges.

In 11 of our 13 productions we have used the services of Brian Bast to design the set, costume the show and collect the props. That choice is yours. But he is the resident designer at Victoria School, the venue that we use. The theatre partner would also be expected to provide a stage manager. This person is of your choosing and does not need to be an Equity member, just good at what they do. At times Nico Van Der Kley, the resident technician at Victoria School has suggested some top flight recent graduates for stage manager.

Victoria School: provides the venue (theatre and gala reception areas), some rehearsal space, and the technical director Nico Van der Kley and his technical support team. While the theatre partner may choose to use someone else in the role of technical director and lighting designer, Nico's services will come into play at some point by virtue of the School's involvement, and it has proved to be an excellent partnership over the years. For this project he is not paid by the School, but will be included in the play's budget. His familiarity with the venue is of great assistance to all. Engaging Nico avoids double payment for certain services as he must be there in any event.

Players de Novo: The lawyers and judges who act as the organizing committee, current and past cast members are responsible for the gathering of sponsorships, advertisers and the selling of tickets. We also look after the arranging of the Gala Reception after the show. Historically there have been no auditions, and casting has been accomplished by the Director saying what he or she is looking for, and the casting committee going out to beat the legal bushes. In filling the cast, we are also guided by our own mandate that the cast should be widely representative of the Bench and Bar. Some of the cast members provided to the Director may have little recent stage experience, but all will have commitment and enthusiasm.

We try to avoid cast members being in the show every year. Our rule of thumb is, but for a musical, you have to be out for two years before you get back in. This increases the pool of potential cast members, and also enlarges the ticket selling and sponsorship pool.

It is also important to know that we are not a legal entity (I know that might seem strange.). We are just a collection of volunteers that are passionate about what we are trying to do. As such we have no bank account. All funds would flow through the partnering theatre company.

Audience: Pay for the tickets (to date \$100.00 with a \$75.00 tax receipt), bring their friends and have the time of their life, both at the show and at the reception.

The rehearsal process: All of the cast members are practicing lawyers or sitting judges and therefore have full-time work. Rehearsals have historically been scheduled for one weeknight and Sunday afternoons starting in early January and running right through to the show date. At times the Directors have called additional rehearsals closer to "show date". This is a long rehearsal period and one to which theatre professionals may not be accustomed. People making the commitment to join the cast will do their best to be at all rehearsals, but scheduling conflicts will inevitably arise over the 4 month span. As part of the organizing committee from the beginning, I am also available to work with the cast, individually and collectively for line runs and other such rehearsals.

When submitting your pitch, it might be helpful to:

- Given a bit about your company and why you are submitting. If there is an urgent need, tell us about that. (for example, Free Will Players – ‘our tent blew away and now we are forced indoors’), If there is a special project, tell us about that
- Talk about your proposed director(s).
- of the three years, please give us your first, second and third choices.
- Tell us about your administrative capabilities. The task is a heavy one, with many masters looking for info
- Propose a play or two, and why. When selecting a play, please be aware that for our own purposes we want a larger cast show, with hopefully a balance of male and female roles, and with varying age ranges. Makes is easier to sell tickets.
- If you want to do a musical let us know what you are thinking

Submit your pitch by email to KEVIN MOTT AT [kevinmott1953@yahoo.ca](mailto:kevinmott1953@yahoo.ca)