

All the world is a stage, and here are its younger players

Trio of teens turn love of all things Shakespeare into theatre company

BY NICK LEES, THE EDMONTON JOURNAL MARCH 6, 2009 3:02 AM



Self-styled "Shakespeare nerds" Brendan Meyer, seated, Calla Wright, left, and Daniel Belland.

Photograph by: Nick Lees, the Journal, The Edmonton Journal

To be or not to be wasn't even a question for three young self-professed "Shakespeare nerds."

Brendan Meyer, 14, Calla Wright, 15, and Daniel Belland, 16, had no doubts about creating a theatre company.

The trio formed the Celsius Youth Theatre last year and their first, well-supported production, was *Twelfth Night*.

They were all billed as artistic directors. While Brendan and Calla also acted, Daniel directed and composed original music.

"The three of us are home-schooled and know each other through home-school events," Daniel says.

"We really started hanging out a lot together last year and talked a great deal about Shakespeare. His plays will stay fresh forever. Shakespeare gives you the skeleton and you build on it. You could set his work in space."

Calla, the costume designer, realized a long-held ambition by playing Viola in *Twelfth Night*. That's the aristocratic woman who dresses as a man after being shipwrecked. She later can't reveal who she is to the man she loves or to the woman who falls in love with her.

"Shakespeare's writing is gorgeous," Calla says. "The characters in his timeless stories are often very complex."

Brendan played Mavolio, a straitlaced head servant whose priggishness causes others to play a trick on him. They convince him the woman he serves is in love with him.

Brendan says it's easy to see why Shakespeare is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist.

"His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright," he says.

The trio note that many of his expressions have become part of our everyday speech. "With bated breath" comes from *The Merchant of Venice*, and "a foregone conclusion" is from *Othello*.

Brendan attended his first live theatre performance at the age of three and was immediately captured by the magical world of theatre.

"I began to pursue my passion by taking a wide variety of classes and performing in lots of theatre," he says.

"When I was 10, I finally convinced my parents that I should pursue film and television roles."

He has appeared in independent movies and made-for-TV movies. (He played the goalkeeper in CBC's *Waking Up Wally: The Walter Gretzky Story*.) His big break as a series regular on the BBC/Discovery Kids show *DinoSapien*. Since then, he has worked regularly, appearing in such TV programs as *Blood Ties* and *The Assistants*. Feature film credits include Tom Green's *Freezer Burn* and *Tooth Fairy*, with Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson.

"When I'm not working and studying, I never tire of reading Shakespeare," says Brendan, now in rehearsal for Fringe Theatre Adventures' *Beneath the Ice*, which opens March 13.

"But I'm also a big Humphrey Bogart fan and revisit his movies regularly. He had great technique.

"If I ever had the means, I'd like to make Shakespearean movies. I also like to write and work on screenplays."

The trio are all involved with the Freewill Players' Shakespeare in the Park productions, and have attended the company's elite Shakespeare camps and acted in its Dream Troupe productions.

"I was six when I met Daniel," Calla says. "It was later, when we were both in a Waldorf School class staging a scene from *The Merchant of Venice* that I fell in love with Shakespeare.

"I played Antonio. Now, I think my favourite play is *Othello*."

Calla hopes to become a full-time writer, but when not acting, reading and creating, she has a love affair with tall ships. She hopes to sail on one soon.

Daniel plays piano and flute and hopes to find a way of both acting and composing music for productions.

"There's also something very satisfying in appearing before a live audience and knowing they are enjoying being entertained," he says.

The trio, now working on staging an evening featuring three one-act plays in the near future, are

delighted that rumour has it that the Freewill Players plan to stage Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus this summer.

"It's not a family production and for that reason is not often performed," says Brendan. "It's very violent, with murders, rape and even cannibalism."

Says Daniel: "If done tastefully, it is an excellent tragedy providing a most rewarding theatrical experience."

Says Calla: "As always, the writing is beautiful, the characters wonderful and the plot moves along well."

Our trio say Shakespeare is not only the greatest writer ever, but is the master of all human experience and of its intellectual analysis.

To argue with them, you probably should have read all of the playwright and poet's 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and several other poems. They have. And they can quote chunks from many.

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