

New Theatre General Manager Sharyn Ayliffe is 'super well supported'?

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

This was an interview with Sharyn Ayliffe, newly appointed General Manager of Theatre Orangeville; Bernadette Hardaker, retiring General Manger and David Nairn, Artistic Director. The three of them were speaking to us from the board room at the now closed-to- the- public Tourist Centre.

We were at home on the other end of the line, ready to listen.

The original focus was to talk about the transition of the job of General Manger from Bernadette Hardaker to Sharyn Ayliffe as of March 1, this year. Of course, given current events, they added to the conversation.

David Nairn began by clearing the air, saying, 'We are in a state of emergency, keeping people employed. There's a great deal to do. We're dealing with the most current information, recouping contingency plans, seeing what we can salvage. We're looking forward to what's next in our season and the other programming.

'If we were to bring Too Close to Home back, it would be in the next season and a half. Our time line is that we are usually 14 to 18 months ahead to our commitment level.[Following the opening night show, after which the theatre was closed down] We all went out and had a meal together and it was alright. We couldn't do it again for another year and a half.'

He added, 'It should be restaged somewhere ' it's a great play.'

Bernadette Hardaker took up the conversation, 'This transition - this is the biggest job possible and Sharyn's doing an amazing job. She just sat down in the chair and started getting it right. She's the right person for the job and no one else could do this any better.'

'From my end,' said Sharyn Ayliffe, 'People have asked me how I'm doing and I tell them, I'm feeling really good about the transition. I'm incredibly well supported. I have nearly a decade of corporate knowledge and a firm understanding of the community and the arts in the region. I'm just one of many rolling with the news we have at this time. We'll continue to do the best we can with what we have.'

Mr. Nairn went on, 'This great team in these trying times - I have 100% confidence that this company will become stronger and and we all will serve as an example on how we will survive, because we will.'

Ms. Ayliffe told us, 'There's no template for what is happening. We have to establish what works for us. We've got emails from other companies about how they're doing things and we're following what works for us and advice from Public Health Ontario.'

'And,' said Mr. Nairn, 'we are masters of technology. We're using it to move forward. In every case, we have to take our cue from Public Health. We're saying that all our programs are not being cancelled but to postpone them, as opposed to just outright cancel.'

'I'm fortunate to have Bernadette here through to the end of the month' said Ms. Ayliffe, 'and she has very graciously agreed to made her self available for the rest of the year to assist with the specifics. As has Marilyn Logan, [who was General Manager] promised to assist as needed.'

She explained, 'Everything only happens once a year, so, it takes a while to learn the job. I'm super well supported. Theatre Orangeville is my home. I've spent nearly a decade in various capacities with the theatre and I am whole heartedly clear about what our mandate is.'

From Ms. Hardaker came, 'I think what is one of the really exciting things about Sharyn is, not only her passion but her youth,

energy and enthusiasm. I love that Patricia [Marcello] has moved into her former position as Programs Manager [with Hailey Bell now as Office Manager in Ms. Marcello's place].

'This whole new team of young, smart women - it's really exciting to see that. This is an organization that requires a tremendous amount of energy. The potential here is unlimited for the foundation.'

She declared, 'I am so optimistic and so charged with the potential; I think we're going to do even greater things than we already have.'

David Nairn was keen to contribute to this thinking. 'I find myself, I feel that there's a renewed energy because of these young - incredibly talented - young women. There's a real sense of dynamic thinking to move this organization to come. Bernadette and I feel re-energized by the passion Sharyn brings to the organization: the cause of young people, bringing this art to the community. I think the future of Theatre Orangeville is extremely bright, filled with love.'

'So here we are in the midst of unprecedented times,' Ms. Ayliffe remarked. 'I think it's incumbent on us to continually find the light and the joy to lead the community to find the light in this. Our role continues to look for joy in even in these difficult times.'

'Support from the public,' she continued, 'the response that we've had has been very supportive. Albeit we have had to postpone things, the community knows that the show will go on. In and when the time is right, we'll be back with open doors and the community will support their theatre.'

She made the point, 'Our patrons and the country and the entire globe are all in this together. They're right there, looking ahead with us, for when we turn the stage lights on again and get ready.'

Of her retirement, Bernadette Hardaker said, 'I walked out of my [home] office four years ago and there are stickers still up since then. With any luck, I'll be revising my writing career.'

'People have said to me, 'How can you leave?' And I tell them, 'Once in Theatre Orangeville, always in Theatre Orangeville. You never leave- I'm still here -just not all the time.'

Sharyn Ayliffe assured us, 'We will continue to post daily on social media... sharing throwbacks from past productions as well with plans for upcoming productions. Our presence will still be very much be known.'

Heartfelt from Mr. Nairn, 'I would like to add, the really great thing about this transition and where we are at the time, is that Sharyn was born and raised here in Orangeville. Bernadette, Marlyn ' all live in this community. They have all have spent a life time here ' and that's says a lot about the community. Our creative and administrative team have made Orangeville their home; this is their home and that makes it personal and says a lot about the theatre.'

He echoed Ms. Ayliffe with the note, 'We are developing many engaging opportunities for patrons so that they will want to stay connected to the Theatre Orangeville experience. Stay tuned!'