

SKAMnanigans S1E2 Transcript

(upbeat music)

Hello and welcome to "SKAMnanigans," the theatre SKAM podcast. "SKAMnanigans" brings you into the whimsical and wacky world of theatre. I'm your host, Branden Sugden. (upbeat music) Let the "SKAMnanigans" begin.

Community has always been at the heart of theatre. Anyone who has taken part in a high school drama club can tell you that the vulnerability associated with improvising by the seat of your pants in front of your crush with a few of your closest friends is a surefire way to create a lifelong bond. Similarly, watching your crush absolutely nail that park bench scene will, well, maybe not my high school improv club that performed on Mondays at lunch, but perhaps your high school drama club is doing the touching, impactful work that brings an audience of neighbours together. And hey, Michael Scarn is a timeless character I think about every day. His impact on my life has been immeasurable. Suffice it to say, theatre is one of the best ways to bring a community of people together. Nobody understands the absolutely seismic impact theatre can have in bonding a community better than Kurt Archer. I had the pleasure of meeting Kurt earlier this week to ask them all about the ways that he and his theatre company, Between Words, have been stimulating and inspiring the community in Victoria the past two years.

(upbeat music)

Hi, Kurt. Thank you so much for joining us and for being our first guest on SKAMnanigans.

I'm happy to be here, yeah.

First, can you just introduce yourself a little bit and tell us how you got started on the One Act Play Festival here in Victoria?

Yeah, Kurt Archer and I go by he/they pronouns and I started Between Words Theatre two years ago. Actually, no, the inception actually started pre-pandemic. I was in Calgary and I was on the board of Morpheus Theatre, a community theatre group there, and I wanted to write a play and put it up in the One Act Festival. And I did that and the theatre company was very supportive of me and then rehearsals were going great and then a week before opening night, this is March, 2020, so it all got shut down. So my play never made it to the stage. And so that kind of stayed with me as I've always wanted to put it on again, you know? And fast forward, I moved to Victoria a year later and it was over a summertime and I was thinking, you know what, I really wanna put my play up. There really isn't a One Act Festival or any

kind of thing here to do that. And so I did some research, looked around and realized, you know, it was kind of, well, you should start a theatre company and then you could apply for grants and this and that. And so I was like, all right, I guess I'm starting a theatre company. (laughs) And so that's how Between Words was born and it was really started in order to really kick off the Victoria One Act Play Festival. And the festival itself is modelled after the One Act Play Festivals in Alberta that I have experience in. So it is modifying, you know, every year. This is our second year doing it now. So we are changing and modifying things as we go too. But yeah, the spirit of the One Act is very much alive and well.

Fantastic. So the One Act Play Festival had a lot of success even in its very first year. And so I'm curious what you feel were some of the factors that led to that really quick success just hitting the ground running like that?

That's a really great question. And honestly, it blew me away too. So in our first year, we sold out every show. The inception of this festival really began after I had a conversation with Mike at the Belfry and laid out what I wanted to do. You know, this is a community initiative. We wanted to bring new works and new artists together, you know, to put on plays. And Belfry absolutely loved it. And so they said, "Okay, how can we support?" So that was really the ground running. I remember sitting there going, "Oh, I've got a venue now. I need to put on a festival." So that's exactly what we did. So each performing group only gets one performance. You know, so it's not a format for everyone, obviously, but it's a great format for experimenting new works and stuff. And it just kind of happened that this festival became all entirely new works, you know, entirely locally written new works. And so I think part of that story really resonated with groups, you know, and being able to reach out to groups like yourselves at SKAM, being able to support rehearsal space and stuff like that helps reduce barriers for artists to want to participate. And it is entirely volunteer run. And so it really became a community initiative. And I think that's what really made it such a success, you know?

So you sort of talked a lot about how developing partnerships in the community was sort of a key element to the success of the festival in its first year and this year as well. So what is your approach to creating and developing those partnerships with community organisations and other stakeholders?

Yeah, well, it's definitely coming into it with the idea that like, we all have the same mission. We want to create new works. We want to create art in the city. You know, there's a lot of great theatre in Victoria. And I think that there's definitely room and there was a gap for more community theatre, more new works initiatives, you know, to kind of come through. And so I think that people wanted to get behind that, that kind of idea, because they saw that as a need, you know? And as a community initiative, it becomes easier to kind of get behind it. You know, that's my thought at least. But for me, partnerships are key. And I went into this thinking that I'm not doing

this alone. This isn't a me initiative. This is how do we make this a Victoria initiative, you know? And so from the get-go, that was how I approached it.

You've got some experience previously producing events and that sort of thing as well before the One Act Play Festival. That's another thing I'm curious about. What have you found different producing this festival from other events? And what's your favourite part of producing the festival?

Well, that's a great question. Yeah, so previously I also ran the TEDx YYC in Calgary for a few years, and it's part of an amazing volunteer team there of over 70 volunteers in some years. And, you know, it's that volunteer spirit of coming together and pulling together and pulling this off. It's a unique experience that can't necessarily be replicated if people are necessarily being paid for it. It's a weird thing that it's like we're running on passion rather than running on profits, if that makes sense, you know? And I think running on passion is really important, but I also think, you know, it's also very important that artists get paid for their work. Like I'm really supportive of that. And so it's finding that balance between creating opportunities where this can happen, right? And being able to also create new opportunities where artists can get paid for doing their work, right? So I think that there's room for both. And the favorite part of running the festival, honestly, is like last year I went into this thinking that I don't know what we're gonna get, right? You know, like this is all new works. This could be like a high school festival for all I know, you know? And I sat through every single one of those performances and I was blown away. I was like, holy, I can't swear on this podcast, but like, damn, like there's some talent in Victoria. There really is, you know? And both the UVic theatre program at the Phoenix and the CCPA students came out in strong numbers to support this festival. And I think that's another big part of the success is having those students on board. It also makes for an interesting audience, you know? That's something I didn't pick up at first, but the audience is diverse. I think there's an idea in Victoria that all theatre patrons are seniors, right? And I don't think that's true, you know? I think that there is a lot of people hungry for theatre and interested in theatre. And I think that this festival, as well as many others in the city, can approve that there's a lot more of a diverse audience out there.

What do you see the future of the Victoria One Act Play Festival being in the next year and the years to follow?

That's a great question. Yeah, I started this with the hopes that it would become an annual thing, and apparently that's what's happening. So I'm happy for that. Yeah, what's next? I wanna continue with the festival year after year, but I want to start working towards doing some more workshops. So this is one part I haven't mentioned before. Each year, I also run a workshop in the lead up to the festival. So last year we did a director's workshop, and this year we did a dramaturgy workshop with Misty Kozak, and it was fantastic. Most of the groups that were part of the

festival were present and just had an amazing time. And that's an important piece of it, because not only is it just an opportunity to showcase, but it's a learning opportunity. And this is why we have an adjudicator this year. Julie McKisak is a professor at CCPA, is our festival adjudicator. And so it's a learning opportunity too. So I think going forward, I wanna do more workshops, perhaps even in the fall, looking at doing some writing workshops or director workshops to kind of have some of the inception of new works start then, and then lead up to the showcase in the spring.

I'm curious also about Between Words as a company. Do you see Between Words expanding beyond the festival or just focusing exclusively on the festival?

Yeah, so its origin is running the festival, but I think there's an opportunity to go into other realms. So one of the ideas I have right now is working on a climate festival, climate theatre festival. That would include workshops in creating new works around climate and theatre, as well as showcasing stories. So every year there's a global climate theatre festival, I guess you could call it, happens around the world. Basically, it's an organisation that allows for all of these short plays to be performed royalty-free during this festival, right? And so you're part of a movement and the whole idea of it is there's you creating conversations around climate change. So I think that'd be really interesting. And I think there's an appetite in this city to explore climate change from an artistic lens. And so I think that's probably my next project.

That sounds amazing.

Yeah.

I can't wait to see that festival, to be honest.

Yeah.

Last question is, is there anything you wanna say to the audiences of Victoria or shout out anybody in particular that you think deserves more praise in the city?

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, well, I think, great question. I think there's a couple things I wanted to say. For audiences, support the arts. I think, teachers might not know this, but access to venues and access to rehearsal spaces is becoming more and more challenging for arts organisations. And I think that just being mindful of that and really, really pushing both the city and both your attendance at these festivals and theatre shows, community theatre shows and different companies all over Victoria, support them because a lot of groups need it. And also shout outs, there's so many groups doing so many amazing things in the city. You guys, SKAM, really being a centre point of community here in Trapid, doing some great, great works over there too. Hapak Theatre has been phenomenal. I've just started having conversations to

talk about working with them in some capacity and they've been so lovely to connect with. The groups actually at Theatre Al Dente, they've been really supportive too. And so they've come on board to support with offering some discounted rehearsal space too 'cause they have a new rehearsal venue in Esquimalt actually. So yeah, there's so much more I could rattle off, but I'll leave it there for now. But yeah, I'm really, really hopeful of the theatre scene, the growing community here that we have and being able to continue to support more local artists here.

Fantastic. And if people want to find you and stay in touch about the festival and other things Between Words is getting up to, where can we find you?

Yeah, so betweenwords.ca is the best place. We're also on Instagram and Facebook. So lots of ways to get in touch and yeah, lots of ways to get involved. So reach out.

Fantastic. Thank you so much for coming on SKAMnanigans, Kurt.

Yeah, no, it's my pleasure.

(upbeat music)

I don't know about you, but I found that discussion with Kurt very touching and inspiring. It can be easy to get down about the state of the world in the digital age with all us Zoomers ticking and talking our way through the world with nary a glance both ways before crossing a street. But the success of the One Act Play Festival really shows the demand is there for live and in-person connection. I would like to reiterate what Kurt said. If you are artistically inclined in the slightest, which I would think you must be if you didn't turn this off after my high school improv revelation, please get out in the community and support your local artists. That can be here in Victoria or anywhere else for that matter. Go see a show, volunteer to be an usher at the theatre, donate some old clothes to a company's costume stock. Theatre cannot happen without community, both to create the art and to witness it, unlike my high school improv club, which my crush may not have actually watched. Anyway, that's our show. Thank you so much for listening and come back two weeks from now where we will meet some of the artists who created work for this year's Victoria One Act Play Festival. Theatre SKAM is grateful to live, work, and create on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen people, now known as the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations. SKAM Nanigans is hosted by me, Branden Sugden. Our producer is Logan Swain. Special thanks to our guest, Kurt Archer, for joining us on the podcast today. Our marketing materials and graphics are by Janine Joplinski. We would like to acknowledge the support of our operational funders, the BC Arts Council and the Capital Regional District for their support of Theatre SKAM. SKAM Nanigans can be found wherever you get your podcasts. Subscribe to get notified when new episodes drop. Thank you so much for listening. (upbeat music)