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The Casket

TA to stage This Is For You, Anna

COREY LEBLANC

✉ coreyleblanc@thecasket.ca

You could say that Theatre Antigonish (TA) has improvised, when it comes to its schedule.

As officials with the Antigonish-based community theatre said in a recent announcement, "once again, [we are] tackling a difficult but contemporary social issue."

This weekend — Feb. 9 and 10 — TA will stage *This is For You, Anna* at St. F.X.'s Bauer Theatre.

TA managing director Reema

Fuller said the change came "as part of our mandate to be responsive to current discourse in the community and globally."

"We believe that the theatre has an important role to play as a platform, and sometimes even as a catalyst, for reflection and dialogue," she said.

"Programming plays that raise important social questions is a big part of that.

TA artistic director Andrea Boyd agreed.

"It is [theatre], primarily,

about entertainment, but it also helps to educate, bring people together and explore issues," she said.

As for when the seeds were planted for making the change, Boyd said she talked to Kailin Wright, who was scheduled to direct another production, about staging one "more timely and pertinent."

Wright said they wanted to stage a piece that reflected the "powerful movement" happening when it comes to sexual and

gender-based violence; one not only happening on the St. F.X. campus and in the community — coming on the heels of two male students being charged with sexual assault last fall — but also globally.

The show

In a press release, TA described *This is For You, Anna* as "a haunting exploration of the issues surrounding sexual violence, revenge, feminism and

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motherhood."

"I have known about it for quite a while – it is pretty famous," Boyd said.

Written by Suzanne Khuri, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Banuta Rubess and Maureen White for Nightwood Theatre in Toronto, it is among the first Canadian plays written by a feminist collective.

It tells the true story of German woman Marianne Bachmeier, who walked into a courtroom in 1981 and shot and killed the man accused of abducting and killing Anna, her seven-year-old daughter.

The play not only tackles that specific case, but also contributes to larger discussions about gendered violence, the role and societal expectations of women, justice and liberation.

Although first presented in the early 1980s, Boyd said, the subject matter, including sexualized violence, remains "incredibly relevant."

"I think it will get people talking, which is always a good thing," she added.

Wright said they focussed on finding a Canadian play that "doesn't aestheticize the violence."

She added that has become an "ethical issue" with art, tackling such subject matter without making it "something that is witnessed and enjoyed."

Wright noted, when they spoke, one of the playwrights stressed her desire not to have any violence depicted on the stage.

'Intense month'

Wright, along with cast members Chelsea Hoyt, Alicia David,

Erin Wynn, Maddy Kendall, only started preparations in January.

"It has been an intense month," she said.

Along with rehearsals, Wright noted, there have been changes made, including a rewrite of one scene. The cast members have also made great contributions in shaping the production.

Boyd added Wright and the cast are "doing a fabulous job."

"It is going to be an engaging and thought-provoking production," she said.

Wright said they hope the play starts conversation about women and gender-based violence, including the prevalence of it and "how we respond."

'We Stand Together'

Before each performance, St. F.X. student-athlete Emma Kuzmyk will take the stage and present We Stand Together, a poem she wrote and delivered in a spoken-word video as part of a campaign launched on the Antigonish campus.

We Stand Together continues its push for more resources and education for sexualized violence on campus.

Each night will also feature a post-show panel discussion about sexual violence, gender and justice, along with a special performance by Antigonish Improv.

"We hope [the discussions] can help shape sensitive conversations on these issues and what is going on," Wright said.

Get your tickets

Tickets, which are also available online at tickets.festivalantigonish.com or by calling (902) 867-3333, can be purchased at the door.

Showtime nightly is 7:30, with doors opening at 7 p.m.