

"Jitters" are too familiar to director Clipperton

By Brock Weir

The backstage ? and onstage ? shenanigans presented in *Jitters*, Theatre Aurora's latest production, are all too familiar to director Michael Clipperton.

The theatre veteran, who is actually new to the Theatre Aurora family, has had his fair share of experiences from falling set pieces, to wigs going rogue in the middle of a performance, experiences that are shared by every actor. This, he said, was part of the appeal when the opportunity came opportunity came up to direct David French's play for Theatre Aurora.



Photo by David Falconer

?I think almost every word David French wrote in this play, somebody spoke at one time or another in the theatre and he heard it,? says Mr. Clipperton, a retired drama teacher hailing from Barrie. ?I think it is a pretty realistic portrayal of what theatre can be like sometimes when everything seems to go wrong, including wrong costumes, bad wigs, actors late, actors getting lost, actors being drunk, and stage managers who are little tyrants. We have all seen that in the backstage world and that is part of the appeal of this play.

?I have had scenery fall down. I have had a wig come off. I was in a show where an actor slipped, fell, broke his ankle, and had to literally crawl off the stage in the middle of a dance number. There have been wardrobe malfunctions ? need I say more? ? standing on the stage with your fly open? a horror story.?

It was also on stage in a two-person one-act play that Mr. Clipperton experienced any actor's horror of horrors.

?It was just me and another woman and we missed seven and a half pages of dialogue,? he recalls in a not altogether convincing chuckle. ?We could see it in each other's eyes that we all knew what we had missed and we just could not get back to pick it up. It was a nightmare that seemed to go on and on forever.?

Thankfully, however, as director, things at Theatre Aurora seem to be going very smoothly. As a fan of Mr. French's work, he jumped at the opportunity to direct when he saw the listing online.

His interest in the theatre began at the tender age of five. His parents and family, although musically inclined, did not have the slightest interest in the theatre, but within their son was a love of being on stage and performing. He chased the dream through high school and university, gaining experience through community theatre and also as a jack-of-all-trades high school teacher with a particular penchant for drama.

?I always felt at home in the theatre,? he says. ?The part I enjoy most is working in the rehearsal ha and getting the piece to the point where it is ready for an audience. That is the most appealing to me and once we get to opening night my job is over. It is about the creative process and bringing all those various and diverse talents together from the actors to the designers, to the technicians, and

coming together to create something.?

He says he finds the behind the scenes work more fulfilling and part of that might stem from a fondness of ?being in charge and telling people what to do I have been accused of that on more than one occasion!? But, he says, this is driven by a vision of seeing how all the ?parts? of a production fit together.

Putting Jitters together has been a ?great? experience, he says, particularly as a new member of the venerable local theatre company and in casting nine roles from the 25 people who tried out, it was a quick introduction to the theatre community. Thankfully, as actors, they too feel the connection with David French's work, focusing on the things they themselves might have experienced while treading the boards but also something they feel the wider community can connect to as well.

?There is a great deal of humour, but it is also a very honest portrayal of what can happen, how actors react, and how actors behave, and how stage managers behave,? says Mr. Clipperton. ?Because David French knew that world so well and he has captured it in these moments that are so telling to me because I have experienced so many of them one way or another. There is a great deal of humour, but there will also be a great deal of honesty.?