

Overture, curtain, lights...

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*This is it, we'll hit the heights
And oh what heights we'll hit,
on with the show this is it.*

Every Saturday, a small stage in Georgetown comes to life. Music will emanate from the wings, little feet will begin to shudder the floor and faces light up with anticipation.

Budding thespians, aged 10 to 18, gather at Georgetown Little Theatre's (GLT) studio in Stewarttown to make theatre magic.

Beginning in 2003, the guidance of Cat Heaven and a few dedicated volunteers has produced more than 450 members of GLT's Youth Company. They've learned all it takes to put on a show. And in the process, they build confidence and find acceptance.

"Drama," said Heaven when asked about the challenges of working with children and teens. "They're so passionate. What they aren't is calm, organized and focused. So, we're going to grab onto this tiger and ride it."

Creating a one-act play festival in the fall and a mainstage production each May, the kids do everything from acting, directing and stage managing as well as sets, sound, lighting and more.





"I get such a blast out of sharing my passion for theatre with these young people. If you want a fountain of youth, immerse yourself in the company of creative, passionate young people working together on a project. As you could see the energy level can get intense."

-Cat Heaven

Heaven is a dynamo. One of the company's founders, she spends on average a dozen hours a week at the studio-- up to 90 hours during "Hell week" leading up to a show. Conveniently, she lives right across the road.

As a prop and set technician in the film industry for more than 25 years, Heaven is keen to share her love of theatre.

"The whole point of the youth company is to have the kids do it," she said. "We want to create an atmosphere where youth feel included and listened to. If they want to do something, we'll help them accomplish it."

Nicholas Uffen was a company member for eight years.

"Young people feel safe there," he said. "Self-conscious kids get to use their creativity. It's an incredibly welcoming, accepting, supportive environment."

Uffen, 22, graduated from Ryerson University's Theatre Performance program in 2016 and returns to give workshops for current members. He credits the youth company for igniting his passion for acting.

Those who don't relish performing are involved in the many other aspects of bringing a show to the stage, including sets, lighting, sound, costumes and makeup.

Nathalie Amyotte, now 17, joined the group when she was 12.

"I was always really introverted," she said. She started as a stage-hand, helping to move sets and props during productions, as well as building sets. "Now I've done the stage-manager's role; backstage is my place to shine."

Amyotte's mom, Michelle Jessome, agrees.

"Nathalie has learned leadership skills and how to articulate her thoughts. It's also helped her in school. Here, kids learn team-building and a love of culture, something that's missing in the education system these days."

Meghan Stewart, 17, has been a member since seventh grade.

"My grandparents forced me into it," jokes Stewart, explaining that the \$20 annual membership fee was a selling point.

Initially cast as an extra, Stewart has performed in mainstage productions and also wrote and directed a one-act play in November 2017.



"I've learned all about the creative aspects of theatre and I love being part of a group of people with the same aspirations and ideals," she said. Stewart plans to attend the University of Waterloo's Theatre Performance program in the fall.

Heaven is quick to mention that she is not a one-woman show.

"Without the GLT's ongoing support and resources the youth company wouldn't exist," she said. A trio of long-time adult volunteers, including Kay d'Entremont, Laurie Uffen and Biljana Marekic, also support the youth members with communications, producing, front of house and costumes.

Now celebrating its 15th season, the company's next play, set for early May, is *Dark of the Moon*. With 30 speaking roles, it's a supernatural tale of love and tragedy set in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. Two alumni members, Taylor Grist and Jill Pike, are co-directors.

Grist, 26, joined the company when he was 13 and never really left. After graduating from Sheridan College in Advertising and Marketing, he wrote and directed *The Time Traveller's Leg*, an ambitious science fiction play, mounted in 2015. Now as building manager, Grist sits on the GLT executive.

"The company empowers youth," he said. "It's amazing what you'll get out of kids when you don't patronize them."

Heaven echoes that sentiment. "If you want to hang out with some of the most intelligent, creative, committed young people around, just walk in the door. We can find room for everybody."

For more information about GLT Youth Company, visit: www.georgetownlittletheatre.ca/index.php/youth-company



Did you know...

This is their 15th anniversary. Fifteen spring productions and 14 Y1A festivals.

Each year they have approximately 60 to 75 members aged 10 to 18

There are usually two evening rehearsals 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. A little over eight hours a week for about 16 weeks for the Spring Production (this year is *Dark of the Moon*) and eight weeks for their Y1A- Youth One Act Play Festival which is in November

There are approximately 25-30 "behind the scenes" people for each show, as many as are onstage. These are youth members who do not wish to act but are valuable members of the production, family and friends of members, or alumni members who come back from university or college to be part of the show.

They have a 60 seat house for this show. There are nine spring production performances, so 540 tickets. They usually sell about 500. The Y1A has four performances, so 240 tickets, probably 200 sold.

There were more than 100 costumes created for their 2012 production of *"Pride and Prejudice."*

They run an eight Workshop Series each fall, dealing with basic theatre skills, and actor's craft.

The members provide face painting at Canada Day in the Glen, Georgetown Fall Fair and the Georgetown Hospital Walk.