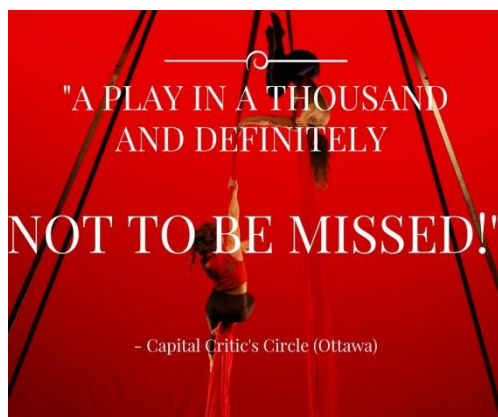


PRESS HISTORY THEATRE ARCTURUS



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STRATFORD FESTIVAL'S SCENE NOTES – April 2016

SpringWorks presents aerial Shakespeare

SpringWorks — Stratford's indie theatre and arts festival — is offering a new angle on *Macbeth*.

An adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy combined with aerial arts, *Weird* is the story of the infamous "weird sisters," caught between the bloody business of Macbeth's tragedy and their own destructive sibling rivalry. The multidisciplinary show by Theatre Arcturus blends Shakespeare's text and storytelling with circus arts, stage combat and original music.

"We first presented *Weird* as part of our 2015 season," says Eileen Smith, Artistic Producer of SpringWorks. "Audiences were spellbound by the artists. Not only did they adapt Shakespeare's tragedy to great effect - they performed their lines while tumbling from silks!"

Winner of the "Best of the Fest" award at the 2015 Ottawa Fringe, *Weird* will return to SpringWorks next month. Audiences will have the chance to see it alongside Stratford's production of *Macbeth*, which begins previews at the Festival Theatre on May 3.

UNIQUE MUSKOKA Article – June 2017

Theatre Arcturus brings aerial arts to Muskoka

Article by Dawn Huddleston / Photography by Larry Carroll

Muskoka residents Lindsay Bellaire and Phillip Poutka are storytellers. Both are classically trained actors who met in the University of Windsor's acting program and both were curious how more physical types of performance – aerial arts and stage combat in particular – could elevate theatre to dramatic and magical heights.

Following graduation in 2010, Bellaire trained at the Toronto School of Circus Arts learning aerial arts – airborne acrobatics performed on long strips of silk or from a suspended hoop – while Poutka accumulated almost 500 hours of stage combat training at Rapier Win, Canada's oldest stage combat school.

There's an abundance of circus arts schools and theatre companies that incorporate aerial arts in Toronto, but Bellaire and Poutka knew they had something different to offer. They created a theatre company – Theatre Arcturus – to meld text-based theatre, aerial arts and stage combat together in a way they hadn't encountered anywhere else. Cirque it's not – the productions at Theatre Arcturus are text-based plays first that incorporate aerial arts and stage combat to enhance the script rather than those physical skills being the main thrust of the performance.

"We were more focused on creating a play where the acting and storytelling comes first and the aerial arts are added in the middle of a scene as a playground or part of the set for the actors to move in," says Poutka, who writes the scripts for Theatre Arcturus, often incorporating his passion for Shakespeare.

Their first production, *Wind*, which they created more than two years ago, tells the



Above: Phillip Poutka as Caliban and Lindsay Bellaire as Ariel in their new show *Rough Magic*. Left: In this fight scene from *Rough Magic*, Ariel is knocking Caliban from his vine back to the forest floor.

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story of the witches from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* using some of the original dialogue, some original text from Poutka, and aerial arts whenever the witches can charm.

"It's a huge challenge to mix both," says Poutka. "We really got excited about that kind of work."

Bellaire and Poutka performed *Wind* in 2015 at Huntsville's Nuit Blanche North, a late-night art event where cutting-edge artists light up downtown Huntsville. It was an experience that piqued their interest in training and performing outside of Toronto.

"There was always this assumption you had to be there to be an actor and to have a theatre company," says Bellaire. "We weren't particularly happy about that. Being in the community (for Nuit Blanche North), we wondered what it might be like to have a space outside of Toronto where we could create our shows."

When they realized no one was offering aerial arts training in Muskoka, they decided to make the move north in September 2015, using space here as a home base from which to create shows and then tour them while offering aerial arts classes to support their efforts.

They are still searching for the perfect permanent studio space – they were at the Foundry in Bracebridge for a while and at The HUB in Huntsville more recently – but intend to remain in the Huntsville area.

In follow up to *Wind*, they have created another Shakespeare-inspired show, *Rough Magic*, featuring two well-known characters from *The Tempest*. Poutka wrote the script and then he and Bellaire began rehearsing to understand how the characters could use aerial arts to augment their interactions.

"Ariel is a spirit that lives mainly in the air and Caliban is a ground-based human seen as having more of a monster sort of appeal," Poutka says of the two characters from *The Tempest*. "We created an original show telling their backstory, how they first met before any of the other characters in *The Tempest* came to the island. It's the relationship between these characters that seemingly have nothing in common, but which has a very fantastical element to it that allows room for the aerial arts in a literal way as possible."

Because Ariel can fly, Bellaire uses aerial silks to move through vertical space throughout the performance. Caliban lives on the ground but, as humans do, has the ability to climb – Poutka uses aerial ropes to represent vines and trees that his character can ascend.

Even if you're not a Shakespeare fan or are unfamiliar with *The Tempest*, you'll still enjoy the show. "It stands alone from *The Tempest* and has been written and created in a way that's still accessible," says Bellaire. "You don't have to know the story."

After a spring premiere in Huntsville,



Lindsay Bellaire as Ariel and Phillip Poutka as Caliban in their new show *Rough Magic*. Ariel is showing Caliban the view from above for the first time.

Rough Magic will begin touring this summer including performances at the Ottawa and Toronto Fringe Festivals.

If you think aerial arts would be fun to try, Theatre Arcturus offers recreational classes with aerial silks and hoops, too – some conditioning classes that are more like a workout incorporating climbing and inversions in a circuit, and other sessions where you can learn and practice different tricks.

As for the future, it looks bright for this young theatre company. Their shows and



Above: Lindsay Bellaire demonstrates a basic inverted manoeuvre to student Nichelle McLeod at their gym in Huntsville. Below: Lindsay Bellaire and Phillip Poutka practice a free hang manoeuvre.

Aerial arts skills do take time to develop, but are well worth the effort, says Bellaire, even if you think you could never do it.

"I can relate to that feeling," she says. "When I first started, I had no upper body strength and it took me a while to even be able to get off the ground. I wanted it bad enough that I just kept showing up. If you do that, you will build the strength. It's not the kind of thing where you can come out once and get a really good sense of what it's actually like."

Bellaire has created programs for kids, young adults and adults that build upper body strength while still having fun.

"At first, you'll learn the basic way of climbing silks but if you have no upper body strength, you might not get far off the ground and that's okay," she says. "Some of the positions you can step up into, so you are doing the tricks low to the ground and you are building strength while you are doing them. The idea is to build on your skills, week to week."

As for the future, it looks bright for this young theatre company. Their shows and



classes get rave reviews and they plan to build on both. They hope to incorporate stage combat training as a comprehensive part of the sessions they offer and to expand their aerial arts classes to include professional training as well.

But Theatre Arcturus is first and foremost a theatre company. "That is our passion and our background and where our training stems from," says Poutka. "We are aiming to develop a new show every one to two years and building an audience here (with Muskoka) who are the first people we share the show with, and then tour it from there."

"Our ultimate dream would be to have our own space and be able to offer a season where our work is showcased," adds Bellaire. "We would also bring other works up to be part of that season, and tour our own shows in addition to that."

Their story continues to evolve but there's no question that Theatre Arcturus will continue to captivate audiences with gravity-defying art and poetic storytelling that combine for a magical experience.

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