

Local ARTS & CULTURE

Yellow Door 'Garten Party' fundraising for fall production

Mike Balsom
The Local

A Victoria Street backyard will be transformed into a Bavarian Garten on Monday, May 30 for a fundraiser for Yellow Door Theatre Project (YDTP).

The Niagara-on-the-Lake charitable organization is hosting a Garten Party FUNdraiser at the home of Wendy and Bruce Gitelman that evening. It's a concept that YDTP founder and artistic director Andorlie Hillstrom had hoped to see come to fruition last year.

"We gave up on it at the time because of all of the changing protocols," Hillstrom says on the line from her Yellow Door studio in Virgil. "The theme came about because we wanted to do something outdoors, and the Gitemans offered their back yard. We were working on *Hansel & Gretel* last fall, so the 'garten' idea came about because of that."

She held onto the idea and the very first Yellow Door Garten Party takes place this Monday. Hillstrom is hoping it becomes an annual event.

The Gitemans' backyard will be equipped with a full professional lighting and sound rig to accommodate 90 minutes of performances from past and current YDTP participants, as well as a few numbers from the evening's featured performers, Kyle Blair and Kyle Golemba.

Regina native Golemba has performed on stages from Nanaimo, B.C. to Summer-side, P.E.I. That includes seasons at the Stratford, Shaw, and Charlottetown festivals. Local theatregoers may have seen Golemba in *Holiday Inn*, *Rope*, *Cabaret* or *My Fair Lady*, among other plays at Shaw.

He is currently working on an original cabaret for Theatre Collingwood called *Handsome but Charmless*, a name he pulled from one of the worst reviews ever of one of his performances.

The graduate of both Sheridan College and the University of Guelph tells The Local that Hillstrom was a formative influence on him while he was starting out in theatre.

"She was a huge support for me from the time I was 10 until 18 years old," Golemba says. "It was while she was running a company called Do It With Class in Saskatchewan. I did a ton of productions with them over the years and learned a lot from her instruction. And she has remained a huge support for me through college and in my professional career."

Golemba has fond memories of Hillstrom inviting company members back to the youth theatre in Saskatchewan to work with him when he was still a member.

"I like doing that for the next generation the same as it was done for me," he says. "I owe Andorlie a lot, and it's really meaningful to give back. And it's so inspiring to see young people perform. They do it purely for the love and joy they get from it. It's great to see them discovering that love and developing their friendships through theatre."

Golemba will be joined by his husband, Kyle Blair, another Shaw veteran. Blair has had roles in *Holiday Inn*, *Man and Superman*, *Androcles and the Lion*, *Guys and Dolls* and *Sweet Charity* at Shaw. He has also appeared in plays at Stratford, the NAC, Grand Theatre, Musical Stage Company, Manitoba Theatre Centre and Theatre Aquarius.

The pair will be singing selections from an assortment of musicals, including their favourite, the Princes' duet from *Into the Woods*. They'll also share some stories about their lives in theatre.

Current YDTP company members will take the spotlight to perform a number from *Godspell Jr.* The company performed the version of the

popular musical about the life of Jesus back in March in their studio space.

Alexandre Brillonn of Queenston, who appeared in numerous Yellow Door Theatre productions, will also be performing. Recently finished his third year in Sheridan College's Honours Bachelor of Music Theatre program, Brillonn has performed with the Shaw Festival, Theatre Aquarius and Garden City Productions, and sung with the Niagara Symphony. Brillonn has won numerous awards and scholarships and was a two-time Musical Theatre winner at the Ontario Music Festivals Association (OMFA) finals.

Sydney Cornett, a YDTP alumna, rounds out the bill. The 19-year-old St. Catharines native is entering her third year at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., pursuing a Bachelor of Music degree. Prior to university Cornett worked through the Royal Conservatory of Music's curriculum in voice, piano, and theory, and competed in many regional and provincial voice competitions. She participated in Yellow Door productions throughout high school, including *Robin Hood*, *Going Under*, and last year's film *Red Letter Day*.

The ticket price for the event includes all food and beverages. Hillstrom promises to stay true to the Bavarian theme as much as possible. That means pretzels, mini sausages and lots of cheese to go along with the Niagara Oast House Brewers beer. Wine from sponsors Konzelmann Estate Winery and Stratus Vineyards will also be available.

And she's hoping lots of guests will show up in their lederhosen and dirndls.

It's an important fundraiser for the not-for-profit youth organization, recently recognized by the Region with a Niagara Impact Award. Though they



The YDTP cast of *Godspell Jr.* will perform at next Monday's backyard event. (Photos supplied)

have been successful in the past with grant applications, much of the funding for their program comes from sponsors such as the Gitemans.

At Monday's event, Hillstrom will be announcing that the Goettler Family Foundation has signed on to be YDTP's major sponsor for the fall season. She says the support of Lauren and Vaughn Goettler couldn't be timelier, as Yellow Door is holding auditions June 5 for a new play written by Lezlie Wade and Scott Christian called *Nobody's Children*. It will be performed at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre Dec. 7 through 10.

"All proceeds (from the Garten Party) go toward our fall production," Hillstrom says. "These shows are expensive, needless to say. I'm hard at work trying to drum up monetary support. These foundations, the Rotary clubs, and all our sponsors are incredibly important."

Also coming up at YDTP is their summer camp program where participants will be performing *Shrek: The Musical Jr.* There are two sessions available for youth: July 4 through 15 and Aug. 8 through 19.

Information about the Garten Party FUNdraiser, the summer camp and auditions for the fall program can be found at yellowdoortheatre.com.



Kyle Golemba and Kyle Blair, both Shaw Festival veterans, will sing a selection of tunes from musicals at the fundraiser.



Sydney Lewin and Alexandre Brillonn, former Yellow Door students, will perform at Monday's garden event.

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