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Theatre Smash

02/19/2009

Ashlie Corcoran, Artsci'01, and Sarah Baumann, Artsci'02, are the artistic producers of Theatre Smash in Toronto. They met at Queen's when, in third year, Ashlie was the stage manager of the Drama Department's fall production. One of her tasks was to hire an assistant stage manager. Sarah applied for the position, and the two clicked immediately. "Sarah got the job in the first 10 seconds!" says Ashlie. After graduation, both moved to Toronto and had parallel career paths, each working at the Tarragon Theatre at different times. They missed working with each other though, so in 2005 they began discussing the notion of forming their own theatre company.



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"We took a good nine months before starting fundraising and thinking what kind of theatre we wanted," says Sarah. We wanted to produce new Canadian work and also contemporary international work that hadn't been performed in Canada." The name of their new company – Theatre Smash – reflects their goals to provide refreshing, provocative theatre and also to 'smash' stereotypical concepts of live theatre and open it up to new audiences.

Theatre Smash's first play, *Tiny Dynamite*, staged in 2006 was the North American premiere of the play by Welsh playwright Abi Morgan. The company's most recent production was *Norway*. Today by Germany-based playwright Igor Bauersima. This play, which has received international acclaim and has been translated into 25 languages, had its Canadian debut with the Theatre Smash production. Ashlie and Sarah have made many theatre connections in their travels – Sarah in Australia and Ashlie in Europe. They also spend a lot of time reading plays and researching playwrights, in order to expose Toronto theatregoers to new works.

While they have alternated the roles of producer and director with each Theatre Smash production, their roles are driven by the particular play. Ashlie was smitten by *Tiny Dynamite* when she first read the script. Therefore, she took the reins as director, to bring it to life on the Toronto stage. Sarah directed *Norway*. Today, which finished its run at the Tarragon Theatre in September.

It takes about a year to bring each production to the stage, with many months of fundraising and business planning before casting and rehearsals begin. Both Sarah and Ashlie enjoy the challenges inherent in running their own theatre company. And they share credit with Queen's for preparing them to tackle their multiple roles. Sarah says, "A lot of our peers [in the theatre community] have commented on the wide degree of experience that we received at Queen's. Queen's encouraged us to be entrepreneurs. We were well prepared."

One of Theatre Smash's objectives is to be accessible to all audience members curious about independent theatre. Ashlie and Sarah launched a student outreach program for the run of *Tiny Dynamite*, with matinées performed for grade 9 students. The feedback was encouraging. They hope to expand the program, with further matinées and workshops for teens. "We want to engage people who don't think of themselves as theatregoers, getting them intrigued by the story and seeing how they relate to it."

Theatre Smash's next production, *Tijuana Cure*, is another first for Canadian theatre. The play is an adaptation of a prose piece by author Layne Coleman, describing his trip to Tijuana with his ailing wife, to seek treatment for her cancer. Ashlie directs and Sarah produces *Tijuana Cure*, which runs from March 11 to 28.



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