

Immersive play takes audience back to Brantwood P.S.

by John Bkila
Oakville Beaver Staff

Sheridan College theatre students are staging a play that will take their audience out of their seats — literally. Graduating students from Sheridan's Music Theatre Performance and Technical Production programs are in their final preparations for an immersive play that will take place at the now-closed Brantwood Public School at 221 Allan St.

Titled *Brantwood 1920-2020*, the show puts its own spin on history as audience-members (the "alumni") are invited back to the school grounds before it closes down for good — the Oakville school officially closed down in 2010.

But as they return, they'll encounter the ghosts from 100 years of teenage life and hear stories of first loves, growing pains, peer pressures and youthful experimentation.

"We're riffing off of the true historical facts, which is this school has been here since 1920. It was closed down a couple of years ago....," Toronto playwright and show co-creator Mitchell Cushman said in a behind-the-scenes video Sheridan published on YouTube.

"So, the premise behind what we're doing is the audience will be treated as if they are alumni who attended this school, different graduating classes all the way through the school's history."

Cushman co-created the play with fellow Toronto playwright Julie Tepperman — it is produced by Michael Rubinoff, associate dean of Sheridan's Department of Visual and Performing Arts.

"Both Julie and I run site-specific theatre companies in Toronto. We've done a lot of immersive work," Cushman said in the video. "And when Michael Rubinoff got interested in creating a large immersive show for his students, he approached us."

As an immersive play, different scenes will be performed in different parts of the school building.

"So, the audience is free to follow about 40 actors throughout the building, and every actor offers two to three characters," Tepperman said in the video. "Before the audience's eyes, an actor will transition from one character in one decade into another character who lives in another decade."

Cushman noted he and Tepperman are excited by the idea that each audience member will see a different version of



Toronto playwrights Mitchell Cushman and Julie Tepperman have co-created an immersive play titled *Brantwood 1920-2020*. Produced by Michael Rubinoff, associate dean of Sheridan College's Department of Visual and Performing Arts, the show takes place inside the now-closed Brantwood Public School in Oakville and features graduating students from Sheridan's Music Theatre Performance program.

| photo by Ken MacKenzie, courtesy DW Communications

the show, essentially having to attend the production many times to truly see it all.

"But a lot of the material does repeat twice with the show to give people both a chance to see the things they haven't seen before, but also to see an event from a different perspective," explained Cushman.

According to the co-creators, because they've written a one-hour play for every decade, there is approximately 11 hours of material all happening simultaneously.

In the behind-the-scenes video, Tepperman said working with Sheridan's triple-threat performers has made writing for the show a "fantastic" experience.

"Having strong singers, actors and dancers at our disposal has really blown open the possibilities as we've been creating," she said.

"Just imagining something as this large a scale," Cushman noted in the video, "this is not your typical student show, see It's on p.35

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