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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT: MATT WHITE, GREEN LIGHT ARTS

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Created in 2014, [green light arts](#) envisions bringing people together from all communities to celebrate theatre arts and provide creative programming that inspires, nurtures and challenges audiences. We spoke to Artistic Director Matt White to find out more about the new and upcoming theatre company.

Q: What was the motivation behind creating green light arts?

A: Before green light, I was directing, producing, acting, and in the theatre scene for about twelve years. I felt that there was a disconnect between the audience and the performance and that we sometimes forget that we are ultimately creating art for an audience. The audience doesn't have to be the same group of people every time, but we want to take theatre, which is an old and antiquated art form, and find out how to resonate with people now.

Q: What's the story behind the name?

A: I went through a phase when I was younger where I wanted to have a cool sounding name, like Know More Theatre or Rocket Science. Later down the road, I realized all of these names that I came up with had negative connotations and they sounded accidentally exclusive. I didn't like that fact and it was not what I'm interested in. green light came from riffing off all these ideas on what it is that I'm trying to do and eventually the notion of 'go' and that we've been green lighted to make progress to something or somewhere led to the naming of the company.

Q: Now that you've completed your first year, how has the audience response been?

A: It was very well received. Our first show was in April with the clown duo Morro and Jasp performing *Go Bake Yourself* at the Kitchener Market.

I'm really interested in taking work from elsewhere and giving it a life here in Kitchener. Not only does that help the artist, it also introduces the audience to new and different work. It was a challenge as I really want to engage and connect with the people here.

We worked with a couple of different organizations in the community for *The Amish Project* to try and expand the conversation around forgiveness. People kept asking 'are you a Mennonite?' and I said 'no, I'm just a human being interested in asking questions'. I love the idea that we're a professional theatre community that builds community through the work that we do. It's the notion that everyone who comes to see the show will feel that they're a part of the company in some way, even if it's just as a follower. Hopefully, they can ask questions and they'll engage in some way with us later on.

Q: How do you go about making the artistic choices in what to showcase at green light?

A: It's a combination of a bunch of things. My first question is 'why does this play need to be done today?' When I ask myself that, it comes back to the ideas that are at the core of the piece and how they can resonate with an audience. I have to like it, but it also has to fit the audience and the aesthetics that we're going for – which is trying to engage in certain conversations.

Q: Who do you envision as your audience?

A: It's tricky. For the first couple of years, I see our audience as being nomadic. There isn't a set audience – the audience that is going to *The Amish Project* is not going to be the same audience for a piece we did for Night\Shift 2014 called *Andy Warhol Presents: Valerie*, an in-your-face performance piece that challenges the ideas of radical feminism. There was a decided age difference between the two, and the festival itself attracted a younger, more mobile audience. I see an audience not as a big group of people, but on whether they are interested in having this conversation.

There's a piece that I'm trying to bring here at some point which is a one-man hip-hop piece. That's a completely different audience on paper from *The Amish Project*. But over time, I'm hoping that people from *The Amish Project* who would have never gone to the hip-hop show would go trust us as a company and take a chance on a piece that they would not have seen otherwise. They may not

like it, but it's engaged with them in a certain way that makes them curious about the show, so they're going to check it out.

Ultimately, it's a general audience and not just a university crowd. I want people to feel welcome and comfortable so they'll hopefully come see this cool work that we're doing.

Q: What do you envision for green light arts down the road?

A: Education has always been an important part of my life and career in the arts. We have a summer drama program, but I'm also looking to set up six-week workshops in different activities, like a clowning workshop with Morro and Jasp for high school students or interested adults.

I want to see us do more partnering with others in the community and help strengthen the community over here. Eventually, I'd like to see us have a permanent space too, that will help expand the education and outreach.

Q: What's in store for green lights art this year?

A: I can't tell you – it's a surprise. But we're looking to make some formal announcements soon on our [website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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