

ENTERTAINMENT

## Green Light Arts theatre company and Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony aim to bring more traffic to Conrad Centre

Kitchener theatre company and K-W Symphony aim to bring more traffic to downtown jewel

By Valerie Hill Special to the Record, Waterloo Region Record



Matt White and Carin Lowerison of Green Light Arts stand inside the Conrad Centre on King Street in Kitchener. The not-for-profit theatre organization will be running the rental of the space as well as staging its own productions there.  
David Bebee / Kitchener Photo Assignment Fulfi

**KITCHENER** — The Conrad Centre for the Performing Arts remains a hidden jewel in Waterloo Region but a local arts group hopes to change all that.

Carin Lowerison and her husband, Matt White, are the founders of Green Light Arts, a five-year-old theatre company that is continually striving to create something new, something different. Now, they have successfully established a partnership with the Conrad Centre's anchor tenants, the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, becoming the centre's first collaborative partner in terms of how the centre is used.

"This will be our new artistic home, we've been nomadic," said Lowerison. "We'd go to do a show and wonder 'where's it going to be?'"

The new partnership gives Green Light a permanent home and will see it develop an outreach program to encourage more arts organizations to consider using the space on King Street in Kitchener, bringing in much needed income for the symphony.

The couple said they still come across people in the local arts community who either don't know the centre exists or find it cost prohibitive. On the latter point, White and Lowerison will look at innovative ideas to help organizations with smaller budgets rent the space, ensuring the centre is never just sitting dark.

Of course whatever they plan won't interfere with the symphony, which uses the space for small concerts and rehearsals. The theatre company will receive a fee for administering the centre's rental program, enough money to offset the costs of using the space for their own productions.

Andrew Bennett, the symphony's executive director said they are happy with the project as presented by Green Light, though in the beginning it will be simply the theatre company managing the rental of the space before they branch out and start recruiting other arts companies.

"Clearly it's a pilot relationship," said Bennett. "We are very happy to develop something while at the same time respecting each other's integrity.

"What can evolve is very interesting."

The symphony doesn't have the local reach that Green Light has, said Bennett. Then, with a laugh, he said that doesn't mean the symphony sits in some "splendid turret" separate from other arts organizations, it's simply that there is not a lot of crossover.

The Conrad Centre evolved out of the King Street Theatre a decade ago, where Theatre & Co. operated. When that company folded the Manfred and Penny Conrad Family Foundation purchased the building and the symphony took up residence.

Over the years, various organizations have used the space, such as IMPACT multicultural theatre festival and Singer's Theatre.

For Green Light to have its own theatre space, as well as offices shared with the symphony, is a new way of doing business for the organization. The couple knows there will be a learning curve as they are creating something new.

"We are moving into someone else's home, how can we share that home?" pondered White.

Looking at the larger picture, they will be eager to speak to arts groups of all stripes to get a sense of what people need.

"It's an experiment, it's a pilot, but there is not a lot of risk or gamble," said Lowerison. "There are great possibilities here."

Green Light will produce its next show at the Conrad Centre. "A Very Leila Christmas," Dec. 11 to 15, is about an Iranian immigrant desperately trying to fit into Canadian culture. Just as Leila figures she is knowledgeable enough to host a Christmas party, she instead mucks everything up. Toronto-based comedian Izad Etmadi plays Leila.

Green Light Arts has consistently provided unexpected theatre and now, with this new partnership, other arts groups might have a better chance of thriving, too.

"This is very much quid pro quo," a symbiotic relationship with far reaching possibilities, Bennett said.

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