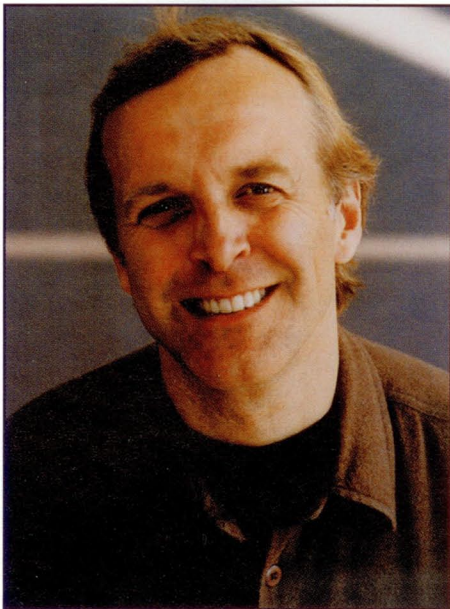


BY DAVID S. CRAIG



An Open Letter to Experienced Stage Performers: Every year, Roseneath Theatre sends out casting breakdowns to talent agents asking for submissions from experienced Equity actors. We make this stipulation because we think theatre for young audiences (TYA) is not a place for beginners. If we are to introduce young people to the art form we love, then it follows their first experience should be in the hands of experts. Why then do experienced theatre actors, artists who would self-identify as having a calling to the stage, turn up their nose, shudder and recoil at the idea of doing a modern school tour?

People say a lot of silly things about TYA. "Children are the audiences of the future!" Duh. Where else do audiences come from? "Children are the most demanding audience." No. Children can be distracted by facile rubbish just as easily as adults. Unfortunately, the silliness extends to the excuses actors give for not doing a school tour.

"I can't perform that early."

The same people who complain about early mornings leap at the opportunity to attend a 6 a.m. shoot for chicken wings. They say the money's better and if they had that kind of work even three months a year I would agree, but they don't. Getting up with a purpose, knowing that an audience is waiting – an audience eager to hear the story you are going to tell is a sure tonic for the cynicism I frequently see in day players over 30.

"The money's terrible."

Compared to what? This past season, Roseneath Theatre paid \$700/week plus \$110/day in per diem plus overtime. Overtime can amount to an extra week's pay. (It's most often incurred sitting in a van, looking at the scenery while listening to your iPod.) We're not proud of these numbers. We'd like to be paying \$1,000/week but by theatre standards it's far from terrible.

"The scripts are bad."

No they're not. Some of the best theatre writing in Canada is for young people. Correction. Some of the best theatre writing in the world is for young people. You can tell it's good because it works for everyone.

"I have to carry in the set."

What is it about carrying in a set that is worse than spending 30 minutes on a treadmill? Which activity has more value? Why is one demeaning? None of my actors return from tours talking about the get in. They talk about the audiences, the impact of the work, the rewards, the pride, the feeling of making a contribution and using theatre to make a difference. (They also show me pictures of the Grand Canyon, The Grand Ole Opry and Graceland.)

Doing one school tour every three or four years should be an accepted part of a successful actor's life. At this point, I would accept one school tour in a career, but our society *and our profession* puts less value on the young than the mature. It's a ridiculous, short-sighted prejudice that I urge you to fight. Make performing for young people a conscious part of your professional life.

David S. Craig is an award-winning playwright and the Artistic Director of Roseneath Theatre.

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