

## 25 years under the stars!

Artistic Director

### Laurie Steven

25 years! It seems like yesterday I was new to Ottawa, trying to find my place in this city and dreaming about starting my own physical theatre company. Little did I know the incredible journey this one intriguing idea would lead me on ...

It started with a vision: I imagined a company rooted in Commedia dell'Arte - an art form I had fallen in love with during my training. I knew this theatre of verbal play and comic inventiveness, would delight artists and the public alike. But there were very few spaces available for theatre in Ottawa at the time, so I had to get creative. I began to envision a visual theatrical style - the provocative masks, imaginative costumes and rich sense of pageantry that filled my imagination greeting audiences in an outdoor space. As the sun set on a summer night and the stars came out, our company would transport spectators to another world through fantastic storytelling.

I was determined to make my dream a reality. I knocked on every door across the city and talked with anyone who would listen. Finally, the dynamic style and memorable characters I was so passionate about bringing to the stage began to excite other people too and Odyssey Theatre was born. In 1986, we launched the first season of Theatre under the Stars in Strathcona Park, winning the support of a small but loyal audience that has grown ever since (and keeps on growing!).

Our first plays were Commedia dell'Arte classics. Then, knowing patrons had an appetite for Commedia, I was inspired to play with the form to give them something new. We had so much fun

putting our contemporary spin on classical works, or bringing the zany, physical energy of Commedia to non-Commedia plays. And even in these early years, I was immensely proud that Odyssey could be a place for Canadian artists to work on original plays.

As the company evolved, artists from around the world joined us to collaborate on new ideas and break new ground. Our style of theatre expanded to embrace other forms of physical theatre, including clown, puppetry and dance. Odyssey has become an important centre in Canada for work in our field. My fascination with myth and folktale drew me to explore how masked theatre could tell these stories in new ways, pushing the company into exciting fusions and experimentation. Throughout our journey, audiences have shared in the laughter and the excitement with us, igniting our

creative spark anew each year.

Looking back 25 years later, I am tremendously proud of how far we have come. We have grown new programs to increase new play development and artistic exploration, launched our first new play festival and first indoor production, and shared mask work with broader audiences through *Lazzi Lazzi*. Odyssey has a great reputation as an award-winning company that has received extensive critical acclaim and enthusiastic audience support. It hasn't always been a walk in the park, as they say. But each year we have tried new things and pushed the boundaries of our art form, offering our audiences the most exciting theatre we could imagine.

As we prepare for our 25th season, I would like to thank all the audiences, donors, sponsors, volunteers, artists and staff that have supported this company for over two decades. This

has been an incredible journey for me and I continue to be inspired for what comes ahead.



**A Guy Named Joe**

"a masterpiece of mask work... like a perfect acrobatic team... everything works together beautifully." Alvin Ruprecht, CBC Radio

Nicholas Di Gaetano,  
Mark Huisman, Scott  
Florence, Alex Guard,  
Cory Doran  
2009

### Laurie Steven Finalist for Victor Tolgesy Arts Award

Odyssey is proud to announce that the Council for the Arts in Ottawa and the City of Ottawa have short-listed Artistic Director and founder, Laurie Steven, as one of three finalists for the prestigious Victor Tolgesy Arts Award.

This award recognizes an accomplished individual who has made a significant contribution to Ottawa's cultural life. The winner will be announced on April 28.

# Our Odyssey

Youth

## Programs

For over 10 years, we have offered innovative youth programming, providing opportunities for creative thinking, skill-building and self-discovery to young people. In turn, Odyssey has benefited from the energy, fresh ideas, and new perspectives they have brought to our work. We are proud to share with you impressions from a young apprentice this past summer:

Odyssey's Youth Apprenticeship Program gave me a summer I will never forget. I made close friends, learned many new and useful skills, developed my range as an actor, and gained a wonderful understanding of how a professional theatre company works.

I have always loved theatre and especially performing, but I had only ever heard how hard it is to make a living as an actor, and I had never really thought about the rewards that could come from performing that were not monetary. While working with Odyssey, I saw administrators, technicians, actors, and every single person involved in the production doing the kind of work they loved, because they loved it. This has encouraged me to audition for theatre schools and programs as I investigate post-secondary education options this year.

The trust and responsibility that were placed on us apprentices gave us an opportunity to grow and learn in a way we never would have been able to otherwise. I was paid in wisdom this summer, and that is a paycheque that will last me a lifetime.

**Sophie Crump - Youth Apprentice**

### The Raven

"lively and enjoyable... [the] direction is simple and subtle, and the cast is terrific." Tom McSorley, CBC Radio



Alix Sideris, Andrew Morphey and Paul Griffin, 2000

### The Illusion

"something approaching a masterpiece" Tom McSorley, CBC Radio



Jeffrey Aarles, Nicky Brodie and Anand Rajaram, 2003

I remember watching my very first Odyssey production, in 1996, *Ondine*, and thinking, "I have to work for this Company" ... the outdoors,

the lights, the raw, explosive talent on stage sharing a tale with us - a tale of yearning, of desire... and victory! Not before long, I did indeed work on that magical stage, playing alongside many talented physical actors - climbing walls, leaping onto each other's backs, dancing, spinning, and telling many brilliant tales. In mask. Through body. In the heat. And under those wonderful stars. My work with Odyssey has shaped the physical actor I am today and working with those incredible masks has provided me with a lifetime of curiosity and lust for mask work. This company is in my heart. Always will be.

Alix Sideris

Actor

Playwright

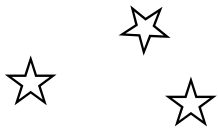
Janet Irwin

Laurie and I shared a coffee in the mid 1980s when she was contemplating starting Odyssey. What Laurie was suggesting - an annual summer season of works from the commedia dell'arte repertoire - seemed to me quite risky.

But her passion and intelligent commitment argued powerfully for her plans. I was convinced during that conversation that something important was about to happen. Twenty-five years of enthusiastic audiences and support from all levels of government have proved her right. As we look at the Ottawa cultural scene today, it's hard to imagine what it might have been like had Laurie not persevered.

Because of Laurie, Odyssey Theatre has grown to be a respected locus for traditional commedia and for experiments in the genre. Over the past decade, she has encouraged playwrights to adapt older stories and write new ones that reflect life in the 21st century.

Over the past 25 years, Laurie has spearheaded many initiatives in production, training and development, and was the visionary who saw the potential of Strathcona Park as a performance site. Ottawa's artistic life owes a lot of its vibrancy and diversity of style to Laurie and her evolving dream.



# 25 Facts about Odyssey Theatre



- 1. **The only company in Ottawa specializing in mask work for adult audiences.**
- 2. Has lead the development of Strathcona Park as a performing arts venue.
- 3. **Was the 1st theatre company to operate out of Arts Court.**
- 4. Has commissioned 207 masks since 1986.
- 5. **230 actors have performed on its mainstage.**
- 6. Has taken 19 new plays and original translations/adaptations into full production.
- 7. **Has given 28 plays new play workshops.**
- 8. Has supported 19 Ottawa writers/creators through the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) Creators' Reserve.
- 9. **Produced its 1st new play festival in 2008.**
- 10. Its audiences have grown 400% since inception.
- 11. **Over 30 renowned guest artists from across the world, including France, Italy, Sri Lanka, China, and the U.S, have lead workshops with the company.**
- 12. Is the only company in Canada to have given workshops in Sri Lankan Kolam and Indonesian Wayang Wong.
- 13. **Is the only theatre company in Ottawa to offer an annual youth apprenticeship program.**
- 14. Is the resident theatre company at Canterbury High School for the Arts.
- 15. **Is an OAC-designated Key Organization, having a "significant impact on: the art form, the artists, their audiences and their community."**
- 16. Its productions of *The Wedding* and *Turandot* were international firsts in their fusion of Commedia and Asian

- theatre forms.
- 17. **Is pursuing its 1st international collaboration with Sri Lankan artists.**
- 18. Produced its 1st indoor production in 2009.
- 19. **Continued performing through the power blackout of August 2003, only losing one show.**
- 20. Has 9 hard-working board members.

- 21. **Over 35,000 people experienced its masked characters through Lazzi Lazzi last year.**
- 22. Each year 80+ volunteers contribute 14,000 hours to Odyssey.
- 23. **Launched its new website in 2010, [www.odysseytheatre.ca](http://www.odysseytheatre.ca)**
- 24. Has over 430 Facebook friends and 250 Twitter followers.
- 25. **Its mascot is a groundhog that lives under its stage in Strathcona Park.**

Odyssey creates fabulous theatre. I come for the freshness and energy of the performances.

On a summer night in Ottawa, who can beat a nice performance in the open air.

## What our donors are saying:

Our kids got involved as Youth Apprentices years ago. We love the physical theatre, the dynamic of characters being masked and unmasked. The plays are about life and people - we all have masks.

We love Commedia dell'arte and the imaginative, fantasy worlds Odyssey creates. It's great theatre to bring our friends to.



**Tony Century 21  
McDermott**

Corporate Profile

Tony was born and raised in Ottawa. He started his real estate career in 2001. Married with 3 children, the youngest being a year old at the time, things were quite hectic in the McDermott household.

Over the years, Tony's business has grown from referrals provided by satisfied clients. Tony takes pride in a job well done and believes firmly that buying or selling real estate is about much more than just money and a handshake.

He sees sponsoring Odyssey Theatre as a beautiful way to give back to the Ottawa community. Tony says "knowing I helped play a small part in the success of Odyssey Theatre makes me beam."

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GOLD MASK



## Gold Mask

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Erin McCarthy & Paul Forster

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## Silver Mask

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