

For Immediate Release

YOUNG PEOPLE'S THEATRE ANNOUNCES HERBIE BARNES AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Toronto, ON, March 2, 2021 — Jenine Krause and David Scandiffio, Co-Chairs of the [Young People's Theatre \(YPT\)](#) Board of Directors, today announced the appointment of Herbie Barnes as the next Artistic Director of YPT. Mr. Barnes is an accomplished playwright, performer, director and arts educator whose 30-year-career spans stages across North America. He was among the generation of young Indigenous artists in the 1990s breaking down barriers to forge professional careers in Canadian theatre. Mr. Barnes will officially begin his tenure at YPT in the fall of 2021.

“Over the past year, our Search Committee interviewed candidates from across Canada for one of this country’s most unique artistic leadership roles,” said Ms. Krause and Mr. Scandiffio. “We are thrilled that Herbie, one of the theatre community’s most eclectic and beloved artists, will carry YPT forward into a very bright future. He is a visionary leader, with the heart of an 8-year-old — a perfect fit for the country’s largest and oldest theatre for young people.”

Looking ahead to the world of theatre post-pandemic, Mr. Barnes believes it will be Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) at the forefront of change. “The purest form of theatre is theatre for young people. TYA has led the charge in BIPOC casting and hiring. It has led the charge in LGBTQ2S and BIPOC education and understanding. And it is often the first to help dramatize and contextualize events in a rapidly changing and complex world,” he said.

An Anishinaabe theatre artist from Aundeck Omni Kaning First Nation on Manitoulin Island, Mr. Barnes was raised in Toronto. His theatre career began in 1989 with Debajehmujig Theatre Group, touring Ontario with the first run of Drew Hayden Taylor's *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock*. Since then he has collaborated with some of North America’s largest theatre companies and was nominated for a John Hirsch Director’s Award. His new play, *Bent Boy*, was workshopped at YPT and shortlisted for the Sharon Enkin Plays for Young People Award in 2020.

Mr. Barnes has a long and storied association with YPT, where as a young audience member, he had his first theatre experience. “My first taste of what would be a life-long passion for theatre started in the old streetcar barn on Front Street,” said Mr. Barnes of YPT’s 123-year-old heritage theatre. Years later, he began his professional association with YPT when he appeared in *The Secret of Shhh* in 1993. He has been making an impact at YPT ever since, both on stage and in classrooms as a playwright, performer, director and artist educator.

As Artistic Director, Mr. Barnes aims to build on the successes of the past and to move the theatre into a new era; one of continued inclusion and innovation. “Allen MacInnis’s legacy as YPT’s Artistic Director has made it possible to give space to someone such as me. Not only furthering inclusion, but true representation — to have a strong voice in the circle.”

“The Search Committee was very excited by Herbie’s intercultural, inter-generational programming ideas, both in show selection and educational activities. I personally am really looking forward to partnering with him for the next phase of our company’s development. I know Herbie’s positive leadership style will inspire YPT’s staff and Board well into the future,” said Executive Director Nancy Webster.

Mr. Barnes brings extensive experience to his new position with North America’s oldest professional producer and presenter of TYA. “I have always found my place in children’s theatre,” he said, having longstanding relationships with YPT and Manitoba Theatre for Young People (MTYP).

Mr. Barnes is associated with some of North America’s most prestigious stages – whether appearing in productions

such as *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (Mirvish - Royal Alexandra Theatre) or collaborating with the Stratford Festival on development workshops. His accomplishments include:

- Directing: *Munschtime!* (YPT); *Tales of an Urban Indian* (Public Theater, New York City/Autry Theatre, LA); *Music Man* (Talk Is Free Theatre); *Oliver!* (Bluff City Theatre); *Inheritance* (Alley and Touchstone Theatre); *The Rememberer* (MTYP); *Someday* and *Dinky* (Native Earth Performing Arts). Film/TV directing credits include *RepREZentin' in Fort Chip* and *The Rez*.
- Countless stage roles: Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* (YPT, Carousel Players, MTYP); Wickersham Brother in *Seussical The Musical* (MTYP); Norval Morriseau in *Copper Thunderbird* (National Arts Centre).
- Film/TV credits: *The Rez*, *Murdoch Mysteries*, *Tipi Tales*, *Buffalo Tracks*, *Guilt Free Zone* and *Dance Me Outside*.
- Script development and dramaturgy with YPT, Native Earth Performing Arts, Debajehmujig Theatre Group and MTYP. His play *Russell's World*, which he wrote and performed in, was part of YPT's 40th Anniversary Season. It was also honoured to be the first world premiere ever selected by the Magnetic North Theatre Festival.
- Facilitating programs as an artist educator for elementary to university-aged students at various schools and companies, including YPT, Centennial College, Centre for Indigenous Theatre, Humber College, The Second City and MTYP. A technique he developed called "Dropping the Mask" has been used at many treatment centres in North America in work with Survivors of abuse.

Before Mr. Barnes begins his role at YPT this fall, he looks forward to finalizing plans for the 2021.22 season with outgoing Artistic Director Allen MacInnis, who announced his retirement in March 2020 after 19 seasons.

The Search Committee included members of YPT's Board, as well as members of the artistic community:

Chris Pitts, Chair of Committee (Past Chair, YPT Board of Directors)
Carol Chiu, Treasurer, YPT Board of Directors
Anshu Grover, YPT Board of Directors
Sheila Brown, YPT Board Alumni
Nancy Webster, YPT Executive Director
Jamie Robinson, Actor, Director and Associate Professor, York University
Leslie McCue, Artist and Educator
Luke Reece, Associate Artistic Director, Soulpepper Theatre
Micheline Chevrier, Artistic Director, Imago Theatre

About Young People's Theatre

Young People's Theatre (YPT) is North America's oldest – and Canada's largest – professional producer and presenter of theatre for young audiences. Over the past 55 years, YPT has staged many of the most important plays that form the canon of work for youth in our country. YPT continues to develop new work and create partnerships with theatre companies across the country and around the world. The enriched learning experiences of YPT's Education & Participation Department provide young people with opportunities to develop their whole being. Through Drama School programs, workshops in community shelters and agencies, educational initiatives in Toronto classrooms, and training and apprenticeship opportunities, we place learning at the centre of everything we do. With this season's new online drama-based programming, YPT continues to support the needs of educators, students and families by creating innovative opportunities for online learning. Visit youngpeoplestheatre.org to learn more.

-30-

Media Contact:

Clare Hill, Communications Officer, Young People's Theatre
647.267.6550 | chill@youngpeoplestheatre.org
Photos: login **yptmedia** | password **yptphotos**