

For Immediate Release

## HISTORIC NEW BEGINNINGS

### New Artistic Director Herbie Barnes and Executive Director Nancy Webster announce fall online programs and extensive renovations at Young People's Theatre

**Toronto, October 20, 2021** – This fall, [Young People's Theatre \(YPT\)](#) launches the next phase in the theatre's 56-year history, with new Artistic Director [Herbie Barnes](#) and the kick-off of the largest expansion project in the company's history. Mr. Barnes is an Anishinaabe theatre artist who brings decades of experience with theatre for young audiences to his new role leading Canada's largest and oldest theatre for young people. As YPT welcomes Mr. Barnes this October, it also begins the first phase of its [Room for Imagination](#) expansion project.

*"To become AD in this time – not only as we move through the pandemic, but also through a time of great evolution with BIPOC, #MeToo and other powerful societal change – is extremely exciting. We are finally hearing voices from communities who have been silenced. As Artistic Director, I cannot sit back in a 'business as usual' position or relax with the notion that 'this is how it's always been done'. With change comes discomfort, and for the next few years, there must be discomfort – in the world, in the theatre, and for me. This is how we begin."*

Mr. Barnes is excited to be starting full time at YPT, having worked with former Artistic Director Allen MacInnis over the past six months to craft a fall season of innovative online programming for the virtual world.

#### **FALL 2021 PROGRAMS**

YPT's 2021.22 season is proudly supported by BMO as Season Presenting Sponsor. Due to COVID-19 and uncertainty surrounding school excursions, YPT continues to present from its virtual stage this fall. YPT must be adaptable in this ever-changing world; therefore winter and spring programming will be announced in the coming months. The season kicks off with playwright Jordan Tannahill's powerful Dora Award-winning play about a viral video gone wrong, *rihannaboi95*. Then, the sensational *SensoryBox TYA* makes its debut just in time for the holidays. Fall online drama classes are officially underway (with in-person options for ages 12 and up), including brand new academic classes focused on building confidence in math and literacy. Schools, educators and artists can take part in YPT's customizable online workshops, and a brand new resource for employers, "Corporate Play Days", launches this fall.

#### **ROOM FOR IMAGINATION**

The [Room for Imagination expansion project](#), announced last spring, will create Canada's largest state-of-the-art theatre complex for young people. Currently underway, the interior renovations of YPT's 123-year-old theatre building will transform YPT's public and artistic spaces, including:

- increased accessibility features,
- lobby areas doubled in size,
- redesigned box office and concessions areas,
- more spacious props, set-building/scenic painting workshops, and
- upgraded theatrical equipment that will vastly reduce YPT's environmental footprint.

Says Executive Director **Nancy Webster**, "We have been bursting at the seams for many years, and this \$13.5 million project will finally allow us to serve our audience and our artists as they deserve. This transformation has been more than 10 years in the making and we are beyond thrilled to see and hear the beginnings of construction in our beloved historic building."

The second phase of the expansion will see new educational spaces and production facilities created across the road at 161 Frederick Street – YPT's newly purchased building. An additional 12,000 square feet will feature purpose-built spaces for YPT's ever-expanding education initiatives, community programs and Drama School, as well as a new costume shop, a full-size rehearsal hall, and administrative offices. YPT looks forward to welcoming its audiences back into beautiful new spaces in 2022.

### **ON THE VIRTUAL STAGE**

***rihannaboi95***

**(Online Nov. 22 – Dec. 18)**

**ON SALE NOW!**

Written by **Jordan Tannahill**

Directed by **Tawiah M'Carthy**

Featuring **Davinder Malhi**

**Recommended for Ages 13-18 | Grades 8-12**

Sunny, aka rihannaboi95 on YouTube, made some videos and shared them online. And while, yeah, they're getting lots of hits, not everyone likes them. Now, Sunny's whole world is threatening to implode. Hidden in the bedroom of Keira – a drugstore makeup counter clerk – Sunny records a video for their loyal viewers and invokes the spirit of Rihanna to help with the situation. 2013 Dora Award for 'Best New Play', Theatre for Young Audiences Division. ***rihannaboi95*** Lighting Designer Michelle Ramsay is nominated for the 2021 Siminovitch Prize. A Video Described version is also available.

Set & Costume Designer: **Camellia Koo**; Lighting Designer: **Michelle Ramsay**; Artistic Advisor: **Bilal Baig**; Stage Manager: **Bradley Dunn**.

***rihannaboi95*** was first produced in Canada by Suburban Beast (Toronto, ON) from April 23 to 28, 2013. The play was performed nightly in a bedroom and live-streamed over the Internet for audiences to watch from their computers.

***SensoryBox TYA***

**(Streamed Live Nov. 29 – Dec. 30)**

**ON SALE OCTOBER 26!**

Co-written by **Eric Rose** and **Christopher Duthie**

Directed by **Eric Rose**

Designer: **Emily Promise Allison**

Developed in association with **Ghost River Theatre**  
**Recommended for Ages 6-12 | Grades 1-6**

**SensoryBox TYA** is an exciting dive into the connection between our senses and the imagination. The adventure begins with delivery of a wrapped box to audience members. Participants will then tune into a livestream performance and, blindfolded, they'll be guided along as they uncover the mysterious contents of the box from the comfort of their own home or classroom... all through the tips of their fingers. An ASL version of **SensoryBox TYA** will also be available.

## **CLASSES & WORKSHOPS**

### **Fall Drama School**

YPT understands that remote schooling over the last year has been a challenge – for students, parents and teachers alike. This fall, the Drama School launches two new online after-school classes that bring fun to math and literacy. Both classes have been purposefully designed to support the learning goals of the Ontario Schools Curriculum:

- **Count Me In!**: Helps students in Grades 1 & 2 build confidence in their math skills through drama games.
- **Do I Have a Story for You!**: A unique opportunity for students in Grades 3 & 4 to strengthen their literacy skills through online fun.

As part of its fall programming, the Drama School is offering a wide selection of online classes for JK-Gr. 12, plus in-person options for youth aged 12 and up at RBC WaterPark Place in downtown Toronto.

This November, parents and their little ones can enjoy **Pre-School Online Drama Time** (new this year!) as well as the return of YPT's popular **Toddler Online Drama Time**.

### **INdepth & Online: YPT Workshops and Artists Online**

YPT's **INdepth & ONLINE** program for schools continues to be available in an online format. The program includes customized online workshops and artist residencies, delivering interactive learning experiences for all grades. In-person workshops are available on a case-by-case basis.

### **Indigenous Artists in Schools**

For classes interested in learning about Indigenous content and curriculum in a meaningful way from Indigenous artist educators. Topics include Indigenous arts and history, Residential Schools, Indigenous-Canadian relations, Land Acknowledgments, storytelling, dance and more.

### **Myself with Purpose**

A fun and interactive video series designed to introduce drama and play to children in Pre-Kindergarten - Gr. 2.

### **Corporate Play Days**

Brand new, Corporate Play Days has been designed to support employers looking for a creative approach to engage staff during these remote times. YPT's experienced artist educators will provide out-of-the-box strategies to fight Zoom fatigue, improve communication skills, inspire creative thinking and problem-solving, and best of all – play together!

### **Professional Development for Teachers**

From boosting confidence in teaching theatre skills to learning how to use drama as a means for self-expression, YPT's artist educators help teachers incorporate drama into their lesson plans for both in-person or online classroom settings.

For more information about all of YPT's fall programming, visit [youngpeoplestheatre.org](http://youngpeoplestheatre.org).

### **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 56 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 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](http://youngpeoplestheatre.org) to learn more.

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