

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE PLAYERS...

Co-director **Aaron Willis** sat down with four of our “veteran participants”, **Holly Kirkconnell**, **Peter Sevitt**, **Jeanette Cairns** and **Doug Croker**, to ask them about their experiences being a Passionate Player, and what it’s been like working on an original piece this time around:

AARON: Had you ever acted prior to joining The Passionate Players?

HOLLY: I’ve been in all five PP productions, but before then it had been 40 years since I’d been on a stage!

DOUG: Yes, with Ryerson's Act II Studio - where we met!

PETER: Never! I’m an accountant (by day!) and I’d never acted in my life before meeting you and Julie back in 2005 when I performed in a scene-study you co-directed called “Shtick!”. I never even did plays at school...though I’d always thought of myself as an outgoing guy!

JEANETTE: I’ve been in all 5 productions! Before that, theatre wasn’t in my life. After my husband died, I got involved in community theatre backstage, and then I decided I wanted to be onstage, but I couldn’t sing or dance so I focused on learning how to act. And that’s when I went to Act II Studio where I met you, Julie & Mitchell who were some of my teachers.

AARON: As some of the longest-serving members of the company, can you share some of the ways that you’ve grown since you first joined?

JEANETTE: It’s been incredible...initially we had months to rehearse, and now we’re down to this two-week marathon (like in the professional theatre!) so there’s so much accelerated learning and also from watching the whole team...everyone is so giving of their time and energy, you can’t help but learn.

PETER: It really is an ongoing learning experience. I’ve learned to try and listen more...not just on the stage, but off stage as well. I suppose the difficulty for me has been because I don’t do any acting in between productions like many of the others do, in some

ways it's like starting over each time...but then, each time I do it I learn so much from all the participants.

DOUG: I have become much more relaxed on stage and learned to enjoy the time rehearsing and performing. Not that I still don't get nervous!!!

HOLLY: Every single time I do it I learn a lot about myself and acting. I certainly feel I can learn my lines better now, and I feel much more at ease on stage than I did at the beginning. I don't get nervous anymore. During the last production, *ReCast*, I thought: "I'm worried that I'm not nervous!" because there's no adrenaline...but actually it's very nice to not be nervous...you can breathe! And that self-consciousness melts away.

AARON: Usually our productions are adaptations of existing plays with large casts. What has it been like for you to work on a new piece with the playwright present in the room? Add to that the fact that it's verbatim text pulled from Robert's interviews – how does it feel knowing your character is based on a real person, or a composite of several people?

DOUG: With the playwright in the room, you tend to be less critical about the play. On the plus side, you can immediately discuss your interpretation and learn about some of the background. With *A Community Target*, we are all impressed with Robert and the work he did in developing this piece.

HOLLY: Well, there are certainly more puzzle pieces. The subject matter of workers' voices being heard really interests me. I just think it's really cool to be part of a "world premiere" of a new Canadian play! And also to have had the chance to workshop sections of it last spring and give Robert our feedback...it's been neat seeing how it's evolved.

JEANETTE: Scary! But fun and exciting, the fact that it's brand new, and also verbatim. It's not like learning a typical piece. I really like that all the characters are based on real people. As we go through the stories, I can really feel the emotional impact of that and how Robert (the playwright) has been affected by each of their stories.

PETER: Working on a new script provides a greater, different kind of challenge. With an existing play, something that's been performed time and time again, I've most probably seen or read it, and so I already have some thoughts about my character. But here, I'm

having to delve much more deeply into the real person I'm playing...it makes me want to be more honest.

AARON: For the most part, we've presented our past productions at theatres (Factory and Coal Mine) and also at a church. The Regent Cinema is the most "immersive" venue yet, very much in keeping with our two companies' interests. What do you think it'll be like performing in such close proximity to the audience, and leading small groups of people around the building?

JEANETTE: It'll be different! Leading people around might feel like being a tour guide! Having people so close to me might throw me off a bit...or maybe not...I don't know! I'm used to working without that fourth wall because I emcee our Act II Studio Matinees, so that experience will help.

DOUG: I think it'll be a bit scary and challenging, since it's not anything I've done before...but we've been given some pretty good direction! Having the audience right beside me will mean we'll have to keep composed and remember our lines! We'll need to keep our focus and not be distracted by the audience - maybe that person with the phone isn't bored, but is on-call for emergencies!

HOLLY: I think it's gonna be fun...and the small space means we don't have to belt it out like on a larger stage, it's more intimate. I think it'll help me feel more like I have a relationship with the audience. And of course some people might know us, so that'll be interesting!

PETER: I just love the intimacy - it's like being in your own living room! And I've never been in a play before where I've had to repeat the same scene four times in a row...I've got to keep my energy up and keep invigorated. Of course, that provides us with an added opportunity to grow each time we do it.

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AARON: Finally, what advice would you give to someone wanting to join The Passionate Players?!

PETER: The response I usually get from people when I tell them what I'm doing, even my wife Lesley, she says: "I'd never remember the lines!" Well, I've realized that that's just the tip of the iceberg...really there's so much more underneath it all to learn. I'd encourage people to come out especially for the camaraderie of it all.

DOUG: You will learn so much from the directors and production people about putting together an entertaining presentation. You see that the ability to work together is paramount - the directors do this with their sensitivity to the players and by keeping us focused. Like any play, you need to be patient, supportive of your fellow actors, attentive to the directors, and happy to be there.

HOLLY: Take the leap! For me, being a Passionate Player is probably the most rich experience of all the experiences I've had acting since I started up again. I love being directed by a team of supportive professionals...you're able to draw things out of us that we might not even know is inside of us.

JEANETTE: Do it! Absolutely do it! It's the most exciting and rewarding experience I've ever had.