

Life in progress: Us & Everything We Own premieres at PAL Studio Theatre

Jeremy Shepherd / North Shore News

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Adam Lolacher (Charlie) and Julie McIsaac (Rachel) are featured in Twenty Something Theatre's production of *Us & Everything We Own* opening tonight at the PAL Studio Theatre. Use Layar app to view video.

Photo PHOTO DAVID COOPER

Us & Everything We Own by Sean Minogue. PAL Studio Theatre, 581 Cardero St., Coal Harbour, Vancouver, April 5 - 13, Tuesday to Sunday at 8 p.m. For more information visit twentysomethingtheatre.com.

SHE raised the call for submissions, and for one Vancouver writer that missive may as well have arced across the night sky like a summons to a superhero.

"It's kind of like the bat signal for every young writer. As soon as you see a call for submissions you send something that's remotely close," says Sault Ste. Marie playwright Sean Minogue.

That call led to the production of Minogue's first play, *Prodigals*, as well as a fruitful partnership with Twenty Something Theatre impresario Sabrina Evertt.

The duo are collaborating on Minogue's newest one-act play *Us & Everything We Own*, with Evertt taking on directing duties.

Before he ever put pen to paper to explore the angst and aimlessness of young men and women, Minogue hefted a guitar for a number of Sault Ste. Marie punk bands.

While theatre seems far removed from the Sudbury bars and basements where Minogue played, he still seems to have some of the spit and stance synonymous with punk.

"You're just so hungry to get your stuff out there," he says of his early writing days. "I'm still of that same mindset."

Us & Everything We Own revolves around Charlie, an ambitious, unskilled young man who may have been a better fit in a previous generation.

"He's kind of my voice of frustration about the world around me," Minogue explains. "He's trying to start a small business, yet he didn't go to university, he has no specific entrepreneurial training. He's trying to do this the old-school way of just knowing the right people and having enough gumption to do it - I guess my thesis in this play is: that's not enough anymore."

For many young people shouldering big student loans in a bleak job market, home ownership resembles a relic from a bygone era, as out of date as duck and cover bomb drills or the Charleston.

The struggles of the millennial generation grant the play a prominence while also putting Minogue in the uneasy position of spokesman.

While the financial struggles of the Y2K kids stoke a fire in his belly, he's quick to preface any opinions with: "I'm no expert, but"

"The more I talk about these serious issues around millennials and all that kind of stuff, the more I'm nervous about trying to frame myself as some kind of authority," he says. "The play's not about pointing the finger at boomers or saying the world's all against me - Charlie is definitely a flawed character who limits himself."

Minogue entered the awkward twilight between high school and the rest of his life without a clear plan for his future.

"I knew I was going to go to university I just didn't know where I was going to go with it. I just remember the only thing I was good at in high school was talking about and analyzing books," he recalls. "That was the only thing that turned my brain on. It seemed like everything else was just noise to me."

Largely inspired by works like *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* by Mordecai Richler, Minogue began his transformation into a self-described "literature geek."

"He was an average guy who just succeeded by dint of hard work," Minogue says of Richler.

He graduated from Vancouver Film School but quickly abandoned the screen for the stage.

"Being a playwright has allowed me to grow creatively and take ownership over what I want to say and also discover what I want to say," he explains.

The immediacy and lower financial stakes of theatre allow for greater freedom and broader range of expression.

"I know a lot of screenwriters that are returning to theatre because it's so hard to get a film made in this country."

Now living in Toronto, Ont., Minogue discovered the characters and relationships of Us & Everything We Own through "panic and anxiety" fuelled writing sessions, which tended to fall between visits to websites.

"I don't fight the idea of being distracted by the Internet," he says. "I think I just accept the fact that there is a greater world out there and the Internet wants to be a part of my life."

While Evertt conducted auditions in Vancouver, Minogue watched auditions through Skype.

Having the writer in such close proximity is a great benefit, according to Evertt.

"I can email him and call him and ask him a question whereas I can't ask Shakespeare a question, or I can't ask Neil LaBute a question," she says. "When you have the playwright there with you in the room you can answer so many questions immediately as opposed to having lots of conversations about what we think it means. We can just be like, 'So Sean, what does this mean?'"

The play eventually took shape with Argyle secondary graduate Alia Stephen serving as the show's lighting designer.

For Evertt, the play is an examination of the traditional landmarks associated with adulthood and their relevance today.

"I think he's really tapped into something key among the millennial generation," she says. "I think it's re-defining what makes our generation successful or not."

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