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York grad turns high school project into full-length musical

By JOSEPH SERGE
Arts Editor

It's not often someone turns a high school project into a full-stage production, but Brian Goldenberg has done just that.

Seven of Us is the culmination of a project Goldenberg, 24, began in high school five years ago.

"Seven of Us is an original musical that I wrote," he said. "It's about seven students who have just graduated from university and are unsure about where they want to go and the choices they have to make."

The musical premieres July 15 at the Markham Youth Theatre and runs until July 17.

The musical revolves around one of the characters, Rob, whose father wants him to go into the family business, but his girlfriend wants them to travel to Europe instead. "It's the struggle between the three of them," he said. "It's a relationship story with a few twists."

Goldenberg is a graduate of Unionville High School's specialized arts program and York University's music department.

His high school choir would finish each school year by performing a medley of tunes from musicals. In his graduating year, he thought it would be a good idea to do some original music, "so I created a sketch of a story, wrote eight songs put them into a medley and orchestrated the choir," he said.

He had always vowed to finish the project, but held off during his years at university. He resurrected the idea last summer and held a workshop at the Vaughan Musical Playhouse.

"That was the first draft of it. I did some work on it based on audience feedback and suggestions and the story has since evolved quite a bit."

For instance, originally the musical was about students finishing high school. “It would make a lot more sense if they were finishing university, so I fast forwarded the characters five years into the future – the characters are much more developed now.”

Proceeds from the musical will go to the Herbert H. Carnegie Future Aces Foundation, an organization that focuses on making a difference in the lives of young people.

Carnegie, an African Canadian, was considered one of this nation’s rising hockey stars but was forbidden to play in the NHL in the 1950s due to his colour. He formed the foundation to help children overcome obstacles and to promote diversity.

Goldenberg received a scholarship from the foundation after high school and has remained involved with the organization ever since, writing its musical theme song.

“The foundation has helped me become who I’ve become,” he said.

Goldenberg has been involved in various capacities with the Markham Youth Theatre for five years. The non-profit theatre is run for youth by youth.

“Everybody involved – the crew, the pit, the actors and directors – are all between 14 and 25,” he said. “It’s kids doing stuff for kids.”

Goldenberg has been playing music since the age of six. He has produced or been musical director for eight other musicals, and he also plays in a band, manages a brass quintet and orchestrates an inner-city choir group. His song Music Will Always Lead Me Home won first prize in an In Front magazine music contest.

“I’m not your typical music theatre freak,” says. “I’m first and foremost a musician. I play piano, trumpet and sing. I love musicals, but I wouldn’t say I’m not interested in other forms of art. I’m equally satisfied watching a ballet as much as a musical.”

He says the music for Seven of Us is modern pop, influenced by Chicago (the band not the musical).

Goldenberg will soon be too old for the Markham Youth Theatre. He plans to go to graduate school and continue writing music (he’s written more than 100 pop songs) and producing theatre. He also wants to teach.

For tickets to Seven of Us, call the Markham Youth Theatre box office at 905-305-7469. For more information on the Herbert H. Carnegie Future Aces Foundation, visit www.futureaces.org.
