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Q&A: *Wrecked* (Roseneath Theatre)

Wrecked director Richard Greenblatt and cast members Jajube Mandiela and Kimwun Perehinec chat about touring Chris Craddock's play to schools across Ontario



Cast of *Wrecked* (L to R): Justin Goodhand, Jajube Mandiela, Kimwun Perehinec and Kevin Jake Walker. Photo by Mark Seow.

This season, [Roseneath Theatre](#) is touring a remounted production of Chris Craddock's *Wrecked*, a play that tackles the issue of alcohol abuse in the lives of teenagers and their families, to schools across Ontario. *Wrecked* premiered in 2005/2006 and took home the 2006 Dora Award for Outstanding Production as well as the Canada Council for the Arts 2006 Theatre for Young Audience prize. We caught up with director Richard Greenblatt and cast members Jajube Mandiele (Susy) and Kimwun Perehinec (Sharon) to find out more about their experiences working on this acclaimed show.

Theatromania: *Tell us about Chris Craddock's Wrecked. What first attracted you to this play?*

RG: It speaks honestly, uncondescendingly and truthfully about a subject that could have felt like a moralistic lesson. It takes an unusual perspective towards the issue (a 16 year old coping with an alcoholic parent), and is punctuated by hilarious and poignant vignettes of teens' use and abuse of alcohol.

JM: The wonderful, succinct and jam-packed way it tells different stories about alcohol abuse without talking down to young audiences.

KP: *Wrecked* is a smart, fast-paced play with an excellent balance of humour and heart. I think that's what hit me first and convinced me it was great. It's FUNNY. Chris has tackled a serious topic—substance abuse—in a way that never talks down to the teens he has written for, and invites them to recognize themselves or people they know in his characters. The through-line is a family story: Lyle is a 16-year-old dealing with an alcoholic mother and trying to take care of his much younger sister. This story is inter-cut with often hilarious “teen scenes”—stories of misadventure as kids like those that make up our audience mix it up with drugs and booze. The play packs a punch, but avoids being heavy handed.

Theatromania: *How would you describe Roseneath Theatre's production in a sentence or two?*

RG: Hard to answer, because it's my production. I've tried to make it fast-paced, highly energetic, smart, inventive and theatrically surprising. Hopefully and most importantly, it's also emotionally engaging.

JM: I describe Roseneath Theatre's production of *Wrecked* as a fast-paced, big laughs, good cry path to freedom!

KP: It's a rich experience thanks to a team of very talented storytellers—from the script, to the design, to the direction, to the performances, this production is economical, playful, deft and insightful.

Theatromania: *How is each character affected by alcoholism?*

RG: Alcoholism in a family creates much collateral damage. But what Lyle realizes throughout the play is that it's okay to ask for help, and that we all need to confront this problem, instead of hiding away from the shame of it all, and being afraid to confront it.

JM: My character Susy who is subject to her mother's negative behaviour, starts quite ignorant of her mother's alcohol abuse but grows to think of alcohol as an “evil potion.”

KP: Well, my character Sharon is an alcoholic. She's already lost her marriage, and her drinking was a factor. Lately her drinking has grown worse. She hits bottom in this play, and runs the risk of losing her kids. Her children, Susy and Lyle, have to live with her volatility and irresponsible behaviour. Susy is little and—though feisty—scared, and relies on Lyle for protection. Lyle is older and angry, and working hard to change his circumstances—he's shouldering way too much responsibility.

Buddy is Lyle's best friend, dealing with his own attraction to pot, and he willingly steps up to

be the support Lyle and Susy need him to be. Ryan is Sharon's bartender "friend" and a former alcoholic who helps both Sharon and Lyle find a path forward. The teens we meet in various teen scenes each have stories about drinking, or witnessing drinking, and the many varied consequences of overindulgence...these range in severity from parties gone wrong and major puking, all the way up the scale to loss of life.

Theatromania: *What has been the most challenging part of the process so far?*

RG: Trying to create a moving story without a jot of sentimentality or a hint of self-pity.

JM: Keeping up! Even though we had 3 weeks to rehearse (as most plays in Toronto do), my brain was playing catch up so much of the time - the play moves so fast!

KP: The physical exertion of touring to schools is hardest. Seriously. It's still early in the run and it's clear to me that the first leg is going to be all about conditioning and finding a groove. This tour literally calls for a different set of muscles from those I usually have to use on the job. Mornings are early and, because we travel with and put up the set ourselves, we're doing two load-ins and tear downs daily - moving fast and working hard. It feels pretty good, but it's exhausting. Second hardest is always staying honest in the storytelling, and never letting things move into sentimentality - one of the exciting things about student audiences is that they let you know when they don't believe you.

Theatromania: *Have you learned anything significant from this experience?*

RG: Much too much to answer here. A lot about the Alcoholics Anonymous.

JM: Yes, two things. On the production side: touring with great, friendly, positive people is so fun! On the subject matter end of things: no matter what kind of addiction someone I know may have (whether it be something in more of a positive light like working too much, or eating too much sugar), they still need to get help and make their life better/more balanced.

KP: This is actually my second experience with *Wrecked* (I did another tour of the play with Roseneath in 2008). What hit me last time and continues to resonate is how often people's lives are touched by alcohol (or drug) abuse. We usually ask audience members, if they're comfortable, to raise a hand if they know someone whose life has been impacted in a negative way by substance abuse. A significant number of hands go up - no matter how old the audience. It's powerful, knowing how relevant the subject matter is to so many people.

Theatromania: *What do you hope audiences take away from this piece?*

RG: That there needs to be honest and non-judgmental discussions about alcohol and drugs. That drinking and driving is NEVER okay. That binge drinking can lead to all kinds of dangerous consequences. And what is moderation?

JM: I hope that audiences take this away: there is no need to be afraid to ask for help.

KP: I hope people leave feeling inspired to talk about the problem. I hope they hear this message: If something's going on in your life or you have questions about whether or not you or someone you know has an issue with substances, you have access to resources and you're not alone—there are people who want to help and who know how. If you need help, it is more than OK to ask for it. Maybe start by talking to a friend you trust, or an adult you feel comfortable with, or someone at Kids Help Phone... but talk about it. Silence isn't going to make anything better.

Wrecked will tour Ontario schools (grades 7 to 12) until December 7, 2012. Visit roseneath.ca for more information.

Touring schedule:

October 29 - November 9: GTA schools

November 12 - November 16: Sudbury Area schools

November 19 - November 23: Thunder Bay, Red Lake and Kenora ON schools

November 26 - November 30: Southern Ontario schools outside GTA

December 3 - December 7: GTA schools

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