
ENTERTAINMENT LOCAL

Children's entertainer Peter Lenton presents Peter Puffin's Whale Tales at the Horizon Stage in Spruce Grove

By Karen Haynes, Spruce Grove Examiner/Stony Plain Reporter
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Peter Puffin. - Photo Supplied

Through an upcoming children's production, the Horizon Stage seeks out a recently untapped audience demographic – preschoolers.

Canadian children's entertainer, Peter Lenton is scheduled to wow the Stage's youngest crowd yet at 11 a.m., on Jan. 28 during his 45-minute concert, Peter Puffin's Whale Tales.

The highly interactive show is meant to engage both the children's physical energy, through actions and audience participation, and their "heart energy," Lenton said.

"If you can find a way to help them invest their heart energy ... if you're reaching their feelings then you're more likely to engage them in what's going on."

Both the physical and emotional interaction is built into each song, Lenton said, adding his intention is to gently encourage participation allowing each child control over their level of involvement.

Children can sing-a-long, dress up in animal costumes, keep the beat with provided percussion instruments or participate in the show's live song writing segment.

"I'm already trying to write stuff that they can relate to, but there's nothing better than asking kids their suggestions and what they think," he said.

Each Whales Tales production is a tailor made set list touching on a range of topics, including the environment, family, friends, safety, perseverance, the great outdoors and animals.

Lenton's Horizon Stage performance will focus on celebrating the wealth of family, friends and the importance of trusting one another.

During the show Lenton often stands away from his microphone, shifting the focus to the kids as they lead the rest of the

audience in song.

"I love that transition where the focus shifts from me to the kids. They get a huge boost in confidence."

Transition is perhaps the best way to describe Lenton's journey to becoming a children's entertainer who has held an arrangement of careers that have all led him to this, he said.

Having worn the hat of biologist, teacher, camp counselor and video producer, each role provided personal development and paved the way for Lenton's current entertaining days.

These past professions have taught Lenton to share and foster his love of nature in children and families, develop media skills through which he now communicates his message and provided opportunities to meld learning with music, he explained.

Lenton's stage name, Peter Puffin dates back and honours his biologist days on the Quebec north shore of the gulf of the St. Lawrence. Here he spent summers living in a lighthouse teaching kids about conservation, hiking and visiting Puffin colonies.

First moving to Canmore, Alta., from Ottawa 20 years ago, Lenton taught at a YMCA camp and led campfire sing-a-longs for 400 kids almost every night for six months.

"You hear people talking about your practice time, your 10,000 hours towards doing something professionally. That was definitely the year. That was my training ground for sure."

Exposing children to musical performances and theatre productions is important as it contributes to brain development and socialization, he said.

"It helps burn the pathway for things that will be used in the future. Even things like math, it's a worthwhile thing in terms of brain development.

"Celebrating the arts scene and helping them reinforce that we're all inherently musical. It's a big part of being human."

That socialization is also important to Brandi Wurtz, Horizon Stage theatre manager as she commented on the Stage's first Munchkin Matinee.

"You can't expect a child at age eight or nine to come and be an audience member and know what's expected of them ... there's a certain etiquette that's expected of them. If you expose them to it as a young age they grow up accepting the fact that live performances are just something they do," Wurtz said.

Peter Puffin's Whale Tales was specifically chosen for its audience participation, she said. "They don't have to sit still for 45 minutes at three years old, cause we know that they don't."

The performance is the first official Munchkin Matinee at the Horizon Stage and although it is the only production tailored to these youngsters in its 2013/2014 season, Wurtz said there would likely be another next season.

"I would like to continue it. With most things you have to try it for a couple years before you know how successful it will be."

Wurtz encourages parents to come and start exposing their little ones to live shows at a young age.

Tickets cost \$12 per adult, \$6 for children and seniors and are available through www.horizonstage.com.

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