

Consolation: A Meditation Musical **Interview with Director Ross McMillan on CJNU radio**

Chris: Welcome back. You are in the spotlight on CJNU 93.7 FM on your Monday afternoon and as promised we want to talk about that show that is coming up and want you to see it is called Consolation: A Meditation Musical and here just before that right now is the director of the show Ross McMillan. Ross how you doin'?

Ross: I'm good thanks, nice to see you Chris.

Chris: Good to see you too Ross ... So we're here to talk about Consolation, a show that you're directing and is coming up at the gas station Art Center will give some details on that in a moment. Talk a little bit about the show and what people can expect.

Ross: Well this is called a musical meditation, it's kind of like a musical, a bit like a concert of songs all written by this one guy and the text is written by the guy as well. There's all kinds of story telling and text which links the songs together. And it's a very Jewish themed show but it's basically the story of this man's life and how he became a songwriter and especially what happened to him when his father died, that's what the show is really about and the kind of self-questioning he went through when that happened. Not all that bad some of it very funny actually. It's got four singer/actors in it and an excellent orchestra - there's a keyboard, stand up bass, and a sax and drums.

I'm a little tired because we just finished rehearsal today but we we're having a great time in there today, getting these songs in shape. The singers are soo good and the band is great. We we're having such fun with the stories. This guy, Bryan Schwartz, who wrote the show - here's a guy, he's a constitutional lawyer, nationally famous in law circles, he's argues cases in the Supreme Court, etc. And in his spare time, he is a self-described song writing nerd and he's written many many dozens of songs and some of them are in this musical. He has this irrepressible optimism about his work and it's sort of infectious. So he's got all of us on board doing this. Great cast. Some really well known local people: Tom Anniko, Kevin Klassen, Simon Miron, and Katy Hedalen who teaches singing at the Mennonite University. And they're all just great singers and good actors and having such fun. There are some Jewish stereotypes in the show, here and there, just for comic effect and we're having just great fun with it.

Chris: And that's the whole part of it, making sure you have fun in rehearsals and it helps with the end product that people see.

Ross: Oh absolutely. You know, if it doesn't cost us anything to do then it wouldn't cost the audience anything to watch. And if we don't have fun doing it, then they won't have fun watching it. But both things are true in this case. Anyone who's watching and thinking "oh you know I could make a musical," well this guy actually did it [Chris laughs] and it's good! If people want to come to the Gas Station Arts Center and see it they will find out that it's good. I think it's going to be a big surprise for people.

Chris: It's coming up April 23, 24, 26, and 27 at 7:30 PM at the Gas Station Arts Center. Tickets are \$20 and the number for the Gas Station Arts Center to reserve: 2042849477. I'm speaking with the director of the show Ross McMillan, the show is Consolation: a Meditation Musical. Any challenges in directing this one?

Ross: Well it's an unusual script because it's not structured the way a musical generally is. And as the title suggests it sort of has to sit with you a bit, it's sort of meditative. There are funny stories in it and so on. It's got a bit of a religious aspect to it too. As I said it's about him dealing with the death of his father and how he's going to explain this to his young son. So it's a bit about generations and so on. So challenges, yeah it's not structured like a regular musical so you're going to have to find ways to knit it together and have a good followable through line to it, but I think we're doing that and having great fun with the process.

Chris: You mentioned there's some stories in it and you have a copy of the book with us. Can you read us a story from it and give people a little taste of what they can expect next week?

Ross: Okay, here's one of my favourites from the show:

A great rabbi who's aged and worn, has come to the end of his days on this Earth. He lies in silence as he awaits his final moment. The rabbi has many disciples and they've gathered all of them around they're masters deathbed be joined in beseeching, "master, do not leave us until you've pronounced to us your final words." They repeat the words. At the hour of death a man does not jest, and so the words of a dying man are regarded as signed, sealed, and delivered. But their master tells them, "leave me alone, let a weary old man die in peace." Still the disciples pressed him for his final words. Finally, with a weary gasp the great rabbi says, slowly, slowly, "Life is like a river." Then his head slumps and his eyes close. The disciples rush out of the room, they know they must attend to his final rights but first they wish to understand his parting message, life is like a river. One disciple argues that it's a message of hope, that our life on Earth is like a river but that life after is like a boundless sea. One disciple suggest that the rabbi may have intended a message of despair, we are immersed in the current, we do not see the ultimate destination, we're helpless to change it. And so the debate grows, the theories multiply, each is contested. At the fringe of the murmuring disciples is the youngest of them. He cannot follow much of the frothing debate. His gaze begins to wander. He looks back at the room where the rabbi lies. He notices a slight nod of the rabbi's head and a twitch of the eyelids. The disciple cries out, "Our master lives!" They all rush back to the rabbi's bedside, and behold, there is within the rabbi a flicker of life. The disciples ask their master to explain, "rabbi, we treasure your legacy but we cannot fully grasp it. What did you mean life is like a river. With voice more interpretations than we have heads to judge them. Before you depart you must help us to understand." The rabbi sighs a heavy sigh, and then he whispers the words that are truly final. "Alright," he says, "so life isn't like a river," and then he dies.

Chris: Very good. I like that. Wow. I mean, it's incredible like you said to write a musical and then to write one in that kind of way. I think it's really special. What was it like to work with Bryan Schwartz?

Ross: Great really. He's very protective of his material, as any author is, but at the same time, he's giving us a lot of artistic freedom to interpret it. Any new piece of writing for the stage, any new play or musical, the first time it's produced, and this is the world premier of this play, it gets pulled apart a bit by the director and the cast and as they try to figure out how to actually get it on its feet and put it on the stage. But he's given us a lot of freedom. He's a very smart guy, very compassionate, a little bit shy, but has a great sense of humour. So it's been great working with with Bryan.

Chris: Thanks a lot. Well this is all coming up April 23, 24, 26, and 27 at 7:30 PM at the Gas Station Arts Center on River. Tickets are \$20 and you can call to reserve: 2042849477. The show is Consolation: A Musical Meditation. I've been speaking with the director of the show, Ross McMillan. Thanks so much for your time.

Ross: Hey thank you Chris. It's been great.