

Expect the unexpected from comedian's new show

Hamilton is pushing her comfort zone, as is the artistic team behind the play

By AIDEN MCRAE
Special to the Star

Comedian Jenny Hamilton vividly remembers being a “happy, weird eight-year-old kid” growing up queer in 1980s Whitehorse.

Hamilton didn't want to play with dolls or get married. She wanted to be like the tough guy on TV. She loved cars and trucks, and idolized mechanics.

Fast-forward to 2023, and when Katherine McCallum, the artistic executive director of Larrikin Entertainment, asked Hamilton to write and perform a show.

She decided it was time to dive deep into her memories from age eight to 18.

There were many tales to tell: the time she planned to fix the world but puberty got in the way, the time she decided to “be normal”, and the time she found her future wife and she fought for her – with a baseball bat.

But how do you tell stories as raw and ranging from heartbreak to hilarity as Hamilton's?

The team at Larrikin Entertainment is pulling out all the stops to bring her teenage world to life onstage: live original music, animation and puppets, the likes of which you have never seen. Even the puppet makers never imagined puppets like these ones.

This production is a journey through time that prompted Hamilton to pick up the trumpet after 30 years, play a few scales, and to find that it came to her.

In the '80s, Hamilton and her friends were working at the Yukon Theatre watching movies that are classics today, and listening to music like the Eurythmics, David Foster, Bruce Hornsby and Pat Benatar.

For the play, Ashley Robyn, Larrikin's musical composer and musical director, has delivered an original song that Hamilton says takes us back to that distinct sound.

A veteran of stand-up comedy, Hamilton wanted to challenge herself and her audience's perception of what she can do; she is pushing her comfort zone, and so is the artistic team behind the play.

Ontario-based director and dramaturge Clinton Walker returned to Whitehorse to work with Hamilton to develop the script for *Teenage Cult Leader*.

Through their collaboration, Hamilton's original script for an autobiographical stand-up comedy routine evolved into a dynamic play that pushes boundaries.

“We agree art needs to be a little bit scary, because that's what is thrilling,” Walker said.

“The really funny things we see on stage are funny because they're real and relatable. Jenny's comedy is based in great storytelling – there's something very generous



Star photo by VINCE FEDOROFF

TOUR IS IMMINENT – Comedian Jenny Hamilton performs in a show in May 2022 in Whitehorse. Jenny Hamilton – Teenage Cult Leader will begin its touring schedule next week.

in what she encapsulates. She was interested in deepening her practice in storytelling,” Walker said.

“Developing new work can be

risky, especially a story that is so personal. It's got to be authentic but it also has to be relatable.

I think anybody, regardless of

how they identify themselves, can relate to the glorious/hideous journey we take to figure out who we are,” Walker added.

“This show walks that line courageously.”

Walker noted that he and Hamilton have lived relatively parallel lives, as he navigated growing up gay in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

“We share a love of resilience, finding out who we need to be, a desire to show our stories, the battle scars, and how we overcame everything thrown at us.”

Hamilton invites everyone to experience this journey – and promises it will be a wild ride.

Looking to today, Hamilton sees young people going through many of the same challenges she did, and realizing that many things remain the same.

Thinking especially of young people in the LGBTQIA2S+ community, Hamilton said, “Whatever you're going through, it's not the first time someone has gone through it. I thought I was the only gay person here in the '80s. I realized I couldn't do it alone.

“Whatever you're going through, find people who love you until you can love yourself. It gets better; you're not alone,” Hamilton added.

“If I can tell my story about a dark time, I truly believe we can get to know each other and we can become okay with each other. Telling our stories is how we connect.

“Sure, mine might be different from other people's – mine has puppets – but I bet there is something in my story that everyone can relate to,” shared Hamilton.

“I'm stretching my wings – expect the unexpected.”

Larrikin Entertainment's world premiere of *Jenny Hamilton – Teenage Cult Leader* comedy with puppets, animation and live music will tour Whitehorse, Haines Junction, Atlin and Dawson City from March 13 to April 5.

Learn more and reserve tickets at larrikinentertainment.ca

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