

Teen suicide still an issue, so this 1890 play is still relevant, says U of R director



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Spring's Awakening, a University of Regina theatre production, follows teenagers as they try to learn about life, death, sex and suicide.

TROY FLEECE / REGINA LEADER-POST

In his first week of Grade 9, Cole Manz's friend killed herself, and nobody talked about it.

"It was all kind of hushed voices in the hall, except for the people who really knew her," said Manz, a second-year pre-law student at the University of Regina.

Teachers didn't mention it. His parents mentioned it only briefly.

The experience makes Manz's role in the latest U of R theatre production "a little bit hard to deal with."

Spring's Awakening includes "a lot of heavy subject matter," said Manz, as teenagers "are left to their own devices" trying to navigate life.

"The theme of the show is essentially, if you keep your children in the dark with the way the world works, you're doing them more harm than good," said director Kenn McLeod.

When Frank Wedekind wrote the play in 1890, "There were these suicide pacts that were happening between kids and waves of suicide that were occurring," said McLeod, who originally adapted Wedekind's work for his master's thesis in 2010.

Recently, there have been several teenage suicides in northern Saskatchewan

(<http://www.leaderpost.com/news/saskatchewan/northern+suicides+27big+priority+sask+children+advocate/12343607/story.html>)

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"The reason to do a show like this again is because the questions haven't been answered, because the problems still exist," he added. "If this stuff wasn't still happening, this play would be irrelevant and unnecessary. It's terrible that this show is still necessary."

Sex is another major theme in the play, the teens trying to manage with little information from their parents.

It's another area where McLeod sees "not a lot has changed" in the last century.

To illustrate the point, he had his cast anonymously describe their memories of "the talk."

Though the students were all born in the 1990s, they had similar conversations to those happening in 1890s Germany.

"Their parents are not quite giving them the information. Everyone's tiptoeing," said McLeod.

The only thing that has changed is children's access to information online.

Although Spring's Awakening predates the 1920s German expressionist artistic movement, this production is associated with The Caligari Project (<http://leaderpost.com/entertainment/local-arts/regina-artists-think-big-in-the-ambitious-caligari-project>), a local arts festival running through mid-December.

The play's themes mesh with German expressionism; visually, this production embraces German expressionism too.

The set, created by student Catherine Bridge, is dark, beautiful, strange, twisted, and reflects "the mindset of these kids as they move their way forward," said McLeod.

The play has a strong message, and one everyone should hear, said Manz, whether you're a grownup or a teenager.

McLeod agreed: "There's a lot to hear and a lot to respond to. Always my hope with the theatre that I do is that it lasts longer than the curtain call. That you go home and you have more conversations about it."

Spring's Awakening runs nightly through Saturday, 7:30 p.m. in the Riddell Centre University Theatre.

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