

WHILE WE'RE YOUNG

BY DON HANNAH



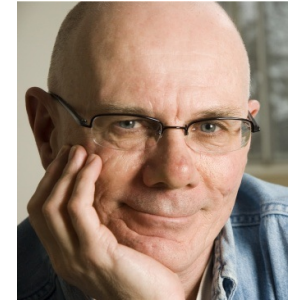
[poster: Dalhousie University Theatre, 2011]

“There are certain things that are just kind of universal about being that age: you’re trying to shake off the remnants of childhood while you’re still not sure of exactly how to become an adult, and for the first time you’re really faced with some big decisions about what kind of person you’re going to be.” - Don Hannah

A PLAYGOER'S COMPANION

The Author

Don Hannah (playwright, poet, and novelist) was born in Moncton, New Brunswick in June 1951 and was raised in Shediac. He began school at Shediac Central, then went to King George School in Moncton and graduated from Moncton High School in 1969. He then attended Mount Allison University in Sackville, where he studied both English and fine arts. After completing his degree, he pursued graduate studies at York University. Hannah did not move back to New Brunswick when he finished his education, although he frequently writes about the province. He now calls both Toronto and the South Shore of Nova Scotia home.



Hannah has been writer-in-residence for the Canadian Stage Company, the University of New Brunswick, and the Yukon Public Library Service. He was the inaugural Lee Playwright in Residence at the University of Alberta, where he wrote *While We're Young* in 2008. Hannah has also been writer-in-residence at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto, Ontario

His accomplishments and work experience are extensive and impressive. He has written and produced plays and worked in many theatrical facilities across the country. When asked why he chose to leave his home town of Shediac and native province of New Brunswick, Hannah stated, “It wasn’t easy to be gay in NB in the 1970s, which was when I left. After I became involved with theatre, it made little sense to go back. I’d had my plays produced in other parts of Canada for nearly 15 years before there was even a reading of one of my plays back home. I’ve written about the place fairly consistently – my last play was set in NB in the 18th century – and I was very happy to work at Live Bait Theatre this fall. But, as one of my characters said, ‘I’m from away, now’.- Adapted from Heather Hotchkiss' "Don Hannah" in *The New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia*

The Timeless Challenges of Young Adults

"Although it is a certainty that people, places and things will change with time, being thrust into the complexities of adulthood has always been, and will always be, confusing and difficult. "

"It's a really interesting age," says Hannah, "because when you are in your early 20s you are no longer a kid and yet you are still at the point where you see yourself as separate from your parents' generation, at the same time you're realizing 'I am an adult and that's the world that I'm going to be operating in.'"

The play follows the life-altering decisions and angst of 20-something Canadians in six different eras, beginning with the present, traveling back in time to the dawn of the nation, and working back to the present again.

The play's characters tackle issues from Canada's current role in Afghanistan and in the great wars of the last century to religious affiliations, politics, family and love. And while the specifics surrounding the choices may change, the nature of the answers doesn't."

"Basically, the theme in this play is that some things change in this world and some things don't," said Kim McCaw, a Department of Drama professor and the play's first director. "Being young and being at the point in your life where you are becoming an adult and making those big life-changing decisions – 'Am I going to marry him? Am I going to fall in love? Am I going to walk away from this? Am I going to go to war?' – All of those big things keep repeating themselves. We keep seeing 20-something people in each era and they're all faced with the same question in a way. They're all saying variations of the same thing: 'It used to be so much easier when I was younger,' and they're only 22."

– Abridged from Michael Brown, *University of Alberta News*, 2008.

Origins

While We're Young was written while Don Hannah was the inaugural Lee Playwright in Residence at the University of Alberta. Hannah says, "When I first arrived in Edmonton, I knew only two things about the proposed play: that it should be an ensemble piece with good parts for all, and that I wanted the characters to be the same age as the actors. The story, the structure – everything else – evolved from there. . . . Working on *While We're Young* became the happiest playwriting experience I'd had in a very long while." The director of that first production, Kim McCaw, says, "In a stroke of wisdom (and genius, perhaps), he made the decision to use the fact that the whole cast would be in their early twenties as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. What we got was a play in which everyone played characters their own age, with similar life experiences (albeit in different historical eras) and similar life challenges." – from the introductory material to *While We're Young* (Playwrights Canada Press, 2009)

"We see how things are different and yet the same, we see how some values are eternal, while others are shaped by familial and societal pressures that evolve and change. We see the overwhelming power of family over us all. . . . And, in the end, we see how the power of love is what makes us truly human and keeps us going together forever." – Kim McCaw

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