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# PLAYWRIGHT BRINGS THEATRE TO INNER CITY KIDS

By *Amy Grief* - November 9, 2016



*Adam Seelig, founder of Little Goat Theatre Company. YURI DOJC PHOTO*



At the beginning of Adam Seelig's newest show, *PLAY: A (Mini) History of Theatre for Kids*, the actors ask the audience, "Who made the first plays in the world?" And they answer: children.

"Almost always, we have an audible response from the kids," says Seelig, an award-winning poet, playwright and director who runs the, Haggadah-inspired (if only in name) [One Little Goat Theatre Company](#). "And then we start to show children that making theatre, making plays, is rooted in the act of playing."

This is Seelig's, and One Little Goat's, first play for children.

But Seelig has two kids and wanted to create something that would introduce a new generation to the world of theatre. While growing up in Vancouver, he remembers watching as theatre troupes performed in his elementary school. "I think that those performances were among the most influential I ever saw in my life," he says.

Seelig is quick to admit he didn't write the whole play. He describes it as more of a collaboration or an adaptation since it's littered with excerpts from well-known sources.

*PLAY* is split into four sections and each deals with a different type of theatre. It starts with games around the fire and then moves on to Greek tragedy, a chapter that includes Sophocles' *Antigone*. Next comes medieval Japanese Noh

theatre and afterwards, it explores the modernist work of Gertrude Stein, Alfred Jarry and Samuel Beckett.

While some of these works appear inappropriate for elementary school students, Seelig wanted to challenge himself to share some of his favourite theatrical work with children. The material might be difficult, but the kids seem to be digging it.

"Typically, the modernist theatre of Samuel Beckett, wouldn't be considered child-friendly material," he says. "And yet because the kids are so open to new experiences and have few pre-conceptions, they're open to this bizarre world of Samuel Beckett."

One Little Goat won an Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant to bring *PLAY* to 40 of the [Toronto District School Boards' Model Schools for Inner Cities](#). These elementary schools get the show free of charge.

Now entering its 11th year, the TDSB Model School for Inner Cities program identifies 150 schools throughout the GTA with a large concentration of students living with limited resources, and aims to provide them with the opportunities they need to participate fully and equally in their schools and communities.

At the time of writing this story last week, Seelig says his cast, which includes Richard Harte, Jessica Salgueiro and Rochelle Bulmer, has performed the show for about 20 schools.

"For me, a huge part of creating this production was for there to be as few barriers as possible, to try to bring barriers down to zero for accessing a wonderful theatrical performance," says Seelig.

Instead of spending time travelling to a theatre, students simply walk down to their gymnasium and watch *PLAY* unfold before them. And they're quite close to the action, considering it's performed right on the gym floor too.

This further brings down the barriers between the audience and the actors, actors Seelig describes as outstanding professionals. "They're stellar, and why not put the very best material and the very best performers in front of the children? Might as well expose them to the best performers possible as soon as possible," he says.

Prior to writing *PLAY* in 2015, Seelig gained acclaim for *One Little Goat*, the only such company devoted to contemporary poetic theatre in North America. He founded it in New York back in 2002 and has run it from Toronto since 2005.

For now, he's focused on bringing *PLAY* to young audiences. He knows it's a huge responsibility, but one that comes with some pretty great rewards. "To see such, let's face it, sophisticated material and sometimes very intense material, like *Antigone*, like Noh theatre," he says, "to see it connect with very young audiences is thrilling."



**Amy Grief**

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