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Melancthon resident creates theatre company, Act 3

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Being an older woman working in theatre can be challenging with roles, stories, and employment reflecting you becoming fewer and far between.

Marni Walsh, a Melancthon resident and former Free Press freelancer, is working to counter ageism in the industry as she and fellow actor Debra Hale co-create theatre company, Act 3.

Founded in 2020, Act 3 consists of 23 professional female actors and writers over the age 50 working to counter ageism in the theatre industry and give voice to the perspective of women in the ?third act' of their careers through their artform.

?We were talking about theatre as older women and how we weren't seeing ourselves reflected on the stage. I asked [Debra] if she would be interested in co-founding a company with me specially for women over 50 and that's how Act 3 came about,? explained Walsh.

Creating a space for the commonly under-utilized demographic, has become a close cause for Walsh as she makes her return to acting after decades of temporary retirement to raise her family.

?Once you're older, what do you do and how do you adapt ? that's the challenge,? said Walsh.

Meeting virtually on a bi-weekly basis, the group of women would bring pieces they had written on their own and read for each other.

?It was pretty tough, but we were able to do it and able to give feedback, encouragement and support to each other,? said Walsh. ?It's really an honour to work with them and create with them.?

Now, as they approach the two-year milestone of launching Act 3 Theatre, the group has created 60 original pieces and has announced their inaugural showcase The Mary-Go-Round Project at Aki Studio Theatre in Toronto.

The Mary-Go-Round Project centers around the idea of an all-female carousel and as it turns each female rider steps into their individual scene. While each of the 12 featured scene gives voice to the older women's perspective on issues that matter to them in their third act the common denominator is a character named ?Mary?.

?Many of these Mary's are figure of fame and infamy white other are everyday Mary's we might meet on the street,? said Walsh.

In the spring of 2021, Act 3 became recipients of a total of $32,000 in funding with grants from the Toronto Arts Council, The Ontario Arts Council and the Federal government's New Horizons for Seniors Program to support the inaugural showcase.

Walsh said the funding was significant on many levels in their ability to develop The Mary-Go-Round Project.

?It gave the money to not only produce this work, but to pay women to produce it,? said Walsh.

She concluded that with the support they hope to expand the group to allow for more women in their third act to continue creating and doing theatre.

The Mary-Go-Round Project stars the 23 members of Act 3 Theatre including veteran performers Rhea Akler, Bonnie Anderson, Catherine Bruce, Heather Cherron Von Atzigen, Marjie Chud, Kerri Clarke, Rita Shelton Deverell, Andy Fraser, Liz Gordon, Debra Hale, DTaborah Johnson, Brenda Kamino, Jorie Morrow, Dawn Obokata, Jillian Rees-Brown, Andrea Risk, Barb Scheffler, Jane Spence, Rose C. Stella, Marcia Tratt, Marni Walsh,Tricia Williams, and Viviana Zarrillo.

Act 3 is inviting vaccinated audiences to join them from March 24 to 27 for five performances at the Aki Studio (585 Dundas St. E). Tickets are available for purchased at www.nativeearth.ca.