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Neil Holland, Don DiPaolo: Tape

an nytheatre.com interview

Neil Holland is co-founder (with Sonya Tsuchigane) of Knife Edge Productions, producers of Stephen Belber's play. Don DiPaolo and Neil Holland are actors who studied together at the William Esper Studio. They have been seen in various well received productions in the NYC area.

Some of our readers may not be familiar with Stephen Belber's play *Tape*. Could each of you give a short synopsis of the play as you see it and why you feel audiences should see it?

Holland: Two best friends from high school, Jon (an aspiring filmmaker on the verge of hitting it big) and Vince (a volunteer fireman who makes his money selling pot) meet up at a Motel 6 in Lansing, Michigan, where Jon's new film is being screened at a film festival. Over the course of the evening we discover that Vince has ulterior motives that are connected to their shared past, and Vince's high school girlfriend Amy, who just so happens to live in Lansing. And when Amy eventually joins them, their shared past finally catches up with all 3 of them, setting off a wildly unpredictable chain of events. I think audiences should see it because it deals with subject matter that we can all relate to. It's a play that really asks the question, "Can we ever escape our formative high school years?" This is a play that is as relevant now as it was 10 years ago.

DiPaolo: It's about three friends from High School that haven't seen each other for about 10 years. Two guys and a girl. There was an event that happened between the three of them. They are now meeting at a hotel in Lansing, Michigan for a film festival and all hell breaks loose. Audiences should see it because it's a great play. I feel it's one of the best contemporary American plays of our generation.

What is it about this play that each of you found so intriguing that you wanted to revive it?

DiPaolo: This play is so human. It's about decisions that are made that come back to haunt us. Relationships are very complex between people. Things are never black and white but just shades of gray. As an actor and a fan of this play this is what really intrigued me. As far as a revival goes, it just took on a life of its own. We started off as two friends who loved this play and just wanted to perform it. But we found so many people that had such a passion for it like us that a revival was just a natural progression.

Holland: What I find so intriguing about TAPE is how it deals with a specific event from the shared past of these three characters, and how each of them has a very specific, yet different interpretation of what actually happened. And it's that interpretation that has played a major role in shaping who they have

become. It's the choices we make, especially when we are younger, that shape who become as adults. And who doesn't have events in their life that they interpreted, or remember much different that the other party or parties involved. I know I do. This is something I can really relate to

The press release states you worked for two years on this play. What were you trying to accomplish over this period of time and are you satisfied with the results?

Holland: The biggest thing we had to accomplish was raising the necessary funds to put up the kind of production we all felt this beautiful play is worthy of. I was lucky early on to have met the playwright, Steve Belber, and become friends with him which really went a long way in getting to where we are today. We did a reading for him, two directors (his wife Lucie Tiberghien and his good friend Sam Helfrich) and a small invited audience. Steve was impressed by what he saw and has been extremely supportive. Sam Helfrich signed on as our amazing director. I am ecstatic about what we've put together. I truly believe it is something special.

DiPaolo: Basically, we were trying to raise the money. We did everything we could think of: Online donations, friends, family, dinners with producers, and cold calling companies to see if they wanted to donate to the arts. Yes, we are satisfied. We raised a good amount of money. We found there are a lot of really generous people who just love theatre.

You are both graduates of the William Esper Studio. How has what you learned at the studio influenced your thoughts on this production and others you might have in mind for the future?

Holland: I learned so much from my time at the William Esper Studio. I have been acting for 13 years, but it wasn't until I studied with William Esper that I truly felt that I was an actor or that I knew what it really meant to be an actor. I am not sure I know how to completely answer this question, but I can tell you that when you come out of that type of training you leave with a true sense of self...of knowing, maybe for the first time, who you are and what you are made of. I think that is a very important thing, because I remember Bill saying that when playing a character you can't try and bring the character to you, you have to bring yourself to the character. And if you don't know who you are, that's a very tough thing to do. I also learned to take risks, which not only shaped what I bring to the role of Jon, but also allowed to even put this production up in the first place.

DiPaolo: First, Esper was an amazing experience. Studying with Bill was priceless. It influenced me from an acting stand point in that being a professional and really doing the work necessary was instilled in me. As far as producing, I find it's a different animal and you just have to do it to learn it but again doing the work and being professional is the key.

Neil is part of the producing company, Knife Edge Productions. How has being the producer differed from being just one of the cast and has it affected your relationship with each other?

Holland: Well, it means that my responsibilities are tenfold. It's certainly not easy. But I have done it before and that experience really allowed me to be prepared. I knew that I really had to have everything in order as much as possible by the time rehearsals came around so that my job as an actor didn't suffer. This is where having two years of lead in time really does help! No, it has not affected my relationship with anyone in the cast or crew. At least not in a negative way. It doesn't hurt that I am surrounded by an amazing group of people.

DiPaolo: It's a lot more work. Usually you just have to worry about the acting but now when my day is done there is always a ton of stuff to do. Today is my day off but I am running around doing all this stuff needed for the show. Neil and I are very close friends and have the same goals and work ethic, so it has only been a positive thing on our relationship.

What's up next for each of you?

DiPaolo: Probably not producing anytime soon. LOL. One of the goals for *Tape* is to showcase my work to more people; especially people in the industry. So I hope to use the momentum of this show to get more work and to get my career to another level.

Holland: I haven't thought that far ahead. I am just loving every moment of this and I want to continue to do that for the next 3 weeks. Ask me again when it's all said and done.

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