

All the world's a stage for local playwright



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It isn't every day that a Tucsonan opens his email to discover a play he's written will be produced in India.

But **Richard Gremel** did.

The Empire High School theater teacher, who is also a student-turned-actor-turned-teacher at Live Theatre Workshop, has written 15 plays since

2008. All of them have been performed locally and two have been published.

One of those, "Robin Hood and his Merry Men," prompted the email from a school theater program in India.

"My plays may never be seen on Broadway, but you may see a Broadway actor that has performed one of my plays in middle school or high school," says Gremel, relaxing before a recent Sunday show of "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" with Live Theatre's family arm, All Together Theatre.

On that Sunday, the playwright, 29, sat, legs crossed, as he watched the actors warm up for the hour-long show. Gremel, who co-wrote the script with **Leslie Miller**, has heard the songs and seen the choreography countless times, but he still laughs.

His adaptation of "Robin Hood" originally written for All Together, was born on that same small stage. Gremel rewrote it as a larger piece for his high school students at Empire, who performed it in 2012. It has since been staged in schools and theaters across the country and in Canada. In addition to India, 15 more productions are booked.

"When I first submitted it, I just kind of threw it out there and hoped that someone would pick it up," says Gremel, who sent the script to various publishers before Heuer Publishing picked it up.

The upcoming production in India was a shock.

"I was contacted by the teacher by email, and at first I thought it said 'Indiana,' but didn't know why there was no city listed. Then I took a second look and realized it said 'India,'" says Gremel, who studied theater education at the University of Arizona and has taught at Empire for seven years.

On writing and audiences

Gremel said he gets more inspiration from stories and characters he liked as a kid, adding that he had been enticed by the Robin Hood characters when he was quite young. He writes for all ages.

“Most of ‘Robin Hood’ I wrote just laying on the couch,” Gremel says, adding he can crank out a script for an hour-long play in a few hours. “I’ll get ideas driving, taking a shower, putting my daughter to sleep, and then I can just sit down and write.”

A family affair

Gremel often works hand-in-hand with his wife, **Amanda**, who acts and teaches at Live Theatre Workshop. She helps choreograph his plays and has performed in them.

“One of the greatest things about Richard is that he is a big kid,” Amanda says. “He puts himself as a younger kid in the audience watching the show, making sure they understand where the story is going.”

The couple’s 2-year-old daughter, **Sawyer**, had her stage debut this summer as the elephant-bird in “Suessical Jr.,” at one of Live Theatre Workshop’s camps.

Health battle inspires

Gremel’s successful year wasn’t without struggle. He spent more than 50 days in the hospital and has undergone five surgeries in his battle with Crohn’s Disease. But even stuck in bed, he found inspiration.

“While in the hospital, I had an idea for a play that lets people know what my disease — and other (diseases) — are all about and how they effect people,” he says.

He hopes to speak with people with various illnesses and get their personal stories about hospital stays, treatments and the ways in which their disease has effected their lives.

Teaching with a mission

Gremel says he believes theater programs help children and students to think creatively and acquire “skills that are so important in life.”

“In Arizona a lot of schools are cutting arts programs, and those are the students that are eventually going to grow up and be the ones to provide us with entertainment,” he says. “We focus so much as a culture on Broadway and big movie screens, but it really all starts in the classroom where it sparks the creative process.”

Up next

Gremel is writing two scripts — “The Thrilling Tale of the Three Musketeers,” which will be performed at Empire High School in January; and “Catch my Disease,” which is still in outline form.

Meanwhile, his play, “Sleepy Hollow and the Ride of the Headless Stick-Horseman,” will premiere at All Together in September.

If you go

Catch it now: “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz” by Richard Gremel and Leslie Miller, through Aug. 17.

Coming up: “Sleepy Hollow and the Ride of the Headless Stick-Horseman,” by Gremel, is Sept. 7-Nov. 9.

Presented by: All Together Theatre, the family arm of Live Theatre Workshop.

Time: 1 p.m. Sundays.

Where: Live Theatre Workshop, 5317 E. Speedway.

Tickets: \$7 to \$10. Reservations: livetheatreworkshop.org or 327-4242.