

Media Release
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Sudbury Theatre Centre
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Teen Suicide provides Catalyst for New Drama on STC Stage

It doesn't take 20/20 vision to see that being a teen today is more challenging than it has ever been. Most of us are glad to leave those years behind even if a magic wand could take us miraculously back in age. No thank you.

In Matthew Heiti's new play *Black Dog: 4 vs the World*, a young, bright, talented teen has taken his life before the play begins. Left in the wake of this tragedy is his teenage sister who struggles to understand what drove her brother over the edge.

Quite by accident, she meets three unlikely outsiders who, without a sense of direction in life, help lift her veil of doubt and depression and show her that there are many promising things in all of their futures.

Each of the four outsiders has his own battles to wage and dragons to slay. Each has his/her own form of mental illness from bi-polar, to anorexia, to anger and aggression, to schizophrenia and asperger's syndrome. There is even a cutter. Each character is found in our school systems, struggling for any sense of accomplishment, self-worth and hope. Each cannot see how to begin the journey to good mental health and a promising life.

The story is told with love and humour and in itself is not a depressing experience. Quite the opposite. Audiences will leave feeling hopeful and wanting more.

Matthew Heiti has written a play about teens and for teens. The characters live on their smart phones, worry about their images and are sure their parents and teachers have no clue about real life.

Playing the teen who has committed suicide before the play opens, is Christian Williams. The four struggling teens are played by Morgan St. Onge, April Perrin, Jake Deeth and Michael Boyce. All five, even though there was an open casting call across the city, are from the Arts Education program at Sudbury Secondary School. The play's music was composed by Williams, a music major.

Directing the show is Sudbury Theatre Centre's Judi Straughan, who, coincidentally was a drama teacher at Sudbury Secondary School from 1985 to 1998. Stage Manager is Colin Williams with Set Design by Megumi Hari, Lighting and Sound Design by Ben Whitman. A full-sized puppet has been created by Thorneloe's Jenny Hazelton.

As the audience is watching the live play on stage, there are film sequences in the background by talented feature-film-maker Greg Tremblay. Again, where did Tremblay graduate from? He too was a Sudbury Secondary drama major in the 1990's. Who better to bring aboard this special project? He and Heiti knew one another in high school (yes, Matt Heiti is a SSS drama graduate as well) and are delighted to work together on this powerful new work.

In another flash of genius, Heiti asks teens in the audience to leave their cell phones on during the show and tweet to the Black Dog twitter account any time they wish.

This is a 100% home-grown show. This is Sudbury. The idea was born with the struggles of a co-operative education high school student who worked back stage at the Sudbury Theatre Centre two years ago. If she could be derailed on a regular basis by mental health problems, what was going on with other teens in our system and our region?

The Canadian Mental Health Association and Police Service along with Director of Education Norm Blaseg pointed out what was really going on and specified the kinds of problems our kids are facing. Yes, this *is* a 100% Sudbury show.

Playwright Matt Heiti further researched Mental Health, (his mother was a mental health nurse in our local health care system) and, after several months, created his powerful new script *Black Dog: 4 vs the World*.

Black Dog has become a common symbol of depression through the ages.

Black Dog: 4 vs the World plays at the Sudbury Theatre Centre for the public on **Saturday, April 6 only at 2:00 and 7:00 pm**. All other shows are for school audiences. Prices are \$15 for students and \$23 for adults and seniors. Tickets are available on line or by calling the Sudbury Theatre Centre at 705-674-8381.

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