



Montreal's Geordie Theatre bids adieu to Mike Payette

Geordie's third Artistic Director welcomed new Canadian voices into theatre for young audiences

MONTREAL, QC - March 11, 2021: Geordie Theatre, Montreal's renowned theatre for young audiences, announces that Artistic and Executive Director Mike Payette will take on a new role as Artistic Director of Toronto's Tarragon Theatre. He will begin the transition in September 2021 and leave Geordie Theatre in January 2022.

Payette will program Geordie Theatre's 2021-2022 season — his sixth as its Artistic Director — and will also direct two shows (not yet announced) for the upcoming 41st season.

During his five-year tenure, Payette set the stage for new works, new artists, and new energy devoted to social impact, inclusion, and accessibility. He launched the Geordie Theatre Festival and premiered 17 new plays, including 12 commissions for Geordie. He worked tirelessly to highlight new voices from emerging and established communities of culturally diverse artists. With Payette at its helm, Geordie Theatre was honoured with a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best Production (Theatre for Young Audiences Division), as well as 33 nominations and 14 wins from the Montreal English Theatre Awards.

"Mike opened the world of theatre to new Canadian voices," says Brett Hooton, President of Geordie Theatre's Board of Directors. "Thanks to him, Geordie has created a strong, lasting social and artistic impact." Hooton notes that more than 50 artists new to the company — from playwrights and directors to teachers and performers — benefited from professional theatre opportunities because of Payette.

"We were blessed to have had Mike lead us for the past five years," says Carol-Ann Hoyte, Geordie's Vice-President. She praises his dedication to shining a spotlight on stories about people of colour. "Because of Mike, my Black biracial son has seen that a career in theatre is possible for someone like him," says Hoyte. "We can be sad, but we can't be selfish. Mike needs to fly and spread his magic to other places."

Payette credits his colleagues and the trailblazers in the Montreal theatre community, including Elsa Bolam, Geordie's founding Artistic Director, for his achievements. He remembers the first theatre production he saw at school was from Geordie, an experience that opened his eyes to the arts. He became a child actor and then a producer and director in his teens. At 19, he performed in a Geordie show directed by Dean Patrick Fleming, who would go on to serve as the company's second Artistic Director.

“Geordie played a major role in inspiring my respect not only for theatre, but also for what it can do for someone,” says Payette, who is quick to acknowledge the contributions, talents, and support of Geordie’s Board of Directors, his staff, and his Geordie partner, Managing Director Kathryn Westoll.

“I love Montreal and the community that has shaped so much of who I am today,” adds Payette. “But I’m very excited to encourage a new voice who will be able to offer themselves to and be surrounded by the magic of what Geordie does. There are artists of all types and experiences who are seeking that opportunity, and I can’t wait to celebrate them and the company’s continued contributions as a place for *all* young people — and the adults in their lives — to imagine and flourish.”

Payette will remain in Montreal until December. Along with Westoll, he will offer a supportive transition for the new Artistic Director.

“Mike has moved Geordie forward in ways I don’t think even he anticipated,” says Westoll. She notes that during the pandemic the company maintained its programming and created a year-round livestreaming studio. The new space allowed the company’s signature 2Play touring shows to reach 15,000 students at more than 120 schools and other community venues across Quebec, despite an inability to travel this season.

“I will miss Mike, but I’m excited for Tarragon and for Toronto,” adds Westoll. “Mike has been amazing to work with, he has continually inspired me, and he’s become a dear friend. I’m so proud of what we’ve accomplished together. Geordie is a leader in theatre for young audiences, and we look forward to welcoming a new Artistic Director.”

A national call for applications for the position of Artistic Director will be announced on Monday, March 15.

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[Geordie Theatre](https://www.geordie.ca) is Montreal’s leading English-language professional theatre for audiences of all ages, entertaining and engaging the imaginations of children and their families since 1980. It is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (P.A.C.T.), the Quebec Drama Federation, La Maison Théâtre, the International Association of Performing Arts for Youth (IPAY), the Conseil québécois du théâtre (CQT), and ASSITEJ Canada.

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