

Desire to give inspires Tommy Mayne's new role

Teacher and town crier now a philanthropist

By Grania Litwin, timescolonist.com June 8, 2011



Tommy Mayne's flair for the dramatic is hardly surprising, considering he taught theatre for 33 years at Victoria High School.

And that's why, when the 92-year-old thespian invited Brian Richmond to dinner recently, the artistic director of Blue Bridge Theatre wasn't prepared for what was about to happen.

Mayne had also asked a few of the young repertory company's board members and friends to dine at Berwick Royal Oak retirement home, and after sitting down at the head of the table he handed Richmond a cheque for \$25,000.

"When I opened the envelope I was completely stunned," said Richmond, who noted it was a hugely significant moment, to have a prominent member of the theatre community offer such tangible support. The small "audience" nearly fell off their chairs, too

Mayne has filled many roles in his long and entertaining life. As a beloved school drama teacher he inspired a generation of actors — about 7,000 to be exact — then spent two decades with Vic AM as this city's town crier. He has served on countless boards in this city, and is a life member of Victoria Theatre Guild, having been keenly involved for a staggering 65 years.

Now Mayne has taken on another role as powerhouse philanthropist.

Last year, he gave \$25,000 to the University of Victoria for a theatre scholarship. He recently donated \$25,000 to the Royal B.C. Museum's renovations at Helmcken Schoolhouse and, out of the blue, this dramatic gift to Blue Bridge.

"I was so glad to hear about this new professional repertory theatre," Mayne explained this week.

"I met my future wife on stage, in a dreadful play actually, and I've been invol-ved in theatre all my life. I love the interplay of live theatre, the co-operation, the fact nothing is guaranteed when you go on stage."

Mayne's recent gift-giving spree was galvanized by a recent article in the Times Colonist.

"I read about a lady in James Bay who was very generous, who said she wanted to see her money working while she was still alive. That really struck me, and that's the philosophy behind all this."

Never a wealthy man, he and his late wife Betty had no children. "But I had a tough Scottish mother-in-law who was a canny investor, so I inherited a good estate.

"I can tell you from personal experience, we truly are more blessed to give than to receive," said the Victoria-born Mayne, who graduated from Vic High in 1935. He attended Victoria College and the University of B.C. before returning to the school to teach drama. He later headed the socials department before retiring in 1978.

His former students include Pacific Opera artistic director Timothy Vernon, actress Sylvia Hosie, artist Carole Sabiston, UVic art historian Kerry Mason, politician David Anderson, author Maria Tippit, broadcaster Joe Easingwood and former McPherson technical director Larry Eastick. Others were inspired to teach or head university theatre or art departments.

"Tommy was undisputed king of the auditorium at Vic High, where he directed many plays and musicals to great acclaim and overflow houses," said Denis Johnson, a member of Mayne's famed Calamity Players at the school.

"He also co-wrote, produced and played the leading role in Vic High's centennial show in 1976, which was huge, and sold out twice in the Memorial Arena." Johnston took over the theatre department from Mayne before spending 12 years at the Shaw Festival as dramaturge.

"Tommy was an inspirational teacher, so engaged with every student," stressed Johnston.

A fascinating raconteur — passionate about theatre, drama, young people, culture, history, education — Mayne jokingly likens himself to Amor de Cosmos.

"I'm a lover of the world . . . I love people," he said with his trademark, spirited delivery.

De Cosmos founded this newspaper and was second premier of B.C. His real name was William Smith but he changed it to Amor De Cosmos, saying it reflected his love of beauty and the universe.

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