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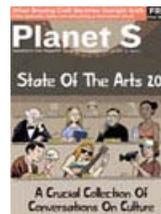
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A Lot Of Patients

It's Judy and Lucy and Dot and Mae and all their pretend pals

by James Brotheridge

DOT AND MAE: DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR
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Normally, telling someone they'd fit right into a 1940s mental hospital either as inmates OR nurses would be insulting (or at least really confusing). But Judy Wensel and Lucy Hill would probably take it as a compliment. The pair play both caregivers and patients in their improvised production *Dot And Mae: Delusions Of Grandeur*, which opens this month on the Globe Theatre's Sandbox stage.

Hill and Wensel have a rare mix of friendship and artistic compatibility that makes for really, really great performances. Going into *Dot and Mae*, they were

obviously thinking of how to make their chemistry work for a long improv show with just the two of them onstage at all times.

That's where the titular characters come in. F.Y.I.: Hill is Dot and Wensel is Mae. It took a bit for the two of them to figure that out.

"Dot was always a name that we had," says Hill. "You went through --"

"I went through like four different names, and then I eventually chose Mae because my grandmother was a nurse in the '40s and her name was Mae," says Wensel, finishing the sentence.

"Mine, I just thought was cute," says Hill.

"There was even a fight over Dot," says Wensel.

Hill and Wensel have had a storied career in Regina. They first met as performers doing *The Fusion Project* in 2006, an annual undertaking at the Globe Theatre where high-schoolers develop a production for the Shumiatcher Sandbox. At the same time, they were both performing with their high schools improv teams. Later on, they worked together often at the Globe, as well as in different improv shows around Regina.

The friendship they've developed is so clear and cute. Affection gushes when I ask about their first impressions of each other.

"Judy is a few years older than me, and I remember in the Canadian Improv Games thinking she was so cool and had a really awesome belt on, [turns to face Wensel] and I complimented you on it in the bathroom one time," says Hill. "Yeah, I thought you were really cool."

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"I thought Lucy was very sweet, and during Fusion, just thought she was a powerhouse of -- she had this ability to be super over-the-top and really brave onstage," says Wensel.

From there, they got chummy offstage. That led to them performing as a duo around Regina and then going to an improv festival in Victoria in the summer of 2010. There, notable improv artist Alistair Cook suggested the idea for Hill and Wensel that would become *Dot and Mae*.

"His reasoning for it was that Judy and I play very sweet and genuine characters, but ultimately, we also play absurd and eccentric characters that within a given improv set will switch between these two extremes," says Hill.

Dot and Mae, two of the nurses at Hawthorn Asylum, introduce the audience to and guide them through the patients' completely improvised stories. Every night of the show's seven-night run will have a new cast of characters along with Dot and Mae, who tie the whole thing together.

The relationship of the two nurses changes depending on the needs of a given night, but Hill and Wensel have a solid handle on how their fictional duo works.

"They try to keep each other in line, because one will always sort of drift off topic," says Hill.

"They take their work seriously, but they're also just young girls who are in nursing--"

"They have crushes and they smooch boys and they gossip about the hospital," says Wensel.

"They've got a bit of an edge, too," says Hill."

"We had a couple of instances working with Alistair where it was very Dot and Mae," says Hill.

"We'd get excited about something --"

"And turn into giddy, giggly girls. It was even kind of annoying, I think, for Alistair," says Wensel.

You can also see the pair becoming invested in the depth of the characters they invent night after night.

"It's funny how you'll do a character and you immediately become attached to them," says Wensel. "I always find that if I do a character and then Lucy does them, I'll be like, "Ugh. She's missing how my legs were."

"I feel the same way!" says Hill.

"It's so funny that you get so attached to people that you've made up on the spot and feel responsible that they get treated well," says Wensel.

One last thing: when I interviewed Hill and Wensel, they'd just been playing around with evocative names for patients like "Vince Lube". Will that make it to the stage? Dunno, but don't bet against it.



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