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UP CLOSE: Renderer carves out a creative niche in Upper Jay

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By TOM SALITSKY (tsalitsky@adironackdailyenterprise.com) , Lake Placid News

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UPPER JAY - Actor. Director. Painter. Drummer. Promoter. It's fair to say that Upper Jay Art Center Artistic Director Scott Renderer wears a lot of hats.

"When people talk about if they're able to do what they do, they don't really choose it; it chooses them," he said. "It's sometimes a curse, too, because I want to do everything. One of my biggest problems is I want to have a relationship with the world in a way that is creative somehow."

Renderer founded the Upper Jay Art Center in 2005 with his brother, Byron. The three-story former Ford plant shares a space with Upper Jay Upholstery, the brothers' upholstery shop. Recognized as a nonprofit organization, the center hosts concerts, plays, poetry readings, art exhibitions, dance performances and artistic seminars in its performance space, the Recovery Lounge.

Article Photos



Upper Jay Art Center Artistic Director Scott Renderer enjo...



"If it's art-related, we do it," Renderer said. "I'm open to the idea of doing almost anything."

How did this actor from the Pacific Northwest find his way to Upper Jay?

As a child in Olympia, Washington, Renderer's first love was painting. At around the age of 5, he took an oil painting class "in the back of a hardware store," and he enjoyed the freedom he found in expressing

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his creativity and the positive reaction it brought from the people in his life.

"There is nothing more affirmative than making a drawing or painting as a little kid and all the grown-ups telling you how amazing it is, whether it is or it isn't," he said. "That's where it all started. Hopefully, they weren't all lying to me."

When Renderer was a teenager, he began acting in his high school's plays, but it was a field trip to see a performance of Peter Shaffer's "Equus" by the Seattle Repertory Theatre that really ignited his interest in the theater.

"It was such an intense play, and it just sold me on it," Renderer said. "I'll never forget that moment. People do this, and people pay money to come and see it as well."

Renderer majored in theater at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington.

"The head of the department took me to New York, actually physically bought me a ticket, physically took me to New York and said, 'This is where you have to come if you want to be a professional actor. Forget about L.A.,'" he said. "And so I moved to New York right out of college and started what you do there, working from the ground up."

Over the next 20 years, Renderer lived the life of an actor in the city. He began performing with the Wooster Group, "a company of artists who make work for theater, dance and media" that has included celebrated members such as Spalding Gray, Willem Dafoe, Frances McDormand and Maura Tierney.

And then, one day, he had enough.

Recovery Lounge

When Renderer's son was born, he and his wife spent a year raising him in the city before deciding they needed a change of scenery.

"I was ready to retire from acting," Renderer said. "A year was enough of having him in that environment. I couldn't relate to it because I grew up in the country, and both my wife and I decided, 'Maybe we should move.'"

"We'd always loved the Adirondacks and thought this would be a great place to raise a kid."

Renderer couldn't stay away for long, though. When he and Byron opened Upper Jay Upholstery, and the duo, both musicians, began using the venue for musical events.

"We just started hosting small events here, parties, and it just caught on," Renderer said. "This is a great place to have a concert and to have people come and listen to music. A friend of mine suggested maybe I should do a play, which I did, and that became the beginning really of everything we do now."

Renderer said the center's programming quickly expanded.

"I became ambitious and encouraged and realized that it was a pretty great environment here, not just the building, but the Adirondacks, for audiences," he said. "There are a lot of people here that like plays and like music and that responded favorably to the kind of stuff I was doing."

Although Renderer has been with the center since the beginning, he only recently became its sole salaried employee thanks to a state grant the center received.

"The position is now official, and it's great to actually be able to sit here and talk to you and be paid for it," he said.

And, in a curious case of symmetry, Renderer has begun acting with the Wooster Group again, right on cue, playing Bert in Harold Pinter's "The Room."

"I told the Wooster Group that I would be available in 18 years when

my son goes to college, and I might come back down and do a play with you guys, so don't hesitate to call me," he said. "That's what happened.

"It's really great work that they do, so I'm actually really blessed to be able to participate with a group at that level."

Just like that production of "Equus" inspired him to pursue a life in the theater, Renderer hopes to inspire young people today with his work at the center.

"I'm trying to encourage younger people to come here, too, which is challenging," he said. "In this day and age, it's hard to pull kids away from their gadgets.

"I'd like to expose as many young people to art, theater and music as possible. That's really important, especially around here, where they may not get into a city or something to see really good stuff that might inspire them (or) point them in a direction. That stuff really does happen to kids. They see something in that moment and think, 'That's what I want to do!' That's what happened to me."

For more information on the Upper Jay Art Center and the Recovery Lounge, visit upperjayartcenter.org or call 518-946-8315.

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