



# *Mind The Gap Productions*

ADRIAN DIFFY BROUGHT HIS LOVE OF THEATRE WITH HIM FROM EUROPE AND CONTINUES TO INSPIRE IN DOWNTOWN SALINE

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Photos and Story by Phil Eich, Storyville Social, as part of the Michigan Main Street Story Series

I grew up in England, which everybody asks me about here. Of course, there's no one simple answer, because my father liked to move around with his job, so, I lived in several different places.

I was born in south England, in Bournemouth. That was my birthplace, and it had a nice beach, but we didn't stay that long. I was seven when he moved us to Staffordshire, which has no beach. It's pretty midland, with a completely different accent, so to blend in, I decided that the only way to make friends at school was to copy the accent of the locals. Plus, I had thought about being a potential actor and I seemed to have a propensity for that, which was great because it saved me from being depressed.

Acting is interesting, because I always liked acting in school, but I was pulled towards track and field, because I was pretty good at that. I got into the national team as a junior and my parents couldn't understand acting. They realized I could run fast and throw things, which I could, and that got me into college with a partial scholarship.

I went to the University of London and did a teaching degree. Physical education was my first, but then I decided I needed a second one because people weren't taking me seriously teaching physical education. I was working 70-80 hours a week coaching and stuff all the time, which was not really what I planned for, so I did a social science degree in economics and geography and that got me further into

education. It decreased my workload by about 60% or so and I got a job working for the EU, which was my salvation.

I left Britain in 1978 having had six years teaching experience and went to Italy to work for the EU in a European School teaching biology and integrated science. I was always teaching with acting in mind. To get the attention of students, you've got to perform. If you want them to listen, you've got to stand on your head, literally. So, I could actually do that. I could physically do a handstand for half an hour.

Then I moved to Luxembourg six years later and finished my career there. That city has a very interesting cross section of people. Lots of different people, and some who work as translators. Luxembourg's a fantastic country and trilingual, so I picked up a number of languages while I was there, which helped me.

I was doing standup at parties and people said, 'You should join the acting group here,' and I said, 'Well, who are they?' So, I found them, joined, and then it took off. I went back to England and did weekend workshops and week-long workshops working with different people like John Malkovich. It all kind of seemed to 'be me'. Acting was me.

I did productions with the National Theatre, which always sounds impressive, but of course, if it was England, it would have been Judi Dench and Helen Mirren. But Luxembourg had attracted people like John Malkovich to come from Paris with the Parisian group, so I followed him on stage.



I met my wife, who is from Michigan, at a theatre workshop in Luxembourg. She's a trained nurse from here and went to University of Michigan.

We had done a production together when she divorced her husband and was going back to the U.S. I thought, 'Well, we should really get to know each other first,' so she moved into my house. We'll be celebrating our 25th anniversary, although we've got five years together prior to getting married so we've been together nearly 30 years and my sons love her.

The move to Michigan was kind of a negative for me because we were really getting going in Luxembourg. Both of us had been cast in some national productions and we had our own radio program on Radio Luxembourg, we were writing stuff, and things like that.

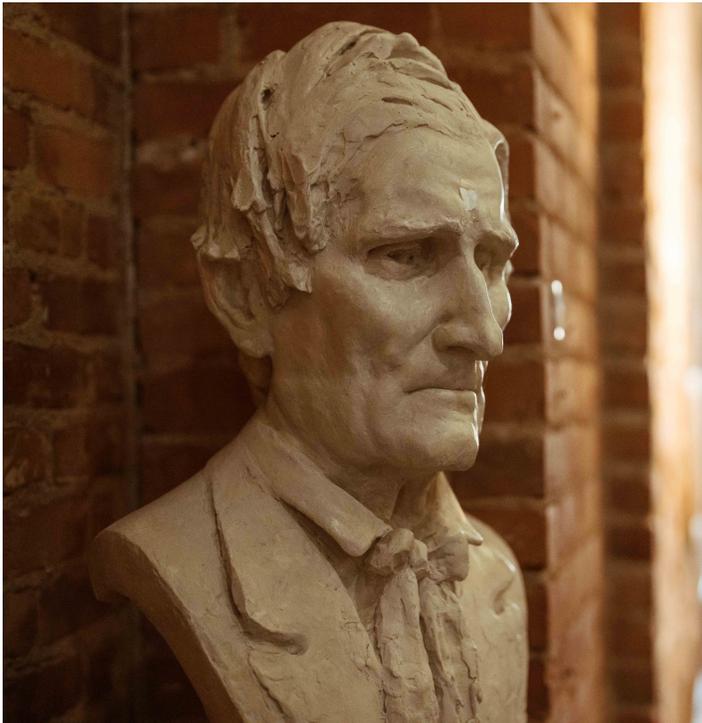
But her parents were getting old in age, and she wanted to spend their last few years with

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them here, so we rented a house out in Marine City, out there on the St. Clair River in Port Huron. I was walking in Marine City on the day after Christmas (we call it Boxing Day) and discovered a new theatre that was being literally assembled from a building not dissimilar to our 109 Cultural Exchange here in Saline.

I spoke to the owners, and we finished up having dinner together. Then we both got cast in the very first play there at the Riverside Art Center, which is now an established theatre. They actually refer to it as the 'mini-Stratford'. It's amazing. They built a hotel alongside it, and it has two theatres.

We did that and then I started going off on my own auditioning for stuff. We both got cast in different roles



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for a few years, when I thought it would be nice if we had our own theatre company to try and do things that other people are not doing.

So, we started Mind The Gap Theatre Productions here in Michigan using the Theatre Nova in Ann Arbor as a base. Today, we've been lucky to find the 109 Cultural Exchange to use because now we live in Saline. It's great because we want to expand what's going on here and bring live theater to Saline.

Everyone probably has a different view on it, but my view is that theatre allows people to come along and immerse themselves with real people, in real time, doing something that takes them into another world rather than a flat screen. Nothing against flat screens, I've used it many times and I think there's a way we have to also merge the two these days.

But with theatre, it's a real set, with real furniture, real people, and real rapport with people on stage. You feel it. I hope the audience feels it. It's a real, visceral experience. It's something that people can go talk about afterwards, or hopefully they will. They take that with them and will want to come back to see that kind of thing.

Theatre is special and if a downtown like this has a theatre space, people can have a really great night out. They can go out and have a meal or a drink in between and it's a unique experience.

The vibrancy grant allowed us to purchase high-quality lighting, which we can actually later hopefully suspend from a rail and we can redirect them, Wi-Fi-operated, high-quality speakers, a sound board and also a lighting board. It's state of the art. It hasn't arrived yet, because it's on COVID backlog, but it's been purchased and will really help create some interesting lighting plots.

I'm 72 now and I started in theatre at 36. Too short of time, really. It keeps me young. It's the lifeblood of my life. The last role I played I did nearly 1,800 lines, on stage for two hours, nonstop virtually, with a 10-minute break.

It's brought me into contact with people who I share a lot of interest with. But more than that, it's enabled me to find myself in different ways and also come out of those parts maybe a more sensitive person, which I hope I am, but at least more aware.

– Adrian Diffey, Mind the Gap Theatre Productions & 109 Cultural Exchange



# Michigan Main Street Story Series



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