Julien Arnold 1964-2024

I am writing today once more with great sadness to report a second incalculable loss to the Edmonton Theatre community. In October, 2024 we lost beloved educator/writer/director/actor, James (Jim) DeFelice; just a few days ago, on November 24, 2024 we lost beloved Edmonton actor,/director/teacher, Julien Arnold. As Liz Nicholls writes in her moving tribute: “The untimely passing of Julien Arnold at 60, felled by a heart attack at the Citadel during Sunday night’s preview performance of *A Christmas Carol*, robs us of one of our finest, and most beloved, actors.” <https://12thnight.ca/2024/11/25/a-wonder-of-an-actor-in-julien-arnold-weve-lost-one-of-our-finest-and-most-loved-theatre-artists/>

According to Anne Nothof’s entry in the *Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia*, <https://www.canadiantheatre.com/dict.pl?term=Arnold%2C%20Julien>, Julien was born in 1964, and lived with his English parents and grandparents in Tanzania until he was five. He grew up and was educated in Edmonton, graduating from the University of Alberta with a BFA in acting in 1989, then an MFA in directing in 2006. For over 35 years, Julien’s enormous talent, versatility and energy made him a constant presence on all of Edmonton’s main and alternative stages including the Citadel Theatre (where his performance as Bottom in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* won him a 2012 Sterling for Outstanding Performance in a Supporting role), Workshop West, Theatre Network, Northern Light Theatre, Shadow Theatre, and Mayfield Dinner Theatre. However, he was a perpetual and sustaining creative force everywhere that theatre was found in Edmonton. He was a founding member of the Free Will Players (1989) which produces the Freewill Shakespeare Festival every summer in Edmonton, an ensemble member of Teatro La Quindicina from 1990 where he performed in many of award-winning playwright Stewart Lemoine’s distinctive comedies, and an initiator of Atlas Theatre Collective (2008) which concentrated on producing contemporary plays. He also appeared in other independent companies, including Theatre Yes, where he was nominated for a Sterling Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor in the world premiere of Cat Walsh’s play *The Laws of Thermodynamics* (2015), and the Fringe Festival where he won a 2014 Sterling award for Outstanding Fringe Performance by an actor in the title role of Jeffrey Hatcher’s *A Picasso.*

I first met Julien as a student in my Canadian Theatre class as part of his BFA training, and watched many of his performances in the Edmonton Theatre since then. He was never less than outstanding in any context in which I encountered him, but like several generations of Edmontonians, my memories of Julien are inextricably tied to his several decades of performance in the annual Citadel production of *A Christmas Carol* first in the Tom Wood adaptation (2000-2018) set In Victorian London, then in the David Van Belle adaptation set in 1940s North America (2019-2024). While Julien played multiple roles in the productions over the years – as part of the acting and musical ensemble, as Marley’s ghost, as Fezziwig, and memorably as Scrooge himself, I agree with Nicholls that for many of us he was the quintessential Bob Cratchit, the role he played for almost two decades in the Wood adaptation. Surrounded by a Dickensian world full of crushing hardship, injustice, poverty, cruelty, and indifference, he had a genius for reminding us of the human capacity to bring humour, wit, humanity, hope, and resilience to that fallen world in a way that transformed it into a place of magic, light, redemption and possibilities. I cannot think of a better place for him to have made his final bow to Edmonton audiences than in a production than he had given so much to over the years – though one may wish that that departure had happened many years from now and in less tragic circumstances.

Our deepest sympathies to Julien’s friends and family, and especially to his wife, Sheiny Satanove, Punctuate! Theatre managing director.