

# Why Can't TYA Be More Like Hockey?

By David A. Miller

**H**ockey is better than theatre for young audiences.

More specifically, seeing hockey is more exciting than seeing theatre. It's not that I don't love theatre. I do. But, I also love hockey. And I often wish that the best parts of hockey were present in every TYA production.

It's not the fighting that I love. It's the speed, the skill, the competitive drive of the players and the unbridled enthusiasm emanating from the fans that excites me every time I go to a hockey game. I want to feel the same excitement about every TYA production I attend.

I want to root for my team.

I want to see a hero emerge.

I want to experience the game, not sit idly by.

I want to feel that my presence really makes a difference and that my cheering can truly fuel the players on the ice.

If TYA were more like hockey, I would show up to every production with the intuitive knowledge and the faith that something magical, unbelievable even, could happen *tonight*—and not because *I* think so, but because we *all* think so. As lighting designer Martha Mountain wrote, "That shared adrenaline high is an amazing thing, fearsome even. The crowd at a game *always* remembers that it is part of a shared experience." Even when my New York Rangers (and because I am a fan, I can call them mine) were in their doldrums, we showed up at games knowing that tonight could be the night that everything changed and that if we believed, truly believed—like Tinkerbell and so much clapping—we could turn the team around. It's why the announcers at Madison Square Garden refer to us, the fans, as "the Garden Faithful."

If TYA were more like hockey, we would be updating our "Fantasy TYA Teams" every day—trading characters, checking stats, ensuring that our team was stocked with only All Stars. If TYA were more like hockey, I would buy the *Media Guide* at the start of every year to learn more about the characters appearing in the upcoming season—their stats, their background, country of origin, and where they spend their time in the "off season."

If TYA were more like hockey, we would bleed our team colors. If TYA were more like hockey, we would *have* team colors. We would wear our theatre jerseys to the show. Hours before the performance, our hearts would start beating faster when we pulled that shirt over our heads in anticipation of entering the building, seeing the house lights dim, and the first lights up.

If TYA were more like hockey, I would high-five total strangers with unabashed joy during highpoints of the performance. I wouldn't be afraid to talk with total strangers about the performance during intermission, even when we are standing side by side at the urinals. I would overhear heated, healthy, and nonviolent arguments in the house about who the theatre's MVP should be this season—perhaps that Seattle's Hamlet really is going to come through in the second half, or that Wilbur is really underperforming this year.

If TYA were more like hockey, we would boo the character that hurt another. We would cheer the character that selflessly assisted another so that the super-objective could be achieved. And at the end of a great show, the fans would cheer the players but the players would also cheer the fans, just as the New York Rangers skate to center ice at the end of every home win and lift their sticks as a salute to their Garden Faithful.

Brian Leetch, one of the Rangers all-time greats, told the *New York Times* that he loved playing hockey because of its team camaraderie. "I never felt the need to be singled out when things went well," he said. "I never wanted to be singled out when they went bad." I feel the same way. I've played badly and I've played well. So have you. But it's not about you and it's not about me. Theatre for young audiences is a team sport. Let's get out there and play every game like it's the playoffs. The fans deserve it.

See you on the ice. ■

*David A. Miller is director of education at Roundabout Theatre Company. He will teach the university course "The Player on the Ice and the Player on the Stage: Actor and Audience in Hockey and Theatre" as soon as he is given the chance.*

## TYA All Stars

### Eastern Conference All Stars

- LW Benjamin  
*The Yellow Boat*
- C Little Girl  
*Tomato Plant Girl*
- RW Tom Sawyer
- LD Maggie  
*Hush: An Interview with America*
- RD Viola Swamp  
*Miss Nelson is Missing*
- G Atticus Finch  
*To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Coach: Mother Hicks

### Western Conference All Stars

- LW Marsupial Girl  
*Tale of a West Texas Marsupial Girl*
- C Sophie  
*The BFG*
- RW Peter Pan
- LD Salt  
*Salt and Pepper*
- RD Horton the Elephant  
*Seussical*
- G The Referee  
*The Wrestling Season*
- Coach: Mrs. Piggie Wiggle

For more TYA All Stars, visit [www.tyausa.org/allstars.htm](http://www.tyausa.org/allstars.htm)