

Friendship is the Magic Element in *The Treehouse Effect*

“The imagination is as powerful as we allow it to be” shares Theresa Mitchell, director of *The Treehouse Effect*, a new play by Brandon Jensen and Mark Warner. This idea is certainly central to the play that depicts the adventures of three boyhood friends who return to their site of childhood hijinks after years of separation. What makes their treehouse so special is its power to transform: from pirate ship to computer game backdrop to the site of a zombie invasion—and yes, even the once cherished bond of three best friends who have grown apart.

It’s not surprising that the journey of this play started with a simple idea between two good friends. Brandon Jensen and Mark Warner both attended the same high school and worked together on several projects while undergraduate students at Emporia State University. So, when Mark was struck with the idea for a new play, he immediately thought of Brandon, and their collaboration began. After two years of work, which included several readings, and revisions, *The Treehouse Effect* premiered on the ESU mainstage. The show is now one of six invited productions to be featured at this year’s KCACTF Region 5 festival.

This heartfelt piece packs a visual punch, as the magical treehouse transports the characters to all sorts of spectacular worlds. Gladiators, aliens, and dragons are just a few of the fantastical beings audiences will encounter in this tale of reignited friendship. The production features a soundscape by student designer Andrew McCutcheon, and an array of special effects to help conjure the adrenaline-charged voyage of the play. The company has worked since early January to remount and rebuild, and is thrilled to be bringing this show to Festival 48.

Warner hopes that this rambunctious comedy will remind us all of our childhood spirits, and connect to theatre-goers of all kinds. “I really want people who have never been to a show before, or who don’t often go to shows to walk away from it being more excited about live theatre.” Director Theresa Mitchell believes the play has central themes we can all relate to: “What I find striking in this play is that the theme, finding balance, doesn't just apply to young professionals, but to anybody at any point in their lives. Many struggle with balancing family, friends and careers. Some burnout, and realize they are unsatisfied or unhappy. Sometimes it takes friends to bring us to a place where we can feel authentic and whole.”

Catch this exhilarating new play on the Mainstage at the Ames Center on Thursday, January 21 at 7:30pm. It’s sure to be a delightful romp as our youthful imaginations take hold. And, as always, be sure to bring your friends.