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## LMDA Canada: Canadian Newsletter, November 16, 1998

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Canadian Newsletter, Nov. 16, 1998

Dear Colleague –

Thank you to all who have renewed their memberships. For those of you who have not renewed, I urge you to do so as soon as you have a moment. Please make cheques payable to LMDA (Canada).

Renewed members:

Jeannette Lambermont, Michael Groberman, David Duclos (new member), Mary Blackstone, Ben Henderson, James Defelice, Alisa Palmer, Denis Johnson, Jackie Maxwell, Don Kugler, Urjo Kareda, David Copelin, Chapelle Jaffe, Brian Richmond, Deirdre Murphy, Kim McCaw, Joanna Falck, Keith Turnbull, Brian Quirt, Stuart Scadron-Wattles and Adrienne Wong.

Dates to remember:

- **LMDA CANADA MEETING AT ATP PLAYRITES FESTIVAL BLITZ WEEKEND –**  
An LMDA meeting will be held on Friday February 26 from noon to 4pm as part of the festival's Blitz Weekend. Geoff Proehl, LMDA President, is planning to attend. The agenda will include Canadian content at the Tacoma conference, as well as discussion of Canadian dramaturgical issues. If you want something placed on the agenda, please contact me.  
For information on attending the Blitz Weekend, contact Bob White, Associate Artistic Director at ATP, at 403-294-7475 or <whiterf@ATPlive.com>.
- The 1999 LMDA Annual Conference will take place at the University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington, June 17 to 20, 1999.
- The PACT conference will be held in Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON, June 23 - 26, 1999.
- The Theatre Centre will be hosting its third Dramaturgy Conference in July 1999. If you would like to attend or speak at the conference, please let me know.

Thank you to all the contributors to this newsletter, and to the Theatre Centre for underwriting the mailing expenses.

Yours,

“Would you be interested in writing a book for us on playwriting?” asks THE WRITER, a monthly American magazine for beginning authors in a variety of genres. *Yet another pompous how-to for wanna-bes?* Thanks in part to such books, many mediocre scripts are born, scripts that scream thesis-in-a-sentence, or are ploddingly sincere, or are new versions of that hardy perennial, the autobiographical melodrama that tells in excruciating detail how Mr. or Ms. Sensitivity got away from (or was destroyed by, or both) his/her horrible family. Write one of those? *Moi?* I don’t think so!

Besides, did Shakespeare read a playwriting text? Did Molière? Did Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw, Lorca, Brecht, Beckett, Shepard, Mamet, Shange, Churchill, and the rest of the good playwrights? Did any of them *write* one?

On the other hand—

I could quote scenes from my own plays to illustrate various techniques. *Cool.* Maybe I can get some productions that way, playwriting workshops, sessional teaching gigs, bring in some cash....

*Cash.*

I am human, and flawed, and broke.

I say yes.

Publication of *Practical Playwriting* is virtually guaranteed. I get an advance against royalties, access to a niche market, the chance to get my hands dirty, the dubious thrill of facing critics—and the opportunity to find out what my ideas on playwriting actually *are*. Fair enough.

Can I entice beginning playwrights to trust their unique imaginations, and to find (or create) appropriate theatrical forms in which to share their stories publicly? How do I tell people what to do *without* telling people what to do?

For months, I feel like a law-firm receptionist: “Angst, Anxiety and Stress, good morning....” I write, but during those months I also fall in love, immigrate to Canada, get married, move to Toronto, get a day job, and buy a house. My mother dies. I stop watching *Seinfeld* and read Dick Francis novels instead.

Suddenly, *Practical Playwriting* is finished. Does the book make sense, or is it the biggest load of bullshit since *Cats*? I can’t tell. My hands are dirty. My nails are bitten, and I haven’t written a play in far too long. But the Library of Congress knows my name.

Part of me says, “Such *chutzpah!*” Another part of me replies, “Shut up. Don’t dramaturg your own life. Let the book go, and write a new play. Work is the cure for too much thought.”

## Adapting Theatre History

– Don Kugler

When I joined the theatre faculty with the School for the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University (SFU), I inherited the responsibility for teaching two one-term “foundation” courses which were offered in the fall term on alternate years. They are essentially theatre history courses – required for the BFA theatre major – and the only theatre history in the curriculum.

I did not relish the smorgasbord approach required to teach the entire history of theatre in two terms, so I decided to radically narrow the scope to the classics – one course on Shakespeare, the other on Greek tragedy.

At SFU, the theatre training does not focus exclusively on acting, but instead emphasizes the all-round theatre artist. Indeed, playmaking courses run parallel to, and are given equal weight as, the acting courses. Because of this, I decided to further narrow the courses to the role of the classics in play creation, with a particular emphasis upon contemporary adaptation.

Here’s the course outline and reading list for the Shakespeare course.

**OUTLINE:** This course examines four Shakespeare plays, their production histories, and contemporary plays inspired by them. Students will read at least one play, and critical material, each week; they will develop and demonstrate analytical skills in three reports, and a final paper. The reading and writing will form a springboard for class discussion about the enduring strengths of the original plays, and their re-interpretation as a result of an evolving theatre / audience relationship.

### **READING LIST:**

Jan Kott: **SHAKESPEARE OUR CONTEMPORARY**  
Shakespeare: **A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM**  
    Botho Strauss: **THE PARK**  
    **THE FAIRIES, AN OPERA**  
Shakespeare: **RICHARD III**  
    Colley Cibber adaptation  
    Normand Charette: **THE QUEENS**  
Shakespeare: **KING LEAR**  
    Nahum Tate adaptation  
    Howard Barker: **SEVEN LEARS**  
    Edward Bond: **LEAR**  
Shakespeare: **HAMLET**  
    Ken Gass: **CLAUDIUS**  
    Janusz Glowacki: **FORTINBRAS GETS DRUNK**  
    Robert Lepage: **ELSINORE**  
    Heiner Muller: **HAMLET MACHINE**  
    Michael O’Brien: **MAD BOY CHRONICLE**  
    Peter Eliot Weiss: **HAUNTED HOUSE HAMLET**

By limiting the course to four Shakespeare texts, the students became very familiar with each work. They also were exposed to early adaptations, some heavy-hitting European playwrights, and, I’m proud to say, a large number of contemporary Canadian playwrights.

The Greek course has a similar outline, and the following reading list. Fewer adaptations, and not as much Canadian content here, but I'm still working on the model.

**READING LIST:**

Aristotle: POETICA  
Aeschylus: THE LIBATION BEARERS  
Sophocles: ELECTRA  
Euripides: ELECTRA  
Christenson & Tremblay: ELECTRA  
Euripides: ORESTES  
Mee: ORESTES  
Sophocles: OEDIPUS THE KING  
Berkoff: GREEK  
Cocteau: THE INFERNAL MACHINE  
Kugler/Rose: NEWHOUSE  
Sophocles: OEDIPUS AT COLONUS  
Breur: THE GOSPEL AT COLONUS  
Sophocles: AJAX  
Sherman: 3 IN THE BACK, 2 IN THE HEAD  
Euripides: HIPPOLYTUS  
Racine: PHAEDRA  
Harrison: PHAEDRA BRITANNICA  
Euripides: THE BACCHAE  
Soyinka: BACCHAE OF EURIPIDES  
Euripides: THE TROJAN WOMEN  
Bond: THE WOMEN

We added a fall term playmaking course, taught by my colleagues Marc Diamond and Penelope Stella, that we call adaptation / deconstruction. This term the students, many of whom are also in my Greek course, are exploring various translations of Sophocles' OEDIPUS REX, and use the studio to adapt scenes and elements. It will lead to the spring mainstage production based, at least in part, on the material the students generate. We plan to have this adaptation/deconstruction course each fall, and have it lead each spring to the mainstage production. It won't always be Greek, but this year it is.

Each week begins with a ten-minute quiz on the text and adaptations due that week. I try to make the quiz easy, if you've really read the play, and impossible if you haven't. It's a chance to bolster their grades, but it also requires them to read with an eye to significant detail.

I create and distribute scene / character / action breakdowns of each text and we compare these structural overviews in class. Often we are surprised that an adaptation, which seems far afield, actually shares very similar structures with its source. Charles Mee's ORESTES is a deconstructionist's dream, and yet it is almost fanatical in following – even quoting – Euripides' original structure.

I repeatedly ask the students to identify in their papers (which are due prior to class discussion) significant structural disparities between the original and the adaptation, to detail the ramifications of those differences, and then to speculate on the implied intent.

One student wrote on the ELECTRA chorus of Sophocles, which tends to speak as one voice, and the individual voices of the democratized chorus in Catalyst Theatre's ELECTRA. Another wrote on the final appearance of Apollo in Euripides' ORESTES, whom everyone seems to obey, and Charles Mee's American President Apollo, whom everyone ignores. These are only 2-3 page papers, but I'm trying to get them to anchor their ideas in small but significant structural elements, and then move out toward the larger implications of those changes.

It seems clear that each week they are more open to the demands of the classical material. Last year, for example, they ended up preferring the Shakespearean texts to the adaptations, which surprised me. They came to appreciate Shakespeare's dense, rich and complex work in comparison to adaptations which were often more single-minded.

But I rail against consensus, and the student responses are increasingly diverse. For a course evaluation last year I asked them to name the character they would most like to play, the play they would most like to direct, the play they would most like to design, and the play they would be most likely to recommend to a friend. Each tended to name four different plays, and every play on the syllabus got mentioned by someone in class. I was astonished, and delighted. I encourage these very personal journeys through the material.

I'm making this up as I go along. It's very much a work in progress. I don't know if engages students in a significant way, or if it's just another course to navigate.

Supporting all our lively classroom discussions is one basic question: why do contemporary artists make use of a classical texts.

I hope that, someday, these students will turn to the classics as a source in their own play creation. The key word is "someday." If there are payoffs, they will be long-term payoffs. They aren't now eager to produce a classic, or an adaptation. But I'm hoping that someday they might.

*Don Kugler is a freelance director / dramaturg teaching in the theatre area of the School for Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University.  
Contact him at <ddkugler@sfu.ca>.*

## A Readiness to Receive

by Lindsay Bell

Christopher Fry's verse comedy *The Lady's Not for Burning* was an enlightening but challenging example of post-war theatre when it premiered in 1948 at London's Arts Theatre. Following in the footsteps of Yeats and Eliot, Fry's verse plays were a refreshing and welcomed relief to England's post-war stage. Written in a free verse style, the poetry is without obvious scansion, couplets or cesuras. It is philosophical and flowery, "Nothing can be seen / In the thistle-down, but the rough-head thistle comes." It is witty and direct, "Nicholas, you always think / You can do things better than your mother. You can be sure / You were born quite adequately on the first occasion." And it is antithetical, "I'll live too, if it kills me." The issue of verse and performance, the *playing* of the poetry, is as prominent in the response to productions of Fry's plays now as it was when it first appeared on the London stage.

In 1948, the critics and the audience were mesmerized by Fry's dazzling wit and poetry and focused solely on the glittering surface of the play without delving into its depths. What the criticism amounted to, in Fry's mind, was a misunderstanding of the poetry as a vehicle of communication. In his essay, "An Experience of Critics" (1952), Christopher Fry defines his use of poetry as a vehicle of form and meaning in his plays. "As comedy is not a drama with laughs," Fry writes, "so a verse play is not a prose play which happens to be in verse. It has its own nature. Who understands the poetry understands the construction, who understands the construction, understands the poetry, for the poetry is the action, and the action, even apart from the words, is the figure of the poetry." Can great literature blossom into great theatre? Simply reading the play is a delight and it becomes quite clear why Fry was deemed the "Shakespeare of the twentieth century." But in practice, transposing these words from the page into the physical world seems to be unexpectedly challenging.

The 1998 Shaw Festival production of *The Lady's Not for Burning* was possibly one of the best productions this play has had, or perhaps will ever have. The production design created a world in which the poetry lived and the performances embraced the language and this fictional world. However, there was still something missing. Perhaps it is allowing the poetry to be the action and finding the action in the poetry. In rehearsal it was so easy to become immersed in the poetry and follow *every* connotation of *every* metaphor into *every* possible interpretation, that often the physical action was not part of the equation. One solution to guard against this trap is to discard the words, go back to the basics and rediscover the story (and the language) physically -- discover the place where the poetry lives and make the poetry the action.

Poetry is an innate method of communication, dating back to the Greeks and including our own adolescent scribbles of things that couldn't possibly be said in any other way *but* verse. Recognizing this, why then is poetry as a vehicle of communication so foreign, so unwelcomed and misunderstood on the twentieth-century stage? Perhaps it is because it forces an outward expression of the inner *poetic* experience. Turning outside what lies within. And consequently, unleashing poetry into action and the physical realm, ready to be received. Verse drama demands that the audience retreats generously into a state of *tabula rasa* and willing abandonment. In Fry's words, "a critic [or audience member] does not have to abandon all thought of ice-cream or lemonade in the interval, but ideally there should be nothing, no preconception of what a play is, no importance, no demands, between him and the stage; only a readiness to receive."

Lindsay Bell was the dramaturgical assistant for the 1998 Shaw Festival production of *The Lady's Not for Burning*.



The Theatre Centre proudly presents  
**BODY GEOMETRY**  
Supported by du Maurier Arts  
A Festival of 10 New Dance Theatre Works  
Runs November 20 – December 13, 1998  
Theatre Centre Box Office 416.538.0988

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Toronto, Ontario... Theatre Centre opens **BODY GEOMETRY** Dance Theatre Festival with wordmachine's *Book of Thoht*. Written by DAVID DUCLOS and Composed and Directed by JACK NICHOLSEN, *Book of Thoht*'s unique blend of poetry, music and choreography creates a dreamscape lament for innocence lost. It is a tapestry of six dance poems and one dramatic narrative. The telling of the narrative is the telling of a journey, and across its passage in time, six other memories are woven like necessary interruptions, like artful distractions... wordmachine unpicks the language of theatre from its usual frozen form and re-syntaxes it to a living poetry.

wordmachine's *Book of Thoht*  
Written by David Duclos  
Composed and Directed by Jack NicholSEN  
Featuring the Choreography of Shannon Cooney, Learie McNicolls, Jessica Runge  
Performed by Shannon Cooney, David Duclos, Learie McNicolls, Jane Miller, Jessica Runge  
Lighting and Set Design by Steve Lucas  
Stage Management by Jp Robichaud  
Preview November 20th  
Runs November 21st– December 6th, 1998  
Tues. – Sun. 8:00pm  
Tickets \$15; Sun. Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> half-price

Double billed with *Book of Thoht* are: from November 21-22: Sarah Chase's *Muzz*: Storytelling and movement interwoven to create a dance sparked by memory and oral history; from November 26-29: Susanna Hood's *Colours, Phase I (blu and Green)*: An integration of dance, music, film and sound exploring the movement of colours; and from December 3-6: Corpus' *Rendez-vous*: Choreographed by Sylvie Bouchard and David Danson: A comedic study in movement of the relationship of the everyday and the exceptional. (all performances at 9:30 pm)

**BODY GEOMETRY** ends its festival with the presentation of 7 exciting dance works by independent choreographers running from December 10-13, 1998 at 8:00pm. Tickets \$15; Fri. Dec. 11<sup>th</sup> half-price. Works included are:

Holly Small's *Ophelia*: After Ophelia drowns Small imagines sinking into the water with Ophelia passing through to the magical underworld; Viv Moore's *An Inside View*: A minimalistic exploration of inner static moments of horror; Sudharshan Duraiyappah's *Indigo*: A dance portrait of images of water; Learie McNicoll's *Armour*: Marks one of the greatest passages in a dancer's life -- the journey back into a body that is human with age, replete with desire and needful of new understanding; Rebecca Todd's *Dendrite*: *The Blood Solo*: A meditation on biology and a love song inspired by the charged electric currents that animate the heart and by the living pulse of the circulating blood; Ned Dickens and Bruce Beaton's *My Body of Work*: A personification of the human body as a living, archival record of injury; Norma Araiza's *La Llorona*: A journey of visions, memories and the ghosts of the departed.

## Necessary Theatre Manifesto

– Stuart Scadron-Wattles

During the gasoline rationing days of World War II, one was supposed to ask oneself a searching question: Is this trip really necessary? It has become a question which I increasingly ask myself in these times of relatively scarce live performance.

I commend that question to you in somewhat modified form:

*What makes this piece of theatre necessary?*

From that question, I attempt to describe two kinds of theatre experience: the Necessary and the Obligatory. These descriptions have become guiding principles for our work at Theatre & Company. They are presented here in abbreviated form. A superficial reading of them will yield only aphorisms. The inquiring reader may find more, recognizing that these principles attempt to embrace audience, require performance dynamics, suggest acting methods, and have implications for dramaturgy:

Necessary Theatre brings artists and audience into that liminal imaginative space which is the theatre.

Obligatory Theatre requires attendance by both actor and audience. Both attend, without meeting.

Obligatory Theatre presents, depicts and challenges, but does not involve. It is *supposedly* good for you.

Necessary Theatre invites us to explore other selves, only to return to ourself, poised for fresh understanding. It recreates. In its proposition of new ways of seeing and being, it gives us hope. In its companionship to our life journey, it lends us strength. It *is* good for you.

Necessary Theatre explicates values. It proposes an order to the chaos of fragmented lives. It scatters the false order of unhelpful assumptions. It reports from the front of cultural change.

Obligatory Theatre celebrates itself, at times proposing idolatry. It is often either self-referential or over-dependent upon contemporary cultural references for its currency.

Necessary Theatre finds, forms, and celebrates the community of audience and artists. There is a compulsion to share the performance event with others who did not attend.

Necessary Theatre requires actors who have recognized their truths, the truths of the piece, and are ready to recognize and incorporate the truths of the audience. It requires that its audience be present and available to the work and that the work be present and available to its audience.

Obligatory Theatre does not require true actors, only skilled actors. It does not require a present audience, only an attentive one.

Obligatory Theatre could work equally well on television.

Necessary Theatre requires the live performance dynamic for its existence.

A diverting piece can make for Necessary Theatre; a piece with serious themes can be Obligatory.

The distinction between Necessary and Obligatory theatre can only be made in performance.

Necessary Theatre may not have an immediately discernible effect.

We approach Necessary Theatre with anticipation, we leave with satisfaction. (Even if we are uneasy with the work or our responses to it.)

We attend Obligatory Theatre with a sense of duty and depart with a sense of duty accomplished. This is often the only satisfaction derived from the Obligatory Theatre experience.

Any theatre will, as a matter of course, present both Necessary and Obligatory Theatre. Our task is to maximize the former and minimize the latter.

. . . . .

While the evaluative distinction can only be made in performance, one must identify those elements of preparation which will maximize the occurrence of Necessary Theatre. We allow questions to flow from the manifesto.

Examples in dramaturgy: Is sufficient room left for an active audience imagination? How does the piece orient the audience concerning the use of their imagination? How does the text and its use encourage incarnation and value human presence?

Examples in rehearsal: Are the actors and technicians being readied for partnership with the audience, or merely prepared to put on a performance? How many of the five senses are we asking the audience to employ? How can we sensually re-orient them towards the piece? How can our previews help us in determining how to work with audiences and how audiences work with us? What parameters can director and performers set to allow for a flexible but consistently true performance run?

We also evaluate performance runs in order to determine what we can learn from them about preparing for next time.

Preparing for Necessary Theatre is best accomplished as a total theatre strategy: front and back of house are involved along with directors, dramaturgs, and performers.

Stuart Scadron-Wattles  
Producing Artistic Director  
Theatre & Company  
Kitchener, Ontario  
stuartsw@worldchat.com

I was first drawn to the theatre by escapist illusions of participating in the adventures of imaginary, extraordinary people; my initial objective was to become an actor. But my focus has shifted. No longer satisfied with in-depth investigation of only one character in a play, my perspective has widened to include a panoramic view of theatre. Questions about individual characters or forces have been superseded by questions about the theatrical form itself: What attracts people to theatre? What are the mechanics? How does it work? (or, more importantly) Why does it work?

The elusiveness of the answers to these, and other, questions are what keep me searching and working in theatre. The tangibility and solidity of a play script initially offered hope that my questions could be answered. I remember working at Alberta Theatre Projects in what was my first job in the arts. One of my duties was to bind the manuscripts received from playwrights around the world. Alone with pages and pages of dialogue, I felt confident that my delicious answers were hidden, but present. Techniques of text analysis proved that my hunch was correct. Like a good actor, I pulled everything from the text. A printed play script gave me a handle on one aspect of the theatrical experience; it gave me a way in.

As my education progressed and as I was exposed to different forms of theatre, my faith in the elucidating power of text was eroded. My old questions were joined by new ones: If the answers are all in the text, how could a script recognized as successful be badly produced? How can less successful scripts be enjoyable and engaging successes with the public? With the birth of these questions, my satisfaction ceased.

This is where I am now. At a crisis of faith that led me into deeper work with text, specifically new theatrical text. As a young (in work experience more than years) dramaturg, I am engaging with other people's texts in more complex ways. But having received no formal training and without a methodology I find myself struggling to adapt to the variety of art-making processes I am involved with. At Rumble Productions, I am currently involved in the creation of two different projects that have, necessarily, two different development processes. For both projects I am working as assistant director, although the actual tasks associated with the position for each project are distinct.

For the first project, a treatment of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* with Rumble's Associate Artist, Chris Gerrard-Pinker, as director, my work is in the library. We are making changes to the text to forge an examination of the twentieth century, while following a more conventional, evolutionary process beginning with a play script. My job is to make tangible the images – to feed the imagination of the design team with photos and words.

My role is less clear to me in the development of *War of the Worlds* (directed by Artistic Producer Norman Armour). Conceived as a gala evening of dinner and dancing at the Pacific Ballroom in the Hotel Vancouver, *War of the Worlds* is inspired by, and definitely a departure from, Orson Welles' 1938 broadcast.

This project has started as a feeling or texture. We know that the evening will include dinner and music, that it is linked to the 1930s and that it deals with issues of invasion on the eve of the next millennium, but we don't have a script yet. We have 'jammed' on ideas with potential collaborators, which include writer Alex Ferguson, who is now writing the play. As a director, I'm not sure what to do. How can I prepare to direct a play that I haven't read? What kind of research do I do? Should I wait and see or should I go ahead at the risk of taking the wrong path?

Considering the amount of research involved, working as an assistant director on these shows is very similar to some of the functions of a dramaturg. Eventually, I will be asking different questions. The differences between the roles will become more clear as we near the production period, and my focus is turned towards the interpretation (rather than the generation) of the text by performers and designers.

As a dramaturg, my questions gravitate around the playwright: how do I elicit the best possible work from a writer? Each writer is unique and I am learning not to expect the same process from different writers. Still, I am perplexed by certain differences. For instance, what do I do when the writer/director tells me that the answers to my questions will become clear in the staging? I am stranded, not able to trust completely what I see on paper. The answers to my text-specific questions do not exist in the world of discourse, only in one person's mind. These are personal issues, which I try to keep personal, while also endeavoring to build a secure and challenging environment for the writer. When I dramaturg, I try to balance my work with the writer with a concern for the audience's experience. I hope that by voicing my confusion—my "huh?"—I can affect change and help to create a satisfying experience for the eventual paying public.

Sometimes, I am dissatisfied with the theatre, frustrated by its quality-instead-of-quantity nature. At times, I question why I have chosen a career path that creates such intellectual and aesthetic dilemmas for me. But I am still here for the same reason: to examine the mystery of the theatre. My curiosity is my driving force, hopefully making my contributions to the development of work valuable. There are no conclusions here at the end of my article. As my ideas about theatre have evolved in the past, I expect them to continue to change. I accept opportunities to articulate my dilemma in order to clarify and refine my questions. Without a doubt I will read this in the future and wonder how I could have conceived of these ideas. But they are what they are: starting places for my unscientific experimentation with theatre.

Adrienne Wong cannot decide whether she wants to be a performer, playwright, director, dramaturg or clown. She currently has the longest title at Rumble Productions, Administrative/Dramaturgical Assistant, and is eager to finish her BFA from Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts. Contact her at <adriennw@sfu.ca>.

## Report from the Rock

– Michael Devine

Greetings from the world's 15th largest island – and if Kate Taylor is to be believed, not a part of Canada's theatrical landscape. The *Globe and Mail's* theatre critic referred to a renaissance in performing arts in last weekend's edition "from Halifax to Vancouver." Frustrating but predictable.

The fact is, not only does Newfoundland have a thriving theatre scene, but unbeknownst to most Canadians, it's a thriving *alternative* scene, where post-Brechtians mix with post-Lepage imagists amidst a large mass of gifted storytellers. There are three major companies (remember that Newfoundland has a population of 560,000 spread over literally hundreds of towns). RCA in St. John's is the home of Andy Jones and Mary Walsh, but also the cutting edge direction of Jillian Keiley and the new work of Robert Chafe and Torquil Colbo. The Trinity Festival is primarily a mainstream tourist attraction but it fosters the work of Des Walsh, probably Newfoundland's leading playwright. And the company I work for, Theatre Newfoundland Labrador, keeps theatre alive on the island's west coast, travelling hither and yon with an eclectic mix of homegrown, Canadian and international fare (I'm the post-Brechtian).

It's essential in a small population centre with a history of tough times to present theatre that is accessible – in some manner. I've found it more effective, for instance, to programme well-known or easily promoted plays and then put an alternative twist on them. What plays in Toronto (generally to smaller niche crowds) generally doesn't play here. But don't get me wrong; while Newfoundlanders can be adamant about what they want to see in a show – music, humour, and no angst-a-thons – they are willing, in my experience here, to accept virtually any approach to staging. The catch is that the staging must somehow make the experience more visceral to the audience. If it helps clarify a narrative or augments a show's thematic impact, it will go. And perhaps that's a lesson in programming and staging we should all keep in mind.

Case in point: currently I'm staging *Man of La Mancha*. The name and associations with Don Quixote and the music will attract a crowd. Once they've paid their way in, this is what they will see: no pit orchestra, only piano and guitar. Acoustic punctuation – claps, stomps, emotional tonalities provided onstage by the cast of 40, none of whom ever leaves the stage. A prison setting removed from Dale Wasserman's bogus 17th century Spain (Cervantes never went through what is depicted in the prison frame scenes), and placed instead in Prague in 1977, when a real-life playwright you all know was first thrown in prison for trying to disseminate copies of Charter 77.

It probably won't be what people expect, but surprise is at the heart of revelation. Theatre can only survive in North America if it foregoes ego and indulgence and reinvents itself in collaboration with its audiences.

Michael Devine

Artistic Director – Theatre Newfoundland Labrador  
<gaylene.buckle@nf.sympatico.ca>

## Out of the Blocks and Onto the Track

Playwrights Theatre Centre - Vancouver

– Chappelle Jaffe

The 1998 season at PTC is running at a good pace. Having made the decision to use all our resources for all levels of development, we are devoting our energy accordingly. There are now three cabals: the first for emerging writers with little or no production experience; the second with writers from the previous year's cabal 1 – who are now writing full-length plays with assigned mentors Sally Clark and Aaron Bushkowsky; and the third cabal for experienced writers who wish to adapt a play to a screenplay or teleplay.

There are one-hundred scripts to date which have been read and are in varying stages of dramaturgy. We have held nine readings so far this season: *Power Lines* - Murray Logan, *Stuck* - Michael Northey (these plays will have staged readings in the New Play Festival in May), *Meek* - Marcus Hondro, *Passion: Elysian Fields* - Conrad Alexandrowicz (production now being mounted at Touchstone Theatre), *Bartleby* - Bryan Wade (an adaptation of the Melville story, this play will also have a staged reading in the New Play Festival), *The Book of Jonah* - Kendra Fanconi (we read and dramaturgically discussed the libretto, as this will become an opera), *Public Scenes/Private Acts* - Martin Kinch (this play is going on to a production at Capilano College in the spring), *The Bubbeh, and, The Zaideh* - Harvey Ostroff. There are nineteen more readings to come over the season, including: *Que Pasa with La Raza, eh?* - Carmen Aguirre (to be produced at the Firehall in the spring), *An Angel in Limbo* - Deirdre Dore, *Something Fierce & The Passion of Sumo* - Aaron Bushkowsky, *Einstein's Gift* - Vern Thiessen, *Obstacles* - Craig Forgrave and Jill Joyce, *Mixed Doubles* - Kathleen Oliver.

At the next level of development, we have completed our first workshop of *Fool's Play*, by Michael Paul, directed by Stephane Kirkland, PTC's Resident Director for the season. We're just beginning our second workshop, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, by Marie Clements, also being directed by Ms. Kirkland. Next up will be *Jump!* by Sheldon Rosen, directed by D.D. Kugler. January to March will see workshops of *The Shooting Stage* by Michael Lewis MacLennan, directed by Stephane; *Scaredy Cats in Love* by Ann St. James, directed by Bob Metcalfe and *At Bay*, by John Lazarus, also directed by Mr. Metcalfe.

In March we will move into our new home here on Granville Island – Festival House – in which we will have our own studio, where we will be able to rehearse and perform. Our 25th Vancouver New Play Festival will be held May 10 - 16, 1999. This will be a developmental theatre festival, meaning that a selection of plays from the year will be performed: 8 - 12 as staged readings and 2 as studio workshop presentations; they will be given rehearsal time accordingly. There will also be two more workshop presentations by Touchstone Theatre and PTC, which are the plays coming out of the Touchstone/PTC writers-in-residence program. The festival will also feature a playwrights' cabaret, a breakfast forum, seminars for writers, and, of course, the writers party.

Anyone interested in attending, please give us a call (604) 685-6228 or email us at <plays@direct.ca>.

– Chappelle Jaffe  
Literary Manager / Executive Director  
Playwrights Theatre Centre

## Rocky Mountain Highs

Dramaturgy and the 1998 Banff playRites Colony

– by Bob White

Since the mid-seventies, playwrights have had a major resource in the Rockies at their disposal: the Colony at the Banff Centre. The 1998 Colony was the second operating under the new partnership of Alberta Theatre Projects, The Banff Centre and the Canada Council for the Arts. From my point of view — both as co-director and a dramaturge — this year's Colony was one of the more enriching experiences I've had in the mountains since I began my visits to the Colony in the early eighties.

As usual, the plays at Banff were in various stages of development. Don Hannah and Conrad Alexandrowicz, for example, were mere weeks away from rehearsals of their scripts in Toronto and Vancouver, respectively. Frank Moher, Conni Massing, Richard Sanger, Jonathan Wilson and Drew Hayden Taylor were prepping for productions scheduled for later this season, while Marie Clements, Nicola Cavendish, Colleen Wagner, Deidre Dore and Silvija Jestrivic beavered away at material that should emerge over the next year or so.

A plethora of playwrights; a deluge of dramaturges. You had your program directors, Keith Turnbull and myself. Your program dramaturge, Joanna McIntyre, who oversaw all the working processes. Your resident dramaturge, Paula Danckert, who worked on three scripts. Your project dramaturges, Andy McKim, Michael Dobbin, Stephen Heatley and David Ferry, who each worked on a specific play. And, finally your dramaturgical interns, Vanessa Porteous and Hans Engel. Oh, and six very committed and giving actors who gave voice to the work.

What was remarkable about the work this year was the collegial nature of the dramaturgical feedback. One always felt welcome to participate in the dramaturgical discussions on all plays, even if one wasn't "officially" attached to it. None of the dramaturges were defensive about their contributions, and all seemed quite willing to defer to a colleague who had more experience or expertise in a certain area. In other words, we talked a lot: about the work specifically, and about the dramaturgical process in general. We shared a lot, we laughed a lot. As a result, the tone of the Colony was extremely non-judgmental and very supportive. As Keith Turnbull most eloquently expressed it, the goal of the Colony is simple: plays should be better coming out than they came in. And I truly believe that you can say that about all the scripts we kicked around on Tunnel Mountain this summer. I was inspired by the conversations with my fellow 'turgues, and the generosity from all corners was most refreshing. It is my hope that we can keep this kind of spirit alive in Banff. Come visit next summer.

**Bob White**  
Program Co-director  
Banff playRites Colony  
<whiterf@ATPlive.com>

PS: The 1999 Banff playRites Colony runs from August 23-September 11, 1999.

PPS: The application deadline for the Colony is February 12, 1999. Applications forms are available from Theatre Arts at the Banff Centre. You can also apply on-line at the Banff Centre for the Arts website: [HYPERLINK http://www.banffcentre.ab.ca/CFAindex.html](http://www.banffcentre.ab.ca/CFAindex.html) [www.banffcentre.ab.ca/CFAindex.html](http://www.banffcentre.ab.ca/CFAindex.html)]





## News from Factory Theatre...

Factory Theatre has established three new programs for 1998 - 1999, all of them designed to bring more artists and more plays into its building (which, by the way, Factory is in the process of purchasing).

- **PLAYWRIGHTS LAB:** Brian Quirt is facilitating this group of five writers who meet every three weeks to discuss plays in production at Factory and elsewhere in Toronto, and to have a detailed conversation about what they are each writing. At every meeting new writing from the Lab members (including Brian) is distributed and discussed. Individual meetings with Brian continue the dramaturgical process. Each writer receives a fee of \$1000 plus a \$500 budget for playreadings, which are scheduled at the writer's request. The writers also have access to Factory's other programs and play development reading series.

The members this year are Claudia Dey (who is working on *Beaver*), Sean Dixon (*The Epic Period*), James Harkness (*Jimmy*), Beth French (*The Labour Theory of Value*), and playwright-in-residence David Gow (*Bea's Niece*). Brian is working on *The Death of General Wolfe*. The Lab runs from September to September.

- **YOUNG DIRECTORS GROUP:** Ken Gass meets monthly with four emerging directors to discuss issues of directing and to work on scene study projects. Each director is working on one short scene and is provided with a small budget for actors. The scenes will be presented to the group in November.

The members are Chris Abraham, Ed Gass-Donnelly, Rebecca Pitcherak and Dani Romain.

- **WORKS FESTIVAL:** Factory is devoting two weeks in its Studio Theatre to a festival of new one-act plays. We are requesting submissions (deadline December 7, 1998) of unproduced but production-ready scripts. Length can range from 15-minutes to one hour. Factory will provide a festival lighting plot, honoraria to all artists involved, modest production budgets and four to six performances for each piece on a mixed program.

WORKS is designed to bring new writers into Factory and to get those writer on stage as quickly as possible. We hope that this event will serve to open Factory Theatre to writers who might otherwise be intimidated by it, and to enable Factory to present plays in a variety of styles and genres. It is also a means for us to meet young directors and seek out writers for next year's Playwrights Lab.

WORKS will take place January 21 - 31, 1999.

## Theatre Centre Research Program

– Brian Quirt

The Theatre Centre initiated a new program this year called Research. For more than a decade the Theatre Centre has operated its R+D program, a research and development forum that has generally included performance as an integral component of the workshop process. Having conducted almost forty R+D sessions, encompassing close to 200 projects, it became clear that the Theatre Centre was fulfilling its role as a developmental venue.

I have worked on R+D for six years, and while satisfied with our development activities, increasingly felt that focused theatrical research was being neglected. Or, rather, that it was not really part of what we did, despite the name of the program. I wondered what a program that existed solely for the purpose of Research might look like. So last year we created a distinct Research program, allotted two weeks in the theatre for it, and solicited applications. What I requested was a project which sought to explore and/or answer a specific theatrical question. What does that mean? It means that if you need to know the effect of performing entirely with the actors facing upstage, and can articulate why that is important to you, we might give you our space for a day and a grant to hire actors specifically to explore the technique and performance repercussions of such an staging choice.

Research is a theatrical experiment which is not linked to a particular project. In the spirit of inquiry, we want to assist artists to discover what they need to further their work, without the pressures of development or production. Applicants were offered up to three days in the space, access to sound and lighting equipment if required and a grant of up to \$1500 toward expenses.

From the submissions I selected four projects which directly responded to our criteria, and which seemed to me both achievable and clearly outlined:

John Moore: an investigation into ideological text and theatrical devices.

Joseph Pierre: working with a dj to create a living soundtrack.

Darren O'Donnell: an exploration of shiatsu as a rehearsal technique.

Hope McIntyre: an examination of silence.

What follows are some notes about each project. Research will continue next summer following an application date in April.

### Joseph Pierre:

Our interest here was in Joseph's desire and ability to combine live dj mixing with scripted scenes. To that end Joseph's dj cousin, Curtis, attended with music and a turntable and mixer. We read a short scene by Joseph, using two actors to explore the text. Curtis then improvised some accompaniment, which we tinkered with in terms of volume, speed of beat, quality of beat and theatrical scoring using scratching. The results were mixed: as expected it was very easy to overwhelm the scene, but when the mixing was working, as Curtis become more comfortable and more familiar with the scene, the effect was wonderful. Part of the difficulty of this experiment is that the scene also needed significant work. Ideally, we would have

worked on the scene separately so that our research into the musical elements could have been conducted without a series of dramaturgical and playwrighting questions interrupting the process. The image of a live dj is very powerful, and it is that live presence which elevates this form of soundtracking above recorded music.

Darren O'Donnell:

Darren's was the most original proposal and in many ways the one that most clearly reflected the criteria. Darren used several short scenes of his own, worked them with actors and then used shiatsu therapy to attempt to affect the subsequent performance of each scene. There is a dangerous controlling element to this research, but Darren is open to questions about the value of such techniques and is still uncertain of their merit himself. This was, I think, a valuable endeavor. Research is perfect for an artist like Darren, whose ideas are sometimes outlandish but always based in considerable thought and preparation. I don't know if there is an application for his work in shiatsu theatre, but the point of this program is that there doesn't have to be.

John P. Moore:

John wanted to explore text from early socialist and marxist writers (Fourier, Engels, Marx) without character, biography and narrative. John's other forays into found-text theatre have been most interesting and effective. I was very curious about what John would do with this material and what theatrical forms he would develop to theatricalize it.

John came to workshop with seven scenes. In each case he had a very clear mental image of what he wanted. Part of the difficulty of the workshop was achieving what John wanted when he was not always able to articulate the image to me. We discovered that John needs to be more detailed in his stage directions: in a sense he was directing the pieces and I (as nominal director) was the facilitator of his vision. We worked out a system by the end of the three days, although with some frustrations along the way. The results, as John agrees, were not all successful, but we learned a great deal about how to use raw text and how to enliven it thematically with basic patterns of movement and various vocal devices.

John was encouraged enough to want to pursue some of the scenes and has applied to the Rhubarb Festival to take them to an initial performance level. They are often quite funny, despite the dry material, so I'm curious if we can find sufficient devices to both illuminate the content of the texts he's found, and keep them theatrically alive.

Hope McIntyre:

Hope explored the use of silence on stage by using two actors to create a series of silent scenes and then presented them in front of an audience to discover the limitations of silent communication. She and the actors worked for three evenings, using improvisation to develop a total of ten short scenes which were presented to an audience of ten on the fourth evening. Hope is very clear about what she gained from this project and it will have many applications in her future work.