

Women's Caucus AD Interviews September 2011 – February 2016

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February 2016

Rita Deverell's Interview with Kim Blackwell, Managing Artistic Director of 4th Line Theatre, Millbrook:

Kim Blackwell crackles and sparkles with energy, confidence, and conviction about her career in theatre in general, and about the significance of 4th Line Theatre in particular.

2015 marks her 21st season at 4th Line, where she has directed 13 productions, including five world premieres and many play development workshops. Kim also recently directed Maja Ardal's *HER2*, a Nightwood/Buddies in Bad Times Theatre co-production. She has been nominated for a John Hirsch Award for Directing Excellence in 2009 and 2014. Kim has worked for some of the top arts organizations in the country, including Canadian Stage, Nightwood Theatre, Tapestry Opera, Dancemakers, and she is a member of Maja Ardal's Contrary Company.

Question: Kim, why are you so invested in 4th Line Theatre? What has kept you there for 21 years?

In response, Kim recounts the happy convergence of talent, readiness, and opportunity that met her at 4th Line, which operates outdoors on the Winslow Family Farm near Peterborough, Ontario. When she was asked by a friend at another summer theatre to get involved in 4th Line, operated by its founder/owner Robert Winslow, 4th Line was only four years old. Kim clung to the company and the company clung to her multi-talents, including stage managing, publicity, acting, producing, and directing.

Most importantly, Kim became invested in the evolving, compelling mandate of play development and production. 4th Line does unique local stories that spring from the history of the community, but have national echoes. 100% Canadian plays, 100% local plays. And everybody has serious fun. 4th Line's shows are big, epic in scale, and meant to "engage, enthrall, educate, and entertain."

Question: Why are you and 4th Line Theatre so supportive of the artistic output of women?

"Well, I'm a feminist," responds Kim Blackwell unhesitatingly, definitively. She adds the statistics: Women are 52% of the population, make most of the household entertainment decisions, and yet are drastically under-represented in the senior management of Canadian theatres. Senior management remains largely white men, she quipped; I don't have to tell you that! Therefore at 4th Line, Kim concluded, if the playwright is not a woman, I'm always seeking women in the key creative positions to balance that out.

Question: Although you've partially answered this, what are you looking for in scripts?

"The Mandate is our guide." 4th Line tells stories about our history that are not well known, but are dynamic, especially untold stories about our rural area. The stories come from the community, offer a sense of place, home, and landscape. 4th Line's stories are local, have national implications, and mean something to somebody.

Question: How do you find such stories? How do members of the PGC's Women's Caucus get in touch with you?

"We develop plays with the intention that they will eventually be on our stage." Kim Blackwell promises that 4th Line is not putting a huge number of playwrights and plays in development that will never see their audience. And their play development process takes time, two or three years, beginning with catalytic community consultations. The theatre is making a long-term investment in its writers and the community's stories.

Kim is always happy to hear from playwrights, although 4th Line's unit is small, and her pledge to women is obvious. There are nine writers presently, four of them women. This summer's 2016 season will see *The Hero of Hunter Street* by Maja Ardal, which tells the story of the December 1916 Quaker Oats factory explosion and fire in Peterborough that killed 23 men and irrevocably changed the lives of local families. The production is a highly anticipated world premiere examining the devastating destruction and profound community response to one of Canada's worst industrial disasters. The play invites us to contemplate the nature of heroism and how a community rebuilds when shaken by disaster. 4th Line Theatre promises an emotionally riveting production, featuring a large cast of professional and community actors, and unforgettable musical numbers.

The work of PGC members Shirley Barrie and Judith Thompson has also been featured and is in development at 4th Line Theatre. To find out more, go to: www.4thlinetheatre.on.ca, and click on New Play Development.

June 22nd, 2015

Joy Fisher's Interview with Christian Barry and Anthony Black, co-Artistic Directors of 2b Theatre, Halifax:

Introduction to 2b Theatre: Founded in 1999 by a group of emerging artists seeking a structure under which they could create and produce work, the company was incorporated in 2000 under the name Bunnies in the Headlights Theatre. When Christian Barry and Anthony Black became co-artistic directors in 2004, they refined the company's artistic vision and renamed it 2b theatre.

Although 2b is based in Halifax, with no “brick and mortar” theatre home of its own, this touring theatre company creates, develops and presents work for the regional, national and international stages. Since its inception, 2b has staged 18 productions, including 14 world premieres, and has won numerous awards, both at home and abroad. Its mandate is “to stimulate the mind and to awaken the spirit by producing theatre that is vital, innovative and challenging.”

In a vision statement that explains the company’s name, the co-artistic directors say: “As artists, we create works that explore the world around us and our experience of what it means ‘to be.’”

[NOTE: Joy Fisher’s Questions are in **bold**, Anthony Black’s responses are in *italics*, Christian Barry’s responses are underlined, anything that was a collaborative response is in regular font]

Please tell our readers a little bit about yourselves. What has most shaped your aesthetic sensibility and interests? How do you see yourselves complementing each other?

I work as an actor, a writer, a designer, and as a producer. All of this has led me to a pretty holistic view of the work, which is something that Christian and I share. We are both pretty focused on how design shapes experience. We have a lot in common but are interested in different things as well. I'm not sure if he would agree with this or not, but it may be fair to say that Christian is interested in cleanliness and I'm interested in messiness (at least in terms of process). Or to say that he's like a subtractive sculptor, carving an essential form from a lump of material, and I'm more of an additive sculptor, sticking things together to create and shape through collisions of form and material. Of course, this is a bit of an over-simplification.

I’m not sure I’m a “subtractive sculptor” since I do feel like I always start with a blank canvas. But perhaps I do tend toward a minimalist approach. I’m interested in precision. And concision.

Based on the numbers (14 world premieres out of 18 productions) it’s evident that 2b has a strong interest in creating and developing new plays, sometimes your own, sometimes in collaboration with others. Can you talk a little about how you each go about choosing projects for collaboration and then, once chosen, how you go about the development process?

I think the choice of material is the result of a series of dialogues. A dialogue with myself, with each other, as artistic co-directors, with artists in the community, and then with myself again...I feel like it’s important for me to fall in love with an idea

if I'm going to spend five years working on it. So lots of reflection time is important - talking with collaborators about the value and impact of the potential creation. As for the creation process, I'm always looking for ways that the content of the idea can inform the form of the piece, and the shape of the process. Also, we tend to involve design elements in the process early and often.

It is a great privilege to know that when I write a play I can most likely produce it through 2b. Beyond that, we have commissioned writers that we are interested in as artists. We don't tend to commission based on an idea we have, tending rather to ask the writer to propose something they are interested in. The collaborations and the development process are usually long-form, taking 3-4 years and incorporating designers and performers into multiple workshops. Given that we generally have the resources to premiere one show a year on average, and that we mostly finish what we start, this means we are generally only selecting one new project per year (on average).

I notice there is nothing on 2b's website about how to submit scripts. Are you open to receiving scripts or queries about collaboration from playwrights?

We don't generally read unsolicited scripts. We are open to receiving queries, but programming from script submissions is not really how we work.

If a playwright is interested in collaborating with you, how should they go about making a submission?

Start a conversation. Have a coffee date or, failing that, a phone call or Skype. Emails, especially ones with attachments that will take a long time to read, are too easily flagged for later attention, which they rarely get as things that require immediate attention take precedence. A meeting or a phone call is the start (or continuation) of a relationship.

What should they include in the submission? A synopsis? Sample scenes?

Excitement. Whatever creates excitement.

When a submission is made, what process do you/would you follow in evaluating it?

We do not have a formal process.

How soon after a playwright makes a submission do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

Call first.

How soon after a playwright makes a submission can s/he expect to be contacted?

Unsolicited submissions may not be responded to.

Is there anything else you would like our member playwrights to know about 2b that would assist them in making submissions that might be of interest to you?

We are interested in theatre experiences that can be chewed on. Plays with big ideas that also go to your guts. But also, create a personal connection. We want to know who you are so we know we can trust you. We assume writers want to feel the same way about us. And invite us to see your work. It's best if we can see something in performance, and if we can meet in person.

According to Playwrights Guild of Canada's Theatre Production Survey from 2013/14, out of 812 productions in the 2013/14 season, 63% were written by men, 22% by women, and 15% by mixed gender partnerships. I know that one of your productions in development is *What a Young Wife Ought to Know* by playwright Hannah Moscovitch. Anthony, as the director and dramaturge for this play, would you please tell our readers about the development history of this play and its current status?

Hannah and I began discussing this idea for a play in 2007. 2b commissioned a first draft from Hannah in the 2009-10 season. Originally, the play was conceived as a piece of historical fiction, inspired by the real life stories of Dorothea Palmer and A.R. Kaufman (two early figures in the Canadian Birth Control movement). But somewhere along the line, it bifurcated into two distinct pieces that we started referring to collectively as *The Birth Control Project*. We became really fascinated (and somewhat sickened) to learn about how intertwined the early birth control movement was with popular eugenics in the 1920s and 30s. The TWO plays that emerged were *Kaufman* (largely comprised of the aforementioned historical fiction elements) and *What a Young Wife Ought to Know* - a love story set in Ottawa during a time of repression. *Kaufman* is now being developed by Hannah in partnership with the University of Alberta drama school and 2b developed *What a Young Wife Ought to Know* via a series of design and script development workshops through to a production in the Neptune Theatre Studio series this past February. You can read a review of the show here: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/theatre->

reviews/what-a-young-wife-ought-to-know-more-than-a-compelling-history-lesson/article22765731/

We received terrific and passionate feedback from audiences, and we are currently developing a tour of the show.

Would either or both of you care to comment on other ways 2b is sensitive to and working to correct gender imbalance in Canadian theatre?

When I am writing, I try to create equal opportunities for male and female performers. We take measures to try to identify women candidates for our emerging artist programs (student rep program, emerging artist-in-residence). It's a bit tough because Christian and I are artistic co-directors, we are both men, and at least one of us is always a key artist (director or writer) on a project. The only 2b show not directed by one of us was directed by Ann-Marie Kerr. Of three commissions, two have been with women.

We both believe in equality, and we are feminists...so hopefully your vision of the world comes out in the work you make. Fifty percent of the acting roles in our season this year were played by women. And Anthony and I are the only permanent male staff members at 2b (the other three are women). As an organization, we don't have any stated policies about gender equity. It's tricky...we always want to put the needs of the work first and, as such, we haven't articulated any mandates or policies that would dictate casting requirements to the artists. But we are very cognizant of the need for gender equality and we are regularly talking about gender balance at 2b.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play or play idea?

Something that moves me. And then moves me again on second reading.

I like a big beautiful idea and I like when that idea is fleshed out in a human story.

Are there any limitations playwrights should bear in mind when considering submitting a play or seeking collaboration with 2b? For example, the two productions I've seen were *When it Rains* and *The God That Comes*. They are very different from one another, but each, in its own way, seems to focus on an approach that facilitates low-cost touring. *When it Rains*, for example, incorporates video and projection in an innovative way that minimizes set design; and *The God That Comes* uses very few props. Or is this not a problem the playwright need consider but can leave for the director and designers to solve?

The cost of touring or producing a show is never a first consideration. I would say the more important thing is some exploration of the relationship of form to content, which I think is what really unites those two productions, along with most of our other work. If a play script creates particular staging or producing challenges, the writer should be implicated in collaborating to resolve the challenges that their play creates. Sometimes challenges are really great for a director to try to solve and the solution to a staging problem can be the highlight of a production. But, there has to be a spirit of collaboration in the problem solving.

What play(s) did you read/see last year that really excited you?

I was completely destroyed by Duncan MacMillan's play *Every Brilliant Thing* (I saw it in Edinburgh...it also just closed off-Broadway). I'm directing another play of Duncan's called *Lungs* this summer. And Hannah Moscovitch's newest, *Infinity*, is genius as well.

I was really taken with some Irish theatre I've seen recently including Riverrun (a one-woman performance of the voice of the river in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake.); Lippy (a piece of experimental theatre that was part Beckett, part David Lynch, and part situation comedy); and I Heart Alice Heat I (a faux-verbatim piece about an elderly lesbian couple that was lovely, funny, and moving).

As a touring theatre company, your audiences are literally all over the world, in many parts of Canada and in many countries. Have you found there are any commonalities among people who choose to attend 2b productions?

It's very different from place to place. As a touring company, we are largely dependent upon the local presenter to find our audience and get them to come to see the work. We are lucky to have returned to a few cities with some regularity (Vancouver, Victoria, Toronto) and in those cities we feel responsiveness of return audiences. But mostly it's all about the local presenter, so that relationship and the quality of the communication is essential.

Do you have any sense of the demographic of your audiences? Gender? Age?

Our audience skews younger than the regional theatres, I would say. But our shows are for adults, not for young children. Gender is mixed.

Which of your productions have been popular with your audiences?

Our most successful touring productions have been *Invisible Atom*, *The God That Comes*, and *When it Rains*. Locally in Halifax, we have had tremendous responses to our Hannah Moscovitch productions (*East of Berlin*, *The Russian Play*, *What a Young Wife Ought to Know*).

2b curates a series of professional development programs which support the development of artistic practice in Nova Scotia. Would any of these professional development programs be of benefit to emerging Nova Scotia playwrights?

Yes. Our student rep programs mostly provide the participants with important first connections to the professional world. Our emerging artist-in-residence program provides artistic mentorship and opportunities to be involved in productions (past residents have included playwrights). Our colloquium discussion series creates a space to have better conversations about art-making.

Is there anything else either of you would like to share with our members?

Keep writing and keep talking to artistic directors. There is no need to be intimidated by them or awkward around them. Befriend them (if they seem like your kind of people) and share your interests and passion with them. At least that's what I am interested in.

April 2015

Sally Stubbs's Interview with Jacqueline Russell, Artistic Director of Urban Curvz Theatre, Calgary:

Jacqueline Russell is a Calgary based director and performer and playwright. Jacqueline's directing credits include: *A Christmas Carol* (The Keyano Theatre Centre), *One Good Marriage* (Lunchbox Theatre), *Weaving Yarns* (Calgary Young People's Theatre), *The Moon Between* (Calgary Opera), *Peg and The Yeti*, *Munsch-o-rama* (New West Theatre), *Invasion of the Pine Beetles* (Evergreen Theatre) and *The Underpants* (Theatre BSMT). Jacqueline was an artist in residence at the Manitoulin Conservatory for Creation and Performance in 2014, where she co-created (with Jed Tomlinson) and performed *The Sama Kutra* (directed by Michael Kennard). Jacqueline was the RBC Emerging Director at Lunchbox Theatre in 2013-14, the Artistic Producer for Evergreen Theatre in Calgary from 2008-2013 and is presently the Artistic Director for Urban Curvz Theatre <http://www.urbancurvz.com>.

I was fortunate to be part of Urban Curvz Theatre's Girls Gone Wilde Festival last

year. The Festival was organized predominantly as a late night cabaret featuring work by and about women. A scene from my script *And Bella Sang With Us* was featured in the cabaret and a workshop and reading of the complete script was organized during the day on one of the two weekends that the Festival ran. My experience in the Festival was fun and extremely rewarding.

Urban Curvz's mandate is to invest in and celebrate women's perspectives, stories and experiences through the art of theatre and to advocate for an artistic ecology that recognizes the bravery and excellence of the female contributor.

How, when, and why did the Girls Gone Wilde come about?

The idea for Girls Gone Wilde came to me in the early hours of the morning (around 3 am) in November 2010. I had just finished performing a show at Fem Fest in Winnipeg and I came home totally jazzed about the idea of a feminist theatre festival. Watching over 20 women sharing the stage created a visceral excitement and I wanted to create that same feeling of collaboration and exhilaration in Calgary. I staged the first Girls Gone Wilde Cabaret in 2011, independently with a group of friends. When I began working at Urban Curvz in the fall of 2011, it was the perfect opportunity to grow the event into something bigger.

Who are your partners – individuals and/or companies – in the Festival?

It is virtually impossible to get a fledgling festival to take flight without the support of other arts organizations. Lunchbox Theatre and Evergreen Theatre have both been tremendous supporters of the festival. We have also had some fantastic small business owners like Aldona B Photography, Perfect Performance Printing and Sanbel Creative Designs come on board as well.

What is the mission of the Festival?

The mission of the festival is to promote a theatrical ecology that includes a larger diversity of female artists and showcase stories that are richly complex while engaging a gender-diverse audience.

What's next for GGW?

Next year is Urban Curvz 10th anniversary so we are planning a big ol' bash. We are planning to expand the festival to include a couple of full length productions, more staged readings and multiple venues. The hope is to partner with other theatre companies to expand the amount of productions and to find ways to engage other arts genres (live music, dance, etc.).

Where do you hope the GGW will be in five years?

I hope we will be an International Feminist Theatre Festival. Calgary is an incredibly "masculine" town, so I think it would be highly cathartic to have our city host a festival that promotes the work of female artists.

What are you most proud of that the GGW has achieved?

I love that we have tapped into a young (20-30's) audience demographic and that we have people coming out to our event that don't normally attend theatre. I love the camaraderie and collaboration that we have seen grow between the artists involved in GGW over the years. Female theatre artists are taught to view each other primarily as competition, so it makes me swell with joy to see women working together as creators, and to see the work that is generated outside of the festival as a result. And I love that our festival is characterized by being funny, edgy and cheeky. It's the type of festival that people come to and walk away going "hey, feminism is rad". That makes me most proud.

What advice would you give to others who might be interested in starting up their own festival?

Do it! Make mistakes and learn as you go. There aren't a lot of models for this type of festival yet, so I just try and create the type of feminist theatre festival I would want to attend.

March 6th, 2015

Joy Fisher's Interview with Clayton Jevne, Artistic Director of Theatre Inconnu, Victoria:

Theatre Inconnu bills itself as "Victoria's longest surviving alternative theatre." It was born in 1978 as a creative venture by Katya Aho-Kern and Clayton Jevne, who together co-created and performed the troupe's plays. For the first nine years the company – with Katya and Clayton at the helm – toured their unique blend of theatre, puppetry, and clowning in Canada and in Europe. In 1987 the troupe established itself in a "legendary" 50-seat Market Square cavern theatre space in "Olde Towne" Victoria, B. C. The company gradually shifted to an "acting" style of theatre, focusing on plays of an "alternative" nature. In addition to its regular season of programming, in 1991 Theatre Inconnu launched an annual summer Shakespeare Festival. Beginning modestly in its Market Square venue, the event quickly grew to become a major tourist attraction in Victoria's Inner Harbour. After producing the festival for 11 years (the last four at St. Anne's Academy Auditorium), Theatre Inconnu handed it over to the newly formed Victoria Shakespeare Society, which continues to produce this well-attended annual event on the grounds of Camosun College. Throughout this period, and up to the present day, Theatre Inconnu has continued to present vibrant theatre in an intimate setting. In 2004 the company took up residence in its current venue: the Little Fernwood Hall, where it continues to produce alternative theatre. This well-equipped "black box" theatre maintains the intimate and informal atmosphere of the troupe's original home. Over the years Theatre Inconnu has continued to periodically take shows on the road, and in 2011 was invited to present its production of *Moscow Stations* at the United Solo Festival in

New York City. Theatre Inconnu produces four plays a year in a season that runs from February through December, and to date has produced more than 120 shows in Victoria.

Clayton, for those who may not know you, please say a little about your own background.

Katya Kern and I had met at the University of Victoria Theatre Department. After we finished our studies, we wanted to do theatre, and the chance of getting a professional job right away was pretty minimal. There was no Fringe Festival in those days. So we started the company and just toured around. I've been with it ever since, in the meantime going back to school and getting a few more degrees, but at the same time keeping the company going.

From 1978 to 1991, our main focus was puppetry. While I was in theatre school I had spent my summers apprenticing with professional puppet companies in Canada and France because they were looking for acting students who wanted to learn how to become puppeteers. So the two of us combined our talents to open what was officially the first permanent puppet theatre in western Canada. We had taken our company to Europe and toured around; we were so excited when we came back.

As soon as the Fringe Festival circuit started, we toured a show. We didn't know what to call ourselves and we had no idea who we were and no one had heard of us, so we called ourselves The Unknown Theatre. In the late '80s, there was a strong push for French immersion in the schools, and there was a lot of demand in French immersion schools for entertainment. Katya was from Switzerland. Her first language was French, and she had a background in French theatre. So we would take our puppet shows into the French schools, but we had to have a French name, so we became Theatre Inconnu.

In 1987 we registered the company as a non-profit society and charitable organization and established ourselves in a permanent venue and eventually started producing seasons of plays. In 1991, it morphed into live theatre because at that time there was no real interest in the art of puppetry here. I took it over myself, then, and I've been running it ever since.

What is the mandate/focus of Theatre Inconnu? What does the term "alternative" mean to you?

Our strongest direction is to do plays that other theatre companies would not do in Victoria. We're "alternative" in that the plays we choose just wouldn't be commercially viable enough for other theatre companies to do. We are not categorically a professional company, so we don't have to meet minimum Equity requirements for paying actors.

It gets harder and harder now to fulfill that mandate because other theatres are branching out. For instance, Langham Court Theatre is a community theatre, but in the past three years they've been wanting to expand their audience base, so they've been choosing plays that they would not have dreamed of producing in the past. Now up to two of their six shows can be very "alternative."

We try to do shows that the Belfry Theatre [an Equity-based theatre across the street] wouldn't do because the Belfry does depend on a certain amount of commercial success in order to keep going. I know that when they've tried to do more alternative stuff, their houses have dropped way down so they can't really afford to take those kinds of chances that often.

I do pay artists fees; it just depends on what the grant situation is like. Because I, personally, am Equity, I do have a really nice relationship with Equity in terms of doing guest artist contracts. So we sort of function in this kind of "No Man's Land." It makes it very hard to get funding. Canada Council informed me years ago that I had to move into the world of professional theatre if I wanted to continue to get funding. B. C. Arts Council is a little more understanding. There are a lot of actors out there who aren't Equity yet who are really good. They need a place where they can show their skills; if there weren't places like us to go to, they would be lining up to audition for Langham Court [which, as a community theatre, doesn't pay its actors at all]. Companies like Theatre Inconnu do have a certain legitimacy in that we do have the odd Equity contract throughout the year, and the actors are going to get a fee that is a respectable fee and acknowledges their work. It does reflect in the quality of our shows, I think.

Your 2015 series looks like dynamite, including two plays by Canadian women playwrights and one play by local playwright Charles Tidler. Tell us a little about why you chose these plays for your next season.

The play that opened last night, *Alien Creature* by Linda Griffiths, I discovered when I was teaching at UVic. I was unfamiliar with it before that, and it spoke to me. It's a play of imagery that paints a really beautiful rich inner picture of what this person, Canadian poet Gwendolyn MacEwen, might have been like. The writing is beautiful. When I read the script of *If We were Birds* [by Erin Shields] it just hooked me right in. It's such an incredible, powerful piece of writing. Again, it's very poetical, but it's really so emotionally engaging and shocking and human. Any play that affects me that way, I want on my list.

We've worked with Charles Tidler before and I wanted to do something again by Charles Tidler. When he said he had a play based on the short story "Spit Delaney's Island" by Jack Hodgins, right away I wanted to know more because when I first moved to the island in the 70s that's one of the first things I read. Coming from the Prairies, I'd never met this kind of wonderful, crazy, eccentric isolated spirits that were on the Gulf Islands. And I just thought he'd done such a

great job of capturing the spirit of these people; I read Charles' adaptation and I thought it had really captured that as well.

Cock, by Mike Bartlett, is a play about gender confusion. Mike Bartlett is a wonderful, younger British playwright, who, I think again, is a brilliant writer. When I started to read the play, I couldn't put it down. It's about a young man who has successfully come out of the closet and has established his gay identity with everyone, including his father. He's about to marry his long-term partner, and then he falls in love with a woman. It's a comedy, but it's also a really sensitively written play about why do we have to be defined. It's not done in a superficial sit-com way. Questions are asked, but not answered.

What do great Theatre Inconnu plays have in common?

It's the writing. It has to take me by surprise. I can't know what's going to happen on the next page. Once it starts to become predictable, that's when I don't get past the next page. I don't have a lot of time to read a lot of plays because I'm trying to run every aspect of the company as well. It's like reading a good novel. I want to have to turn the next page. I don't want to sit there and think: "O.K., how can I make this interesting on stage?" So the writing has to be really emotionally engaging. In fact for me, if it's going to be really emotionally engaging, it also has to be intellectually engaging. There are a lot of issue-driven plays out there. That's something I really disagree with, that art should be focused on issues. Issues can grow out of the characters and the situations just like they do in real life. The issues have to grow out of human conflict and human insecurity and desire for power and control. If the issue is the main theme, then, right away, that's going to turn me away from it.

How often does Theatre Inconnu do new Canadian plays?

Probably almost never. That's got to do with marketing. We've found in the past that our audiences just dwindle down because we haven't had anything to hang a tag onto it. If it's a new play and it's adapted from an award-winning book, for instance, then we can market it on that. But if it's somebody out of the blue who had no awards attached to their name, even if it were a really good script, I'd probably shy away from it because it would be really hard to market it and people just wouldn't come. If it's a new script, but it has a number of reviews behind it from, for example the Fringe circuit, then we can market it on those reviews. We don't have a new play series, or anything like that.

Charles Tidler's play is based on a short story by Jack Hodgins. Notes indicate it will undergo "further adapting." How does Theatre Inconnu develop plays? How do you decide which plays you are going to develop?

Charles and Jack both wanted to revisit it when they found out I wanted to do it. Jack felt that his perspective has changed over the years, and obviously other people's sensibilities have changed, too. So I think they want to see if there are

other things that need to be more emphasized or less emphasized in the script. So the two of them will be sitting down with us and the director and looking at it again. It'll be exciting. I've developed one-person shows for myself. After I think I've got it down pretty well, I perform it in front of an audience to see where I lose the audience. With Charles and Jack, it'll be kind of a new experience for me. Although we did it a bit with Murray Gold with *Kafka, the Musical*, because he wanted to adapt it for the stage, but he was also a playwright as well as being a musician and a composer, so he had a pretty good idea of what needed to be changed.

I didn't see submission guidelines on your website. Do you accept unsolicited submissions? What's the process for submitting plays to your theatre?

Well, people just send them to me. But I don't have a lot of time to read them. I've thought about that, I have to put something on the website because people are going to submit things anyway. So I should put up guidelines, like, for instance, that you have to have something to market it with. Are you a Governor-General Award winner? Maybe this is the first time anyone has looked at this play, but if you've got a history of being an award-winning writer, then we can market it through that. But if you're just out of a creative writing department, then we can't take a chance, because I'm pretty sure nobody would come.

What happens to a script that is sent to you? What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

If I do have the time, then I would say what I thought. I would try to point out what's working well, and advise them, if it needs changes, to base the changes on what's working well.

Do you personally like to read a play in the early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

I prefer to see scripts that the playwright feels are complete.

Approximately how many plays come across your desk each year? Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

Last year, I think I got two. No, actually, I received three from three guys last year. I don't really even think about gender when I'm reading a play. I can't say that I have a preference for either men or women playwrights.

Do you have any general comments about your contact with playwrights? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy or turned off? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or email?

Well, the ones I've been directly involved with I've found to be really nice. They're just so happy that people are doing their work. Usually, I don't deal directly with

playwrights. I deal with their agents. If a playwright has sent me a script and hasn't heard from me after a month, they should contact me because often I just get too busy and I forget about it. If they bug me, I'll feel guilty, and I'll read it, and that's good. And I won't be angry because they bugged me when I read it.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

There has to be conflict right away. That doesn't mean so-and-so against so-and-so, but an inner confusion, even, going on, that makes me want to know right away how is this going to be resolved. It doesn't have to be the main conflict that's going to go through the whole play, but, if this person is a conflictive personality, then it's defining for me right away that there's going to be tension, either internal tension or tension with somebody else. That's what grips me and pulls me through.

What plays did you read last year that really excited you?

If We were Birds. Also, the Sam Shepard play, *A Lie of the Mind*, which I found really powerful to read. I'm currently reading a play again by Murray Gold, who did *Kafka, the Musical*. He's writing a new play, and he sent me the first act. It's really an exciting play. And he would like to develop that with Theatre Inconnu, eventually, when he finishes it. So I really enjoyed that play.

One other script that I read in the last 12 months was Linda Griffiths' last play, *The Age of Arousal*. I really wanted to do it this year too, but then I thought two of her plays in one year would be unfair. But I've already talked to her publisher about doing it next year. It is a very, very unique play. The Guardian in London wrote: "Canadian playwright Linda Griffiths doesn't so much adapt George Gissing's *The Odd Women* as explode it."

When I think of the quality of writing of the plays that we've done by Erin Shields, Judith Thompson, Sarah Ruhl (American), Linda Griffiths, and Banuta Rubess I really would like to be introduced to the work of more Canadian women playwrights. There must be so many incredible voices out there that I'm completely unaware of.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

All through 2014 we had audiences fill out surveys. It turns out that our demographic hasn't changed in almost 30 years. Seventy-five percent of our audience is over 65; the majority are women. When we were really young, producing plays, it didn't mean that young people were coming to see them. We'll do plays that, on the fringe circuit, might have a younger audience, but, if you're doing regular seasons of plays in Victoria, your audience demographic is going to be older. I've had people say, "Well, thank goodness you credit older people with having some kind of tolerance for being challenged and for having imagination, because often people seem to think that, because you're over 70, that you

suddenly want to see the old plays that were done in the 1930s or '40s.”

We do have a lot of middle-aged people coming to our plays, but between the ages of 60 and 90 there's a lot more, and people have the life experience to know that there's a lot to think about. There's a lot of things they've been challenged with during their lives, so the plays we choose are plays that deal with complex and deeper issues of the personality. People who are young, who haven't had to confront as many situations still don't know who they are inside and are not that interested in seeing that type of thing. So it's never really going to change.

What plays have been popular in the past?

The ones that have commercial appeal. I mentioned Sarah Ruhl before. We did *In the Next Room*, which I think is a wonderfully quirky piece of writing. It's deep; it's about women in the late Victorian era discovering the vibrator to release their sexuality and all of a sudden people waking up to the fact that they have a sexual life. So people thought it was a sex comedy and we had a lot of people come to our theatre who had never been to our theatre before. Those people don't come back again. We lucked out on that one because it fit our mandate. Sarah Ruhl is a wonderful deep writer.

Alice sold out because a lot of people had heard of *Alice in Wonderland* and there's a lot of Tom Waits fans out there. We lucked out again because it fit our mandate. It explored some really wonderfully complex themes. People didn't come to it knowing that. A lot of them went away saying: "I don't know what it was about, but I really liked it." And other people came away thinking: "I knew exactly what it was about, and, boy that was important." But it was the commercial appeal that drew people into the theatre.

I notice Theatre Inconnu currently has a Youth Program in conjunction with Tim Gosley, the founder of Merlin's Sun Home Theatre. Can you talk a little about that and how it came about?

Tim Gosley and I went to theatre school together in the 1970s in Edmonton. Tim was from Victoria. He got into puppetry, too, and he became one of Canada's premier TV-movie puppeteers, as well as touring his own shows. Tim moved back to Victoria four or five years ago. His house happens to have a 50-seat theatre in it. We started exploring the idea of actually involving his activities and our activities. He had done so many workshops with children. His wife is also a theatre practitioner who has taught lots of young people. So the two of them together seemed like a perfect couple to run this interesting multi-discipline youth program where the kids learn puppetry, they learn acting, some dancing. We bring in guest instructors. The older youth learn scriptwriting from people who come in. It's a nice off-shoot in that we focus on the alternative and the challenging in our live theatre, so to do something for kids is more inclusive, It

allows us to have a broader involvement in the community.

What keeps you working in the theatre?

I have a certain fanaticism that drives me in terms of thinking that live theatre can be so much more than what it is. It is an elitist art form, which is too bad. It's a small number of people who go to live theatre, and most of them can afford tickets that are between \$30 and \$80, whereas the general public goes to the movies, which are \$12. I'm driven to try to make theatre accessible, which is why our ticket prices are \$10 to \$14. I've had a lot of pressure to raise them, but I don't care.

I don't want to sound too pretentious, but I'll probably end up sounding that way, but I think if the right plays are done, and they're done with a real focus on presentation – and I don't mean this in a traditional sense - then theatre can give audiences a much more transcendent experience than they could have imagined. I think we've come to accept as normal a very limited and superficially emotional experience as audience members, and that is such a shame. When I work with actors, I want to guide them closer and closer to reproducing what actually happens in real life – which has been documented in scores of scientific studies - on stage. The influencing circumstance of speaking from memorized text has this overpowering subconscious effect on actors that they're not even aware of, that acting theorists are not even aware of. To make actors aware of this so that theatre can give us a deeper unbroken emotional ride – to make us truly aware of our huge capacity for empathy – to make theatre a safe place where audiences can transcend the emotional awareness society limits us to - That's what really drives me. And I'm getting too old to change jobs.

January 7th, 2015

Rita Shelton Deverell's interview with Quincy Armorer, Artistic Director of Black Theatre Workshop, Montreal:

You know you're not in Toronto for sure. Nor are you in Vancouver or Winnipeg.

The character-filled, ivy, leaded glass ambiance of Rue Jeanne-Mance covers the arts building that houses Montreal's Black Theatre Workshop.

I admit it, those other cities mentioned have character, too! But I'm looking at a distinctive blend: the old stone of old Montreal, African art, a usually English but sometimes French, black theatre, 44 years old. That makes BTW the oldest continually running black theatre in Canada.

Summer is just beginning so Artistic Director Quincy Armorer will take off soon for his usual summer stint of classical theatre acting. He welcomes the acting "break," but is equally glad to be back in the AD chair that has only been his for

three years when fall arrives.

Quincy Armorer meets me in a booked lined room, furnishings covered in African kente cloth. When he was appointed AD in 2011 Armorer had this to say: *“I am very pleased and honoured to be named Artistic Director of **Black Theatre Workshop**. As a Black theatre professional born, raised and living in Montreal, I have always held **Black Theatre Workshop** in the highest regard. I look forward to playing a significant role in the artistic growth and continued success of the company, in Montreal and within the broader theatre community.”*

That determination and pride spill over into the conversation. So does the honour and sense of responsibility Quincy Armorer feels: For education. For entertainment. For community ownership of the theatre.

The 2014-15 season will be an unusual, risk-taking one at BTW. The risk is financial, two productions on the mainstage. Two mainstage productions in one season is an accomplishment that has taken 44 long years of existence. It did happen once before in BTW’s history, 25 years ago.

For the PGC Women’s Caucus this season’s two productions can be a point of pride: Both plays are by women. One, *Gas Girls* (Oct. 21 – Nov. 8, 2014) is by our very own Guild member **Donna-Michelle St. Bernard**.

The other, *Random* (a co-production with Montreal’s Imago Theatre, Mar. 18 – April 4, 2015), is by British playwright Bonnie Tucker Green. Her play explores the disproportionate number of “random” acts of violence that happen to black families.

The female voice is important says Armorer. There is a difference in tone he wants to explore and display. And there is an imbalance of opportunity he’d like to help correct.

Gas Girls, Armorer comments, is simple but complex. Simply a very good play, full of unique relationships, and we enter a world that is normally not ours. The girls sell love for gas and other necessities, and then they search for love, another necessity.

2014-15 also boasts a school touring production about civil rights activist Harriet Tubman, a poetry jam, and readings of new plays. Quincy Armorer at this point is especially interested in plays for young people.

Youth are important to BTW: Entertaining them. Mentoring them. Growing stories they can recognize from their Montreal roots.

Do you have to be black to work with BTW? Not necessarily. *“The mission of Black Theatre Workshop is: to encourage and promote the development of a Black and Canadian Theatre, rooted in a literature that reflects the creative will of Black Canadian writers and artists, and the creative collaborations between Black and other artists.”*

There is an obvious interest in women’s work, at least in this season.

Submissions should be sent to Quincy

Armorer: submissions@blacktheatreworkshop.ca, in Word or pdf, with a lot of patience. Response time can take up to eight months due to the fact that the AD must review each submission personally. Other guidelines are on BTW’s website.

A significant 45th birthday is coming up for Black Theatre Workshop. Armorer wishes for all that pride, honour, history, responsibility, and entertainment to be front and centre. We can watch out for, and perhaps contribute to, the celebrations.

November 10th, 2014

Joy Fisher’s Interview with Micheline Chevrier, Artistic and Executive Director of Imago Theatre, Montreal:

Micheline Chevrier has been the Artistic and Executive Director of Imago Theatre in Montreal since July 2013, but she began her association with the theatre in January 2011 when she joined Imago as Associate Director. Previous to that, she had been Associate Artistic Director at Theatre New Brunswick from 1990 to 1992, Associate Dramaturg at Playwrights Workshop Montreal from 1992 to 1993, Artistic Director of the Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa from 1995 to 2000, and Associate Artist at Canadian Stage in Toronto from 2002 to 2004.

In addition to these positions, Chevrier has worked across Canada and abroad for more than 30 years as a director and dramaturg. As a director, she has worked at such theatres as the Shaw Festival, the National Arts Centre, Theatre Calgary, Alberta Theatre Projects, the Citadel, the Globe Theatre, Prairie Theatre Exchange, Manitoba Theatre Centre, Canadian Stage, Young People’s Theatre, Geordie Productions, Imago Theatre, Theatre New Brunswick and BeMe Productions (Barcelona and Munich). Her directorial credits include works by Chekhov, Moliere, Shakespeare, Coward, and Virginia Woolf; Canadian playwrights such as John Murrell, Wendy Lill, David Young, and Ann-Marie Macdonald, as well as several Quebec playwrights, including Michel Tremblay, Michel Marc Bouchard, Jean-Marc Dalpé, Francois Archambault, and Carole Fréchette.

Chevrier received a Betty Mitchell Award for Best Direction, two Capital Critics' Awards for Best Direction and Best Production, a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best Production, and a META for Best Direction. She has also directed and taught at the National Theatre School, Concordia University, McGill University, York University, Dalhousie, and University of Alberta, among others.

Imago Theatre was incorporated as a non-profit company in February 1987. It is one of Montreal's longest running independent English-language theatre companies. Imago was founded by Andres Hausmann. In 2000, Clare Schapiro took the reins, eventually sharing them with Chevrier, and ultimately yielding them to her in 2013. Imago "produces thought-provoking works that reflect women's voices and stories of our times." It is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT); Playwrights' Workshop Montreal (PWM); Conseil Quebecois du Theatre (CQT); and Association des Compagnies de Theatre (Act).

What is the mandate/focus of Imago Theatre?

Well, it has always been to produce work that deals with, for lack of a better term, current issues; so we've always showcased contemporary work. It's not a theatre company that produces Shakespeare or Oscar Wilde. So the plays are recently written, and right now we're focusing pretty much on plays that have been written within the last decade.

We have done some new work as well, but we rarely commission. Next year, we'll be working with a playwright from Montreal to do a creative collaboration, where the script will be developed in a more devised, collaborative way.

More recently, we've been focusing on stories with a more feminine perspective, so most of the playwrights we are producing, by default, are women. But it's not exclusive. If we got a story that reflected the feminine perspective but was written by a man, we would consider it as well. And we are, more and more, going toward strong political content. By that I mean that the play contains a really strong discussion, about both political and social issues.

Another important factor is that we look for plays that come from different cultural perspectives. The conversation should always have some intercultural perspective, as well as a feminine one.

How many new Canadian plays does Imago Theatre do per season?

We do one full production a season. Usually an established play, not a new Canadian play. We're a tiny little theatre company. We're trying to expand our activity to two productions a year. This season, we're doing a festival of play readings, and then a production of an established play. Given that we are a small

company with little means, it's very rare that we have produced new plays given the demands of the development of a new work. It's pretty challenging. We have premiered new translations in the past. In short, we have limited resources to produce new work, unless we are in a partnership situation.

What do great Imago plays have in common?

They deal with a current issue that has a strong social and political conversation within them, but they also offer a great amount of "theatricality," meaning plays that challenge the form, that invite a high level of creativity and invention in their realization. I am also drawn to strong characters in extraordinary situations. Last season, we produced Erin Shields' *If We Were Birds*. That is a perfect example of the kind of work we want to be doing.

One special project listed for the 2014-2015 Season is a Festival of Readings to mark the one hundred year anniversary of the First World War. I noticed that most of the plays are by women playwrights despite the fact that the subject matter is war. Can you talk a little about this project?

My idea was to reflect on the last century, since the start of the First World War, the "war to end all wars", which obviously was not the case. I wanted us to present plays that explored the consequences of war, the victims of war, predominantly children, women and the displaced. It just happened that five out of the six plays were written by women. It wasn't planned. We are collaborating with five other Montreal companies and they are each presenting one evening, one play, which is within their mandate. For example, Geordie Productions in Montreal is a TYA [Theatre for Young Adults] company, and they are presenting *The Sound of Cracking Bones*, which is about child soldiers. It was written by Suzanne Lebeau, a Quebecois playwright. I think it happened that way because we're not talking directly about warfare. We're discussing the outcome of war – that war is a losing proposition for everyone – there's no such thing as 'winning a war'. I wanted us to reflect on that. All the plays are about contemporary conflicts, within the last 50 years or so.

Imago approached several independent theatres. These companies all have very different mandates. I asked them whether they would consider having their artistic director or someone else of their choice pick a play and direct a reading for the series. They all agreed. Imago is curating the festival, so I chose the plays with them to make sure that there was enough variety and that we could afford to do it! Imago is the producer as well as the curator. We all participated in every creative decision regarding the readings, but everybody is taking charge of casting, contracting, and overseeing the realization of the readings.

Imago doesn't have its own space. Actually, none of the companies that we are collaborating with on this project have their own space, so we are presenting it at the Monument National in their Studio space in November.

With regard to the 2014-2015 Season, Imago's website says: "Stay tuned, more to come shortly." In addition to the play reading series, how is the season shaping up?

I am presently in Edmonton directing a play called *La corneille*. This is a co-presentation with l'UniThéâtre in Edmonton. I approached the artistic director, Brian Dooley, about this play, since I had met the playwright in Montreal. Imago commissioned the translation, and then partnered with l'UniThéâtre to present the original French version in Edmonton, with myself as director. So that's part of our season. We will also be doing a public reading of the translation in Montreal in December.

Our full production this season is *Random*, by U.K. playwright Debbie Tucker Green. This will be a co-production with Black Theatre workshop, presented in March 2015. A friend who had seen it in London told me about this piece and said it was the best theatre she had seen in years, so, of course, I looked into it, got a copy of the play, read it and fell in love with it. It's a piece that is performed by a solo black female actor who plays multiple roles. It's a play Green wrote in response to the random stabbings that were happening in London in 2008 due to gang violence in urban centres. The play is the story of a family, of a young kid who goes to school one day and is stabbed as part of a gang war encounter, and dies. And the family deals with it. It's beautifully poetic; it's really, really moving, and I thought it would be a perfect match for us to do a co-pro with Black Theatre Workshop. Quincy [Armorer], the Artistic Director of Black Theatre Workshop, wanted to expand his activities during the year, and so, for the first time, they are actually producing two plays. This coproduction is allowing both companies to do more.

We are presenting it at the MAI, the Montreal Arts Interculturels.

The website indicates that Clare Schapiro is coordinating a new project on behalf of Imago to form a coalition of companies to create a permanent home for the English-language theatre community. Can you talk about this project?

Clare, who is the past Artistic Director of Imago, started this a long time ago. The aim is to find a home for six independent theatre companies in Montreal. It is about us finding space for office and for creation. Originally we wanted to add performance space, but it's proven difficult to get the support of the different government levels for that. So, now we have an actual building that the city has promised us, which will be able to house the offices of six companies and two major rehearsal spaces, one fully equipped so that we can actually rehearse with tech, a space that can also be used for readings for a limited audience. The plan is that we will probably be moving in there by 2016. The aim was to have a home where these independent Anglophone companies could share resources and try to partner on more projects. And to also have a place that will be recognized as

the home of the independent English theatre community.

Can you talk about the *Artista* project?

This was a dream of mine in terms of activities that Imago could undertake. I wanted us to be present in the community in more ways than producing shows, and that's what we're trying to do. This is a youth mentorship program aimed at young women between the ages of 16 and 21 who are in need. "In need" can mean many things: in need of a place where they feel safe to create and express themselves; in need because they are financially challenged (this is a free program); in need because they feel they want to have a career in theatre and wish to connect with the professional community; or in need of finding such a program when there might be none in the community where they live. This year – our first – we have seven participants. They're all amazing; they're all of different cultural, financial, and social backgrounds. This is led by our artistic and administrative associate at Imago and by a member of the professional community. It takes place over a period of 13 weeks. Participants create their own work and then present it. Each participant has their own personal mentor, a professional female artist from the community. They also have people who come to teach them specific workshops – script analysis, some movement work, some vocal work.

We just did an Indiegogo campaign to raise funds for it and we reached our goal of \$10,000. We're pretty happy. We're learning a lot. There are a few things we're going to adapt and change. Every Monday, the participants and mentors meet and have dinner together from 5 until 6, and then they work from 6 until 9.

I've always wanted to reach out to young women. Giving them a place where they can express what they feel and are encouraged to do so is very important. I want them to know that they have a right to speak and be heard. For some women that realization can come late, especially for young women who are trying to find their place in the world. Theatre is one of the best ways to do that. When Joy [Ross-Jones, *Artista's* Program Coordinator] joined our team last year, she mentioned how much she loved teaching, how close to her heart that was, I thought: "This is serendipity: Joy should create this program with us and make it happen."

How does Imago develop new plays? How do you decide which plays you are going to develop?

I do get plays in the mail once in a while. It's great that I don't very often because I work part-time at Imago and I don't have much time to read new works or works from people interested in getting them produced. In terms of new work, we definitely favour Montreal playwrights, no doubt about it. If I'm going to produce a new work, chances are pretty high that it's going to be a Montreal playwright. And the subject matter (how it fits our mandate) is what's going to tip the balance.

I try to figure out ways to present as many works as we can, and the only way to do that is in partnership. We have a very small operating budget, and it limits us. But with a partner, our resources increase.

How often does Imago premier a new Canadian play with a full production?

Extremely rarely. I would like to change that, but I would need to partner with another company that has more resources than we do. We already have a partnership with Playwrights Workshop Montreal. They've been incredibly supportive. Last year, we worked on developing a piece called *The Peace Maker*. We workshopped it at Playwrights Workshop Montreal and then presented a public reading of it. I invited a couple of artistic directors from Montreal, in the hopes that they would be interested in producing it with us. The story takes place in Israel and Palestine: we follow a young Canadian Jewish woman as she goes on her birthright. Given the content and that we have a very committed theatre-going Jewish community in Montreal, I thought maybe the Centaur or the Segal might be interested in presenting it. So far, no bites.

Is there a place at Imago for playwrights from other provinces?

Oh, absolutely. For example, we're doing Debbie Tucker Green, who's from the U.K. In this case, we had an amazing Montreal actor for this play. We're not "playwright-centric." We are "artist-centric." *Random* is great, but the reason I'm producing it is that we have a Montreal actor who is perfect for the part.

I didn't see submission guidelines on your website. Do you accept unsolicited submissions? What's the process for submitting plays to your theatre?

When I read over your questions, I thought I should probably say something about that on the website. I love when people write to me and say, "I have this play and this is what it's about," and give me a sense of the content of the play and the history of the play and tell me why it's a good match to Imago. Then, depending on what's going on with us, I can say, yes, please send the play along. I need to express that on the website. I should probably say I prefer getting a personal email and then a short description of what the play is about, where it's at, what the playwright hopes to do with the piece. All of that is extremely informative and helpful.

What happens to a script that is sent to you? What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

I read it. I'm the one. I read it and then I write back and probably say (in most cases so far), thanks, it's not going to happen at Imago. I might say I have ideas where this script could go, if I think it's a good match, potentially, with other Montreal companies. Because I'm alone – at the best of times we're two – it's really hard to give it full attention. So, I don't give feedback, I don't evaluate it. I

simply say if we're interested or not, and that's it.

Do you personally like to read a play in the early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

I'm happy to read it in the early stages, but I'm not interested in dramaturging it. I do not have the resources or the time. I don't care what stage it's at because I will make a decision based on the content and maybe a sample of the writing, if I don't know the playwright's writing.

Approximately how many plays come across your desk each year? Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

I would say up to 10 plays cross my desk each year. About half right now are submitted by women playwrights. It seems to be on the increase now, more and more women, because, I think, people are starting to understand who we are, that we are focusing on that perspective. I think it's a perspective that's lacking on our stages.

Do you have any general comments about your contact with playwrights? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy or turned off? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or email?

Email is my first choice because it gives me a chance to respond when I can. A phone call would be hard because I'm in and out of the office so much.

It's great when they know what we do. When they've looked at our website, looked at the plays we've produced in our recent past, understand our mandate and our activities, read our blog. When they've really researched the company, so they know what we're after, that helps. Then they can see if their play - how their play - would fit and write to me because they think there is a match.

What turns me off completely is someone who doesn't do that. I've had people send me stuff that didn't even remotely fit the mandate, and I've written back a very curt message saying: "Perhaps you should find out about our company before you send your work to us." And, of course, I didn't read it. Again, no time.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

I guess it's the importance of the story. Why are we talking about this right now? I respond to the urgency and the importance of the story. And of course, to the quality of the writing. It's hard to write a play, much harder than writing a novel, frankly. Finally, I would say that, as a director, I like a certain degree of theatrical invention, when the playwright is playing with form. I'm not as interested in a naturalistic piece: I love it when we're using theatre in an imaginative way to tell a story.

What plays did you read last year that really excited you?

The one we produced last year, *If We Were Birds*, by Erin Shields. That really excited me. *Random* is one that really excited me when I first read it. And I just read a piece by Colleen Murphy called *Pig Girl*. It really excited me. When the playwright is not only dealing with challenging content, but is also challenging the form itself, that excites me.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

That's a really interesting question. I think it's shifting. Certainly, on our last production, *If We Were Birds*, we had a very young demographic. Kids in college, at university, in their 20s. And then we have people who are 40s, 50s. People who are looking for edgier content than the established Montreal theatres might provide. We are building our audience right now. Because we produce so little every year, we can't establish a consistent relationship with an audience, and so each project is a very specific outreach. We reach out to schools – high schools, colleges, and universities. We do a lot of outreach to groups, depending on what the play is addressing. Social media has become, of course, an important way to reach people. Audience members who are over 60 and come to see us, know us. I'm thrilled when they come, but we can't make that our target audience: other theatres already speak to that demographic. No need to compete there.

No specificity when it comes to gender or ethnicity unless we're doing something like collaborating with Black Theatre Workshop. Age is more of a factor for us, not gender or cultural background. There, our reach is broad.

What plays have been popular in the past?

If We Were Birds was the top-selling show at Imago. There are many reasons for that. Great play to begin with, and, if I can say so myself, a strong production. We produced it at the Centaur Theatre as part of the "Brave New Looks" series, and it was in the fall. I have learned over the years that people want to go to the theatre in October! We had a very large cast. There's something about seeing lots of people on stage (or at least more than 2), seeing something epic, and the story itself is epic. So there was something about the theme and the size of the conversation that attracted people.

What keeps you working in the theatre?

I go back to the necessity to tell what I call important stories. Stories that need to be told, that need to be heard. A conversation that needs to happen about a particular subject. If there is an exploration of the form added to a challenging issue, suddenly people revisit that topic in a different way and want to talk about it. It sounds really grand, but I believe the only way to change the world is to understand it and the only way to understand it is to learn about it, and I think theatre can be an amazing tool for people to learn about situations that they may not be aware of, that they may not understand, that they may be afraid of. And I

think theatre has a way of introducing it without being dogmatic. So, I do this work because I think we need to tell stories to make the world a better place to live.

September 10th, 2014

Rita Deverell's Interview with Eric Coates, Artistic Director of the Great Canadian Theatre Company:

High energy, commitment, excitement, purpose, and future plans absolutely sizzle from the persona Eric Coates, the Great Canadian Theatre Company's (GCTC) Artistic Director.

My sense of scandal and intrigue could not resist asking about the run of Michael Healey's play *Proud* in GCTC's 2013-14 season. You'll perhaps remember the contretemps?

To quote Ian Brown in the Globe and Mail, March 17, 2012: "*Michael Healey, the award-winning playwright resigned a few months ago from Toronto's Tarragon Theatre after 11 years as a playwright-in-residence. In January, Healey took an early draft of his latest work, Proud, the third in a trilogy of dramas about "Canadian societal virtues," to ...the artistic director of Tarragon and a professional collaborator of Healey's for nearly 20 years. The play features an unnamed character called "the Prime Minister." Tarragon's AD "...chose not to take on the play. So Healey resigned and went public with his story, asserting that the Tarragon was intimidated by the prospect of losing federal-government funding.*"

Needless to say, I asked Eric Coates about the response to *Proud* in Ottawa, the epi-centre of the federal government.

Proud was a great success. Audiences loved it. Our audiences expect and want politics, edge, controversy.

For those who missed the joys of *Proud*, the script was published by Playwrights Canada Press in 2013.

When Eric Coates was appointed AD just two years ago, he said: "*The Great Canadian Theatre Company represents an artistic ideal that I have shared throughout my career. For the last seventeen years, I have worked almost exclusively on new Canadian work and I look forward to continuing this practice in a vibrant and engaged community of fellow artists. GCTC is what we all strive to be as artists: independent, socially conscious, politically active and passionate.*"

Coates refers with reverence to his formative experiences at the Blyth Festival where all Canadian work and local reflection was the mantra.

At GCTC he says, the canvass is bigger. Local is national. Edge is expected by audiences. And there is the six play season. The theatre produces “a *subscription season of six full-length plays in English for adult audiences. Our mandate is to produce theatre that provokes examination of Canadian life and our place in the world.*”

The 2014-15 season is 20% written by women, and yes, Coates would like to hear from more of us.

Among the many plans he’s put into effect is expanding the amount of new Canadian work that gets produced by partnering with the Ottawa Fringe Festival. That’s through the Undercurrents Festival presented at the Arts Court Theatre.

How to contact Eric Coates and the GCTC with an unsolicited script?

Please contact GCTC’s Artistic Director ***prior to sending scripts for consideration***. If the proposal is of interest, the playwright will be invited to send the script. Please include the following:

- A short synopsis and up to ten (10) pages of the script
- Information about the development or production history of your play
- A cast breakdown
- Your full mailing address, phone number and e-mail.

GCTC will send you a brief e-mail indicating that they have received your submission. Response time is slow due to the high volume of submissions and the fact that the Artistic Director is the only staff member who reviews submissions. We ask for your patience in receiving a response from us.

Where to send your query:

Eric Coates, Artistic Director
Great Canadian Theatre Company – Administration
300-1227 Wellington Street West
Ottawa, ON K1Y 0G7

The truly hopeful part of this story for the Women’s Caucus is six mainstage Canadian plays, an Undercurrents Festival in addition, a tradition of risk taking, and AD Eric Coates who beams commitment to new Canadian scripts.

June 6th, 2014

Rita Deverell's Interview with Ken Gass, Artistic Director of Canadian Rep Theatre:

Ken and Rita sit down at the Epicure, that longtime Toronto, Queen Street, theatre watering hole. Ken has just come from rehearsal of *Watching Glory Die*, Judith Thompson's new one-woman show, which he is directing.

From Historica Canada, *the Canadian Encyclopedia*, Dec. 16, 2013

"Ken Gass, director, playwright, producer (born at Abbotsford, BC 10 Sept 1945), is one of the key figures in the development of Canadian theatre. As founding artistic director of Toronto's influential Factory Theatre in 1970, he vowed to "abandon the security blanket of our colonial upbringing" and to produce only Canadian work, a mandate to this day at that theatre. Ken Gass graduated from the University of British Columbia in 1967 with a BA honours degree in theatre and moved to Toronto in 1968 to teach high school English. Although others were quick to adopt a Canadian-only policy, Factory Theatre Lab (as it was called then) became renowned as the "home" of the Canadian playwright and as a hotbed of experimental theatre."

Ken, you have a long, distinguished, and rich theatre career. How is the Canadian Rep Theatre different from your other ventures?

Primarily, Canadian Rep Theatre is not different from other ventures, and this is its second life. In 1983-84 I founded, with a SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) grant, the first CRT. With hindsight the early '80s were not the best time to launch a racially diverse, Canadian with an international flavor, English, French, and Aboriginal type of company.

We only had money for that one year, to hire a large company of 19 actors and four directors. We had several successes, but a short life. And then Factory Theatre needed saving, so I returned to it.

But now I'm back to the concept of Canadian Rep: a permanent company that reflects Canada's culturally diverse faces, and produces plays from the Canadian canon, new and classical, in repertory. CRT should also have a youth wing eventually. With enough resources this company would be the all-Canadian Soulpepper.

Rita aside: Ken Gass is obviously never down for the count. Since we are exactly the same age, I find this inspiring and energizing.

Your three plays of this first season are all Canadian, yea! What are you looking for?

I am looking for substantial and substantive.
We're project to project now, but all the plays will always be Canadian.

Rita aside: I can come up with so many Canadian retrospectives!

There are many good ideas. What I don't have are resources.

The play you're in rehearsal for now is written and performed by the wonderful Judith Thompson. Why this play?

Well, there is the fallout from Factory Theatre, but I don't want to go there. I had planned to do Judith's play there and she stuck with me.

The play is inspired by the in-prison suicide of young Ashley Smith, while the guards watched.

Watching Glory Die deals with very important issues. We're giving it a stunning visual look and doing something quite ambitious, travelling with a large and complicated set to Vancouver's Cultch Theatre, a stunning and imaginative space.

Since our audience for this interview is the Women's Caucus of the Playwrights Guild of Canada, are you especially interested in the work of women?

Yes and....the plays could be new, or they could be a second look.
I am doing a workshop reading now with Florence MacDonald. I see CRT as a company that develops as well as does established plays.
I am interested in diversity and gender issues.

Why women?

Because of my relationship with my grand-daughter.
Because of the amount of violence against women in the world.

You don't yet have submission guidelines on your website. Are you ready for submissions? And if so how would you like them sent?

We're trying to get-together a call for submissions very soon, as soon as we finish producing the new George Walker play. George's latest script is about a returning veteran of the Afghanistan conflict, *Dead Metaphor*, and will be part of

the off-Mirvish season at the Panasonic Theatre from May 20 to June 8. It received rave reviews in its world premiere in San Francisco last year.

In the meantime, “yes” Women’s Caucus members should contact me at: kengass@hotmail.com

Remember, there is only one me to respond!

Anything you’d like to talk about or highlight that I haven’t asked you?

I want to have a number of plays in development for 2014-15. It has been a fortunate life. Teaching has been able to pay my basic bills, so the various theatre companies I’ve founded have not had to pay much of a salary. I do want to partner the Canadian canon with international work as the Canadian Rep Theatre moves along.

May 8th, 2014

Joy Fisher’s Interview with Michael Shamata, Artistic Director and Erin Macklem, Artistic Associate of the Belfry Theatre:

Located in a picturesque 19th Century heritage building in Victoria, B. C., the Belfry Theatre began producing plays in 1976. Since then, the Belfry has produced more than 230 plays, including 158 Canadian plays, and has staged more than 33 premieres.

The Belfry’s stated mission is to produce theatre that “generates ideas and dialogue, and that makes the audience see the world a little differently.” This mission was demonstrated recently by its production of *Proud*, by actor/playwright Michael Healey, a political romp focused on a prime minister who very much resembles Canada’s current prime minister. The Belfry’s production was the third nationwide (the first was financed by Healey and a crowd-funding campaign after Healey’s home theatre gave the play a pass).

According to Artistic Director Michael Shamata, the Belfry’s main focus is on Canadian work, including premiere productions, recently premiered plays and scripts from the canon of Canadian classics. The Belfry produces up to 12 plays per year: one or two summer productions, a four or five play Mainstage series, and SPARK, its mid-winter festival of innovative and alternative work from across Canada.

Please tell our readers a bit about your background. When did you come to the Belfry as Artistic Director? What theatre experience preceded that move? What has most shaped your esthetic sensibility and sense of mission?

I came to Victoria just over six years ago, following about 10 years as a freelance director based in Toronto. Prior to that, I was the Artistic Director of the Grand Theatre in London, Ontario, and before that, the AD of Theatre New Brunswick, which is based in Fredericton and, at that time, toured every production to seven other towns and cities across the province.

I consider Bill Glassco to have been my mentor for Artistic Direction, and John Hirsch to have been my directing mentor. My esthetic developed to a large extent through my many years of working with designer John Ferguson, who believes that a stage set is a platform on which the play can take place. That thinking led me to a somewhat minimalist approach to theatre. As for my sense of mission, I know that I find it more rewarding to run a theatre such as the Belfry, with a narrower mandate, than a traditional regional theatre. The limitations are liberating, and the clear mandate makes it easier to take a position and create an ongoing dialogue and journey with the audience.

The current season's Mainstage productions have included a Canadian classic, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, by Ann-Marie MacDonald; the premiere of *Home is a Beautiful Word*, collected and edited by Joel Bernbaum; the North American premiere of *A Tender Thing* by British playwright Ben Power; *Proud*, by Michael Healey; and *Equivocation*, by American playwright Bill Cain. Apart from an intentional thematic link to Shakespeare in most of them, what was it about each of these plays that made you decide it was right for the Belfry?

I always say that the perfect Belfry play is engaging and entertaining, and is a play with ideas. Our audience likes to leave the theatre with something to think about and talk about. They are interested and curious.

***Equivocation* is a co-production between the Belfry and Vancouver's Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival. In your experience, are there benefits for playwrights in co-pros? Are there disadvantages, e.g., fewer playwrights whose plays are produced?**

For a company the size of the Belfry to partner with Bard on the Beach for a Shakespeare-related play like *Equivocation* makes good sense for everyone. The playwright benefits from a more fully realized production, and the long run allows the actors to grow and become more solid and centered. With regard to the fear that fewer playwright will be produced: in all co-productions, I would hope that

both partners have a passion for the play on which they are collaborating. Bard and the Belfry were both interested in producing *Equivocation*, and might easily have produced two separate productions – as opposed to two different plays by two different playwrights.

According to your website, new play development is an integral part of the Belfry’s mandate. This season, for example, saw the premiere of *Home is a Beautiful Word*, a verbatim theatre piece developed from interviews about the issue of homelessness in Victoria which were collected and edited by Joel Bernbaum. In what ways did the Belfry assist in the development of this play?

The Belfry commissioned Joel to create this piece of theatre. We provided accommodation and an office to work from during the times when he was conducting interviews and/or when we were in workshop with the piece. We had three workshops, and then two public readings during the 2013 SPARK Festival, and another at one of the service organizations that addresses the needs of the disadvantaged. One later workshop looked at how we were going to put *Home Is A Beautiful Word* onstage.

How do you decide which plays you are going to develop and which ways you are going to assist?

In most instances, our involvement with play development begins with the playwright. Either the Belfry approaches a writer about creating a play for us, or we are approached by a writer who is interested in developing an idea, or has a script that is already in progress.

The Belfry also has an “Incubator Programme.” Can you describe how this program works?

I am actually in the process of rejigging the Incubator Programme. Currently, independent companies in Victoria apply to the Belfry because there is some aspect of their work that they would feel might benefit from some mentorship, or there is an artistic path that they would like to explore for the first time. The incubation period is two years, culminating in a run during the SPARK Festival. The re-conception of the programme is based on a development model being used at the Theatre Centre. It would see us inviting three companies to be in-residence at the Belfry, and one of those three projects would likely be invited to participate in the SPARK Festival two years later. The aim of this new concept is to remove the pressure for a company to come up with a performance-ready piece of theatre, as opposed to allowing the companies the freedom to explore without a deadline.

***PLEASE NOTE: As Michael went into rehearsals for *Equivocation*, at his request I have answered some of the remaining questions, noted in *italics*.
– Erin Macklem, Artistic Associate**

The Spark Festival, scheduled for the last two weeks in March, has been described as a “Festival of new plays and ideas.” It includes a mixture of events including full productions of a variety of plays, new play readings, a crop of “mini-plays,” and professional development workshops. How did this festival begin and develop and what do you look for when planning this event?

Prior to Michael, “The Festival” (having no other name than that) presented shows from across Canada over a roughly six-week span of time with no set or consistent schedule from one season to the next. Michael wanted to generate more of a vibrant and, well, “festive” energy and so he gave it a name (the SPARK Festival) compressed the period of time into two weeks, with presentations in both the Stewart Main Stage and the Studio theatres simultaneously. We commission local theatre companies to create preshow “miniplays” (inspired by the Tarragon “office plays”); programme play readings (often of work in development, or work with ties to the Belfry or Victoria playwrights); host professional development workshops with visiting artists; and throw a huge party halfway through the festival (the Midway Party). With all of these activities being packed into two weeks, the building does take on a decidedly celebratory energy.

In terms of what he looks for when planning SPARK – to quote his Welcome Message in this year’s SPARK brochure: “If the Belfry produces contemporary work all year long, why do we need the SPARK Festival? Because there is a lot of extraordinary work being created by independent theatre companies across this country, and we want audiences in Victoria to have the chance to experience some of it.” There are no hard and fast rules in terms of planning, but these shows tend to be more edgy than what might be programmed on the main stage; they are often shorter plays, plays that might appeal to a younger audience demographic. To, again, quote Michael’s Welcome Message: “We live on the edge of the country, and we want to stay on the cutting edge, too.”

What is the best way for a playwright interested in having his/her work included in the Spark Festival to approach the Belfry? Or is this Festival by invitation only?

Although often programmed by invitation, Michael accepts pitches for plays that have been produced and the production is extant (these are presentations and not Belfry productions). Archival videos, media packages, letters of support are useful. Most useful is the opportunity for him to see the show in person, though,

of course, this is not always an option. If a playwright has a play being presented at a festival such as SummerWorks, alerting Michael to this would be great.

The Belfry's web page includes the following information regarding submitting scripts:

We accept submissions from Canadian writers.

In an endeavor to best serve the greatest possible number of playwrights, please submit a one page script description. Please include the following:

- Your name and contact information,*
- A brief synopsis of your play,*
- A description of your play's previous development/workshop/production history,*
- A cast breakdown (how many in cast, men/women, any doubling).*

Please attach the first two scenes of your play (not the whole document).

We receive many script submissions every year and it sometimes takes us several months to read them. We are not always able to provide dramaturgical feedback.

Fax or email submissions will not be accepted.

Please mail to:

Script Submissions

*c/o Artistic Associate
1291 Gladstone Ave
Victoria, BC
V8T 1G5*

Approximately how many new scripts come across your desk each year? Roughly what percentage of these come from male playwrights, from female playwrights, and from gender-mixed collaborative teams?

This season, to date, we have had +/- 50 scripts submitted to us in whole or in part. We have not tracked the scripts by playwright gender.

As a follow-up to the last question, consider this: The Playwrights Guild of Canada surveys the number of productions of plays by Canadian men and women in each province. In the 2012/2013 year, in British Columbia, only 24.5 percent of the productions were of plays by women playwrights, well behind all the other areas of the country except Atlantic Canada (17.5 percent). Canadian women playwrights were well-represented in the Prairie

provinces (Manitoba, 59 percent; Saskatchewan, 56 percent; and Alberta, 35 percent), and fairly well represented in Ontario (34 percent) and Quebec (30 percent). How does the Belfry's record compare? Why do you think so relatively few plays by Canadian women make it to the stage in British Columbia?

Belfry's record of plays by Canadian men and women in 2012/13:
Mainstage – 2 men (1 of these was translated by a female), 1 woman
Festival – 1 man, 2 women, 1 gender-mixed writing team
Readings – 1 man, 2 women

Belfry's record of plays by Canadian men and women in 2013/14:
Mainstage – 3 men, 1 woman
Festival – 3 men (representing 2 plays, one of which was a two-man co-writing team), one gender-mixed collective creation
Readings – 1 woman, 1 man

As far as why so relatively few plays by Canadian women make it to the stage in BC, I can only speak for myself (this is Michael again). Programming a season is a balancing act that involves many factors. Gender is certainly one of the things I keep in mind. However, the plays themselves, what they say, and how they work together as a series must ultimately take precedence. One season there were actually more female writers than male writers.

When a submission is made in accordance with your guidelines, what process do you follow in evaluating it?

We will email the playwright to let them know we have received the script, but that it will likely be some time before we are able to read it. As far as evaluation goes, Michael and I will share scripts with one another that we feel might be a good fit for further development or future exploration. We ask ourselves "is it a good fit?" both logistically in terms of the size of our theatre, our available resources – as well as artistically; will it ignite our Belfry audience's imaginations?

How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

One month – email.

If you decide you'd like to see a full script, how soon after a playwright makes a submission can s/he expect to be contacted?

Best not to have expectations. We do our best. We do not have a Literary

Manager or equivalent, we have only Michael and myself and while we consider script submissions to be very important, we are only able to read them as our time permits. In the past two seasons we have made it a priority to increase programming and to expand our outreach and engagement activities. This has meant even less available time for script reading.

Is there anything else you would like our member playwrights to know about the Belfry that would assist them in submitting scripts that will suit your needs?

An awareness of our repertoire and resources is helpful – eg. it is unlikely we will be able to produce a play with a cast of more than 10. We generally have more time to read plays in June and July and less time in September, February and March.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?
Michael says, “An idea that excites me...that I can take away and think about.”
Erin says, “Thought, craft, and risk, working in concert. Hmm, that sounds like the single most important three things I’m looking for, doesn’t it. What I mean is that a play that expresses a high level of those three things will leave an impression on me, and stay with me rolling around in my mind long after I’ve read it. That’s what I’m looking for.”

What play(s) did you read/see last year that really excited you?

Michael says, “*Terminus* (Mark O’Rowe), *The Valley* (Joan MacLeod), *This is War* and *Other People’s Children* (both by Hannah Moscovitch)”

Erin says, “*Exia* (Meg Braem), *Tour* (Naomi Sider), *How to Disappear Completely* (Itai Erdal)”

What is the demographic of your audiences? Gender? Age?

Our audience is generally between 50 and 70 years of age, predominantly white, and is comprised of more women than men.

What plays have been popular with your audiences?

Most popular at the Box Office: *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, adapted by Michael Shamata (Belfry production 2012); *When I Was a Kid* by Shayne Koyczan (presented at SPARK Festival 2012); *2 Pianos 4 Hands* by Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt (Marquis touring production 2011); *Mom’s the Word Remixed* by Linda Carson, Jill Daum, Alison Kelly, Robin Nichol, Barbara Pollard and Deborah Williams (presentation of Arts Club production 2011); *The 25th*

Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, Music and Lyrics by William Finn, Book by Rachel Sheinkin (Belfry / Arts Club co-production 2010); *The Real Thing* by Tom Stoppard (Belfry production 2009); *Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nicola Tesla* by Electric Company Theatre (Belfry production 2008).

Plays that people are still talking about: *Home Is A Beautiful Word*, compiled and edited by Joel Bernbaum (Belfry commission and premiere production, 2014); *Proud* by Michael Healey (Belfry production, 2014); *Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet* by Ann-Marie MacDonald (Belfry production, 2013); *And Slowly Beauty...* by Michel Nadeau, translated by Maureen Labonté (Belfry production of English-language premiere, 2011); *Red* by John Logan (Belfry production, 2012); *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, adapted by Michael Shamata (Belfry production 2012); *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, Music and Lyrics by William Finn, Book by Rachel Sheinkin (Belfry / Arts Club co-production 2010).

The Belfry's free B4Play presentations have grown in popularity so much the public is advised to come early to ensure they'll be able to get in. Is there a role for playwrights in these presentations?

Yes! If the playwright is available they will certainly be included in this event, as we have done in the cases of Bruce Ruddell (Let Me Call You Sweetheart) and Joel Bernbaum (Home Is A Beautiful Word).

The Belfry also schedules Afterplay discussions during the run of its plays. Have these yielded valuable information for playwrights as well as for the production company?

Our Afterplay facilitators are asked to submit a report after each event, detailing the main discussion points and comments from the audience participants. This document is copied to other staff internally, and, in the case of Let Me Call You Sweetheart and Home Is A Beautiful Word, the reports were also cc'd to the playwrights at their request. I cannot speak for these playwrights, but I imagine it could be useful to hear responses from audience members directly after having seen the show – for instance hearing if the same questions come up again and again.

We ask that members of the creative team (actors, directors, writers) don't attend the Afterplay events in order to let the audiences freely express their thoughts without skewing them towards praise or criticism based on artists in attendance. Because of this, for better or for worse, Afterplays might provide feedback playwrights may not otherwise receive as it is anonymous and unsolicited and offered as a direct response to having just seen the play, as opposed to the intentional dramaturgical feedback from peers. Playwrights are welcome to

receive Afterplay reports or not as is their wish.

March 6th, 2014

Joy Fisher's Interview with Del Surjik, Artistic Director of Persephone Theatre, Saskatchewan:

Founded in 1974 by Janet and Susan Wright, with Brian Richmond as its first artistic director, **Persephone Theatre** has a long history of supporting the arts in Saskatoon and has become the largest theatre in Saskatchewan.

In 2007, when Del Surjik took the helm as artistic director, Persephone moved into its new facility at the Remai Arts Centre at River Landing where its season has grown to a six play Main Stage series, a three play second stage series ("The Deep End"), and six productions for youth. Persephone continues to support the development and production of new work and local playwrights.

I notice your next scheduled Main Stage production is *Strawberries in January*, by Evelyne de la Chenelière, translated by Morwyn Brebner. Like many, though certainly not all, of your Main Stage Productions, it is a comedy. What do you look for in a script when you select plays for your Main Stage?

When we look for a script for all of our layers of programming we are looking first and foremost for quality work – work that speaks to our audience and represents the best of what theatre makers do. In the case of our Main Stage we then look for work that will fit as part of a complete offering for our patrons. As a regional theatre we believe it is important to share work of as many different styles and genres as we can, and with a subject matter that is as varied as our audiences. Some are comedies and others are classics, world premieres, musicals, or just about anything we can come up with. We are supporters of Canadian writing, so we are always on the hunt for Canadian work that fits the bill.

Persephone seems to have various ways of developing new plays. This past November, in its Deep End productions, Persephone staged the world premiere of *A Man A Fish* by Donna Michelle St. Bernard, and in March it will stage *Dreary and Izzy* by Tara Beagan, a co-production with Western Canada Theatre, Gateway Theatre and SNTC. How do you decide which plays you are going to develop and what method you will use for a particular play?

We try to be as responsive as possible to each story, its writer and the needs of the project. *A Man a Fish* came to us as a submission that was already near to completion, so for that script we went into supportive mode. We found the

creative team that we felt would be of most benefit to the piece, and allowed for a rich but focused conversation on the little things that were still craving attention. *Dreary and Izzy* is of course a previously produced play so the approach was different, with the emphasis on creating the co-pro situation that would best support the playwright and other artists. On a script that we will be premiering next season (watch the season announcement to find out which one!), we took an entirely different approach again by engaging in a long process of dramaturgical meetings and support followed by workshops and even “design dramaturgy” (in which a designer is invited into the development process to help the playwright define his/her thinking about the visual world of the play).

As we are a producing theatre with a loyal, supportive and intelligent audience we have to use our resources wisely to work on scripts which we feel will find a home on our stages, so our developmental support is always focused on that. Another important factor is the playwright him/herself: is this artist ready to see a script through to production? Because those final few drafts of a play are often the most difficult to generate, as well as the most important. So we’re looking for playwrights who take a mature, conscientious and collaborative approach to their work.

According to Persephone’s website, each year you “scour the world for the best productions created for the young.” How did the youth series begin and develop, and what are you looking for?

Our youth series is one of our treasured programs and feeds back into our other work with adults and children. This series is largely touring work that is presented to our audiences. The series actually began as the Broadway Youth Series run by Joan Flood. We took the series under our umbrella in 2007 when Joan was retiring, as we wanted to ensure the series had a future. With this work we are looking for high quality theatre that speaks to specific grade ranges. The majority of the audience base for this series is through the school system. The work may be theme or issue based, classic literature, or just for fun, but in the end the most important thing we look for is works that speaks to our young audiences.

I found script submitting guidelines in your “contact us” form under the subheading “scripts”. I have reproduced them below:

Persephone Theatre’s mandate and practice has a wide range of production that includes new work. We are interested in receiving submissions from emerging and established writers of plays that fit within our producing spectrum. We ask that submissions follow the guidelines below. We accept submissions of both produced and unproduced scripts. In your initial submission please include:

.Name

. Address

- . Phone number
- . Email address
- . A short writer's bio
- . A short history of the production and/or development of the play
- . A short description of the play (50 words max)
- . A casting breakdown
- . First 15 pages of script

Only those whose full scripts are requested will be contacted. We ask that you do not phone or email to check the status of your script.

Submissions must be in PDF format with the play title and the playwright's name as the file name (e.g. play_title-playwright_name.pdf).

Attach your script package. Packages that don't follow the above guidelines will not be accepted.

Is there anything you would care to add?

Only that we love to hear from playwrights – they are the basis of everything we do. It is important to us to be able to develop relationships with playwrights and that often starts with the submission process. Unlike many Canadian theatres, we do accept unsolicited manuscripts and our Literary Management team will read each submission.

When a submission is made in accordance with your guidelines, what process do you follow in evaluating it?

With our Literary Management team's broad range of responsibilities, it is not always possible to read submissions as soon as they are received. But when they are read, they are entered into a database along with any new or updated information about the playwright. Periodically throughout the year, the Literary Managers bring to the Artistic Director scripts that they feel may be of interest, or that may answer a programming need for the coming season. This is only part of the Literary Managers' duties but it is at the core of their contribution to Persephone's operations.

Occasionally – and with excellent results – we have a "Reading Day", where a few actors are hired to read excerpts from scripts the Literary Managers have chosen from among our submitted plays.

In evaluating submissions we look of course for writing that we feel will capture the imagination and intellect of our audience – writing that speaks to the people of Saskatchewan. At the same time, though, we are looking for writers who have

a unique voice, who challenge both themselves and their audiences with their subject matter, form, style, and characters. So even a play that doesn't 'fit in' to our short-term programming needs could wind up bringing us together with a playwright whose work we want to support.

If you decide you'd like to see a full script, how soon after a playwright makes a submission can s/he expect to be contacted?

The timeline varies. We try to respond quickly with an information email that acknowledges receipt of the submission and gives some sense of what to expect next. It can take up to six months, or rarely, even longer – or the circumstances could conspire to have us requesting the script within days. It all depends on what else is going on at the time.

We do keep everything on file, as there can easily be a situation where a submission that didn't fit into the programming needs in a given season may be just the thing that rounds out another season.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

A playwright with a strong, theatrical, and creative voice that speaks to an audience.

What play(s) did you read/see last year that really excited you?

There is a fantastically quirky little play called *Matchstick* that was written by Saskatoon artist Nathan Howe, and toured the 2013 Fringe circuit in collaboration with Lauren Holfeuer and Kristin Holfeuer. We loved the voice behind the play, and after Nathan and Lauren returned from the Fringe we started helping Nathan work on the 2.0 version. It has expanded and deepened into a lovely, funny and moving piece. He calls it a "not-very fairytale folk musical" which is a wonderful way to encapsulate its charm.

We also enjoyed Jordan Tannahill's *Late Company*, Sean Devine's *Except in the Unlikely Event of War*, and Christopher Durang's *Vanya and Sonya and Masha and Spike*.

What is the demographic of your audiences? Age? Gender?

We pride ourselves on being across the board. We have patrons from age 5 to 85 at our shows and they come from of all kinds of backgrounds. There are nights when we run our seniors program, which picks people up from their door, takes them for supper, then to the theatre and back home again. Other nights you look out into the lobby and see nothing but young couples out on date

night. We welcome all.

What plays have been popular with your audiences?

We have smart and savvy audiences that are generally willing to dive in. *Strawberries in January*, which ran (of course!) in January, intrigued our audience, and some of our small venue work like Donna Michelle St Bernard's *A Man A Fish* and Dan MacDonald's *History of Breathing* have elicited a great deal of response. Audiences have also been excited about some of our presentations, such as the Old Trouts' *Ignorance* and Catalyst Theatre's *Nevermore*. Like most theatres, in December we try to make our programming as inclusive as possible, and productions like *The Sound of Music* and *The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon* have made Persephone a holiday tradition for many families. We're proud to be a part of Saskatonians' lives in this way.

Is there anything else you would like our member playwrights to know about Persephone?

You are the basis of theatre and have the toughest job in this art form. Stay true to your voice and write work that excites you and speaks to an audience that you respect and care for. For us, while we can't produce them all, we love to hear from everyone and know what they have cooking.

November 4th, 2013

An Interview with Susinn McFarlen, Lynna Goldhar Smith and Loretta Seto of Wet Ink Collective:

Vancouver's **Wet Ink Collective** is a non-profit society dedicated to nurturing and developing the work of women playwrights and scripts featuring strong roles for women. It is the brainchild of three artists: **Loretta Seto, Lynna Goldhar-Smith** and **Susinn McFarlen**.

Who are the women behind and leading Wet Ink?

Co-Artistic Directors **Lynna Goldhar-Smith, Loretta Seto** and **Susinn McFarlen** are emerging and produced playwrights from diverse backgrounds. Lynna is a multi-disciplinary artist. She has written for stage and television with a focus on young people. Susinn is an actor with extensive experience in theatre and film and television. Loretta has a Master's in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia. She is a published author. Her work includes screenplays, non-fiction and fiction for adults and children.

How, when and why did the Wet Ink Collective come about?

We met a few years ago through the Playwrights Theatre Centre's Block P which exists to give playwrights the skills to produce their own shows. The three of us were doing Fringe shows about women and grappling with the challenges associated with self-production. We found one another and realized that it was a lot easier to work collectively, support each other, and share the love. That continues to be the foundation of our work.

Last year we incorporated as a non-profit society and Wet Ink was born. It's more challenging with a bigger group, but it's still feasible to challenge and support one another.

What is the mission of Wet Ink?

At Wet Ink we want to:

- create a canon of great plays by and about women for everyone to enjoy.
- write plays with great roles for women rather than those where women appear in the role of wife, secretary, lovers, etc. as accessories to a male character's self-actualization.
- share our experiences and resources and support, inspire and hold ourselves and our colleagues accountable for doing the writing and the work to move it forward.
- create a 'tribe' and celebrate work by women playwrights, our members and others.

What's next for Wet Ink?

We're building on our successes of last year which was hugely exciting and culminated in a Wet Ink showcase of readings at the BC Buds Springs Arts Fair, a juried theatre festival at Vancouver's Firehall Arts Centre.

In October 2012 we brought in Jane Heyman, theatre director, dramaturge and educator, as a facilitator for our writing intensives. Over the year Wet Ink ran two of these eight-week intensives and mentored twelve fabulous women playwrights: ourselves and nine others.

Wet Ink also hosted several Salons celebrating playwrights whose works were opening in Vancouver. The playwrights are invited as guests of honour. These intimate gatherings run for two hours in the evening or afternoon and feature great food, beverages, and lively conversation about the scripts, productions and related topics. Guests of honour last year: **MAC Farrant**, **Yvette Nolan**, **Sally Stubbs**, and **Lucia Frangione**. Our first Salon this year celebrated **Colleen Murphy** whose play *Armstrong's War* is premiering now at the Arts Club Revue

Stage.

As of October 2013 we've launched into another session of intensives with Jane Heyman as facilitator. One of our aims this year is to step up production. Participants have been asked to provide and do their best to stick to writing goals for their work with Wet Ink. We intend once again to end the year with a staged reading.

We were also delighted to join forces with the **Playwrights Guild of Canada** and the Arts Club to sponsor an exciting Master Class with **Colleen Murphy** which took place at the Stanley Theatre in Vancouver over two weekend in late September and early October.

It feels like we really are creating a tribe. Wet Ink members involved in the writing circles support one another, see plays together, and many are becoming good friends as well as writing colleagues.

Where do you hope Wet Ink will be in five years?

We plan to establish a reading festival. We don't see ourselves as producers of work, but we'd love to take on a group mentorship to help other women self-produce. So many women don't get their work done. We want women playwrights of all ages to feel empowered to act as independent writer-producers. Many young women are already doing this. We believe it's time for women of a certain age to become more pro-active in making opportunities.

What are you most proud of that Wet Ink has achieved?

Lynna: I'm most proud of the productions we did at the Vancouver Fringe Festival and the discovery of how the ongoing support made us stronger and then took us to the decision to embark on this whole magical concept that is Wet Ink.

Loretta: I'm most proud of what we accomplished at the 2011 Fringe Festival. We worked so hard and produced great results. Now I feel proud of the community we're building. I'm happy and honoured to be amongst these women who are so talented.

Susinn: The quality of work that is coming out of the writing circles and the camaraderie is thrilling. I'm in love with the process we're exploring in the intensives. We'll determine this year whether that process is working for us: whether we, as individual playwrights, want people to react as we're creating or whether there's another approach we may adapt instead to write plays as a collective. My favourite thing next to the work is the community we're building.

Is there anything else you want to say?

Lynna: I'm excited about the learning curve associated with the writing circles. I've learned so much about how writing problems can be solved with the input of others.

Susinn: People always say that writing a play is like having a baby. They call their script 'my baby'. I disagree. The script is your baby then your toddler then your obnoxious teenager and then the young adult who you think has gone until he's back. And you're trying to get them out there. It's like raising a frickin' kid!

Loretta: Thank you.

October 11th, 2013

An Interview with Ruth Lawrence on the Women's Work Festival:

Ruth Lawrence is an actor, screen-writer, playwright, Co-Artistic Director of White Rooster Theatre and one of the three passionate theatre professionals behind Women's Work. An intimate, welcoming, and inspiring festival in St. John's, Newfoundland, Women's Work revolves around new plays in progress by women.

How, when, and why did the Women's Work Festival come about?

When I was working at RCA Theatre as Amy House's Artistic Associate (2005-08), I got an email from the International Women's Day committee asking if we were holding any events to celebrate International Women's Day. Amy, Erin Whitney and I put our heads together and came up with an idea to gather women artists to "Show our Support" for Women. Along with several others, we visited City Hall, the Confederation Building, the Arts & Culture Centre and a few other places wearing our bras outside our dresses as a "show of support". We made the CBC TV news that day, had our photos taken with the Mayor and some councilors, sang for the MHA's and civil service employees, and also had a short private chat with Premier Danny Williams. That night we hosted The Ladies of Misrule, an event celebrating Women Pioneers in the arts in Newfoundland and Labrador. It was an extraordinary celebration. The next year, we again held a Ladies of Misrule, but by then Sara Tilley had approached us to work with her on a play reading series for female playwrights. That's when Women's Work was really born.

Who are your partners - individuals and/or companies - in the Festival?

It's basically three women, three companies - Ruth Lawrence, White Rooster

Theatre; Sara Tilley, She Said Yes! Theatre; and Nicole Rousseau, Resource Centre for the Arts Theatre.

What is the mission of the Festival?

The Women's Work Festival is a developmental festival for new plays by female writers. Founded in 2007, it has a longstanding connection to International Women's Week.

The Festival is unique in the province and is one of only several in the world that is dedicated to women's work-in-progress. In a very short period of time, this festival has had overwhelming success in connecting our community to a larger network of international artists. On a local level, it has become the incubator for a number of plays and playwrights who regularly submit their work for consideration. The festival employs a large number of local actors and dramaturges whose contribution is invaluable to the process. Right now, the works receive a one-day workshop, time for rewriting, then a public reading. It's a concise process with an excellent talent pool.

Women's Work is an incredible audience development outreach initiative for the entire theatre community as it puts the artists in direct conversation with the potential audience. The readings are very well attended with feedback sessions that are very rewarding for all participants.

The festival has as a secondary aim to build community for women in St. John's and to perform outreach to women's organizations. The admission by donation policy ensures that all who want to attend can do so affordably or at no cost. It provides a very strong link to the women's community through our donation of the collected admission to a local centre for women and children in crisis, Marguerite's Place.

What's next for Women's Work?

In 2013, we added some new features to the Festival. For the first time, we had women singer-songwriters perform before each reading. It was a lovely addition to the program that we'll continue. We were also approached by a well-established female artist to showcase some of her work. Though it couldn't be achieved last year, we are working with her to ensure this exhibition is in place for 2014. Having operated out of the Eastern Edge Gallery since our inception, our steady growth has led us to move our readings this year to RCA's LSPU Hall. Our funding has been quite erratic so our growth plan is sure, but it's steady. We're so pleased this year to be funded under the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council's Festival Program. It gives us confidence and stability. We also receive some support from Canadian Heritage that we hope will continue and grow.

Where do you hope Women's Work will be in five years?

I hope that the funding support for this festival continues to grow and diversify. Two years ago, we were able, through several partnerships and funders, to bring Ebru Gokdag from Turkey to deliver a week long Theatre of the Oppressed workshop and do a full staged reading of her play. It was one of our highlights of the past 7 years and was filled to capacity each day. Then right away, the funding requirements changed and this international presentation became unfeasible. So I hope that as we develop and grow, the resources remain so that we can continue to offer our local artists world-class experiences right in their own communities. Longer workshops and at least one staged reading a year would be such a treat.

What are you most proud of that Women's Work does or has achieved?

At last count, eleven plays that have been workshopped through the Women's work Festival have been produced, two more have planned productions within the next year. Right there, that's an incredible success story for seven years and an incredibly sparse budget.

What advice would you give to others who might be interested in starting up their own festival?

Be optimistic and realistic- start small and dream big. In the past 20 years, I've witnessed incredible festival ideas that crash and burn because they got too big, too fast. It's painful to grow, especially frustrating if the work is excellent but the financial support and audience don't follow fast enough.

Good bread takes time. Put all the best ingredients together, let it rise, knead it with love and care. As it bakes, people will get a whiff of something good and they will follow their nose. Then let them eat it up. If they like it, they'll come back for more. And they will bring friends. Time and consistent good quality are the essentials.

What would you like Women's Caucus Members to take away from this article?

If they are writers at any stage, I would like them to submit their work to the Festival! If they are theatre-goers, I encourage them to buy a ticket to a show written by a woman, in advance. It seems a little crazy in 2013 but support can still be slow to come for stories written by women. Buying your ticket in advance (of any show really) tells the producers that this is a valuable production, that it is needed and wanted, AND it lets everyone behind the scenes and on stage relax

and do a good job without worrying if anyone cares to see or hear it. I would like theatre producers to encourage this audience by programming and creating excellent, risk-taking productions from new and established voices. That's all I would like.

May 27th, 2013

Beverley Cooper's Interview with Kelly Thornton, Artistic Director of Nightwood Theatre

Kelly Thornton is an award-winning director and dramaturg. Kelly has been the Artistic Director of Nightwood Theatre since 2001 where her work has received wide acclaim and toured nationally and internationally. Directing credits at Nightwood include *The Penelopiad*, *Between the Sheets*, *The Happy Woman*; as well as *The List*, *That Face*, and *Wild Dogs* (all produced in association with Canadian Stage); *The Danish Play* (Aveny-Teatret, Copenhagen; Magnetic North Theatre Festival; National Arts Centre), *Bear With Me* (Magnetic North), *Mathilde*, and *China Doll*. Other selected credits include *The Comedy of Errors* (Canadian Stage); and *This Hotel* (Theatre Passe Muraille/Planet 88, Dora nomination Outstanding Direction). Kelly has been honoured with a Pauline McGibbon Award for her exemplary work as a director, was nominated for the Siminovitch Prize in Theatre in 2010, and was recognized for her commitment to the training and mentorship of young women in the performing arts by being named a 2008 YWCA Women of Distinction. She is the Associate Director of the National Theatre School of Canada's Directing Program.

Nightwood Theatre was founded 33 years ago as Canada's first professional women's theatre company. That's a big and important mandate. Obviously you can't be all things to all women. How have you focused that mandate for 2013?

I have a pretty broad interpretation of what a "feminist" play is. My general desire is to look at women in all directions: to see them in their darkest moments as well as their finest hour. I think people appreciate the raw honesty; of seeing themselves in the foibles of a character, and hopefully instigating a dialogue on the source of this behaviour. Women are complex and I am moved to not only tell our stories but to awaken new perspective on who we are and how we can go forward.

Of course, I'm also deeply attracted to political plays that deal with women's status on a global level. It's imperative that a play such as Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* (US) is shared with our audience, that the plight of women in the Congo was exposed. Though it was not a Canadian play there was no doubt in my mind, Nightwood would partner with Obsidian to realize this play.

Nightwood has several ways of developing new plays, right? How do you decide which plays you are going to develop?

It is a very organic process. I move forward with things that move me, while always keeping my audience and mandate in the back of my mind. But plays come onto my radar in various ways – through Ontario Arts Council Theatre Creator’s Reserve, upon recommendation from another AD or dramaturg, from playwrights contacting me about their work or about residency options, through Write from the Hip, even sometimes the unsolicited script will make its way into our development roster if it speaks to us.

How does Write From the Hip work?

Initially Write from the Hip was a Playwright development program taking novice writers but in 2010 we began to adjust this mandate to focus on play development. Our desire was to see these young writers make it to the mainstage. The writers have a one on one relationship to our Literary Manager Erica Kopyto as well as group sessions where a mentor may come in and work with them. Over the course of the year they are asked to write a full length play and then it is workshopped with a professional director and actors and given a public reading.

What is your plan for Groundswell 2013?

Actually we are taking a hiatus from the New Groundswell Festival in 13/14 but we are developing two new plays with our playwrights in residence Anusree Roy and Diane Flacks. The Festival will be back in 14/15.

How often does Nightwood premier a new Canadian Play with a full production?

Almost every year we produce at least one new play. Sometimes if we feel the script is not ready we make the decision to postpone it and instead draw from the international pool or a previously produced Canadian play.

I see your script submission guidelines on your website.
(http://www.nightwoodtheatre.net/index.php/artists/script_submissions)

How does a playwright get your attention with a new play?

Call our Literary Manager Erica Kopyto. She is often my ears and eyes in the first round and she reads everything and takes coffee with many playwrights that she is interested in.

What happens to a script that is sent you?

I ask Erica to read it and if she feels it is of interest she will pass it to me to read.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

I would rather read a play that is further along but that being said if your script is in early stages, a solid excerpt and project description and synopsis can grab my attention.

Approximately how many new scripts come across your desk each year?

At least 100.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights who want to get their play developed with Nightwood? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy/turned off?

Don't hound. Do your research. Don't make me do it for you. In other words our website has all the information you need regarding submissions and programs. Spell my name right. That pesky "n" in the middle of Thornton is a tough one but it's a turn off when it's missed and somehow symbolic. But truly get to know what we do on stage at Nightwood and if you feel like your work speaks to this then it will very likely catch my eye and finds its way "in".

How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

I prefer email.

If you mailed it by post send a quick email right after you send it to say "I have sent you my script. Let me know if you have the time to read it right now. I would love to hear your thoughts." If you sent the script by email say this when you submit it. I can respond saying I will pass to Erica as I am too busy or now is a good time and I should be able to be back in touch later this month.

Playwrights often grumble that it's hard enough to get first productions of a new play but even harder to get a second production, do you think this is true? Why?

The country is a bit obsessed with play development and only producing the plays they have developed which I think is one contributing factor. I also believe we rush new plays to the stage without investing resources to fortify them before

they premiere. Too many plays live and die in three-week runs, as they have been slaughtered by critics. The New Groundswell Festival's addition of workshop productions is aimed at giving the playwrights the chance to see how the play interacts with its audience without the risk of media criticism. So far it has been a very successful model.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

That the play is risking something - either in form or content. I'm not very attracted to safe plays.

What play did you read or see last year that really excited you?

Refuge by Mary Vingoe - a play based on verbatim interviews from the CBC, and recorded following the death of an Eritrean refugee in Halifax, whose questionable past works against him as he seeks asylum in Canada. It exposes the perils of Canada's Immigration system and the uncomfortable truths around our unspoken prejudices.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

Results from the Creative Trust audience surveys conducted during the fall of 2010 indicated 74% of our audience is female, and the average age of our audience is 44.

What plays have been popular in the past?

During my time these have been quiet successful critically and at the box office:
The Penelopiad
Between the Sheets
The List
Bear With Me
China Doll
The Danish Play
Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God

What keeps you working in the theatre?

I have an insatiable urge to create. I'm also fascinated by human psychology. I love the journey in the hall solving the puzzle of the play and its characters. And I love when things align and you can truly commune with your audience. It's addictive.

April 5th, 2013

Catherine Banks' Interview with Jillian Keiley, Artistic Director of The National Arts Centre English Theatre:

Jillian Keiley, is the founder of Newfoundland's Artistic Fraud, and has worked with artists and theatre organizations across the country. There is lots of information on the internet about her innovative approach to directing, her teaching and her many awards, all of which make her a very exciting choice as the new Artistic Director of the NAC English Theatre. Just look her up.

The current season at the NAC English Theatre is a season of plays written by women! Some of the plays such as *The Glace Bay Miners Museum* and *Innocence Lost: A Play About Steven Truscott* are co-pros with other theatre companies, and that means more plays by women on more stages this year! This season (selected by outgoing Artistic Director Peter Hinton) includes: **Theatre Series:** *The Glace Bay Miner's Museum* by **Wendy Lill** (based on the book by Sheldon Currie) *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and adapted by **Janet Munsil**; *Metamorphoses: Based on the Myths of Ovid* by Mary Zimmerman; *Innocence Lost: A Play About Steven Truscott* by **Beverley Cooper**; *Big Mama!* *The Willie Mae Thornton Story* by **Audrei-Kairen**; **Studio Series:** *thirsty* by **Dionne Brand**; *The Edward Curtis Project* by **Marie Clements**; *Miss Caledonia* by **Melody A. Johnson**. **Family Series:** *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, adaptation by **Janet Munsil**; *Sanctuary Song* by **Abigail Richardson-Shulte** and **Marjorie Chan**; *Tulugak: Inuit Raven Stories* by **Sylvia Cloutier**.

What is the particular strength that you bring to the NAC English Theatre?

That's hard to say, but perhaps the thing that makes me THINK I'm good for the job is that I love theatre still after seeing hundreds of productions. I love the theatre. I love seeing shows that work and seeing shows that don't work. And I'm interested in artists and what they are trying to say. For the most part, they are seeking the beauty in things - even hideous things. Many of them drag out the hideous things so that they can frame them with some beauty in them: **Colleen Wagner's** work is like this, Berni Stapleton's, **Judith Thompson's**, **Marie Clements'**. It's hard to stare the truth of the violence they talk about in the face, but brilliant to see how they make us feel love and see beauty. I think all theatre makers are like this in some way.

When I read scripts from other countries that have had productions in those countries' National Theatres I feel that I am reading a script that brings the weight of the fears, desires, dreams, and perhaps what might be expressed as a collective energy that lives in those societies. What do you think---should plays produced at the NAC tell us/international theatre artists something of Canadian Society?

We joke all the time about having a 'Canadian' personality, but really in the exception that we're not like Americans, or the British, or the Irish, or the Congolese, or the Chinese, there isn't one that I can see. I love that we are not a melting pot that way, that it really is a Sunday dinner. We are not that easy to reduce into an aesthetic or popular Canadian ethic. I've noticed a few trends perhaps but even these are regional and not national. Nova Scotia artists have a brilliant physical sense; Calgary artists have got a knack for puppetry and ensembles; Vancouver artists are exploring form and the very question of what theatre is; Newfoundland seems to have a specialization in telling reflective stories about our own selves, as we struggle with what was once an homogenous culture and is now exploding with influences from all across the globe; and First Nations story telling is independent of all of that. While there are certain thematic likenesses like Trickster tales, I can't think of two plays more different than *Almighty Voice and His Wife* and the new piece by Clifford Cardinal, *huff*. Toronto is such a mix of styles and stories you could spend your life in the study of the forms of that city. So all we can do with Canadian Stories is share aspects of the crystal of our culture. Next season seven of our ten works are by Canadian writers, and each of the other three have such a singular take on them, they couldn't be any other brand than Canadian. As for the plays that tell us something of Canadian society, I think the NAC has a wonderful opportunity to share these styles and these stories and act as a sort of hub where non-nationals can learn about aspects of Canada and where Canadians can learn about Canadians.

In researching my questions, Jillian, I read an interview that you gave to the National Post. In response to a question about your goals you said this: "There's a lot of really interesting artists in the country who are creating original works; but those works get created, they get seen and it's the end of their development. I'm interested in participating in the development of a Canadian canon. What the NAC might be able to do is work with some of these companies from across the country, see these premieres and give them another shot. And it would be a partnership from the beginning." Does this mean you are more interested in working with collective/companies than developing the work of individual playwrights?

As you can imagine, though I'm not sure that most people realize it, we are approached, I would say, six to ten times a week with a new script or project to consider. If we are swamped with meetings, or on the audition run, or seeing productions out of town, or in rehearsal, you can guess that that stack of scripts can pile up pretty quickly, and we are still getting to scripts that we had sent in to us when I first arrived.

We are working with a guiding principle that the NAC can become a place that

features great contemporary Canadian work, and one that has a curatorial mission.

Associate Artistic Director Sarah Stanley and I want to continue to see a good deal of Canadian Work on our stages so we've changed our development model to be one of investment. We are now investigating shows that are happening across the country and investing in the production at their debut stage so that their premiere can be even stronger. Then if the production works at that level we are following the production through to a second production, and eventually hope to programme the production for our own stage. There are many shows that have premiered on our stages here or at large festivals, and while some have been extremely successful, some really needed to be produced somewhere else before coming to our 800 seat venue. I've suffered that myself and have had shows die on the vine because they were premiered at a place that is, in the public eye, dedicated to 'the best of'. This gives a new work no chance to breathe or improve before hitting this particular audience. That might seem risk averse but in fact, it's risk investment. We want to bring diverse, interesting, risky work to the stage, but need to make sure that the piece has proven its quality beforehand. It can be a crucifixion to put a new work on that stage and realize all too late that it's not ready. There are so many great works in the country that want to be produced a second or third time, works that have proven their excellence, and I believe the NAC is the right venue for that. We are aiming to be a part of new works that we believe we can help in their premiere stage and this will contribute to the development of the Canadian canon and we can showcase these pieces here for our national and international audiences. This doesn't mean only working with companies, though in many ways that's a great model, and perhaps the best one for our purposes.

What is the process for a playwright submitting a new script to you? Do you want to see a finished script or do you want to be able to work with a playwright from start to production? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or email? Is the process different for submitting a script that has already been produced?

We don't officially accept unsolicited scripts. We just don't have the staff to read them. Sarah and I really do try to get to everything, but in reality, it's impossible. It's a bit of a catch 22. I would be very worried if artists in Canada stopped sending us information about what they are doing, and we base a lot of our travelling on when there is a premiere, or when we can meet with a particular artist. While it is overwhelming, we do try to make as much time as we can, just so we can educate ourselves about what's going on. I don't suggest sending in a script that has not been previously produced successfully or if it doesn't have a company tied to the premiere, we just can't promise we'll get to it. But if you would like to pitch something, you can send that by email. Paper scripts are

problematic for us, and expensive for playwrights.

As for follow-up on unsolicited work, we really would like to respond to everyone but we simply don't have the staff to do it. Follow-up emails are okay as a nudge, but because we haven't invited the script, we may not get to it for ages, so a lot of follow up might be a stressful thing for us both. Also, we can't reply to all scripts to say they won't be selected for next season, simply because we're not thinking that way, and often we don't know. We read the script, make notes for ourselves, and then when we put together the Ensemble, we choose the scripts to best showcase that group. A script I have read three years ago, which seems to have not been chosen, will suddenly float to the surface because we've got exactly the right person for the lead in our Ensemble. We do keep a list of all of the plays we've read and, in combination with classics and other contemporary showcase pieces, we build the season around the group we've selected for the Ensemble. Plays that are sent in that we really like get added to a list for future consideration.

The NAC and the Canada Council have partnered to create a playwright-in-residence program for playwrights from Aboriginal and culturally diverse backgrounds. (This year for instance it was the distinguished poet Dionne Brand.) Is this an invitation only program or do the playwrights apply directly to the NAC?

The programme is by invitation.

In your view what does having a Resident Acting Company bring to the NAC?

The NAC has such a unique and large mandate, that I thought: how can we possibly have the effect that we wish to have? There are eight people directly on staff for the English Theatre, and only two of these are in Artistic Leadership positions. So we did what we do best and looked towards the idea of collaboration. How do you achieve these far reaching goals in national engagement? We work with more humans! So in planning for this season and the upcoming seasons, we have been on an extensive audition tour, and the audition tour is literally endless, and will end when our tenure ends. We are looking for people who have connections and powerful effects in their own communities. We hire our Ensemble from September through to April and in that time, they may be on stage or they may be conducting workshops, working on our behalf on outside projects, engaging with young people, creating a new project, or investing in their own work, which helps us to have an impact times ten. The following season, we bring in a completely new Ensemble, so in that season, our Ensemble has a major impact, nation-wide, times ten for ten completely different communities.

What play did you read/see last year that really excited you?

I have seen so many in the past year that it's hard to boil it down- right now I'm thinking about Chris Tolley and **Laura Mullins'** *Awake* and **Charlotte Corbeil Colemans'** *Sudden Death* but also **Annabel Soutar's** *Seeds*, Veda Hille and Bill Richardson's *Craigslist Cantata*. I saw *Innocence Lost: A Play About Steven Truscott* by **Beverley Cooper** twice and it was very moving, even more so the second time. Sidemart's *Trad*, Atomic Vaudeville's *Ride the Cyclone*, The Belfry Theatre and NAC's co-production *And Slowly Beauty...*, but, you know, these are all plays I've seen in the past two months so I'm not thinking outside that time. *Spent* by Adam Palooza and Ravi Jain was extremely exciting to me as was *As I Lay Dying* by Theatre Smith-Gilmour. And and and... See, I'm an addict. There were also several plays that I read that were so great, but that list is too long to quote here.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

It seems to be skewed to Females, over the age of 55, but it varies widely depending on the production.

February 4th, 2013

Conni Massing's Interview with Robert Metcalfe, Artistic Director of Prairie Theatre Exchange:

This is Bob Metcalfe's tenth season as the Artistic Director of Prairie Theatre Exchange. During that time the company has seen the creation of the Carol Shields Festival of New Work, the PTE Playwrights Unit and six world premieres, many of the latter directed by Bob. PTE also annually produces an adaptation of Robert Munsch stories, which is almost always a new script.

Before arriving at PTE, Bob was the artistic director of Sunshine Theatre in Kelowna and the associate artistic director at Green Thumb in Vancouver. He also had an active freelance career as an actor and director following his graduation from the Studio 58 acting program in 1980.

What is the mandate/focus of PTE?

I'll assume that you don't want the legal mandate, which is pretty general. The focus of the theatre (there's also a school) is on contemporary, Canadian work. We will put international scripts into the mix, but I try to keep the playbill Canadian. I know the people in most Canadian plays, regardless of where the play is set – whereas, I can read an American play and really like it, but not know the characters in the same way. There are exceptions, of course.

We have what I think of as a sort of social contract with our audience. We assume that they're intelligent and willing to watch theatre with a point of view, even in the 'lighter' shows. I promise people that they will have something to talk about on the way home.

We're not a play development centre, but we have premiered 140 new plays in the last 40 years. We have a 10-member playwrights unit, and an annual festival of new work.

How many plays do you typically produce per season?

Five or sometimes six, on the Mainstage (subscription series) plus a Holiday Family show, which plays on the Mainstage over the December Holidays, then tours the province.

What do great PTE plays have in common?

Honesty. That's the short answer. One of the things that I appreciate about the PTE audience is how they're open to a wide range of scripts – we'll do something new and maybe a bit outrageous, then a play centred on science or politics, and something heart-warming and 'homey' in the same season. We put *Wingfield* and *The December Man* on the same playbill, for example.

In the end, a good story, with compelling characters, which resonates with our community, is what we try to put on the stage. It's always tricky to find the right balance over a season. And so much comes down to what we can afford to do.

Can you describe the process for submitting plays to your theatre?

Submissions come to me. I prefer a synopsis and a 10 page sample, especially if I don't know the playwright. Emailed Word, or PDF is best, as I read on an iPad.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

Depends on the playwright, and how well I know them. We tend to invest mostly in our local playwrights, and I see early drafts from them, but if you want to get your show done and I don't know you, better to send a production ready script. With the limited reading time, there's not that much chance that your script will be read twice.

Approximately how many plays come across your desk each year?

60-100

Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

I don't keep track of the gender of the playwrights, but I know that I hear from many more men than women. I do keep my radar up for plays by females. The reason for that is simple: 85% of my tickets are purchased by women.

What is the process you go through in reading new scripts?

Process?? I try to read whenever I can. I have a part time Artistic Associate, Debbie Paterson, and sometimes I'll ask her to read scripts when she has time. She'll pass on any that she thinks will work for me to read, but there's nothing so grand that I'd call it process.

I look at the requirements of the script before I read the whole thing– the cast size for instance – and if there's an element in the show that PTE just can't facilitate, physically or fiscally, I won't waste time reading it. Especially if I might love it.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights?

I'm often terrible at getting back to people. I feel awful about that, but there is just not enough time in my days to do everything that needs to be done. My road to hell is well paved. Also, I hope that they know that there are lots of great scripts that I read, which simply aren't a good fit for this theatre.

How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or email?

I tell people that it could take 6 months for me to read the play. It might take longer, or I might read it the day it lands in my inbox. A nudge after a couple of months is good.

Do you have a cap on how many actors you can afford to hire for a play? Should playwrights limit themselves in terms of cast size?

Yes.

No.

This is the horrible situation that many theatres have these days. We can't afford to do the shows that should be written with larger casts, and many theatres that can afford to mount larger shows, don't do new, or even much Canadian work. This is not a playwriting problem, but a problem that affects playwrights. It trickles down into theatres our size.

I will say that for the time being, if you're sending PTE a large cast play, it won't find a home here. But we cannot keep limiting the opportunities for Canadian playwrights to tell stories with the full scope that the script requires. It's better than it was 30 years ago, but we're not nearly where we should be

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

Honesty. Intelligence. A compelling story. It must contain answers to the question "Why do this play, here, now, for these people?"

What play did you read last year that really excited you?

Red. This is War. The Brink.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

It's a mix, but it skews over 40, female, university-educated, middle class. The programming struggle is to serve the core audience that we have, while considering the future audience that we need.

What keeps you working in the theatre?

Lack of training in anything else. That, and those emails and letters from our audience members who have been truly moved by a show, or just appreciative of what we're trying to do at PTE. I'm a bit of a cultural nationalist. I see the work of we do as our contribution to building Canada. Does that make sense?

November 5th, 2012

Beverley Cooper's Interview with Roy Surette, Artistic and Executive Director at the Centaur Theatre, Montreal:

Roy began his tenure as Artistic & Executive Director of Centaur Theatre in November 2007. A native Vancouverite, Roy studied at Studio 58 and graduated in 1979. In the early 1980's he was Associate Artistic Director for Carousel Theatre in Vancouver and Western Canada Theatre in Kamloops, B.C. He became the Artistic Director of Touchstone Theatre in 1984, a company acclaimed for innovative and provocative Canadian works. In Vancouver, Roy directed many award-winning productions including *Whale Riding Weather*, *Lion in the Streets*, *When We Were Singing*, *A Map of The Senses*, *Lilies* and *The Number 14*, a collective creation set on a Vancouver bus that took him to the New Victory Theatre on Broadway, the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto, to Belfast and to Hong Kong. Roy became Artistic Director for Victoria's premier company, The Belfry Theatre, in 1997. There, Roy directed over twenty-five plays including acclaimed productions of *Mary's Wedding*, *Homechild* and *Urinetown: The Musical*. He also directed the premiere English Language production of Michel Marc Bouchard's *The Coronation Voyage* for Alberta Theatre Projects and the Belfry. He has won several Jessie Richardson awards and Victoria's Monday Awards in recognition of his diverse body of work, most recently for *Unless* in 2005 and Kevin Kerr's aerial comic tragedy *Skydive*, with co-director Stephen Drover in 2007. Roy directed *Mom's The Word 2: Unhinged* for The Arts Club Theatre in Vancouver and subsequent productions in Glasgow and Melbourne and recently in Montreal for Just For Laughs. For Centaur, Roy has directed *The Mystery of Maddy Heisler*, *Skydive*, *Shirley Valentine*, *In Piazza San Domenico*, *The Madonna Painter*, *Don Quixote*, *Schwartz's: The Musical* and co-directed *With Bated Breath*.

What is the mandate of the Centaur? What is your focus?

Our mandate is very broad at Centaur. We can produce from the classical or contemporary repertoires and local, national and international work is all an option. We do a six play subscription season with each play running between 30

and 38 performances.

How often does the Centaur Theatre premier a new Canadian play?

We do a fair number of premieres, as many as two a season. Most of these tend to be by local playwrights and although we have no formally structured play development program we will often develop these plays through readings and workshops. We sometimes work with the wonderful Playwrights Workshop Montreal in developing a work. Occasionally we will premiere a work by a National playwright. Admittedly the intensity of shepherding a play though to a premiere needs a trusting confident relationship so I gravitate towards writers I know well or at least have some history with.

What do Centaur Plays have in common? Who is your audience?

We present a widely diverse program in the course of a season. Our subscriber base is primarily middle aged and middle class Anglophones but that is expanding and diversifying slowly. We attract a lot of students which is fantastic. We are NOT on the radar of the hipster crowd. Most of our work is contemporary in form and content although we have staged works that investigate history. I prefer plays driven by strong rounded characters more than polemic work. We are very conscious of box office potential when considering plays. More so than I wish we were. However, our audience wants substance.

What plays have been popular in the past?

Popular Past premieres? Italian plays such as **Vittorio Rossi's** *Paradise by the River* and *Carpenter Trilogy*. **Steve Galluccio's** *Mambo Italiano* and *In Piazza San Domenico*. Montreal stories such as **Bowser and Blue's** hilarious *Schwartz's: The Musical* was produced at the same time as **Michael Mackenzie's** biting indictment of the financial industry, *Instructions to Any Future Socialist Government Wishing to Abolish Christmas*. Of course **Fennario's** *Balconville* premiered here as well as **Tremblay's** *For the Pleasure of Seeing her Again*. Outside of premieres *God of Carnage* was our biggest hit last season.

What is Brave New Looks?

Brave New Looks is a program where we mentor/host an independent Montreal company and provide our 245 seat theatre to the company for a two week run. These may be new works, new translations or revision looks at classics. Often classics or translations but recently we presented an Indy production of **Alex Haber's** domestic Christmas comedy *Four Minutes If You Bleed*.

How does a playwright get your attention with a new play? Do you have a submission policy?

Admittedly a bit vague. I confess...We are currently very under-resourced in reading and responding to submissions. I feel horrible about this. I suggest starting with a summary and excerpt. Certainly I would recommend sending a

close-to-production ready draft. I simply don't have time to look at unfinished work. I don't have time to offer in depth dramaturgical advice. Patience once submitted is needed. Also, come and see me if you can. I'm always up for a 10 minute pitch ;-) Email follow up is best. Too many phone messages are a turn off. Also, do some research as to what we've produced in the past. I go to A LOT of theatre. Probably when I should be on the couch attacking my pile of play submissions I am more likely at a play. If you have a play in production, invite me, I'll likely come.

Approximately how many new scripts come across your desk each year?

I'd say I receive about 60-80 plays each year, maybe 20 % are by women.

What play did you read last year that really excited you?

Beverley Cooper's best seller *Innocence Lost*, A play about Steven Truscott....moving and an important reminder. On stage next February!

Playwrights often grumble that it's hard enough to get first productions of a new play but even harder to get a second production, do you think this is true? Why?

It's a good idea to make sure and inform Artistic Directors when a play premieres. A new play premiere may go unnoticed given the huge number of plays going on in a year.

A tidy promo package outlining the play's history, the response it received and other pertinent information will get our attention. Why do you think this is a play for Centaur?

An endorsement letter from an enthusiastic colleague can help...a letter of introduction if you will. Theatre is so much about relationships which is why we often work with familiar artists but everybody is interested in new voices. This country is huge. It's impossible to keep up with every region so don't expect AD's to know about your hit production at the other end of the country.

What keeps you working in the theatre?

So many talented, passionate, astounding and hilarious people work in theatre. More and more I value celebrating live performance, language and the sharing important stories. Empathy. Understanding. Connection.

May 15th, 2012

Catherine Bank's Interview with Rachel Ditor Literary Manager at The Arts Club Theatre, Vancouver:

The Arts Club Theatre Company, now in its 48th season, operates three venues: The Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage (650 seats), Granville Island Stage (450 seats) and the leading playwrights have had work developed at the Arts Club

Theatre including Denis Foon, Lucia Frangione, Michele Reml, Hiro Kanagawa and Daniel Maclvor.

Bill Millerd was tied up with rehearsals so Rachel Ditor, The Arts Club Literary Manager, stepped in. As you will see Rachel gives a very clear picture of what happens to a script when it arrives at The Arts Club.

What is mandate/focus of The Arts Club Theatre Company?

The Arts Club Theatre Company is committed to staging and developing stimulating, quality theatre for the enrichment of the community. Our key strategies are:

1. To consistently present dynamic theatre and quality services for our guests.
2. To be a nurturing organization which fosters and develops talents of local artists and staff.
3. To take the lead in establishing partnerships for artistic growth and excellence.
4. To seek and maximize opportunities to position the Arts Club for ongoing success.
5. To be diligent in managing our non-profit societies with integrity and fiscal responsibility.

You have three venues, is there one particular venue where new Canadian work tends to be programmed?

New work has been programmed at each of our three theatres. The goal is to find the right space for each play.

How many new Canadian plays does Arts Club do per season?

About 3. But there's no rule, it depends on how many are ready for production and what else is being programmed.

I see on your new play development page that ReACT is a thriving program. The Silver Commission Project is specifically for Vancouver playwrights, how often do you work with playwrights from outside of your province?

Very rarely do we premiere work from writers out of the Province. If BC theatre companies don't have premiering work from BC writers at the top of our agenda, who will? It's a primary responsibility and passion of ours to build and nurture BC talent.

What do great Arts Club Theatre Company plays have in common?

Our programming is very eclectic; great plays have come in all shapes and sizes here. A compelling experience for the audience might be the best common denominator in plays that we'd categorize as great. Whether it's Tear The Curtain! that was provocative or Buddy! that was a box office hit, or a quietly

magical play like *The Patron Saint of Stanley Park*, the performances or the story or the ideas grabbed the audience and took them on a memorable ride.

I see the guidelines for submitting plays on your website (<http://www.artsclub.com/events/react/index.htm>). Is there anything you'd like to add about the submission process?

No.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

I'm happy to read plays at any stage in their development, but I will sometimes wait to pass scripts on to Bill if I think the draft is too early. By which I mean if the tone or voice of the play is clear, then that's something he can respond to – either it resonates for him or it doesn't. Before that's clear it's hard to know what you're actually responding to. Over many drafts plot will change, characters change, ideas get clearer, but the voice should only become stronger. You don't want or encourage that to change.

Approximately how many new scripts come across your desk each year?

Approximately 100 unsolicited scripts. .

Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

About 25-30%.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

Once a year we have a reading retreat when I divide all the unsolicited submissions between about 6 of us, including Bill Millerd. We read as many as we can over the course of two dedicated days. The scripts are read and discussed, a report form is filled out, and a box for second reads is created for any scripts that the readers liked and think Bill and I should read. The reading retreat committee always includes any dramaturgy interns we have, often our resident designer, our artist liaison, any playwrights associated with us who want to join, Bill and myself. Other times it has included interested senior staff from other areas of production, development, and box office. Outside of that reading new plays happen ad hoc, as time and interest allow.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights who want to get their play produced at the Arts Club? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy/turned off? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

I always tell playwrights that harassing me works. It helps move their script to the top of my daily to-do list. But more than anything timing has a lot to do with my ability to reply. The summer months are better than during the rest of the year when I have almost no time to read any scripts, whether I've asked for them or not. I'm always hopeful about having reading time but rarely able to find it outside of the summer. Having a new play development assistant this year has meant more plays get read, recommended and discussed but funding for this position is precarious.

Do you have a cap on how many actors you can afford to hire for a play? Should playwrights limit themselves?

No cap. No limit. If we love a play and feel it could have a home here, and that we could do it justice, we'll do it. The season needs to be balanced in terms of risk, but that's Bill's look out, no playwright needs to address that issue for him.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

Not one single thing but a combination of a few major points: is the voice is strong and interesting to us, is the writer is a good match with the company and someone we want to collaborate with and support? Also, playwrights should see plays at our theatres if they are interested in writing for us. Operating on assumptions about what kind of plays we program or who our audience is has been a big stumbling block. And opening night audiences are an anomaly. Seeing a show during its run gives a better picture of who is sitting in the house. A writer needs to have a genuine interest in speaking to those people, in having a conversation with them, which is very different than wanting to please them or teach them.

What plays did you read last year that really excited you?

Too many to list here. There is no shortage of exciting plays.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

Last time we did this, our audience was 64% women and 75% lived within a 15km radius of the theatres. We don't know age as we don't have birth dates in our database.

What plays have been popular at the Arts Club Theatre Company in the past?

Excluding musicals, the most popular plays over the past few years: Glengarry Glen Ross, The Importance of Being Earnest, Calendar Girls, The 39 Steps, Mom's the Word: Remixed (premiere), It's A Wonderful Life (premiere)

What keeps you working in the theatre?

The people I get to work with, the constant creative and intellectual challenges the work presents, the variety of projects I get to be involved with, the belief that making theatre is valuable to our culture and quality of life, and a meaningful and ethical occupation. And at this point I probably don't know how to do anything else!

April 27th, 2012

Conni Massing's interview with Ruth Smillie, Artist Director of the Globe Theatre:

Ruth Smillie is a director, playwright, actor, and theatre educator. Born in Vanderhoof, British Columbia, in 1954, Ruth's family lived in Vancouver and Natick, Massachusetts, before settling in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in 1961. Ruth spent a year at the University of Saskatchewan before moving to Toronto in 1974 to study acting at Ryerson University. Summers were spent in Saskatoon working as an actor for Twenty Fifth Street Theatre. Upon graduating from Ryerson in 1978, Ruth worked as an actor in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Saskatoon.

Ruth Smillie's plays for young audiences have been produced by theatres across Canada. *Zeke and the Indoor Plants* was published in *Canadian Theatre Review 60* in 1989; *Teenage Moms* was published by Ginn Canada in *Cues and Entrances*, 2nd Edition, 1994. Her most recent script, an adaptation of *Robin Hood*, premiered on the Globe Theatre main stage in 2011.

Ruth was the Artistic Director of Persephone Youththeatre from 1981 to 1984 and the Artistic Director of Catalyst Theatre in Edmonton from 1985 to 1995. In 1998, Ruth Smillie was appointed Artistic Director and CEO of Globe Theatre. During her time at the Globe, Ruth has overseen two major renovations and an expansion of Globe Theatre's facilities in the historic Prince Edward Building. She conceived and produced *Lanterns on the Lake*, an annual outdoor celebration of art and community that was a signature event for the City of Regina for a number of years. Ruth also initiated the Shumiatcher Sandbox Series, which develops and presents new work and experimental theatre created by Saskatchewan artists, the Globe Theatre School and the Actor Conservatory Training Program.

Two productions developed as part of the Shumiatcher Sandbox Series, *Governor of the Dew* by Floyd Favel and *The Velvet Devil* by Andrea Menard, were showcased at the National Arts Centre in the fall of 2002. Globe Theatre's production of *Elephant Wake* toured nationally in 2010.

Ruth's directing work at Globe Theatre includes: *Peter Pan*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Sexy Laundry*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks*, *Just So*, *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*, *Cinderella*, *Old Wicked Songs*, *Wit*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Secret Garden*, *The Velvet Devil*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Amadeus*, *Elizabeth Rex*, *Honk!* and *The Wizard of Oz* (with Michael Kennard).

Ruth was presented with the University of Saskatchewan Alumni Award in 2000, the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002, the YWCA Women of Distinction Arts

Award in 2004, and the Saskatchewan Centennial Medal. In 2008, she was named as one of ten Women of Influence by SaskBusiness Magazine. In 2011, she received the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. Ruth is the mother of three grown children and the grandmother of Davey.

What is the mandate/focus of The Globe Theatre?

To entertain, educate and engage Saskatchewan people in the art of professional theatre by offering high quality performances to audiences, professional theatre training for artists, and classes for children and adults.

How many plays does the Globe do per season?

Main stage: 6 or 7 Shumiatcher Sandbox Series: 4 to 6 National touring: 2010 Elephant Wake by Joey Tremblay 2012 The Story of Mr Wright by 2b theatre and the Globe Young Company Fusion: annual play creation process with artists 16 to 19 Commissions: usually 2 per season

What do great Globe Theatre plays have in common?

I know that the correct answer to this question is 'great writing'. That is not always the case. Sometimes great plays are not especially well written but have a powerful or engaging story that in the hands of great actors, directors and designers are transformed into very fine productions. In other cases, the great work is a devised piece created through improvisation and collaboration with stunning theatrical results. Our goal is to create outstanding productions.

Here's a snapshot of the work we do at the Globe. On the main stage, some of the productions are premieres (two this season), others are second or third (or more) productions by Canadian playwrights, some are classics, some are one-person shows, others are large-cast shows, some are comedies, some are dramas and some are musicals. We almost never do co-productions. We occasionally feature productions from other theatres; however, because we are a fixed theatre-in-the-round, this usually involves re-designing and re-staging the production for our space. Four of the six productions this season are by Canadian playwrights; 5 of the six productions next season are by Canadian writers.

The Shumiatcher Sandbox Series showcases emerging artists, new work and a wide range of performance practices: multi-media, dance, improvised theatre, original 'musicals', plays, and non-traditional theatre creation processes. The emphasis is on showcasing Saskatchewan artists.

Can you describe the process for submitting plays to your theatre?

We are no longer accepting unsolicited manuscripts. We were receiving hundreds each year. Instead, we ask that playwrights email us with a brief synopsis and cast size and then we let them know if we would like to read the full script. We do accept submissions for the Shumiatcher Sandbox Series each fall. The format for those submissions is on our website.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why? I prefer to read scripts that are ready for production. We do not have the human resources to read and respond to a lot of scripts so, if a play is not ready for production, we tend to put it aside.

Approximately how many plays come across your desk each year?

Over the past six months, we have accepted 39 scripts electronically. I would estimate that we receive 3 to 4 times that number of inquiries in the same time frame by email. Another 30 to 40 scripts arrive unsolicited by mail, even though we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

We receive almost double the number of submissions from women.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

I read scripts all year round. We usually have the play list for the following season finalized in August and my preliminary list is usually finished in June.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights?

I know how difficult it is to be an independent artist and how difficult it is for playwrights to get their plays produced. To be honest, we have never produced an unsolicited manuscript on the main stage. We do commission writers. My priority is to commission plays by Canadian playwrights who have a relationship with Globe Theatre and a connection to this community. We have commissioned and produced a number of plays by Joey Tremblay: *George Dandin*, *The Alice Nocturne*, a re-imagining of *Elephant Wake*, and a new script that will premiere next year. This season, we premiered *Shout Sister*, a wonderful play by Sharon Stearns who was the writer in residence at the University of Regina three years

ago. On the second stage, we are presenting five new works this season: *Dot and Mae: Delusions of Grandeur*, co-created and performed by two young Regina artists, Lucy Hill and Judy Wensel; *Cope*, a hip-hop musical by Regina actor and writer, Greg Ochitwa; *House of Three*, created and performed by FadaDance (Heather Cameron, Misty Wensel and Fran Gilboy); and a multi-media piece by Regina puppeteer and director, Chrystene Ells, *Kaleidocycle*.

What works for you and what makes you a little crazy or turned off?

What works? Artists who are interested in engaging with the Globe, the theatre practice of the Globe, our audiences and the community. A play that resonates

with audiences in Toronto will not necessarily have the same impact in this community. Recognition on the part of the writer of the uniqueness of this theatre and this place and a desire to be part of this particular theatre in this particular part of the world makes for a great connection and relationship.

What doesn't work?

Mass emails. Receiving unsolicited manuscripts by mail. Playwrights calling or emailing every week to see if I've read the script. Not checking the Globe website to get a sense of the body of work that we are producing and the environment that we produce that work in.

How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or email? I would prefer only to receive an email a month or two after the submission.

Do you have a cap on how many actors you can afford to hire for a play? Should playwrights limit themselves in terms of cast size? It depends on the play. We have produced *Elizabeth Rex* and *The Coronation Voyage*.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

There's no one element that stands out for me. My longer list would include the writing, story, theatricality, transformation, and characters that I care about.

What play did you read last year that really excited you?

And Slowly Beauty by Michel Nadeau

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

We sell roughly 60,000 tickets each year and have 5,000 subscribers. The majority of our patrons for the main stage are women. Subscribers tend to be well-educated and middle age. The demographics for single ticket buyers skews younger for productions such as *Metamorphoses*, *Elephant Wake*, *The Thirty*

Nine Steps. Our Christmas productions attract a multi-generational audience: toddlers to great-grandparents.

Our audiences come from all over Saskatchewan, North Dakota and parts of Manitoba.

What plays have been most popular at the Globe in the last few years?

Robin Hood, Peter Pan, A Closer Walk with Patsy Cline (produced as a special event), *Sexy Laundry, The 39 Steps, A Midsummer Night's Dream*

What keeps you working in the theatre?

There is nothing else I would rather do. I am in love with the act of creation. Without theatre, I don't have enough air to breathe.

March 26th, 2012

Beverley Cooper's interview with Andy Mckim, Artist Director of Theatre Passe Muraille:

Since 2007, Andy has been the Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille, Canada's oldest theatre for developing new work. He has worked at the Neptune Theatre, and in England and Scotland where he garnered two Fringe First Awards working with Jack Klaff. From 1986 to 2007 he enhanced Tarragon's growth as one of Canada's foremost theatres for new play development as their Associate Artistic Director.

Andy has directed more than 50 different productions, mostly world premieres. Most outstanding is *2 PIANOS, 4 HANDS* which has toured world-wide. He has been nominated for Best Director Doras and his productions have had numerous Dora nominations/awards. Andy has directed more than 30 intensive, new play workshops and worked as a dramaturge with over 120 different writers; directing each of their public workshop readings.

He sat on the Toronto Theatre Alliance board (TTA) from 1993-1997 serving as the TTA President from 1997-1999. He sat on the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) board from 1993-2002 serving as the PACT President from 2002-2005. He has been recognized with the Harold Award, the Playwrights Guild of Canada Bras D'or Award and the George Luscombe Mentorship Award.

What is mandate/focus of Theatre Passe Muraille?

Theatre Passe Muraille is mandated to develop and produce innovative and

provocative Canadian Theatre, and to nurture new and established artists and companies. Theatre Passe Muraille is devoted to encouraging, enhancing and increasing meaningful interactions between its communities – artists, staff, audience, neighbourhoods and supporters. Theatre Passe Muraille has a special interest in supporting and presenting independent artists and companies, emerging artists, collaborative and multidisciplinary work, ethno-specific and ethno diverse work, and marginal voices.

How many new Canadian plays does Theatre Passe Muraille do per season?

All of the plays we produce are new Canadian works. Theatre Passe Muraille usually produces three to five new plays each session as well as three productions in association with other independent companies. We also present new work in our season. Plus we present new work in development throughout the season in *Buzz*.

Buzz is our main play development initiative that utilizes what we like to call audience dramaturgy—the creation of new work with ongoing direct audience feedback. *Buzz* happens tri-annually as a weeklong festival. New work is presented each night and the presentations are at all stages of development, from a first scene to a near-completed draft. The artists provide written questions for audience members to answer that will help to forward the development of their piece. We also host intermittent *Buzz Nights* throughout the season to allow for further development of specific works of interest.

In addition to our season programming we also have several after-hours events that allow for a variety of artists who are creating new and exciting work to present on our Cab Stage throughout the season following Mainstage performances.

In the 2012/2013 we will be producing six new pieces in our theatre, presenting five new works in development as part of an extended *Buzz Festival* process, called *Bring on the Buzz*, as well as three sight-specific / gorilla theatre works around the city and a street festival. All of this will be taking place in our fall Theatre Beyond Walls season, funded by the Metcalf Foundation. Theatre Beyond Walls is a “Toronto-building” initiative. We will have artists in our building exploring creations that reflect an interest in the culture, social justice or sustainability in our city. Other artists will be taking their works out into the city to reach people where they live and work. We do all of this in order to celebrate Toronto and its communities.

I see playwrights can submit plays on your website. (<http://www.passemuraille.on.ca/get-involved/artists/script-submission/>) Is there anything you'd like to tell us about the submission process?

We want to build working relationships with artists so we create opportunities for artists who are emerging or new to Theatre Passe Muraille to introduce themselves and give us a sense of who they are as artists in a broader sense, rather than blindly reading a script. The submission form on the website allows playwrights to give us a short introduction of themselves and their work. Our dramaturg receives these forms and corresponds with the playwright in an attempt to determine whether their work may be a good fit for TPM. We also meet new writers and receive scripts through our pitch sessions. Two or three times a year we hold a Pitch Blitz where artists of all disciplines are invited to present a five-minute pitch to me. Playwrights often take this opportunity to introduce themselves, give some context for their work, and hand over their script in person. However, as our focus is largely on creation based work that is collaborative or multidisciplinary, reading a script is not always the best way to be introduced to a new piece. Theatre Passe Muraille's artistic staff (Myself, Rob Kempson the Associate Artistic Producer and Samantha Serles our dramaturg) is seeking out new artists and plays of interest by regularly attending workshops, performances and festivals- such as SummerWorks, Fringe and Next Stage.

Often the work at TPM is creation based. Where does the playwright fit in that process?

While TPM does seek to produce work that is creation based we are also interested in playwrights and their plays. This season all of our plays were relatively playwright driven. Some, like Pamela Sinha's *CRASH*, follow a familiar model of production with a director taking a script and guiding the process, but it has to be said that director Alan Dilworth has collaborated a great deal on the development of the script. But there were other projects like Lisa Marie DiLiberto's *TALES OF A TOWN* that were developed from the ground up in a collaborative, creation-based environment, rather than being written in drafts. We are home to a variety of development models and are always looking for the ways in which we can support artists who wish to be collaborative in their process, however that fits for them.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

For text-based plays I prefer to read the script when it is at a later stage of development. Often writers do not fully know what they are writing until they have completed a draft. I think it better serves the writer to submit their work when they have a stronger understanding of what the play is.

Creation based work often benefits from being shared at an earlier stage of development, which was part of my objective in establishing the *Buzz Festival* here at TPM. When developing work that is collaboratively created or multi-disciplinary it is necessary to find out how all of the elements of the piece work

together early in the creation process. The *Buzz Festival* allows artists to experiment with many elements of performance while the work is still in a developmental stage such as movement, sound, puppetry, and projections. Buzz gives artists an opportunity to receive feedback from the audience, but it also gives me the chance to experience work that I may be interested in producing. Seeing the work on stage with an audience rather than reading a script or project proposal can provide a much deeper understanding of the artist's goals and vision for the piece.

Approximately how many new scripts come across your desk each year?

Approximately three hundred scripts a year. That includes scripts received from our online script submission form and the Pitch Blitz, scripts solicited from writers that Theatre Passe Muraille has established a relationship with, and scripts received as applications to the Ontario Arts Council's Theatre Creators Reserve fund.

Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

Looking at the submissions we have received in the last two years there is a fairly equal divide between men and women playwrights.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

Theatre Passe Muraille's dramaturg and I will read a new script and discuss it. If we are interested in the writer or the play we will invite them to meet with us. Depending on our level of interest in the work, in these meetings we may discuss specific dramaturgical elements of the script, or it may simply be a chance to become more familiar with the playwright. Sometimes this will result in the playwright or artists being asked to present work in the *Buzz Festival*. After each *Buzz festival* we meet with the artists to discuss the experience and what they learned about their piece.

Once we have established a relationship with an artist by engaging with them and their work, we may invite them to be in residence at Theatre Passe Muraille. We support our Resident Artists and Companies in a variety of ways including: providing access to rehearsal and performance space, placements in the *Buzz Festival*, mentorship from Theatre Passe Muraille staff. It is a long-term relationship that is not based on a specific project.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights who want to get their play produced at Theatre Passe Muraille? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy/turned off? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

Playwrights should be familiar with the work that the company produces and be able to articulate how their play fits the mandate, or how the company's work resonates with them as artists when submitting a script. A follow-up with either a phone call or email if you haven't heard anything from us after two months is acceptable. This may sound odd but so many people try to "sell" their work, rather than illuminate for us how they think the work is a good fit with our institution. In particular, I find many people telling me that their work will "sell tickets". Don't get me wrong, we want to sell tickets, but that is not the attractive component.

Do you have a cap on how many actors you can afford to hire for a play? Should playwrights limit themselves?

While the number of actors in a play is something that I have to take into consideration when I am programming new work in a season, I don't think that playwrights should limit themselves when they are in the process of creating new work.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

We recently did a demographic study of our audience. It showed what we

knew already, which is that our audience is very heterogeneous. It is a younger audience and a more intercultural one, with income class diversity. It is also an audience that is looking for a novel experience. Like most theatres we have a blend of male and female audience members with females in the majority.

What keeps you working in the theatre?

I went into the theatre in 1975 with a desire to craft stories about our world that speak to an engaged audience, in challenging ways, while providing entertainment. That still gets me up every day

February 27th, 2012

Conni Massing's interview with Vanessa Porteous, Artistic Director Of Alberta Theatre Projects

Originally trained as an actor, Vanessa has worked in nearly every creative role possible in the theatre. She was a senior member of the artistic team at Alberta Theatre Projects (ATP) from 1998 to 2006 where, among other things, she oversaw the world premieres of over 30 new Canadian plays as a part of ATP's annual playRites Festival. During this time she also spent several years on the dramaturgical staff of the Banff Playwrights Colony. In the last nine years, Vanessa's productions in Calgary have been nominated for over 25 Betty

Mitchell awards in various categories, including 5 nominations for Outstanding Production. In March 2009, she was appointed the fourth Artistic Director in ATP's history.

What is the mandate/focus of Alberta Theatre Projects?

We do contemporary plays: a season of plays from the 'rep' (English language, Canadian, presentations) and a festival of new work, the Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays. Plus a family holiday show.

How many plays does Alberta Theatre Projects do per season?

8-9

What do great ATP plays have in common?

They are about what it means to be alive right now.

Of course there is some information about submissions on your website. Is there anything you'd like to add about the process for submitting plays to your theatre?

The vast majority of new Canadian plays that end up on our stage in the Enbridge playRites Festival have all received significant play development, either with us, with other theatres, or independently. We accept 'submission packages' with a script sample from writers we don't know, or a full script with recommendation from a play development centre, a colleague, an agent, etc. We have rarely if ever produced a new play that has come to us 'over the transom' i.e., from a totally unknown source.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along?

I think it's better to send plays when they are farther along; and I personally prefer to read late drafts.

Why?

What I love most is actually doing plays: rehearsing them and sharing them with an audience. That is what we're all about. So I like to really see where the play is going. I believe in the writer's capacity to write their play, and want to join in once the vision is very clear and I can see what the play is going to really be. From the writer's POV it makes sense to send your play when it's really far along. That way people get a good feel for what it'll be and don't risk passing on it too early. That said, we have relationships with certain playwrights whose work we've done before and I'm always thrilled when they offer to show me an early draft. Because

I am familiar with their work, I feel like I can read their newest creation with more context.

Approximately how many plays come across your desk each year?

We read or attend workshops for approximately 200 plays a year. We used to keep score but it became nuts.

Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

Lots. We produce quite a number of plays by women.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

Assistant Dramaturg **Laurel Green**, Artistic Associate Festival **Vicki Stroich** and I read plays. Given the volume of plays and the wideness of our programming mandate, we try to focus on material that may end up being 'for us', rather than 'diamonds in the rough' or front-line early play development or supporting the development of writers. There are exceptions, of course. Process: we read the play; we write a one page report for each other, we discuss the ones that might be 'of interest.' We respond one way or the other, eventually.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy or turned off? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or email?

We often take a very long time to get back to people. Too long. We are attempting to address this problem but it is perennial. The only advice I would give is this: do have a look at the theatre's mandate AND record of production before sending the play, to see if your play is appropriate for that theatre. Also, my personal pet peeve is when writers undercut themselves by describing their beautiful artwork in commercial terms to me in their letter, i.e., trying to persuade me how 'saleable' or 'affordable' it is. Talk about what compelled you to write it, and what if any further development you foresee before it is ready for production. I prefer an email - phone-calls put the recipient on the spot. There is no need to keep following up. We will respond when we can. We do not generally provide dramaturgical feedback or an explanation, if we decide the play will not be for us. Sending a play to a faraway theatre where you don't know anyone is the least effective way to get your play produced. The most effective way is to gather some fans around the play and develop it or work on it or showcase it or even do it yourself or work with play development resources that exist already.

Do you have a cap on how many actors you can afford to hire for a play? Should playwrights limit themselves in terms of cast size?

We do not have a 'cap' but rather must balance the whole season in terms of number of artists we can hire, and also, within our festival, find some kind of casting balance. That said we have done festivals with an ensemble of 17, and festivals with an ensemble of six. It depends on the play, the rest of the season, and what we can afford that year. Playwrights should not limit themselves, but I think good playwrights think both practically and artistically about how many people they need to tell the story. Like you would if you were a composer: What are the 'forces' you require? It is one of the important structural and organizing tools of a playwright: the cast of characters.

In the Canadian theatre I think it's fair to say that six people starts to feel like a 'larger cast'. That's the reality. On the other hand some places are looking for large cast plays (ensemble theatres, summer festivals, colleges and Universities.) Also: people do larger cast plays all the time. It just has to be worth it. But so does a small cast play. When you select a play, you always, always believe it's worth it. Everyone believes in the play when they pick it. No one picks a play because it's 'affordable.' You pick a play because it has seduced you utterly.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

Beauty, in the widest possible sense.

What play did you read last year that really excited you?

Thinking of Yu by **Carole Frechette**, in **John Murrell's** limpid translation.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

Our audience is wide-ranging in age, gender and taste, and I hate to segment them as if I were selling a product, when what I'm doing is inviting a conversation. You can talk with anyone if the subject is of interest.

What plays have been most popular at ATP in the last few years?

The Penelopiad, **Ronnie Burkett's** work, our family holiday musicals, **Joan Macleod's** work, *I Claudia*, *Mary's Wedding* ... it's hard to tell what will make a connection.

What keeps you working in the theatre?

Beauty, in the widest possible sense.

January 24th, 2012

Catherine Banks' interview with Tessa Mendel, Co-Artistic Director of Halifax Theatre for Young People by Catherine Banks

What drew you to theatre for young people?

I was interested in the idea of developing a theatre for young audiences in this region that would introduce young people to the richness of theatre – both in terms of depth of content and of aesthetic expression. As a mother of young children, I was very aware that there is very little theatre available here for kids after the preschool age, except big musicals and occasional school tours. So I felt that there was a need – and I was excited by the challenge of meeting it.

What is mandate/focus of Halifax Theatre for Young People (HTYP)?

Our Mandate: We believe in the imaginative power of art to help us understand ourselves and our world, and connects us with others. We want to create theatre that is challenging and exciting and that honours the unlimited capacity of young people. We believe that to do this, and to engage their full participation, theatre for children and youth requires a deep commitment to superior artistic values and production standards.

How many plays does HTYP do per season?

One to two.

What do great HYTP plays have in common?

They are plays with depth and richness in terms of characters and themes so that all ages of audience can respond to them fully.

Do you accept unsolicited submissions? What are your submission guidelines?

Yes, we accept unsolicited submissions. We don't have specific guidelines.

Since we are primarily facility-based, in the past we have been looking for plays which offer some kind of scope in terms of design vision, and so on, and have tended to be interested in plays with relatively large casts. That may change as we move to a two play season, in that we may consider smaller cast/design plays that are more suitable for touring.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

They are two very different processes for me. If I will be engaged in the process of working with the playwright to develop the play further then I like to read it

early on, if not, I am happy to wait till it is more fully developed.

**Approximately how many plays come across your desk each year?
Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?**

That's a little difficult to answer as we're a relatively new company. There hasn't been much consistency so far, but a quick check shows that we've received eleven scripts in the last nine months, five of which were from women playwrights.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

I tend to wait till I have some free mental space and can read a number of plays at one time, so that I can get into the right frame of mind. I read the script all through at one sitting, and usually know immediately whether it's something that fits within our mandate, and which we might consider. If it is, then I send it along, with any others that excite me, to my co-artistic director. I will then do a second reading if we're at the point of making a choice.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights who want to get their play produced at HTYP? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy/turned off? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

It works for me if playwrights contact me by email and send their scripts as attachments. I did have one playwright who expected me to arrange to buy the book through their publisher, and the fact is that it's unlikely I'm going to get around to it. I prefer all contact to be through email, unless a playwright wants to have a more involved discussion about an idea for a project that we might develop together, in which case arranging a time to call works well. I don't mind a follow-up email after a couple of months, but the truth is it may take me a little longer to get to it. That's not because it's not important. It's because it is important to me, and I want to make sure I give it the time and consideration it deserves!

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

For me, it's always about whether it 'goes deep'. A lot of plays for young audiences are a bit superficial, glib re-workings of fairy tales and cute plays with messages about how to be good friends! If it grabs me and makes me think and feel, I believe it will work for kids.

What play did you read last year that really excited you?

I just read **Hiro Kanagawa's** *The Patron Saint of Stanley Park* – it was really

warm and magical, and is a story that both children and adults will respond to.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

It changes for different plays. Most commonly in the 8 – 12 ‘family audience’ range. And we get both boys and girls attending.

What plays have been popular in the past?

The Gravesavers, which was adapted by **Chris Heide** from **Sheree Fitch’s** novel, was a great success. It’s a ghostly historical romance with a contemporary through line. The story is based on a true local tragedy plus it’s a story both kids and adults can relate to...

What keeps you in theatre?

I think it’s probably the wonderful feeling of artistic collaboration that happens when everybody – playwright, designers, actors, and the director – are putting together all their ideas and creativity and enthusiasm. As a director I feel I’m providing a framework for that to happen in, and when it works well, it’s fully engaging and almost magical.

December 6th, 2011

Beverley Cooper’s interview with Michael Shamata, Artistic Director of The Belfry

Michael Shamata has been the artistic director of the Belfry Theatre since 2007, where his directing credits include *And Slowly Beauty...*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Jessie Awards for Outstanding Direction), the Canadian Premiere of Joan Didion’s *The Year of Magical Thinking* starring Seana McKenna and Ann-Marie MacDonald and Allen Cole’s musical *Anything That Moves*. His west coast directing credits also include Glengarry Glen Ross starring Eric McCormack (Arts Club Theatre, Vancouver), *I Am My Own Wife*, *Hello, Dolly!*, *Guys and Dolls* and *The Music Man* (Vancouver Playhouse), and *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Winter’s Tale* (Bard on the Beach, Vancouver).

Michael has directed at most of the major theatres across the country, including the Stratford Festival, Canadian Stage, the Citadel Theatre, and the Manitoba Theatre Centre, and his work has been seen in every province in Canada. His productions have won awards for Outstanding Production in Toronto (A Little Night Music), Vancouver (Fiddler on the Roof and Spelling Bee) and Ottawa (Kilt). Michael’s production of Paul Dunn’s *Offensive Shadows* won the Audience Choice Award at the 2007 SummerWorks Festival in Toronto, and he is the adaptor and director of Soulpepper Theatre’s semi-annual production of *A*

Christmas Carol. Michael is also a writer and teacher, and is the former Artistic Director of both Theatre New Brunswick (1990-1995) and the Grand Theatre in London, Ontario (1995-1999).

What is the mandate/focus of The Belfry?

Contemporary plays with an emphasis on Canadian plays

How many new Canadian plays does The Belfry do per season?

The Belfry produces between three and four Canadian plays, presents between four and five Canadian plays (some part of the Spark Festival). Out of that one or two are new work.

What do great Belfry plays have in common?

Ideas contained in an engaging envelope.

I see the guidelines for submitting plays on your website (<http://www.belfry.bc.ca/contact/>), Is there anything you'd like to add about the submission process?

No. It's dry, but accurate.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

It depends. If I am being asked for dramaturgical input, then I enjoy reading a play in its early stages. If I am being asked to consider it for production, then I would rather see it in the best light possible.

Approximately how many new scripts come across your desk each year?

Forty easily; probably more.

Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

Between a quarter and a third of the scripts I receive.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

I read each script personally and respond to the playwright --often with notes -- usually by e-mail.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights who want to get their play produced at The Belfry? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy/turned off? How soon after a playwright submits a

script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

Most playwrights are so grateful to receive even negative comments that it makes me think that they rarely hear back from theatres. I get a bit crazy when playwrights assume that because I have responded with notes it means that I am going to produce their play, this is not the case. Once the playwright has initially sent a play they should give me a couple of months and then if they haven't heard back, contact me by e-mail.

Do you have a cap on how many actors you can afford to hire for a play? Should playwrights limit themselves? Well -- large casts can definitely be prohibitive. But I also hate to suggest that playwrights limit or edit themselves. At the same time, it is nice to have plays with some scale in a season. It is pointless trying to tailor a play to fit what one thinks a theatre might be looking for. Theatres are looking for good plays, period. And if it is good enough but large, they will often find a creative way of producing it whether it be through a co-production or some other such arrangement.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

An idea to take home.

What plays did you read last year that really excited you?

And Slowly Beauty... by Michel Nadeau (currently a co-pro between The Belfry and the NAC); *The Small Room at the Top of the Stairs* and *Thinking of Yu* by Carole Fréchette (both translated by John Murrell); *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris and *Belleville* by Amy Herzog.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

A healthy mix of ages between 40 and 70. Equal parts male and female. Very white.

What plays have been popular at The Belfry in the past?

During my time: *Brilliant!*, *The Real Thing*, *Mom's the Word*, *Ride the Cyclone*, *And Slowly Beauty...*, and *Jitters*.

What keeps you working in the theatre?

The occasional moment of simple reality that takes your breath away and the sight of an audience thinking about what they have shared.

November 8th, 2011

Interview with Bradley Moss, Theatre Network's Artistic Director:

Bradley Moss has been Theatre Network's artistic director since 1999. He has an MFA in Directing from the University of Alberta and was the original director of NextFest, Theatre Network's annual festival of new plays, music, dance, visual art and poetry by emerging creative artists.

Brad has developed and directed many new plays during his time at T.N., including work by Chris Craddock (*Public Speaking*, *Summer of My Amazing Luck*), Darrin Hagen (*Buddy*), Eugene Stickland, and Jon Lachlan Stewart. Theatre Network productions have earned numerous kudos at the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes awards. The theatre has also won the warm regard of the local community for its support of innovative independent production, the promotion of emerging talent, and the opportunities provided on its main stage.

What is the mandate/focus of Theatre Network?

Our mandate is contemporary theatre from around the world with an emphasis on the Western Canadian Playwright.

How many plays does Theatre Network do per season?

We produce four Mainstage plays each season, as well as Nextfest – an 11-day multidisciplinary emerging arts festival. We also host The Roxy Performance Series, a series of plays from local independent theatre companies.

What do great Theatre Network plays have in common?

I have a friend who says, "Open mouths lead to open hearts". To me that means plays that are funny and, of course, have something to say, but are also full of heart as well. I am known to have a penchant for the black comedy, which is true, but more importantly, does the play have something relevant to offer us in our lives today? A contemporary play could mean producing *Hosanna*, for example, because that play is still full of vitality and still speaks about our world today.

What's the process for submitting plays to your theatre?

Plays can be submitted in the fall to me. I ask that Playwrights contact me first before sending it blind so I know a bit about the play and the writer.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why? I read all the plays. And I read them in various stages of development.

Approximately how many plays come across your desk each year?

Maybe 10 to 20 plays per year.

Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

I would say that the percentage of men and women is almost equal now.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

Depends how new it is. Sometimes I'm putting on a dramaturgy hat, and sometimes I'm simply moving a young playwright into Nextfest, our festival for emerging artists. Other times, I'm reading a play that has already been produced, and so that's just a straight - "Are we interested or not?" So basically, the process is different for each play. I'm a slow reader and a slow responder. I know I can frustrate folks, but I'd rather take my time reading someone's work, so I know it better than to just rush through it.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy or turned off? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or email?

I expect a follow-up email or call. Either is fine. In general, you have to know that the plays are very important to the artist and to our theatres, and you just never know where a great play may arrive from. That pushy person might just be afraid or excited and when you read the play you might discover a writer of real depth. Generally, I find good playwrights 'get it' – meaning that not all artistic directors will like your plays and so it is your job as a playwright to establish working relations with directors and producers. I guess constant hassling is a turn-off.

But checking in every few months is fair game.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

That it moves me. That there's something relevant being discussed by the play and that it has value in its discussion and examination of the world we live in. That I'm surprised by the play in either content (I cannot believe you just said that) and/or its form. That I'm drawn to want to explore and spend more time with the play.

What play did you read last year that really excited you?

DOG, by Jon Lachlan Stewart, for its bold theatrical style and *An Almost Perfect Thing*, by Nicole Moeller, for its content and silky style of language. I actually directed *DOG* and saw a production of *An Almost Perfect Thing* (which went on

to win a Sterling Award for Outstanding New Play). Often I can get upset or even appalled by a play and its content only to realize later that the play really pushed my buttons. That's when I go back and see the play better on the second read through - that's when I really see its beauty.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

Our audience ranges from 20's to 60's. Most in their 40's and 50's and more women than men. I would estimate that our audiences are made up of 60% or more women.

What keeps you working in the theatre?

The smell of grease paint. Seriously. I love the smell of theatre and I love creating shows. I love working with creative people, problem solving, discovering how we can clearly tell our stories. I guess that is the real secret for me – I love creating our Canadian stories. A recent example would be Chris Craddock's new play *Public Speaking*, which I directed last year. I had so much fun working with him, and figuring out how best to tell the story. The play itself struck a chord with me, its politics I agree with. Plays like that, processes like that – that's what keeps me working in theatre.

October 13th, 2011

Beverley Cooper's interview with Eric Coates, Artistic Director of the Blyth Festival by Beverley Cooper

Eric Coates is the artistic director of the Blyth Festival, where he has worked in a variety of disciplines since 1995. Eric has directed many shows at Blyth including *Vimy*, *The Ballad of Stompin' Tom*, *The Ginkgo Tree*, *Against the Grain*, *Having Hope at Home*, and *The Drawer Boy*. He studied at Ryerson Theatre School and continues to take an interest in the program. Eric is the President of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT). He is also a recipient of the PGC Women's Caucus Bra D'Or award, given in recognition of his support for gender equity.

Eric has a great record of supporting playwrights and new work. Since he became artistic director of Blyth in 2003 there have been twenty-three world premieres, eight scripts published, and two finalists for the Governor General's Award (Reverend *Jonah* by **Paul Ciuffo** and my own play *Innocence Lost: a play about Steven Truscott*).

I personally love working with Eric. He's smart, funny, straight with you, extremely supportive of the artist yet also knows his audience well and while he doesn't pander, he knows what they will like.

What is the mandate/focus of Blyth?

The mandate is surprisingly simple. In essence, all of our productions must reflect the Canadian experience. The pattern of creating new work is purely a reflection of the various artistic directors. Each one has had a different aesthetic, but we all adhere to the audience and artists' expectation that we will create new work.

How many plays does Blyth do per season?

It varies from year to year. The standard template is to produce four plays, in repertory, on the mainstage. The variables are (or have been): outdoor shows, revivals of hits that run exclusively for two weeks pre- or post-repertory season, fringe productions in the Phillips Studio, and the Young Company. In 2011, we produced four mainstage rep shows, one Young Company show on the mainstage, and we presented two fringe shows in the Phillips Studio (these were strictly presentations, in Blyth by invitation).

What do great Blyth plays have in common?

The great ones tap into the authentic local culture without caricature. These are the plays that use Huron County as a microcosm of human behavior. They emphatically do not rely solely upon a local audience, even though the locals may connect to the work on a powerful level. The great plays, nonetheless, are able to transcend the purely local relationship and create a universal appeal.

I see the guidelines for submitting plays are published on your website (http://www.blythfestival.com/np_development.php). Is there anything you'd like to add about the submission process?

Writers should provide a cover letter of introduction, including a CV.

Unsolicited scripts sent via email or hard copy will be read at the discretion of the artistic director.

A cover package should include a précis of the script and a short writing sample from the same, if it is a completed play.

If the playwright is interested in pursuing a commission, the writing sample can come from an already completed work.

Proposals should include a short statement relating to the script's exploration of Canadian identity.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

Hard to say, given that my relationship with each playwright is going to dictate the answer. If pressed, I'd say that if the playwright is someone with whom I have an established working relationship, then I'd like to see the work as early as possible. If it's a new relationship, then I'd like to see something that has been through at least one complete draft.

Approximately how many plays come across your desk each year?

This varies wildly. Right now, I have 20 scripts on my desk that have arrived between March 2011 and September 2011. Another eight or nine have arrived unsolicited via email in that time. And on the closing day of our season, no fewer than four playwrights showed up to attend the show and dropped unsolicited scripts off for me. I don't keep a clear record of how many have arrived per year, but I will try to in the future. It's fair to say anywhere from 40 – 70.

Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

More than 50% are submitted by women. This is consistent with inquiries from artists in every department. Submissions from women regarding acting, direction, stage management and design far outstrip the correspondence from men. In the case of actors, it's almost double.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

I prioritize the scripts that I have approved for submission, in order of arrival. I am very candid about the fact that I do not consider myself a good dramaturge in the conventional sense. I do not approach the script as something that requires structural analysis on a first reading. I simply read it through the lens of Blyth's core audience, which is diverse, yet smattered with fundamentalist Christians and fire-breathing cultural conservatives. I can tell very quickly whether the work will resonate with our crowd or not. If I feel that it has the right aesthetic, but the content is too edgy, I weigh that against the writer's progress to date. Is it early enough in the process to discuss any significant changes, or is the horse already out of the barn, so to speak? In simplest terms: I taste the play and I can tell pretty quickly if I like the taste or not. If I really like it, I will go to great lengths to find a way to take it through development and into production.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights who want to get their play produced at Blyth? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy/turned off? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

Unless you've been to Blyth, please do not tell me that this script is exactly what I'm looking for. I hate the "my play is a panacea" pitch. I certainly don't begrudge anybody's inability to get to Blyth due to geography (i.e., the playwright lives in Vancouver), but don't presume to know this particular audience unless you've been part of it.

Please take the time to let me know if you're coming to the theatre and you'd like to introduce yourself. Because I'm often in the lobby or in the audience, people like to do the guerilla pitch right then and there, usually with unsatisfying results because I'm already engaged with someone else. Call ahead, tell me that you'd like to say hello and drop a script off, and I'm very likely to oblige.

I like people. I do my best to mind my manners and consider their vulnerability when their work is on the line. Why then do they send unsolicited critiques of my work when pitching their own scripts? Just a few days ago, I received the following backhanded compliment from a writer who had attended a show here: "...I saw Play X last week. I thought it picked up in the second act." Thanks for the glowing endorsement. Keep in mind that this is part of an unsolicited pitch from a stranger who said hello and handed me a script. You may think that I'm over-reacting, but take a step back and consider it from my perspective: I have a dozen new plays in development. I struggle against huge odds to support and develop these scripts through to production. There are endless anxieties, complications, feuds and frustrations in addition to great rewards. And in what I can only assume was an attempt to show some moxy, the stranger tells me "...it picked up in the second act" ??? Common sense, combined with sensitivity, goes a long way in establishing a relationship with other artists.

Since we have so many plays in development here, any playwright with a pitch needs to be patient. Even if I like something, it may be a few years before it can fit into the programming.

Increasingly, I receive pitches with what appears to be an endorsement from another artistic director or dramaturge – i.e. "Ms. Smith at AnyTheatre says that this would be a great fit for Blyth." Upon investigation, I find that Ms. Smith actually said something along the lines of, "Well...you could try submitting it to Blyth because they produce new work." This kind of misinformation has the potential to damage your relationship with both Blyth and AnyTheatre.

Back to the original question: I generally suggest a timeline for the playwright to contact me after I've agreed to read the script. Regarding email or phone, I have no preference.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

Potential resonance with Blyth's audience.

What play did you read last year that really excited you?

The Penelopiad by Margaret Atwood

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

Senior women. Primarily WASPish within 100km radius of Blyth.

What plays have been popular in the past?

Early days were all grassroots local: **Ted Johns'** *He Won't Come in from the Barn*. **Paul Thompson** collectives. **Colleen Curran** comedies, such as *Cakewalk*. *The Drawer Boy* by **Michael Healey**, developed here but premiered at Passe Muraille, *Innocence Lost* by **Beverley Cooper**. *Reverend Jonah* by **Paul Ciuffo**.

What keeps you working in the theatre?

The glamour of it all. I often ask this question myself. I love the arts and I especially love this job when it bridges the gulf between a conservative audience and activist creators. I also thrive on providing resources for developing artists. Watching the arc of the actual development of a piece of art is akin to watching a child grow. And the fascination with that process never dims. Finally, it's the relationships with other artists and patrons of the arts that fuel the fire.

September 13th, 2011

Catherine Banks' interview with Pamela Halstead, Artistic Director of Lunchbox Theatre:

I had a new appreciation for the life of an Artistic Director and what kind of time demands and pressures she/he is under, while trying to read scripts, when I asked **Pamela Halstead** of Lunchbox Theatre if she would launch this series of playwright questions for Artistic Directors. She clearly felt this series to be an excellent idea and she was pleased to be asked to be the first guest AD so never for a moment did it feel like she didn't want to participate. But finding the time to *get 'er done* was another matter.

Pam arrived in Nova Scotia in early July after an exhausting season with Lunchbox that concluded with the wrap up of their Stage One Festival---the workshopping of 10 plays over a three-week period. (During the last month I will add Pam was transitioning in a new General Manager after having done both jobs for almost two months including throughout the insanity of the Festival).

Pam then began a four week rehearsal period for *Vigil* at Valley Summer Theatre in Wolfville (a critically acclaimed hit starring PGC member **Jenny Munday**), and

as soon as that opened she headed for Prince Edward Island for a three-day workshop of **Catherine O'Brien's** *Fascinating Ladies*, which will appear later in the Lunchbox season.

Then it was back to New Brunswick to squeeze in a family visit. On her days off, Pam took the time to see as much theatre as she could, not only to support her theatre colleagues but because she has a vast curiosity about theatre. And as always she made time for friends. But the capper was that through this entire time she was trying to buy a property in Nova Scotia. And of course it was EPIC--as these things can be---with delays and dramas. She delayed her flight and, when she finally got the keys, took the three days remaining and threw herself into checking out yard sales and Value Village until the place was pretty much set up to help with the dearth of accommodation available in Halifax for visiting artists.

So, it wasn't until Pam was back in Calgary that she had "time" to read and respond to our questions. I didn't have to remind her, something that I was dreading, as I knew she was in the midst of the start up of Lunchbox Theatre's season. I was pleased to see her answers in my inbox and as I read through her authentic responses I felt great that Pamela Halstead of Lunchbox Theatre is launching this series.

What is the mandate/focus of Lunchbox?

From a foundation of noon-hour performances, Lunchbox Theatre strives to create, produce and disseminate original one-act plays, with a focus on new Canadian works, which examine and explore socially relevant issues in a contemporary context. We strive for a balance between works that reflect our audience and their particular world and those that aim to take the audience to a different place and open their eyes to fresh experiences and new understandings.

How many plays does Lunchbox do per season?

6 - 8 depending on the season

What do great Lunchbox plays have in common?

The story telling is key. They are able to take the audience on a full and rewarding journey in a very efficient arc that can be completed in 60 minutes or less. The most successful are often more lighthearted, but still with a number of layers of emotional engagement. Many have been developed at Lunchbox through the Stage One Workshop program with the Lunchbox audience in mind.

You host the Suncor Stage One Festival and those submission guidelines are on your website. Do you accept submissions outside of that Festival?

Do the same submission guidelines apply?

Submissions are accepted year round and are gauged as to whether they meet our criteria and whether they are production ready or should be vetted through the Stage One Festival.

Do you personally like to read a play in its early stages or when it is farther along? Why?

In regards to Lunchbox Theatre when it is further along as I have a better sense of whether it will meet our production needs. As a freelance dramaturg, I love to be involved in the process from an early stage.

Approximately how many plays come across your desk each year? Roughly how many are submitted by women playwrights?

Over 50 plays annually. About 40% of applicants were women each of the two years I have been here.

What is the process you go through reading new scripts?

I read them and see if they meet our criteria and whether they engage me. If I also think about whether they will engage my audience I look as to how close they are to being production ready and whether or not they would benefit from more development and whether the playwright is open to that.

Do you have a general comment about your contact with playwrights who want to get their play produced at Lunchbox? What works for you and what makes you a little crazy or turns you off? How soon after a playwright submits a script do you want to get a follow-up call/email and do you prefer a call or an email?

I appreciate an email asking if I am interested in a submission. And I do not mind a follow up email 4 - 6 weeks later asking if I have had a chance to look at it. I do not like phone calls unless I personally know the playwright. Continually calling me does not endear me to a new playwright. Neither does sending more and more newer drafts if I have already said I am not interested. Those drafts end up in the recycling as if I have already said no as I do not have time to read more and more versions.

If I have said I am interested and would like to be kept abreast of future development that is a different story though, be sure there is some significant growth before resending as again my time is limited and after version two if it has not improved significantly that will be the last draft I read.

What is the single most important thing you are looking for in a new play?

Heart. No matter whether it is a comedy, a musical or a drama it has to have heart.

What play did you read last year that really excited you?

Louis B. Hobson's *Almost A Love Story*. It is about a man who leads a dual life with his wife and son and a male lover on the side. After his death the truth comes out and the survivors have to deal with their grief and the truth. It has a tremendous amount of heart and as with the best plays leaves the audience to ask their own questions and come to their own conclusions.

What is the demographic of your audience? Age? Gender?

Primarily female ages 35 - 75. There are three distinct groups - downtown office workers, seniors, and school students.

What plays have been popular in the past?

Last season's biggest hits were *In Flanders Fields* (Robby Phillips and Nicky Gontier), a musical about the life of John McCrae; *With Bells On* (Darrin Hagen), a Christmas comedy about a drag queen and a recently divorced accountant who get stuck in an elevator together and *Shopaholic Husband Hunt* (Glenda Stirling), a play about the perils of a thirty something dating in the modern world.

What keeps you in theatre?

The moments when magic happens and people are genuinely moved - be it to laughter or tears. And when theatre genuinely changes someone's perspective. Last season after a reading of *Almost A Love Story* I had a quiet senior women come up to me and say that she had thought she was coming to another reading and would probably not have come had she known the content. That she was not that comfortable with homosexuality. But she had not felt uncomfortable at the reading and also felt that it changed her view of things - that those two men really loved each other. Those moments are the key to why I feel it is important to tell stories - to reflect the human experience back to the audience.