

## The 2020 Bra d'Or Award Nominations

The Bra d'Or Award (BDA) recognizes an individual for his/her/their efforts in supporting and promoting the work of Canadian women playwrights. The Women's Caucus of the Playwrights Guild of Canada launched the BDA in 2006 to recognize and celebrate industry leaders championing gender equity. This year, there are nine impressive nominees from many different regions of Canada!

### 1) **AVERY JEAN BRENNAN (nominated by Kai Taddei)**



Avery Jean Brennan is a powerhouse of empathy and determination. In this past year, they: 1) made Canadian theatre history by being the first trans woman to appear on Neptune Theatre's stage; 2) taught multiple workshops at theatres across the country on how to make theatre inclusive to trans and gender non-conforming (GNC) folks; 3) fought the CAEA to include a non-binary gender option on their website; and, 4) began work on a new musical for an all-trans ensemble. Avery doesn't just support and amplify the work of women playwrights in Canada, and that's what makes them such a badass; they fight every day to help others overcome gendered oppression and gender inequity in all of its forms, whether cis, trans, Two Spirit, non-binary, or agender. The amount of labour and educating this person does while also battling systemic transphobia on a day-to-day basis, and offering their love and support so wholeheartedly to the creative communities they serve, flat-out astounds me. They are one of the most loving human beings I know, and they always, \*always\* take the time to amplify the work of those around them and to show up for their peers.

## 2) MARJORIE CHAN (nominated by Julie Phan)



I was introduced to Marjorie Chan as a young writer who was given my first opportunity to mount a show outside of my school. I was seventeen years old, and I was juggling the demands of writing and producing my own show with thirty-hour work weeks, university applications and keeping myself on track to graduate high school. As part of my agreement with Toronto Fringe under the Cultural Diverse Artists Project, I was given financial support and a mentor. I asked for somebody with a similar cultural background to mine that could understand what I was trying to express through my writing. That's how Marjorie became the first Asian-Canadian mentor I've ever had the opportunity to work with. When she first met me, I was anxious, overwhelmed and lost; in that first meeting alone, she calmly helped me put the pieces of my show together and helped me restore confidence in myself. In subsequent months, she introduced me to members in the community that have further developed and have become involved in my work. I would not be where I am as an emerging artist without Marjorie. There are countless other people that have worked with Marjorie that continually point out how her kindness and generosity stands out to them. Aside from being a very accomplished theatre creator herself (as a writer, a director, an actor, and artistic leader), and being a writer who continually centers the diverse voices of Asian womxn within her own work, Marjorie is a champion for all womxn theatre creators. While Marjorie teaches playwriting workshops directly within the community and to students within an educational institution, her work for promoting womxn's voices especially stands out as an artistic leader and a director. As the new artistic director of Theatre Passe Muraille, the launch of the "Meet Marjorie" program invites and encourages new artists to introduce themselves directly to her. This opportunity attempts to break down barriers that have historically prevented

marginalized artists from having a seat at the table, by bringing them directly into her field of view. With a larger platform now, Marjorie continues to create opportunities for different marginalized communities, and for all people who fall in between these groups. I have nothing but love and appreciation for Marjorie and the work she has done to uplift my own voice, but also the voices of other womxn in the community. I can't wait to see what she does in her capacity as the new artistic director of Theatre Passe Muraille, and a lifelong mentor for so many diverse artists in Toronto's community.

### **3) KARA FLANAGAN (self-nominated)**



In 2018, Kara Flanagan founded Theatre Carpe Diem, a Victoria, BC based theatre company, dedicated to Canadian playwrights with a mandate focused on stories about women. Kara has been running this company for two years and has been instrumental in creating a platform for Canadian women playwrights to tell their stories. The #metoo movement in 2018 was an opportune time to seize the day and launch a theatre that promotes female storytellers and underrepresented voices in Canada. With the launch of this company, came great support from the theatre community in Victoria and a strong desire to see the company provide new opportunities for female artists and playwrights. Bringing on local director Wendy Merk as Artistic Director, Kara and Wendy worked with their membership to further refine the mandate. The mandate now focuses on stories of female empowerment. The issue being addressed with this change was the view that a focus solely on stories about women sometimes led our play committees to stories of victimization. Wendy and Kara seek stories that inspire and empower women, and, hence, create a powerful narrative that truly celebrates women. In the 2019/20

season, two Canadian female playwrights were featured: Wendy A. Hamilton and Linda Edwards. It is of further note that Kara's launch of this theatre was also inspired by her work with the Victoria Academy of Dramatic Arts, an acting school she co-founded in 2012. In planning the launch of the theatre, she surveyed female students at the school to gauge their interest in having a vehicle for them and future female playwrights and actors to tell their stories. As a mentor, Kara recognized the importance of creating opportunities for both new and established playwrights and artists to work together to ensure that a mandate to tell stories about women is relevant today and stays relevant to future generations of artists.

Kara is currently pursuing a PhD in drama education at the University of Victoria, and she is excited to expand her career as an educator. Kara recognizes that supporting Canadian female playwrights takes more than simply choosing a play written by a Canadian woman. It takes three key ingredients: education and mentorship to support new theatre artists who understand the importance of female storytellers and stories; a vision that empowers and celebrates women; and courage to take a risk to achieve a mandate that supports Canadian women playwrights telling empowering stories about women.

#### **4) HEATHER INGLIS (nominated by Beth Graham)**



Heather Inglis is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada and an award-winning director, producer, and dramaturg whose career has taken her across the country. She has directed and assistant-directed over forty productions, many of which have been new Canadian works. Credits include: The Shaw Festival, Citadel Theatre, Workshop West Theatre, Northern Light Theatre, Azimuth Theatre, Theatre Junction, Gordon Tootoosis Nikaniwin Theatre, Live Five, The Doppler Effect Productions, Alberta Playwrights Network, Saskatchewan Playwrights' Centre, Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre, The Notable Acts Festival, and Universities in Edmonton, Calgary, and Saskatoon. She has been dedicated to dramaturgy and new play

development with credit as a director and dramaturg on well over one hundred workshops and staged readings of new Canadian plays, many of them by women. Notable engagements include: serving as Resident Dramaturg (North) Alberta Playwrights Network, leading The Citadel Theatre's Playwrights' Young Company, serving as Dramaturg for the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre, serving as Artist in Residence and Festival Dramaturg at NotaBle Acts Summer Theatre Festival Fredericton, serving as Convener of the Playwright Development Centres of Canada, and creating and leading Alberta Playwrights Network's Playwrights' Gym.

Throughout her career, Heather has not only encouraged and championed plays by women playwrights but she has also produced their work, notably with her company Theatre Yes. Before theatres began to postpone shows due to COVID-19, Theatre Yes was set to produce *Tell Us What Happened* by emerging playwright, Michelle Robb. Currently, Heather is the Artistic Producer of Workshop West Playwrights Theatre where she continues to support women playwrights at all levels of experience.

#### **5) THOMAS MORGAN JONES (nominated by Alissa Watson)**



It is my great honour to nominate Thomas Morgan Jones, Artistic Director of Prairie Theatre Exchange, for the 2020 Bra d'Or Award. I have had the privilege of working with Thomas in several capacities since his move from New Brunswick to Winnipeg – as a student, an assistant director, a playwright, a colleague, and most significantly, as a mentee. Thomas is an extraordinary leader, fuelled with integrity and dedication. He is the type of person you hope would lead, not just the arts, but Canada. Thomas accepted the position of Artistic Director at Prairie Theatre Exchange in 2018, following Robert Metcalfe's fifteen seasons with the theatre, and since then, he has been a gift to the Winnipeg theatre community. Thomas exudes respect; for patrons, artists, and collaborators. In the art of connecting with others, he is a master; so much so, it is now hard to imagine this community without him. At this time, one that has seen the arts in unprecedented waters, a time when arts administrators are forced to navigate constant

upheaval and change, it is imperative I mention that Thomas continues to lead Prairie Theatre Exchange with calm and grace. Incredibly, in this dark and confusing time for many theatre professionals, he has inspired the Winnipeg community.

For a mid-career artist, Thomas has a substantial resume, and one that is multifaceted. He is a respected performer, playwright, movement coach, director, and arts administrator. However, one of his most important attributes is his advocacy for female playwrights. Two major accomplishments in this area include directing the first three plays of the Governor General Award-nominated playwright, Anusree Roy, as well as programming, developing, and directing Natalie Sappier's *Finding Wolastoq Voice*. It is because of Thomas's investment in Sappier's story that it has now played at Theatre New Brunswick, Native Earth Performing Arts, Ship's Company, National Arts Centre - Indigenous Theatre Section, and here in Winnipeg at Prairie Theatre Exchange. Additionally, Thomas helped facilitate the funding from New Brunswick and Manitoba that allowed Natalie to be in-residence at PTE while her show was in rehearsal last season. During his time at Theatre New Brunswick, Thomas programmed new works/world premieres by Tania Breen, Kim Parkhill, Gabrielle Houle (who co-wrote alongside Thomas and Richard Lee), Kira Smith (a high school student who wrote TNB's Theatre for Young Audiences touring show as her first play), and Mona'a Malik, a prose writer, whose story he assisted in adapting into a touring TYA play (with support he helped acquire from Young People's Theatre in Toronto). He also programmed a play by Judith Thompson.

I think it is outstanding that for several playwrights, myself included, it is Thomas who made our professional playwriting debut possible. Establishing the Emerging Playwrights Unit, in partnership with the Manitoba Association of Playwrights, was one of Thomas's first accomplishments at PTE. The EPU has sixty percent female representation – of which I am fortunate to be one of the members – and has become a safe and inspiring place for emerging writers. He has offered us support, avenues to share our work, as well as a home at PTE. I was commissioned by Thomas in 2019 to adapt Robert Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess* for PTE's holiday show and school tour. In addition to his consultation while I adapted and directed the project, I received a Canada Council grant for the 2019-2020 season to shadow him in three directing projects at PTE. Among many things, I learned how much respect he has for the creation process. If it weren't for Thomas, I would never have had the opportunity to push myself artistically, and I certainly would not have achieved my first professional production. Under Thomas' guidance, I have become a stronger writer and a more sophisticated artist.

In his two seasons (and a programmed third) at Prairie Theatre Exchange, Thomas has supported, programmed, or directed works by Sharon Bajer, Hannah Moscovitch, Pamela Mala Sinha, Marie Beth Badian, Danielle Séguin-Tétreault, Kristen Thomson, Yvette Nolan, and Anita Rochon. Additional new works by women are in development as well. The PTE Leap Series programming continues to reflect his efforts to advocate for diverse female-identifying creators, as it has seen works from Debbie Patterson, Freya Bjorg Olafson, Ming Hon, and next season, Carmen Aguirre. PTE has long held the mandate that a minimum of fifty percent of all their plays be written or created by women. Following the example of Robert Metcalfe (former recipient of this award), Thomas had this commitment embedded in PTE's strategic plan, so the company is held accountable. Thomas is incredible at recognizing and harvesting potential; he also has vision for exceptional stories and compelling theatre. He is not only an advocate for

established and emerging playwrights but women who are yet to be playwrights. As a playwright, I have experienced Thomas as a thoughtful, kind, skillful, patient, calm under pressure, approachable, inspiring, respectful, honest, outstanding collaborator, and a truly beautiful human being. Thomas knows in which direction to start you off and the right amount of support to keep you steady. If learning to write a play was like learning to ride a bike, you would be soaring down the sidewalk long before you realized he wasn't hanging on in the first place. The future of the arts is safe with people like Thomas Morgan Jones at the helm. Emerging artists can wait a lifetime for their career to springboard; often, we are nothing without our mentors. Because of Thomas, I have a new level of appreciation for what it means to invest in a career in theatre. As a result, he is worthy of my whole-hearted respect as a colleague; there is no greater gift I could offer him for his dedication to women's stories, than a glowing recommendation for this award. I hope you will recognize Thomas Morgan Jones as the recipient of this year's Bra d'Or Award.

**6) ANNA PAPPAS (nominated by Claire Dunn)**



I am nominating Anna Pappas for the Bra D'Or Award for her efforts in supporting and promoting the work of Canadian women playwrights. In an article in *The Guardian*, "British Theatre Has A Problem with Women: These Playwrights Want to Solve It" (by Eleanor Ross, Jan 8, 2019), Nadia Fall, the Artistic Director of Theatre Royal Stratford East in London and an associate director at the National Theatre was quoted as saying: "This isn't about a lack of brilliant plays written by women. When I was programming our inaugural season, I could easily have chosen female playwrights for every show. It's all about who the gatekeepers are." Anna Pappas, as the Founder and Artistic Director of Canada's Ergo Arts Theatre, decided her power as a gatekeeper was best used to throw that gate open wide to female and marginalized gender playwrights. In the early days of Ergo Arts Theatre, Anna was instrumental in developing the

work of female playwright, Alexis Bernier. From 1993, those plays were part of the Fringe and Summerworks Festivals, with productions of *Vicious Circle*, *Then/Berenice*, *Truce*, *Breaking Character* (chosen as Patron's Pick Toronto Fringe), and *Buckle My Shoe* (selected as one of NOW Magazine's Fringe Favourites). Since 2017, Anna stepped up her effort with two significant programmes. That year, Anna created Pink, the arm of Ergo Arts dedicated to supporting emerging (young and older), female-identifying and marginalized genders; and in 2018, she launched Ergo Pink Fest (EPF), a festival to mentor and give visibility to female-identifying and gender-marginalized playwrights. To enter, playwrights have to meet three criteria with their one-act plays to showcase the stories of women and non-binary characters: 1. The script must feature at least two women/non-binary people, who both have names; 2. These two people talk to each other; 3. They talk about something other than a man. (Those of you familiar with the Bechdel-Wallace Test will recognize the criteria!) At the inaugural festival, selected playwrights took their first draft through three sessions with a professional dramaturge, three workshops with actors and a director, all of which culminated in a staged reading. The festival itself was a three-day event featuring the readings of the new works, and panel discussions around themes impacting female-identifying and non-binary artists. In 2018, panels were held on the value of mentorship and relationships between artists, especially in regard to bridging the gap between emerging and professional, mentor and learner, to create an environment of artist empowerment; and on cross-racial casting on contemporary stages. In 2019, the two panels were "Theatre School 101: Renovation/Reinvention," with moderator Tanisha Taitt, hosted panelists Gabriella Albino, Marie Beath Badian, Marcia Johnson, Emerjade Simms, athena kaitlin trinh, and Paula Wing; and "The Business of Playwriting and How to Talk About Your Work," moderated by Joanna Falck, Literary Manager at Tarragon Theatre, with panelists Rebecca Burton (Membership & Professional Contracts Manager at Playwrights Guild of Canada), Matt McGeachy (Company Dramaturg at Factory Theatre), and Myekah Payne (Company Dramaturg at Obsidian).

With the simple Bechdel-Wallace test-esque parameters as its launching pad, EPF has done amazingly well at moving the needle. In the last three years (including prep for the 2020 festival), EPF has had a total of 143 artists involved, from playwrights, directors, actors, dramaturges, artists in panels and workshops, graphics people, and a photographer. In 2018, 69 artists were involved - 58 were women (80%), and 1 was non-binary (1%) – so in all, 81% women and gender-marginalized artists. In 2019, there were 80 artists total: 64 were women (80%), 7 were gender marginalized (8%) - so 88% of artists were women and gender-marginalized artists. These numbers really flip the percentages we've grown so used to seeing: in 2016/2017, only 26% of productions were by women. In 2017/2018, it was up a titch to 30%. And in 2018/2019, it was 31%. Because of the very DNA of the Ergo Pink Festival Anna has created, EPF's numbers are over 80%. Year over year, just think of the impact this one festival could have on the works created in Canada by women, for women. This is the kind of legacy that moves mountains. At 2018's Ergo Pink Festival, nine new plays were developed by women playwrights. I was fortunate to be amongst them, developing my play, *The Women of Casterbridge*, a retelling of the male-centred novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, by Thomas Hardy, to refocus the story on the women's point of view. I can tell you from my personal experience, developing that play with my assigned and experienced dramaturge, Beverley Cooper, and having the play rehearsed and read under the auspicious direction of Diana Leblanc, by the cream of the Canadian performer crop, was a highlight of my career. I felt so supported in

the big artistic risk of developing new work from the moment I was invited into the festival by Anna, to being in the trenches with my dramaturge, to the rehearsal process, to the night of premiering my new work. It was a thrill to be amongst so many women, working together. And this was a sentiment I heard over and over by the other female playwrights in my cohort. At 2019's Ergo Pink Festival, 7 new plays by women and gender marginalized playwrights were developed. For 2020's Ergo Pink Festival, a number of new plays by women and gender marginalized playwrights have been chosen but not yet announced. Female and marginalized gender dramaturges will be employed to help the writers develop their plays – and casts with over 50% gender equity will be hired to perform the plays in staged readings. But it's not just about the plays being created once and read once, at the Festival. It's about building a body of work that becomes part of the library of Canadian theatre – a chance to employ female and marginalized-gender artists over and over. And it builds the cvs of those involved, so they have a chance to create other plays that will have legacies of their own. What I appreciate about Anna and her work is that she has looked tirelessly at every aspect of how to help women and marginalized genders achieve their creative goals. The festival, recognized by grants at municipal, provincial and federal levels, nevertheless operates on a shoestring, with almost every dollar going to the artists working at the festival as dramaturges, panelists, jury members, stage managers and performers. The application fee has remained steadfastly low, and Anna has implemented an application bursary to remove financial barriers from applying to Ergo Pink Fest. I believe that the Bra D'Or Award would help Anna help female and marginalized gender artists continue to create new work. So that the stats of female-created works in the country can finally achieve – at the very least – gender parity – and the spotlight they have earned to tell the stories that so richly deserve to be told.

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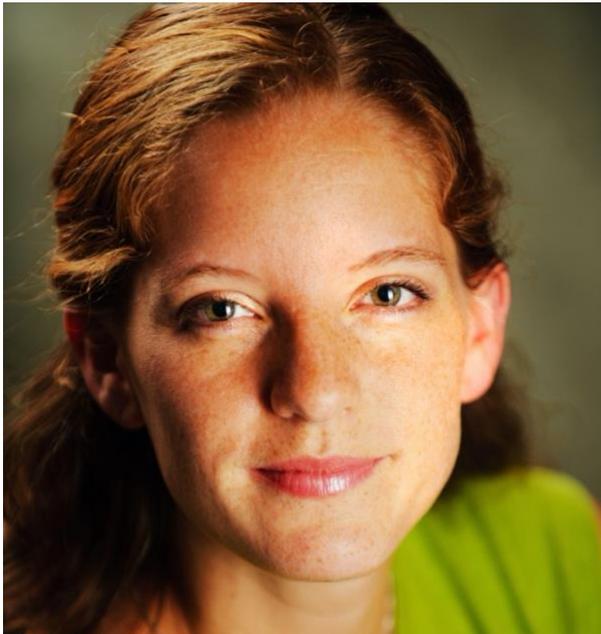
**7) CAROLINE RUSSELL-KING (self-nominated)**



Caroline Russell-King is the co-author (with Rose Scollard) of *Strategies: The Business of Being a Playwright in Canada*, the first ever published source book for Canadian theatre which included a comprehensive guide to theatres, universities and colleges, festivals, service organizations, grants, agencies, competitions, residencies, rights agencies, agents, publishers, awards and portraits, and interviews with ten of Canada's top theatre makers, including Micheline Chevrier, Maureen Hunter, Marti Maridan, Djanet Sears, Mary Vingoe, and the late Iris Turcotte. Caroline has served on various arts boards, including being the past vice president west for the Playwrights Union of Canada, as well as regional rep for many years for PGC. She served on the board of Alberta Playwrights Network, where formally she was the executive director. She has always championed playwrights, especially women and underrepresented populations. She is the dramaturg in residence for Calgary's only community theatre, Urban Stories, developing new works almost exclusively by women. With her own company, Dramaturgy on Demand, Caroline continues to work with both professional playwrights and emerging playwrights. She ran the Petro Canada New Play Development series for Lunchbox Theatre for three years, working with Colleen Curran, Tracy Power, Judith Clark, Katherine Koller, and Michelle Deines. As a dramaturg she has worked with African Canadian Maira

Crooks to bring three of her plays to the stage. Caroline tirelessly promotes other artists. As a theatre critic she also profiles theatre artists and champions their work, including articles on Rose Scollard (for *CanPlay*), director Elizabeth Sepkowski-Tarhan (*Calgary Opera*), director Valerie Pearson (*The Globe*) and playwright Meg Farhall. She has written over thirty plays (her last play *Palliser Suite* was published by Frontenac House), and has received over sixty productions across North America. She has been nominated for a Betty Mitchel Theatre Award and a Calgary Theatre Critics Award. She has been a national adjudicator for Playwrights Canada Press, Storybook TYA awards. She volunteered for years on the Public Lending Rights committee, and since 2018, has volunteered teaching playwriting and creative writing to men who are challenged by addiction, dealing with former or pending incarceration, homelessness, and mental health issues. She joined the union/guild when she had her first professional production at age 21, and at age 57 continues to work and champion fellow playwrights. For what her artist clients say and other critical reviews of her work go to [www.carolinerussellking.com](http://www.carolinerussellking.com).

**8) BRONWYN STEINBERG (nominated by Margo MacDonald)**



Through her theatre company, TACTICS (Theatre Artists Co-operative-The Independent Collective Series), Bronwyn has been working for years to amplify the creative voices of independent artists in the Ottawa area--primarily women artists. She has helped numerous new plays written by women to receive time, space, money, and encouragement through the workshop stage to public readings, and even through to full productions. I personally would still have a ten-year-old play sitting in a drawer if Bronwyn hadn't approached me about bringing it out for two TACTICS series workshops over the past couple of years where I was able to finally complete my most epic script to date. Bronwyn has given work to numerous professional women playwrights, directors, actors, designers, and production team members working in independent theatre--providing opportunities to develop work too ambitious and large in scope to be done at, say, the Fringe Festival level. This was particularly needed in Ottawa and Bronwyn, along with

her TACTICS team, are constantly looking for ways to adapt what they do to provide better support to these artists.

**9) THE WET INK COLLECTIVE: CO-ADs, SUSINN MCFARLEN, LORETTA SETO, AND LYNNA GOLDHAR-SMITH (nominated by Barbara Pollard)**



Wet Ink Collective directors encourage and champion female writers (plays and screenplays) in a remarkable series of well-constructed workshops that the three creators tirelessly facilitate at great personal expense. And we are seeing incredible results with more plays getting public readings, and plays and screenplays being produced. Wet Ink Collective is showing up on more and more biography sites for new plays being produced, as well as for screenplays in production. The number of workshops has doubled and the written work continues to flourish and be recognized. Their informal salons celebrate the achievements of Canadian women writers in a way no one else does.