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NEWSLETTER

Interview with Zach Fraser,  
Incoming AD of Infinithéâtre

Conducted by Alexis Diamond,  
October 19, 2020



ZACH FRASER

Zach Fraser is a Montreal-based director, producer, actor, puppeteer, puppet-maker, and teacher. Past projects with Infinithéâtre include *Trench Patterns*, *Kafka's Ape*, and *Love, Child*. His award-winning *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Stage Play* (RustWerk ReFinery) based on Chester Brown's graphic novel continues to tour occasionally across the country. Other directing credits include *Indra's Web* (National Theatre School of Canada), *Fifteen Dogs* (John Abbott College), and *The Water Chronicles* (Geordie Theatre), which recently won the 2019-20 award for Outstanding PACT Production at the Montreal English Theatre Awards.

Zach teaches in the Theatre Department at John Abbott College and at the National Theatre School of Canada. Puppet designs include *Stars: Together* (Crow's Theatre), *B-612* (La Roulotte), *MacBeth – Walking Shadows* (Shakespeare in the Ruff), *The Nisei & The Narnauks* (Persephone Productions), *The Aeneid* (Talisman Theatre) and *The Heretics of Bohemia* (Scapegoat Carnivale/Segal Centre).

*After 22 years as Infinithéâtre's Artistic Director, Guy Sprung will be stepping down at the end of February. Director/producer/actor/puppeteer Zach Fraser will take the reins of the company in March 2021.*

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*ALEXIS DIAMOND (AD): What is the mandate/focus of Infinithéâtre?*

*ZACH FRASER (ZF):* Historically, Infinithéâtre's mandate has been plays written in the English language by Quebec authors, plays that look at contemporary life in Quebec, plays that resonate with the community here. The company also has a tradition of examining controversial issues; the work is definitely politically charged and socially engaged.

Infinithéâtre has a history of focusing on scripts, on new play development, and of being the representation of the Anglophone community here within Quebec. So, the focus is on Anglophone theatre, on Anglophone writing, but very much within the context of Quebec, a Francophone society. So, there are productions that have been bilingual in nature, and productions with French subtitles.

In recent years, the mandate has opened up to Indigenous writers from across the country. There's also a history of producing plays in unconventional venues, like hospitals, churches, galleries, and so on. The traditional home of the company is the Bain Saint-Michel, which is scheduled to reopen next year after its refurbishment.

*AD: How do you see your artistic direction within the continuum of the company?*

*ZF:* As with any transition to a new artistic director, it's a combination of cherishing the best of the company's history while looking towards the future.

Historically, the company has been passionate about script development. I think I am more passionate about play development: I am curious about the dialogue between the playwright and the rest of the team in the room during the development or rehearsal process. I'd like to make more space for the traditional relationship between playwrights, directors, and the creative team to open up into a different kind of collaboration, seeking an organic evolution of the script into its three-dimensional form.

A lot of the work I have done in the past has explored *écriture scénique* (scenic writing). I am a director and not a playwright, but I love the dialogue with the playwright, examining what can live in the world of the playwright. Ultimately what we're trying to do is make living, breathing plays. Sometimes the best language is words, sometimes it's a visual language, or movement. I look forward to encouraging these sorts of conversations.

*AD: What are Infinithéâtre's initiatives in terms of new-play development? How will these change or continue under your leadership?*

ZF: Right now, Infinithéâtre's initiatives for new work include the Pipeline, the Write-On-Q! Competition, and The [Writers] Unit. And these will continue in some capacity, even if modified.

For the Write-on-Q Playwriting Competition, which is held every September, each submission goes through a curatorial process. It's a great way to encourage playwrights to submit who might not automatically reach out to this company; it's a great way to meet new playwrights. And the playwrights have the promise of a reading or a monetary prize if they make it through the whole vetting process. The benefit for us is that it brings plays to us that we might eventually consider for production, and at the very least it is a way for us to discover plays and playwrights.

In terms of how it could be improved, we are asking questions about the jury: who are the different voices being included on the jury... I think the company is in a period of reflection about how we can do better with representation.

I think we can be proud of the things we've done while also asking what we can do better. COVID is giving us an existential moment for reflection, as are all the movements for equity, diversity, inclusion, and representation.

I am well-aware that I am a middle-aged white guy. As artists and as individuals, we

automatically take space. There are ways that we can give over space, and there are the ways that we can use the space we have. I am conscious that I have an opportunity here to make sure that everyone feels welcome at this table.

Infinithéâtre takes pride in being engaged socially but also in the artistic quality of its productions, so it's about marrying those two things. We are art makers, so it's about the themes explored but it's also about the artistic process. For Infinithéâtre, a mid-sized company, ideally producing a couple of plays a year, and running ongoing development projects, we have to ask ourselves how we can use this platform. It's a privilege and a big responsibility. And the reflection is ongoing.

*AD: Can you explain a little bit about the new leadership structure at Infinithéâtre?*

ZF: As Guy Sprung was looking to step down from the artistic direction, his concern was the transition of the company. Given the broad demands of the position, he looked to a partnership to run the company. Ellen David is Artistic Producer, Oren Safdie is Head of New Play Development, and I'll be Artistic Director. Each of us has specific responsibilities corresponding to our complementary skill sets and areas of expertise. We have all been members of the extended Infini family, but often working on different projects. That's why we have this transition year, as we all get familiar with each other, and with our new roles while Guy is still actively involved in the company's day-to-day activities. It feels like an organic transition; it's a healthy work in progress.

*AD: Are you looking forward to the stack of unsolicited scripts on your desk?*

ZF: Yes, absolutely. I am always excited to discover new artists. I love the sense of community, conversations, meeting people, making discoveries. I love encountering people who have different perspectives and lived experiences. I love being challenged, sometimes through humour, sometimes through the dramatic, sometimes through the more conventional, sometimes through the more experimental. I love conversations that are complicated, that live in the grey zone. I love when everything is not already figured out. So, to PGC members: Please go ahead and reach out, send an email, introduce yourself.

*AD: Do you personally like to read a script in its early stages or when it is farther along?*

ZF: I don't think a script should have all the answers on the page. If it's such a well-made play that everything's been figured out on the page, and there's nothing else to explore in the rehearsal room, then I suppose I'm a bit less excited about it. I love when there is a certain problem-solving that has to happen in the room. If a play is so solid and tight on the page, I can't help but wonder whether it actually needs a production.

*AD: Do you prefer a call or an email?*

ZF: I have to say given how life is right now, I prefer an email with a follow-up call. Or an email to schedule a call.

*AD: How do you feel about second productions?*

ZF: They're great! Second productions extend the lives of shows. I want that for Infini's works, but I'd also like to find a balance between developing, producing, and touring new work and introducing great pieces from elsewhere to our audiences.

*AD: What is your dream Infinithéâtre audience?*

ZF: Broader than it currently is. Not just Anglophone, but Allophone; everyone. I sometimes envy the French theatres in town that have younger audiences, where it's a hip thing to go to the theatre. I don't want to alienate our loyal audiences! I want the work we do to be energized and energizing. The work needs to resonate, to ignite, to provoke and inspire people. It's always an ongoing challenge to change people's minds about theatre, the idea of it being stuffy and tired. But we can always learn from the other arts that reach out to people in different ways. For instance, we are looking into bringing theatre to underserved communities through the Maisons de la culture (Montreal's community-based culture centres) and other means.

I hope Infinithéâtre can resonate beyond specific demographics to broader audiences. Theatre can tell specific stories with a universal resonance. After all, it's the human experience that ties us together.

Zach invites you to begin a conversation.

Email: [zach@infinitheatre.com](mailto:zach@infinitheatre.com)

[Read the press release announcing Zach's appointment as the new AD of Infinithéâtre.](#)

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Join Infinithéâtre on December 13th at 5 p.m., as Guy Sprung passes the torch to Zach Fraser, incoming Artistic Director of Infinithéâtre. A deep dive into Zach's experience and career, and a discussion of the future of Infinithéâtre, this is sure to be an unmissable Chat Room!

The conversation will be streamed live via Zoom and to the Infinithéâtre Facebook page. Further details to follow.

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*Alexis is an anglophone theatre artist, opera and musical librettist, translator, and theatre curator working on both sides of Montréal's linguistic divide. Her award-winning plays, operas, and translations have been presented across Canada, in the U.S., and in Europe. In 2018, Alexis began a multiyear collaboration with Professor Erin Hurley (McGill University) and Emma Tibaldo (Playwrights' Workshop Montréal), researching the history of English-language theatre in Québec. In May 2019, Alexis served as Co-Artistic Director of the famed Festival Jamais Lu, where she presented the mostly French-language Faux-amis with co-author Hubert Lemire, supported by CALQ. Upcoming tours of her theatre translations include The Problem with Pink by Érika Tremblay-Roy, published by Lansman (Le Petit Théâtre de Sherbrooke), and Pascal Brullemans' The Nonexistent (DynamO Théâtre). Her translation of Pascal Brullemans' plays for young audiences, Amaryllis and Little Witch, was just published by Playwrights Canada Press.*