

## **Down Centre**

### **Highlight on Diversity – British Columbia and Alberta**

Over the upcoming year, the Diversity Committee is bringing you a series of articles highlighting the activities of theatre practice across the country that engage with diversity in content, form or practice. Each of these companies define “diversity” in a different way, but each company shares the value of using theatre to explore how we negotiate difference, not as a problem, but as a shared, universal experience. In struggling to give voice to the many facets of Canadian society, these artists must also continually strive to devise new ways of working.

This article focuses on British Columbia and Alberta. Of the companies and projects profiled below it’s important to note that most are not members of PACT. While most companies follow the workplace guidelines agreed upon by PACT and CAEA, others have stated that “membership would seriously limit our ability to work.”

#### **Concrete Theatre (Edmonton, AB) – [www.concretetheatre.ca](http://www.concretetheatre.ca)**

PACT Member Concrete Theatre was founded in 1987 and is currently under the artistic leadership of Artistic Co-Directors Mieko Ouchi and Caroline Howarth. The company focuses on theatre for young audiences. Ouchi states, “We are casting for difference constantly, even if cultural diversity isn’t the issue. We want kids to feel like someone up there is like them, whatever that is: tall like me, chubby like me, Filipino like me.”

This coming spring, Concrete is focusing on two projects. First is *The Early Bloomer* by Jana O’Connor, about a flower who blooms just a little sooner than the other plants in her neighborhood. The second project this spring is *Are We There Yet?* by Jane Heather. In it’s 13<sup>th</sup> year of production, AWTY is a play about sexual decision making for grade nine students.

#### **Stage Left Theatre (Edmonton, AB) – [www.stagelefttheatre.com](http://www.stagelefttheatre.com)**

Led by Artistic Director Michele Decottignies and Associate Artistic Director Nicole Dunbar the company engages in a broad range of activities from workshops to community-based projects, production to commissioning, and presenting the Balancing Acts Festival. Stage Left is a Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed, endorsed by Augusto Boal in 2005. At the forefront of all Stage Left’s work – through performance, multimedia or other art forms – is passionate commitment to promoting positive change and social justice.

In early December, Stage Left completed a Calgary run of *Time to Put My Socks On* – a collaboration between Decottignies, Dunbar and disability artist and activist Alan Shain and Toronto-based choreographer and performance artist Rebecca Gorman. The play – exploring love, sex, masculinity inside a relationship between a disabled man and his able-bodied girlfriend – toured to the Toronto and Montreal Fringe Festivals and has an upcoming tour in the works.

### **Realwheels (Vancouver, BC) – [www.realwheels.ca](http://www.realwheels.ca)**

Perhaps best known for *Skydive* – which throws together theatre, 80s music and flying actors – Realwheels creates and produces work that “deepens the audience’s understanding of the disability experience”. Artistic Director James Saunders speaks of disability as the landscape upon which universal stories are played out rather than the cause of dramatic conflict.

Upcoming for Realwheels is *SPINE*, written by Kevin Kerr, a co-production with the University of Alberta. Described as “a thrilling hunt for the body and soul mate that best defines us” the play is part of the ongoing conversation about the intersection of the virtual and real worlds. *SPINE* will premiere in Edmonton, and tour to Vancouver for the 2010 Cultural Olympiad.

### **The Savage Society (Vancouver, BC)**

*Where the Blood Mixes*, a Governor General Award winning play by Kevin Loring, is a co-production between Loring’s Savage Society and a handful of other organizations including the Luminato Festival (Toronto), PACT Members Vancouver Playhouse, Western Canada Theatre (Kamloops) and the Firehall Arts Centre (Vancouver), and was also presented by the 2008 Magnetic North Festival in Vancouver. Digging through layers of history and memory, the play exposes some of the consequences of residential schools and celebrates the survivors. A national tour starts in at PACT Member The Belfry Theatre, in January 2010.

### **HIVE 3 (Vancouver, BC) – [www.buzzbuzzbuzz.ca](http://www.buzzbuzzbuzz.ca)**

Also part of the 2010 Cultural Olympiad, HIVE is the collective brain child of Electric Company, Leaky Heaven Circus, the Only Animal, Radix, Rumble Productions, Theatre Replacement, Theatre SKAM, Theatre Conspiracy, Felix Culpa, PACT Member Pi Theatre and PACT Affiliates Boca del Lupo and Newworld Theatre. A smorgasbord of Vancouver’s independent theatre community, HIVE features short installation-based works for small audiences that repeat through the night in a party atmosphere.

Always committed to community cross-pollination and accessibility, HIVE is expanding the notion of inclusivity. This year’s HIVE is presented during the Paralympic Games, creating an opportunity to address access for persons with disabilities head on. While no show can be 100% accessible for all, the HIVE companies are addressing physical access, exploring sign language translation and audio description.

### **Urban Ink (Vancouver) – [www.urbanink.ca](http://www.urbanink.ca)**

Founded by award-winning playwright Marie Clements, urban ink is now under the direction of Diane Roberts. The company continues to create, develop and produce the work of aboriginal and diverse communities using a variety of mediums from theatre to dance to video and multimedia.

Urban Ink recently produced *The Arrivals Co(Lab) Showcase*, the culmination of a nationwide series of workshops called *The Arrivals Project*. The project is multidisciplinary and explores root cultural practices and promotes cross-cultural exchange. Roberts facilitates the creation of work using the Personal Legacy Process – a methodology that encourages ancestral exploration based on archival research and intergenerational interviews.

### **Puente Theatre (Victoria) – [www.puentetheatre.ca](http://www.puentetheatre.ca)**

Led by Chilean-born director Lina de Guevara, PACT Affiliate Puente Theatre has been producing work since 1988 that reflects the complexity and humanity of the immigrant experience. The company produces a wide range of events including full productions, workshops, forum theatre and mentorship opportunities. This past fall, Puente produced *Canadian Tango '09*, a community-engaged project facilitated by playwright Carmen Aguirre.

Upcoming for Puente is *Worldplay Sundays*, a series of four staged readings and a rare opportunity to hear aloud the theatrical work of colleagues from around the world. These plays include *The Nun's Pilgrimage* by Chilean Jaime Silva, *Aurash* by Iranian Bahram Beyza-ie, translated and adapted by Soheil Parsa, *The Person* by Egyptian Alfred Farag and *Living Memories: Kenya's Untold Stories* by Al Kags.

### **Screaming Weenie (Vancouver, BC) – [www.screamingweenie.com](http://www.screamingweenie.com)**

Screaming Weenie is an award-winning west-coast company promotes and produces queer and sex positive performance. Activities range from special events like the *Diorama Party* or *Mommy Dearest to Clean Sheets* – a script development and reading series in currently in its second year. Also on the horizon is *The Sanctuary Project*. This project explores the experiences of Canada's queer immigrant and refugees.

Screaming Weenie is under the leadership of new Managing Artistic Director Seán Cummings and Associate Artistic Director and playwright C.E. Gatchalian. The company is catapulted into a renewed sense of energy, building partnerships and projects within and between the many facets of Vancouver's queer and theatre communities.

### **Newworld Theatre (Vancouver, BC) – [www.newworldtheatre.com](http://www.newworldtheatre.com)**

Founded in 1994, PACT Affiliate Newworld productions investigate the intersections and borders between cultures, styles and disciplines. The company produces a broad range of work from large-scale productions like *Crime and Punishment* to installation or relational work (*Placebook* and *HIVE*) to agitprop, tour-friendly shows.

Upcoming is *Ali and Ali 7: Hey Brother (or Sister) Can You Spare Some Hope and Change?* created by Camyar Chai, Guillermo Verdecchia and Marcus Youssef. A "sequel" to *Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* –the first Canadian work to address US Foreign policy post-911 – *Ali 7* applies the same brand of post-identity satire to the new world. *Ali 7* is co-commissioned and presented by the Vancouver East Cultural Centre.

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*Article published in impact! December 2009 issue.*