

The Graduate Centre For Study of Drama Presents...

FOOT
2006

THE FESTIVAL OF
ORIGINAL Theatre

Performing

Adaptations

Robert Gill Theatre, University of Toronto
Wednesday, February 15th–Sunday, February 19th, 2006

Featuring five days of interdisciplinary performances and panels from across Canada, the United States, and Britain.

Special performances by critically acclaimed theatre companies Native Earth Performing Arts, fu-GEN, and AfriCan Theatre Ensemble.

Keynote Address: Prof. Linda Hutcheon, University of Toronto

Table of Contents

Artistic Directors' Notes	1
2006 Foot Team	2
At a Glance Schedule	3
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15	
Keynote: Linda Hutcheon, "Performing Modernism: Adaptation and its Discontents"	4
<i>Moments</i> by Karen Gilodo	4
13:20 – <i>A Floridian Tragedy</i> by Michelle MacArthur	5
<i>Galley of Fools</i> by Performance Research: Acting and Disorder Group	5
<i>The Anatomy of Miss Gee</i> by Laura Rocca	5
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16	
Adaptive Dialogues I & II: <i>Death in Venice</i>	6
<i>Crushed Into Comedy</i> by Anne Chislett and David Archibald	7
<i>Finding Father's Dark Side</i> by Kate Hodgert	8
<i>Pinned Up</i> by Heather Saum	8
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17	
Adaptive Dialogues III & IV: <i>To the Lighthouse</i>	9
Plenary Paper: Stephen Johnson, "Uncle Tom's Cabin"	10
Conference Panel: "The Artist in Creation and Production"	10-12
Artist Roundtable: "Adapting the Experimental"	13
<i>Half Empty</i> by Julian DeZotti and Nathan Maharaj	14
<i>Nurse!</i> by Lisa Hayes	14
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18	
Conference Panel: "Perversion, Performance, and Play: Staging Canons"	15-16
Conference Panel: "Shakespearean Re-presentations"	17-18
Conference Panel: "Imagistic Texts"	19-20
<i>The Answer is Horse</i> by The Emergency Theatre Project	21
<i>Death of a Chief</i> by Native Earth Performing Arts	21
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19	
Selections from <i>Banana Boys</i> by Fu-GEN Theatre Company	22
Selections from <i>Market of Tales</i> by AfriCan Theatre Ensemble	23

Artistic Directors' Notes

The Beginnings

Founded in 1993, FOOT is an annual student-run conference and arts festival produced through the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama. Its goal is to create a discussion between scholarship and praxis through scholarly papers, panels, artist roundtables, workshops, staged readings, and original performances. The structure and theme of the festival varies from year-to-year, reflecting the diverse interests and energies of the Drama Centre. Past programmes have included themes such as Metaphor and Metonymy: The Language of Theatre and Film, The Dramaturge in Collective Creation, and Bodies in Space.

The Vision

What first attracted us to the theme of adaptation was its potential for inter-disciplinary discussion and collaboration. The term adaptation suggests a re-imagining and re-presentation from one medium or form to another. Imagine: the work of a visual artist inspires a poet who decides to transform the image into verse. The poem is then picked up by a novelist who expands its subject into a multi-volume saga. A young playwright, perhaps a bit frustrated by the lengthy prose decides that the essence of the tome would be better realized as staged dialogue. A dancer who attends the premiere of the play decides to take a stab at reproducing its action using movement. A critic in the audience for this dance interpretation is so impressed by the performance that she decides to document it using a very precise method of visual scoring. The dance score is passed along to a member of the Blue Man Group who decides that it must be re-imagined for percussion, played in blue make-up and taken on tour. The adaptation cycle continues. Too often we forget that we study and work within a community where some boundaries should be permeable. Fields can meet and mingle, and this melding of forums and forms can provide us with manifold opportunities. Ours is not a solitary discipline, but an area of study where the very act of performance—of representation—involves the adaptation of texts to enacted, embodied form. A method of simultaneous creation and re-creation, the practice of adaptation, as intimated by Linda Hutcheon, serves as a portal through which narratives may persist over time, reshaped and remolded according to context, interpretation, and personal biography.

The Results

This year, we are thrilled to have assembled academics and performers from across Canada, the United States, and Britain. We have no doubt that the talent and interdisciplinarity of participants will generate an engaging dialogue about the process and implications of adaptation.

Many people, named in the following pages, have helped us make this festival possible. We would like to give special thanks to Luella Massey for all her tireless support and energy; Paul Stoesser for his technical expertise; all the students, staff, and professors at the Drama Centre for their help, encouragement, and participation; Topher Grace for his mass appeal; our designers Leslie, Louis, and Jonathan for their creativity and hard work; the Graduate Students' Union for their ongoing support; and last, but certainly not least, our fantastic production team, who have translated our vision into a reality.

We hope that you find this festival as engaging, thought-provoking and discussion worthy as we have found our process.

Michelle, Lydia, and Keren

2006 FOOT Team

Artistic Directors: Michelle MacArthur, Lydia Wilkinson, Keren Zaiontz

Production Manager: Antony Nesling

Technical Director: Amanda Lockitch

Stage Manager: Stacey Bartlett

Assistant Stage Managers: Genadijs Dolganov, Barry Freeman, Tom Kerr, Gillian Levene

Lighting Consultants: Amanda Lockitch, Siobhan Sleath, Paul Stoesser

Publicity: Jocelyn Pitsch

Web Design: Leslie Barcza

Poster Design: Louis Duarte

Programme Coordinator: Michelle MacArthur

Programme Design: Jonathan MacArthur

Lighting Operators: Andrew Hanna, Chris Jackman

Sound Operators: Laura Farley-Ratcliffe, Jocelyn Pitsch

Technical Director (Drama Centre): Paul Stoesser

Box Office Manager: Luella Massey

House Manager: Jennifer Spry

Properties Assistant: Sergio Melo

Costume Assistant: Lydia Wilkinson

Lighting Crew: Stacey Bartlett, Andrew Hanna, Jon Lockhart, Antony Nesling, Gabriel Santos, Mark Turner

Paint Crew: Vera Ter-Emmanuilyan, Andrew Hanna, Stacey Bartlett, Amanda Lockitch, Antony Nesling

Conference Crew: James McKinnon, Barry Freeman, Tom Kerr

Conference Moderators and Chairs: Paul Babiak, Bruce Barton, Jill Carter, Nancy Copeland, Paul Halferty, Karen Lazar, Leslie Katz, Richard Plant, Paula Sperdakos, Sam Stedman, Robin Whittaker, Lary Zappia.

We are grateful for the kind assistance of: John Astington, Paul Babiak, Bruce Barton, the Centre for Comparative Literature (U of T), Chris Clarke, Jordana Commisso, Nancy Copeland, James Gladstone, Hart House Theatre, Linda Hutcheon, Stephen Johnson, Leslie Katz, Gavin McDonald, Richard Plant, Melissa-Jane Shaw, James McKinnon, J-P Pineau, Michael Sidnell, Siobhan Sleath, Paula Sperdakos.

At a Glance Schedule

Wednesday, February 15, 2006	
11:00am–12:30pm	Keynote Address: "Performing Modernism: Adaptation and its Discontents" Prof. Linda Hutcherson, Centre for Comparative Literature, U of T
8:00pm	Performances Featuring: <i>Moments</i> by Karen Gilodo <i>1320: A Floridian Tragedy</i> by Michelle MacArthur <i>Galley of Fools</i> by Performance Research: Acting and Disorder Group <i>The Anatomy of Miss Gee</i> by Laura Rocca Followed by reception
Thursday, February 16, 2006	
3:00pm–5:00pm	Adaptive Dialogues I & II: <i>Death in Venice</i> (Novella to Opera & Novella to Film)
8:00pm	Performances Featuring: <i>Pinned Up</i> by Heather Saum <i>Finding Father's Dark Side</i> by Kate Hodgert <i>Crushed Into Comedy</i> by David Archibald and Anne Chislett
Friday, February 17, 2006	
10:00am–12:00pm	Adaptive Dialogues III & IV: <i>To the Lighthouse</i> (Novel to Radio Play & Novel to TV Film)
1:00pm–2:00pm	Plenary Paper: "The Technology of Minstrelsy," Prof. Stephen Johnson, Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, U of T
2:15pm–4:30pm	Panel: <i>The Artist in Creation and Production</i>
4:45pm–6:30pm	Artist Roundtable and Q&A: <i>Adapting the Experimental</i> Featuring: Chad Dembski, Emergency Exit Theatre David Duclos, DNA Theatre Richard Windeyer, Bluemouth Inc.
8:00pm	Performances Featuring: <i>Half Empty</i> by Julian DeZotti and Nathan Maharaj <i>Nurse!</i> by Lisa Hayes
Saturday, February 18, 2006	
10:00am–12:00pm	Panel: <i>Perversion, Performance, and Play: Staging Canons</i>
1:00pm–2:45pm	Panel: <i>Shakespearean Re-presentations</i>
3:00pm–5:00pm	Panel: <i>Imagistic Texts</i>
8:00pm	Performances Featuring: <i>The Answer is Horse</i> by The Emergency Theatre Project <i>The Death of A Chief</i> by Native Earth Theatre Company
Sunday, February 19, 2006	
2:00pm	Closing Performances (Followed by Q&A): Scenes from <i>Banana Boys</i> by fu-GEN Theatre Company Excerpts from <i>Market of Tales</i> by AfriCan Theatre Ensemble

“Performing Modernism: Adaptation and its Discontents”

Linda Hutcheon, University of Toronto

Despite the ubiquity and persistence of adaptation as a creative mode (think: Shakespeare, for shorthand), the standard critical position is to decry adaptations as secondary, derivative and belated. Morally judgmental words like tampering, interference, deformation, desecration, infidelity and betrayal are as common in scholarly articles as they are in journalistic reviews. Based on the belief that “storytelling is always the art of repeating stories” (Walter Benjamin) and on the theoretical work done on the issues of intertextuality, medium and genre specificity, this paper will explore (through examples) some of the persistent critical clichés about adaptations that move from the page to the stage or screen. For instance, performance media are always said to be less able than textual media to present things like interiority, temporality, ambiguity, silence, irony, linguistic and structural complexity—the very characteristics that have been called the hallmarks of modernist fiction. But is this true?

Linda Hutcheon holds the rank of ‘University Professor’ in the Centre for Comparative Literature and the Department of English at the University of Toronto. She is the author of nine books on contemporary culture and theory, including the forthcoming *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge, April 2006); she is also the co-author (with Michael Hutcheon) of three interdisciplinary studies on opera and medicine, most recently, *Opera: The Art of Dying* (Harvard UP, 2004).

Moments

by Karen Gilodo

Co-Directors: Jaime Escallon Burgalia, Karen Gilodo

Filmmaker: Jaime Escallon Burgalia

Actors: Carlos Congote, Laura M. Rocca

Moments began as an assignment for Leslie Katz’ class: *Sacrifice and the Meaning of Ritual*. The assignment called for an adaptation of a story involving elements of sacrifice and its impact on family, community, etc. The play explores the moments leading up to a mother’s decision to sacrifice one child for the sake of another. When the sacrificial victim survives, mother, child and the rest of the family must live with the knowledge that a mother has made the impossible choice.

In this theatrical installation, we used film and ‘theatrical’ media to explore the moments leading up to such a decision and the subsequent fallout. The play experiments with choral techniques to illustrate how different characters read the same situation. The aim of the piece is to bring to light clashing perspectives surrounding an emotionally intense circumstance.

13:20 – A Floridian Tragedy

by **Michelle MacArthur**

Director: Michelle MacArthur

Chorus Director: Adam Paolozza

Actors/Collaborators: Jill Carter, Alexa Elliott, Paul Halferty, Elizabeth Maloney, Cat McCormick, Scott Moore, Jess Moss, Sundance Nagrial, Aislinn Ritchie, Christine Rodriguez, Jaclyn Smith, Lydia Wilkinson, Tyler York, Keren Zaointz

13:20 – A Floridian Tragedy explores the circus surrounding the removal of Terri Schiavo's feeding tube in March of 2005. It borrows from Greek tragedy, the Bible, the media, and pop culture to adapt this tale of political sacrifice to the stage.

Galley of Fools

by **Performance Research: Acting & Disorder Group**

Seminar Members: Justin Blum, Jacqueline Harris, Chris Jackman, Nenad Jovanovich, Tom Kerr, Jon Lockhart, Mladen Ovadija, Zed Pitkin, Maer Powell, Jacquey Taucar, Vesna Tovstonogov, Roxanna Vahed

With a special appearance by Leonard Elias, David Fuhman, and Benjamin Mehl of the University College Drama Program

The Anatomy of Miss Gee

by **Laura Rocca**

a one-act adaptation of the W.H. Auden poem "Miss Gee"

Director: Brad Lepp

Performers: Alastair Forbes, Jonathan Langley, Katie Lawson*, Ieva Lucs*, Mark Purvis, Paula Schults, Kate-Ann Vandermeer

* Appears with the permission of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

Let me tell you a little story

About Miss Edith Gee

She lived in Clevedon Terrace at number 83 ...

Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*

This piece is an adaptation of W.H. Auden's "Miss Gee," a ballad about a reclusive social castaway whose dignity continues to be stripped away as her body is ravaged by cancer. In its autopsy, *The Anatomy of Miss Gee* examines and dissects the cultural narratives which we have constructed around illness, and questions the possibility of renewal, rebirth, and resurgence.

Death in Venice I: Novella to Opera

Participants: Erika Varga, Laurel Damashek, Ioana Furnica

Can opera successfully represent the silent, interior psychological narrative of a modernist novella? How about filmed opera? And is it ever a good idea to paint a man gold, put him in a white suit, and make him sing as a countertenor? We'll be discussing problems of representing interiority in Stephen Lawless's production of Benjamin Britten's opera *Death in Venice*. Opera is a medium with multisensory, simultaneous modes of expression available to it: musical, visual, and verbal. We will examine Britten's and Lawless's strategies for staging Thomas Mann's narrative, and argue for a semiotics of interiority that translates Mann's novella into a complex operatic language. Along the way, we ponder problems of embodiment, subjectivity, and the erotics of adolescent gymnasts; the changes that the camera inevitably introduces to a filmed opera; and the influence of intertextuality and critical discourse on the history of a work and its adaptations.

Death in Venice II: Novella to Film

Participants: Joseph Culpepper, Sandra Bialystok, Patrick Ellis, Martin Zeilinger, Ronald Ng

Luchino Visconti's film *Morte a Venezia* - an adaptation of Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* - was heralded as a 'masterpiece' even before its release. And even though it was the production company Warner Brothers that made this announcement about its own film, the excitement surrounding the release of *Death in Venice* was not quelled. The secrecy around the production of the film and Visconti's own reluctance to discuss his project to the media contributed to the public's anticipation. During the film's production, a long article was published by Hollis Alpert in the "Saturday Review." This article made a series of surprising claims, including an anecdote in which Thomas Mann had an encounter with Gustav Mahler who admitted to having been obsessed with a young boy in Venice. Although this claim was strongly rebuked by Mahler's and Mann's families, the tale was not easily forgotten. This story corroborates with Visconti's production, where Gustav von Aschenbach—Mann's protagonist—was changed from a writer to a composer, specifically, to Mahler. Furthermore, Visconti relied heavily on Mahler's compositions to provide extra-diegetic music, particularly during long scenes such as Aschenbach's slow gondola ride.

Mann purists were not pleased with the film, and Mann critics have been harsh. The depiction of the young boy has been criticized by many, and his final gesture at the end of the film has been denigrated as both strange and confusing. The same is true of the flashbacks, used only in the film, an awkward device that works to marry Aschenbach's personal musings with the filmic medium.

By using Warner Brother's *Making of Death in Venice*—released just before Visconti's film—this presentation will highlight how the interiority that Mann evokes in his novella is brought to life in Visconti's film. The music, the use of the camera, the representation of Death figures and the use of diegetic and extra-diegetic sound will be guides for evaluating and understanding this adaptation. Finally, the most important question to be broached will be whether Visconti's adaptation can be understood independently from Mann's novella, and if not, what ramifications are there for this kind of adaptation?

Thursday, February 16: Performances

Crushed Into Comedy

by Anne Chislett and David Archibald

A presentation of songs from *The Perilous Pirate's Daughter*,* a musical based on the adventures of Bill Johnston and his daughter Kate during the crushed 1837-38 Rebellion, by Anne Chislett, and David Archibald. Our playwrights' notes from the premiere performance at the Blyth Festival say it all:

Here's the truth
(Almost) Every word
Who thought the facts
Could be so darn absurd.

There really was a bold Canadian Pirate
Who did the deeds we say he did and more
Indeed, he had a fiery, handsome daughter
Together they robbed the rich to aid the poor

There really was a Navyman named Elmsley
Whose job it was to put the rebels down
When rougher justice made him feel uneasy
He questioned his allegiance to the crown.

His meeting with fair Kate we have invented
But not the new career he finally chose
Though if you fear our play will teach you history
Rest assured it isn't one of those.

Now Van Rensselaer's very close to our portrayal
MacNab you may applaud or may dislike
A valiant patriot or vile oppressor,
He carried out the first pre-emptive strike.

The rebel signs and signals are recorded
Though silly and unlikely they appear
Truth is often twice as strange as fiction
As events unfold on stage this will be clear.

The Perilous Pirate's Daughter was commissioned and first produced at the Blyth Festival in 2003. It has since been produced at Thousand Islands Playhouse, Station Arts, and the Highland Summer Festival.

Finding Father's Dark Side

Based on the poem "Dark Side Trilogy" by John Hodgert

Director: Kate Hodgert

Dramaturg: Roxanna Vahed

Cast: Jessica Liadsky, Jennifer McNaughton, Amber Mills

Stage Manager: Jacquey Taucar

Technical Advisor/Design: Sarah Cutfield

Finding Father's Dark Side is about poetry. It is a theatrical adaptation of the poem "Dark Side Trilogy" by John Hodgert. It is an experiment designed to examine what a poem, this poem, looks like when it's moving through space, what it sounds like, how it is embodied in the figure of the actor, how it is honestly communicated through the design, how it lives and breathes when ripped off the page.

Finding Father's Dark Side is about adapting. It is the expression of a daughter's attempt to translate one of her father's poems into something she can understand, into something meaningful to her, into a play. It is, ultimately, the expression of a daughter's attempt to understand her father through adaptation.

Finding Father's Dark Side is about daughterhood, the relationship between women and the men who treated them. Using text, image, memory, sound, light, and movement, a company of three female actors and I collectively created the piece in rehearsal. Each of these three actresses (one for each section of the trilogy) bring their experiences of daughterhood and their relationships with their fathers to the development process. The opportunity for collaboration was also extended to women designers, management personalities, etc. (ie. other daughters). It is about the universal daughter, what we have in common and our differences.

Finding Father's Dark Side is also about me. John Hodgert is my father. I am his daughter. My father has written volumes and volumes of unpublished poetry over the last 40 years. He has, in the past, asked me to read some of his work, asked for my feedback. I was unable or unwilling to do so because I believed that I didn't understand poetry and that I didn't understand my father and because I was scared. It is my hope that, in 'putting on' my father's words and putting them up onto the stage, I will come to know him in a real way and truly experience the power of his work.

Finding Father's Dark Side is my gift to my father and his gift to me.

Kate Hodgert

Special thanks to Esther Parry.

Pinned-Up

Choreographed by Heather Saum

Dancers: Alana Upcraft, Catherine Carpenko, Emma Doran, Laurel MacNeil, Candance Jones, Niomi Cherney, Amber Alexce, Sarah Lochhead, Angela LeClaire, Kate Nankervis

Musician: Kenta Aoki

Music: Original score

Pinned Up is a dance interpretation of Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*. It is not a danced version of the events in the play or a reenactment but a departure of ideas and themes that surface from the play. The major ideas that are used from the play are the ideas of a doll house itself, birds and the Tarantella dance which Nora performs in the play. Unlike Ibsen, I am not attempting to make a jab at women's status or society. In the work I am attempting to show how individuals can limit themselves by becoming preoccupied and focusing on one thing. This narcissism of repeating their actions over and over again, like a bird's movements, does not bring clarity but rather a maddening frenzy. This frenzy is much like the dance of the Tarantella that Nora dances at the end of the play when she is terrified about her husband finding out her secret.

To the Lighthouse I: Novel to Radio Play

Participants: Tania Botticella, Sachie Iwata, Alisha Walters

In her essay "Carry on, Echo: The Dissident Sound Body," Francis Grey discusses the relationship between the radio and feminist art, and states "a body which is voice alone [...] reforms and metamorphoses itself entirely through [...] sounds it can slip past the censor, [and] is already engaged in the process of resistance." If then, according to Grey and other recent theorists, the radio and feminist art-forms are somehow intrinsically linked, Lindsay Bell's radio adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is serendipitous indeed. But what exactly is entailed in the process of adapting Woolf's work across mediums? Does the novel's shift into the radio form foreground Woolf's feminism at the expense of her other literary aesthetics? Is the corporeal body eradicated altogether, as Grey and Bell suggest? And how does the radio come to embody the ratiocination of the interior mind? These are issues that our next radio panel will discuss.

To the Lighthouse II: Novel to TV Film

Participants: Sarah Hamilton and Catherine Xiaowen Xu

Our presentation focuses on the relationship between Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and its 1983 television adaptation directed by Colin Gregg. We have staged our explorations of the text and its adaptation as a dialogue/debate between an adamant supporter of the original novel and a defender of the potential of television as a medium. We will look at the successes and failures of this adaptation by considering how specific parts of the production function on their own and in relation to their source text. For example, we will look in detail at the "Time Passes" section of both the television production and the novel to see how elements like point of view and asides have been adapted. This will help us to explore not only the merits and failings of this particular adaptation, but also the potential merits and failings of television adaptations in general. We believe that productive adaptations of complex novels into the medium of television are possible, but that this example of *To the Lighthouse* is not entirely successful because of its attempt to be overly faithful to its source text. By considering the productive potential of television as a medium we will look at some of its strengths, such as its ability to reach a very wide audience and its collaborative production method. Our discussion/debate will reach a consensus, with the supporter of the novel acknowledging the potential of television, and the supporter of television conceding the failure of this particular adaptation.

“Time and the Tom Show: Familiarity and Shorthand in the Performance Traditions of Uncle Tom’s Cabin”

Stephen Johnson, University of Toronto

From before Harriet Beecher Stowe finished writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* until at least the 1930s, incarnations of its subject matter, bearing its name, toured North America in great numbers, playing sometimes three or four times per year in large and small urban centers, in companies from four to two hundred, in venues ranging from living rooms and street corners to the best and most opulent theatrical venues. In the absence of copyright laws and a clear comparative genre providing any ‘horizon of expectations’ for audiences, the so-called ‘Tom Show’ took onto itself whatever characteristics seemed to work in the moment. Though certain tableaux, incidents, and characters had to be present, the shape of the performances varied greatly, as did the time frame—represented in a 1903 film, for which performers adapted their usual fare to less than twenty minutes, and without sound. In the process they preserved some ‘bits’ (or ‘lazzi’?) that are barely visible to the naked eye. Do these remain because no one cared to cut them? Or, in fact, are they invisible to *our* eyes, and not to the original audience, used to an extraordinary short-hand in the presentation of this material?

“Abstracting Chekhov: Staging Short Stories at the Chekhov Now Festival”

Peter A. Campbell, Penn State Berks College

Since 1999, the Chekhov Now Festival in New York City has been a venue for new and innovative works based on the writings of Anton Chekhov. Its mission has been to explore Chekhov outside of the realm of the naturalistic theatre. The festival invites, commissions, and presents productions and adaptations that emphasize the theatrical, the physical, and the symbolic. As the literary manager of the festival, I have focused on commissioning new adaptations of short stories that are non-naturalistic in their adaptation and production. The festival has played host to several adaptations that do not merely create a mimetic form for a narrative story, but explore new forms of remaking fiction through sometimes abstract physical, dramaturgical, and technical means.

In this paper, I will explore some of the ideas, writing, and rehearsal processes that brought these adaptations to fruition. I will use my own experience adapting and directing Chekhov’s stories “Anyuta” and “The Lady with the Dog” as a framework for discussing the adaptation and production process, which will incorporate interview material with several of the playwrights and directors, including Courtney Baron, Judythe Cohen, Cusi Cram, Ron Fitzgerald, Adam Melnick, Leah Ryan, and others.

**“Brushing ten million other worlds:
The National Theatre adapts Phillip Pullman’s His Dark Material”
Laura MacDonald, University of Toronto**

When director Nicholas Hytner commissioned an adaptation of Phillip Pullman’s best-selling, 1200 page children’s fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, for Britain’s National Theatre, the un-stageability of the novels made it an irresistible project for playwright Nicholas Wright. The trilogy’s young heroes travel through numerous worlds searching for family, battling a power hungry church, and along the way encounter fantastical creatures such as armoured bears, witches, dead souls, angels and miniature flying spies. Using first hand interviews conducted with Wright and composer Jonathan Dove, this paper will discuss the adaptation, workshop and production process of *His Dark Materials*, and suggest an interdisciplinary, collaborative approach was essential to bring Pullman’s epic to the stage.

**“Glory: Catching the Darkness—An Examination of Interdisciplinary Adaptation”
Kathleen Pollard, Co-Artistic Director, Reality Under Siege Performance Company
Dylan Robinson, Co-Artistic Director, Reality Under Siege Performance Company, University Of Victoria**

A text belonging to the literary canon is a text that is qualified with a certain aesthetic, political, social—or in some contexts—economic status. A person who reads a canonical work assumes a status of privilege. Consequently, one cannot avoid canonizing oneself in the process, having joined the ranks of those privileged members of society who are ‘up to the mark’, and in a position to qualify literature based on a system of exclusivity. So long as this cycle is self-sustaining, the canon’s intransience remains intact; however, should a person decide to take liberties with a text—to pillage the structure and content, to embezzle the narrative line when it comes to the practice of adaptation and turn a canonized text on its’ head, s/he is indirectly appropriating the culture from whence it came.

**“Chick Joint: Adapting (to) Life Behind Bars”
Beth Watkins, Allegheny College**

This paper will examine the process by which I devised an original play from the prison correspondence of Oberlin student Jesse Carr, a transgendered person who was arrested in 2002 for civil disobedience and sentenced to Alderson Federal Prison—the first women’s prison in the U.S. Primary sources include: Jesse’s letters and those of his email support network (he was undergoing testosterone injections at the time of his incarceration), newspaper accounts of the arrest and trial, and the manual of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The history of Alderson, originally founded by social reformers, and accounts of Alderson’s famous inmates (including Billie Holiday, Tokyo Rose, and Martha Stewart) helped me to shape an ironic, and sometimes humorous, context for Jesse’s story. In adapting this material, I employ techniques of Epic Theatre and Community-Based Performance, and draw on Paulo Friere’s concept of teaching “literacy” to audiences—in this case the “literacy” of prison life—by making jargon, ritual, hierarchy and rules the stuff of performance.

“Othello: Image, Improvisation and Shakespeare as Source”

Tom Stroud, University of Winnipeg

My presentation will focus on my recent production of *Othello* to illustrate the possibilities of a non-narrative, interdisciplinary approach to this classic Shakespearian tragedy. I will also discuss my methodology in the creative process.

Othello was presented in Winnipeg at Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers Studio/Theatre on September 22-24, 2005. While I provided the initial conception and direction of the piece, the final work was the result of a highly collaborative process involving myself, a visual artist, and seven dancers. It was a full-evening, structured improvisation that utilized selected text from *Othello* to create imagery and interactions responding to the issues and ideas embedded within the narrative.

In my presentation I will use excerpts from *Othello* to comment on reinterpreting a classic text as well as the use of imagery as an alternative to narrative. In addition, I will address the training process and performance techniques that were used in the production, which I term Central Focus. I have developed Central Focus over the last twenty years of creative work with actors and dancers.

Program Credits for Performance Clips for “Othello: Image, Improvisation and Shakespeare as Source”: Othello

Concept and Direction: Tom Stroud; Costume and Set: Diana Thomeycroft; Sound Score: Brent Loft, Tom Stroud; Lighting Design: Hugh Conacher; Performers: Jennifer Essex, Brent Loft, Rachelle Potoski, Gabriela Rehak-Dovgoselets, Ron Stewart, Rebecca Hope Terry and Natasha Torres-Garner; Acknowledgements: Othello was commissioned by Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers in September 2005.

“Staging Calderón’s Life Is a Dream for the 21st Century”

Jean Wagner, Voice & Vision Theater, New York City and Bard College
Wendy Weckwerth, Yale School of Drama and Dartmouth College

Pedro Calderón de la Barca's Spanish Golden Age drama *Life Is a Dream* (1635) is a classic early example of a dream play. However, as director and dramaturg our interest in the play stems from the resonances between the world of this play and contemporary politics. In a post-9/11 world, Calderón's complex layering of nature, nurture and destiny seem particularly postmodern.

Existing English-language translations are dated, primarily written for a British audience, and often quite loose adaptations of the original. Translating Calderón's text is a particular challenge. His style is highly baroque and poetic, his long speeches full of extended metaphor and repetition. Translators and adaptors have also struggled to render the play's ending for modern audiences, often rewriting it. We commissioned a new literal translation, which we then adapted to a playable format. Our goal was to retain the narrative line of the play and its poetic style, while making the language accessible to a contemporary audience.

What does it mean to stage a dream in our postmodern context? How can technology be useful in “translating” Calderón's dream to the stage? How do we make the lyrical quality of Calderón's language resonate for a contemporary audience? How do the tragicomic elements of *Life Is a Dream* speak to a world after Gheiderode and Beckett? After Weiss's *Marat/Sade* and Parks's *The America Play*?

Friday, February 17: Artist Roundtable

Adapting the Experimental

Chad Dembski: While in New York doing a production I decided to see a couple of other shows that I felt would never be seen on a Toronto stage. I went see *Permanent Brain Damage* by Richard Foreman and his experimental performance company Ontological Theatre. This very appropriately titled piece had an effect on me that lasts to this day, with bare bulb lighting, strings, random words posted on set, a broken Victorian box set, highly stylized movement style and rambling philosophical monologue about god, death and uncertainty. I had no idea what the hell I had seen but it an effect on me of both witnessing a car crash and what I feel church should have been like for me as a child. It seemed as if a truly insane person was given a reasonable budget to do whatever came into their head, and throw it back at an audience, this was what it felt like to be inspired. I would continue to visit New York city over the next few years to get my “fix” of contemporary performance from such companies as The Wooster Group, Gale Gates et. al, Richard Maxwell, Pina Baush, Robert Wilson, and most recently Radiohole.

In 1998, I decided to begin adapting my own work and started with Shakespeare’s “Measure for Measure”. My first part was doing a twelve person character movement piece called *AuReoLa Part 1*, where four modern songs scored a 20 minute piece that acted as a prologue to the actual play. This lead me to *me@sure 3.1* where I ripped the text and extracted from each scene my own personal favourite lines and used them as basic text. From there my company The Oomph! Group and I added dance, video, puppetry and live song to the piece. This was the beginning of working on pieces that fed me in a new way, I saw new things with every performance, audience reactions were all over the place, critics were confused but sometimes very curious, and most all I had a pride and love for my work that I never felt before.

“The important thing is the capacity to astonish. Not shock--shock is a worn-out word-but astonish. The world has no grounds for complacency. The Titanic couldn’t sink, but it did. Where you find smugness, you find something worth blasting. I want to blast it.” — Terry Southern

David Duclos: I see in experimental theatre practice the opportunity to pursue art in a permissive, tolerant environment. I believe that formal experimentation defined and exhausted 20C aesthetics, and that the 21C will see a shift in focus onto ‘process’. The practice of art as a collaborative exercise between individual creators will eclipse the modernist paradigm of the sole genius who stands outside and beyond the traditions, like a beacon. Art becomes the expression of a plurality or community, more than of an individual. The information age has so opened the libraries and museums of the world that an emphasis will fall naturally on syncretic and hermetic values - as opposed to a value system that is institutional and capitalistic - and that experimentation will serve as an agent of coherence and cohesion in a new era.

Half Empty

by **Julian DeZotti & Nathan Maharaj**

Starring: Julian DeZotti & Nathan Maharaj.

Dramaturgy: Aleks Podbereski

****Scenes taken from "An Enemy of the People" by Arthur Miller, adapted from Henrik Ibsen****

Just as newspaper coverage of current events yields a piecemeal narrative built on the structure of days and weeks, this play builds on discreet scenes, each yielding slightly more information than the last--or different information altogether. Focus shifts as the story is told, as do rhetorical style, syntax, and pace. This is how a story exists in the popular consciousness—in film, print, television, radio, the emerging blogosphere—and so too then on the stage. But newspaper will be privileged, as it is in the streets of Toronto, where every day the headlines of half a dozen publications vie for your attention, your sympathy. The story stands at the centre, while around it narrative is spun that selects, excludes, exhorts, and constructs—not only truth, but the beholders of truth, the reading public.

Specifically, we adapt both aspects of Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" and coverage of the Walkerton water debacle into a series of scenes, a pointillist narrative, for the stage. Every scene a new day, a new perspective, with new facts and personalities in play. We bring into fighting quarters the notions of public trust, betrayal, and assumed audience.

"Adapting Oral History for Performance"

Performance/Demonstration by **Lisa Hayes**


For the theatre artist embarking on the task of adapting oral history into performance, several questions arise. How important is it to use the exact words of the interview subjects? If the subjects' words are changed, either by intention or the ephemeral nature of memory, do you somehow negate the "truth" of their experience? Decisions like these are not necessarily made at the beginning of a project. The issues may not even be a conscious area of consideration during the creative process. Instinct and intuition are the guiding principles: "it feels right" or "it works." After the show has been written, perhaps the playwright will come up with answers to questions like, "why?" or "how?" but it is important to keep in mind that the explanation is being articulated after the fact. In this performance/demonstration I will discuss my process in creating the one-woman play "Nurse!", which revolves around a nursing strike and is based on oral histories I did with nurses. I will illustrate the journey of some of these interviews into performance by first performing three monologues from the play and then playing an audio montage of interview excerpts on which these monologues were based.

“Sherman’s Adaptation of None is Too Many: One Source, Two Plays”

Amanda Lockitch, University of Toronto

In 1982, Irving Abella and Harold Troper published *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933–1948*. This socio/political/historical text explores the issues and elucidates reasons behind Canada’s unofficial closed door policy toward Jewish refugees in the years proceeding World War II and beyond. This book became source material for two very different plays written by Jason Sherman. The first, *None is Too Many*, is a docudrama adaptation commissioned by the Winnipeg Jewish Theatre in co-production with the Manitoba Theatre Centre. This play offers a surprising amount of material adapted from its intertext and remains faithful to the overall intention of the original book: education. Although *Remnants* also draws heavily on Abella and Troper’s monograph, *None is Too Many*, as its primary intertext, Sherman uses the biblical Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 30), to tell this story of exile, loss and fear.


I am interested in exploring these plays in two ways. First, I will look at their intertextual ‘debate’ with the original Abella and Troper book in terms of how Sherman refines, refutes or qualifies the non-fictional history in order to produce drama. I will also compare the production draft of each play with its latest publication in order to explore the modifications, reflected by textual adjustments, which presumably arose out of the needs and process of production.



“Was it Brecht who made it Brechtian?”

Nenad Jovanovic, University of Toronto

A special place in Brecht’s oeuvre belongs to adaptations. Much has been written on the strategies the playwright employed to make the source material conform to the norms of Epic theatre. Rather than to go back over ground that others have already covered (looking at how the adaptations fulfill Brecht’s theories), I will look at how the original works lend themselves to the project of adaptation--in other words, how they already contain features we now associate with Brecht.



“Quiet on the Surface’: Chekhov in Ireland, 1995-2004”

Virginia Anderson, Tufts University

In his 1933 play, *Drama at Inish*, Lennox Robinson paints a comic picture of the esteem with which the Irish people have held the work of Russian dramatist, Anton Chekhov (despite the fact that previously cheerful town residents turn depressive under the influence of Russian drama). Seventy years after Robinson’s play premiered, Chekhov is still venerated in Ireland and adaptations of his work have both shaped and reflected Irish national identity. Within recent history, a period I will begin in 1995, a number of notable cultural and political developments have increased the Irish appetite for Chekhov’s work. The ascent of Ireland’s star in the global community provides the foundation for discussion of recent adaptations, establishing the political and social context in which they have taken place. I address the adaptations of two established Irish playwrights: Brian Friel followed his 1981 adaptation of *Three Sisters* with adaptations of *Uncle Vanya* (1998) and *The Bear* (2002), both produced at The Gate theater in Dublin. Thomas Murphy was commissioned to write a new adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* for the centenary celebration of the Abbey Theatre, Ireland’s national theater, in 2004, the year that also marked the centennial of Chekhov’s death. These adaptations of Chekhov’s plays reveal a global shift in both “Irish” theatre and Irish national identity. Although “quiet on the surface,” as Constance suggests in Robinson’s *Drama at Inish*, the continued production and adaptation of Chekhov’s plays in Ireland indicate a complex national identity.

“Ancient Presence: Why Adapt the Classics?”

Dr Alison Forsyth, University of Wales, Aberystwyth

“Whatever makes the classics seductive, is the future of what they say. Their fascination is not due to their current song, but to what it promises to be” (Maurice Blanchot). This paper provides a number of reasons as to why one would wish to adapt or creatively revisit a canonical work, particularly ancient dramatic works which provide the bedrock of Western culture. With particular reference to Jean Paul Sartre’s adaptations, *Les Mouches* (1948) and *Les Troyennes* (1965), Fugard, Kani and Ntshona’s adaptation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, *The Island* (1974), and the recent global interactive anti-Iraq war “adaptation” of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* as part of the *Lysistrata Project* (2003)—I will illustratively investigate the many reasons for adapting the ancients.

“From Viking Sage to English Page to Canadian Stage:

Michael O’Brien’s Radical Adaptation of Hamlet.”

James McKinnon, University of Toronto

The paper will discuss Michael O’Brien’s *Mad Boy Chronicle* as a uniquely Canadian revision of *Hamlet* by focusing on its engagement with the imperial canon (of which *Hamlet* is the veritable cornerstone) which has so preoccupied Canadians in their quest to define nationhood through cultural production. O’Brien attacks our colonial fetishization of Shakespeare by writing an inter-textual travesty of the ultimate “master text,” based not only on *Hamlet*, but also on the ancient Danish saga upon which *Hamlet* itself is based. The play exposes with the very process of colonization and cultural appropriation that caused a Danish saga to become the quintessential imperial English master text in the first place, and in doing so it not only resists but counter-colonizes the master text. The paper will explore the history and inter-textuality of three texts—*Hamlet*, *Mad Boy*, and the original saga (as preserved by the 12th century monk Saxo Grammatica)—in order to trace the process of colonization and counter-colonization through which the Danes lost their cultural voice and O’Brien found it again. I will also discuss the play as a frustrated Canadian playwright’s response to a Janiform theatre culture which constantly questions its “Canadian-ness” while at the same time worshipping the imperial canon. Ultimately the goal will be to explore the paradoxical potential for liberating our colonized theatre from the imperial canon by producing plays about colonization.

“The Adaptation of Classics: Making A Midsummer Night’s Dream Resound Contemporarily”

Sergio Melo, University of Toronto

The discursive community of the performing arts often uses the term “adaptation.” There are a number of manuals on the general “rules” of how to adapt a work of art from one medium into another and essays on facts and interpretations related to adaptations. However, there is scant literature about the essence of adaptation as such. Grounded in Italo Calvino’s idea of classics and Julia Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality, this paper investigates the phenomenon of adaptation itself. Illustrating the presentation with film clips and stills of Ingmar Bergman’s *Smiles of a Summer Night*, Woody Allen’s *A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy*, the staging of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by the Brazilian group *Nós do Morro* (*We from the Shanty Town*), directed by Fernando Mello da Costa, my own adaptation, and a few transpositions of Shakespeare’s play into other media, I will grapple with the propelling forces, the challenges, the problems, the solutions, the results, and the impacts of recreating classics.

“This only is the witchcraft I have used”: Harlem Duet as a Feminist Adaptation of *Othello*”

Sarah Waisvisz, McGill University

Rather than attempting to label Shakespeare or his plays as feminist, this paper is interested in what happens *after* Shakespeare, and in how feminist readers and writers work to “remember Shakespeare differently” (Neely). What exactly is at stake here? Must feminist writers transgress and cross the boundaries of the Shakespearean canon in order to reconcile or redress issues in his work that they find incompatible? Keeping in mind Shakespearean critic Linda Bamber’s strategy which “locates the feminism in the critic-- not in the author or even the work,” I am interested in feminist revisions of Shakespearean plays, and how these adaptations, as acts of resistance, interrogate and interpret the ‘original’ Shakespearean plays from a feminist perspective and re-write and re-shape Shakespeare with tremendous consequences.

Canadian writer Djanet Sears’s 1997 play *Harlem Duet* is a feminist adaptation that “remembers” Shakespeare’s *Othello* “differently.” With Elizabeth Grosz’s criteria for a feminist text as my rubric, I will show how *Harlem Duet* ultimately shifts how Shakespeare’s *Othello* can be read. By creating a charged space for dialogue about race and relationships within the black context that is othered into non-existence in *Othello*, *Harlem Duet*’s focus on contemporary race relations, assimilation, and racial solidarity cannot be undervalued. Sears successfully “exorcises” the ghosts haunting Shakespeare’s *Othello* by not shirking from, indeed by highlighting, the racial tensions of current North American society. *Harlem Duet* demonstrates how adaptations are sometimes collaborative, sometimes oppositional, but always in fervent dialogue with the original text.

“Adapting the Audience: An Exploration of Cross-Media Spectatorship”

Natalie Corbett, University of Toronto

This paper explores potential intersections between the activity of the theatrical spectator and the video game spectator. Recent scholarship on video games has tended to treat gaming as an isolated experience, in which interpersonal interaction is almost exclusively virtual or digitally mediated. Frequently, however, the gaming situation includes physically present, non-playing individuals who function as an audience. This paper attempts to identify the characteristics of this act of observation through a consideration of its conventions and its appeals. In trying to define the dynamics of video game spectatorship, I theorize several key sources of pleasure that are shared with theatrical spectatorship, including the pleasures of identification, interpretation, and liveness. I argue that while clearly distinct from the experience of watching a theatrical production, video game spectatorship shares more in common with live performance than is acknowledged by popular critical approaches, which tend to focus on the relationship between video games and film.

“The Liar: A Translation and Analysis of Jean Cocteau’s ‘Le menteur’”

Laura Estill, University of Toronto

Performance by **Ben Lancaster**

This presentation examines Laura Estill’s translation of Jean Cocteau’s one-act one-person play “Le menteur” into English. Ben Lancaster performs the title character, a self-proclaimed liar. This extended monologue is The Liar’s search for truth in himself and in others. This piece explores the barriers between playwright and character, between actor and audience, and between falsehood and truth.

Following the performance, Laura will briefly discuss Cocteau’s theory of translation and his theatrical criticism. Laura and Ben will then discuss the questions that came up in working through the piece, and the choices they made to create an artistically viable performance that remains true to Cocteau’s philosophies.

“‘Straight Down the Line’: Noir-ing the Stage with Double Indemnity”

Tony Perucci, California State University, Northridge

My paper considers the challenges and possibilities of adapting film noir for the stage. I base my consideration on an original adaptation, *Double Indemnity: A Poem of Tabloid Murder*. One of the goals of the adaptation was to find out how to translate, but not simply replicate the film noir aesthetic (and not reduce it to film noir “style”). To this end the performance was meant to “deconstruct” the genre by commenting on the tropes of the genre as evidenced in this classic film. In our production, we worked to not only disrupt the representation of the “original” film, but also to open up the process of adaptation that moved from novella to film to stage. We were thus able to extend, rework, and recombine elements of the film and novel to enter into an ongoing process of adaptation by producing a performance as a poem, which was based on a film, which had been adapted from a novella, itself inspired by a tabloid news article.

“Chekhovian Adaptations”

Alan Thomas, University of Toronto

For five years, 2000 to 2005, Theatre Smith-Gilmour (principals Dean Gilmour and Michelle Smith) have presented a series of performance pieces at the Factory Theatre, Toronto adapted from short stories by Chekhov. Each production has enjoyed good critical and audience response and extended runs, a noteworthy success for a fringe company.

Most of these short stories presented by Theatre S-G have fallen into disregard today and in this recycling, therefore, the company has accomplished a recovery of neglected work. Written for magazine publication, some might be considered forgettable ephemera were it not that they demonstrate the admirable Chekhovian properties of rigorous and unsentimental observation. Those recording peasant life are especially honest in the depiction, without moral comment, of the subjects' ignorance, brutality and squalor of life.

The training of the Theatre Smith-Gilmour principals is in mime and clowning. The method employed here emphasizes physical versatility in enacting a voiced narration, built from phrases and whole passages extracted from the texts. “Shorts,” for instance, uses an impressionistic sketch by Chekhov of a scene at a railway station to get the piece under way with the rapid piling and unpling of luggage. For “In the Ravine,” a solitary figure squats, a brick or two in hand, and turns them over and over, silently. After some shattering events, the heavy weight of those bricks emerges as we learn the most ruthless of the characters has succeeded in becoming owner of a coveted brick-works. The group's techniques darken or lighten the scene with great fluidity and frequent doubling by actors also lends liveliness to the point that the tone of the action might at times seem at odds with the grimness of the tale. It is a style of presentation, nonetheless, in general sympathy with that mixed and shifting perception of life we think of as Chekhovian.

Theatre S-G's dramatisations demonstrate some of the strengths and weaknesses of the performance mode. They convey a sense of illimitable dramatic imagination, as if no idea or situation cannot be made physically demonstrable, and with a delightful sense of spontaneity. But what is their longevity? Will they in time form a body of work to be reflected on, and perhaps modified by succeeding generations? Some kind of text is in existence for each work but the productions might not easily be repeated and the ethos of performance does not appear to favour re-staging.

“The Answer is Horse”

Presented by **The Emergency Theatre Project**

Company: Liz Days, Julia Holleran, Cody Lindquist, Katie Naka, Joya Scott

In the early 1960s, Stanley Milgram began a series of studies designed to examine what acts of cruelty an ordinary person could be persuaded to carry out against an innocent stranger—an exploration inspired, in part, by a desire to understand the Holocaust and subsequent trial of Adolf Eichmann. The results of Milgram’s experiments entailed the following: about two-thirds of the subjects delivered what they believed to be a dangerous, 450-volt electric shock to another innocent human being when encouraged to do so by an authority figure. With this in mind, it becomes impossible to ignore the potential we all have to commit acts of evil--“just following orders.” Operating like a jazz theme and variations, *The Answer is Horse* riffs on the ramifications of Milgram’s findings and examines the ripples of their continued shockwaves in a post-Abu Ghraib society.

The Death of a Chief

Presented by **Native Earth Performing Arts**

Community. Ambition. The need for a leader. Incorporating personal stories, dance, movement and song into Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, *The Death of a Chief* draws parallels between the classic story of power and betrayal and our lives today as Native people in Canada.

The Death of a Chief is very much a work-in-progress, and this performance is actually excerpts. So far the company has had four workshop weeks - one in May, one in August, one in September, and this week in February. The company has used the time to explore physically the meaning of the play; to investigate why the play resonates for an aboriginal community; to develop the tools to speak the text; to develop company. The performers have brought personal writings to the process which we then incorporated into the Shakespearean text.

Co-adapters/directors Kennedy Cathy MacKinnon and Yvette Nolan and choreographer Tamara Podemski have allowed the process to lead the product. We don’t know yet what the eventual shape of the show will be.

The acting company for this week of workshop is Tara Beagan, Clifford Cardinal, Falen Johnson, Michelle Latimer, Craig Lauzon, Jani Lauzon, Cheri Maracle, Monique Mojica, Sara Sinclair and Michelle St John.

The Death of a Chief will continue in development through 2006-2007, and is slated for production in fall 2007. Its creation is made possible through a grant from the Laidlaw Foundation.

Adapting *Banana Boys*

Presentation by **Fu-GEN Theatre Company**

Playwright: Leon Aureus

Director and Dramaturge: Nina Lee Aquino

Actor, Luke Young: Insurp Choi

Actor, Mike Chao: Derek Kwan

Actor, Rick Wong: Richard Lee

Actor, Dave Lowe: David Yee

Actor, Sheldon Kwan: Dale Yim

Banana Boys, the novel, was a difficult thing to adapt. It is epic, mythic and (at points) entirely confusing. The nature of the action is often dialectic, proving difficult to make theatrical. Also, the structure of the book naturally alienates the five boys from each other by segregating their narrative. Trying to bring them together within a shared history to form some cohesive linear movement from an agreed beginning among the five storylines to some natural end was the first choice when workshopping the play. That decision proved helpful, but ultimately rang false. In the months leading up to production, it was decided that the play couldn't be that ordinary. It couldn't realistically depict the ordinary lives of these boys... it needed theatricality, magic, and a distorted, heightened sense of reality in order to make the lives of these ordinary boys... extraordinary. The play needed Pyloxidin, Rick's wonder-drug in the novel. If it was going to work, it needed to be strung out like Courtney Love at Christmas-time.

Because of the way the novel was built, because of its erratic style and its ability to find beauty in the mundane... the play almost defined a creative process of its own. It **had** to be episodic, it **wanted** to be fragmented, for its inability to be linear and constant. That was the easy part; the mistakes were loud, clear and painfully obvious. The hard part was that there were so many stories, so many themes, issues and important landmarks in the lives of these boys that had to be parted with. The book helped for backstory and certainly informed much of the intention behind each character... but it worked against finding a centralized story. There was a point when I had to simply put the book away and find the play that was escaping the pages.

Sunday, February 19: Special Performances

Market of Tales

by AfriCan Theatre Ensemble

Director: Ronald Weihs

Choreographer: Muoi Nene

Designer: Judith Sandiford

Stage Manager: Tony Adah

Producer: Modupe Olaogun

Live Music: Waleed Abdulhamid

The Ensemble Performers: Seifu Belachew, Alexandra Drossos, Teddy Masuku, Muoi Nene, Aktina Stathaki, Selam Teclu

Market of Tales is based on a concept shared by many African cultures: our present life, standing between a life before birth and a life after death, is a marketplace. We are in this world to interact with each other, exchanging our experiences, our dreams, our desires, our stories.

Market of Tales is a new work of theatre created by the AfriCan Theatre Ensemble. It uses elements of African storytelling, freely adapting them and incorporating elements of African performance styles such as masquerade. The stories are from many cultures, and include folk tales, personal accounts, history, dramatic vignettes, story-songs, dance-drama, poems—any of the myriad ways of telling a story. They draw on varied storytelling traditions, incorporating many kinds of dance, music and song. The effect is to demonstrate the rich diversity of human experience, and the common threads that unite all of us. It is early morning. The stage is in constant movement. Suddenly, there is a request for a story. The storyteller begins the storyteller's traditional call: Hadithi, hadithi!

The stories begin. The ensemble members form a loose semi-circle (half of an imaginary circle embracing the audience). Whoever is involved in the story being told moves into the centre; there is fluid movement between performers and observers. Drumming, dancing song and musical accompaniment weave through the action.

At first the stories are mythic in scope: the origins of violence, of desire, of suffering. Then we have stories about human life, funny, tragic, sometimes instructive. As we move toward the present, there are stories from recent history, stripped of their detail to expose their essential meanings.

There is the sad and beautiful tale of a woman who lays her baby in the shade while she is working in the field with other women. An eagle comes, but instead of harming the child, he shelters it. The woman's husband tries to shoot the eagle, and instead kills his own child. From this time forward, his descendants are destined to kill each other.

Immediately, we move to a story from Kenya about the strife between two ancient tribes, descended from two brothers. It tells of a great hero, invincible like Achilles, who is wreaking devastation on the other tribe. They send a woman to him, who seduces him and finds his secret—he can only be wounded through his shadow. When the warriors try to kill him, however, they fail. The woman sets a trap for him and succeeds, for she has figured out his secret—it is his shadow in the moonlight that is vulnerable.

A tortoise tale, from the African repertoire of trickster stories, shows how tortoise becomes rich by duping the rest of the animals. "The Drunken King" shows us a ruler who has everything, and still wants more, until he brings about his own destruction. There is a story of a young man who does Death a good turn, and one about how a child teaches his parents respect for the elders.

We move away from myth and folktale to real stories of today, such as the (true) story of a young man told to report for interrogation in a week, living in fear, only to find out that it is an attempt at extortion, or the story of a Kenyan cook in a house of the colonial rulers who carried messages to the Mau Mau. And a story of politics that turns into a story of love.

source: www.africantheatre.org/current_season.html