



Critically Speaking

The CTCA E-Bulletin

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National Board:

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Robin Breon (Toronto),
Robert Cushman (Toronto),
Stephen Hunt (Calgary),
Byron Laviolette (Toronto),
Martin Morrow (Toronto),
Alvina Ruprecht (Ottawa),
Anton Wagner (Toronto),

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President's Corner

by Don Rubin

For several years, CTCA has been hoping to organize a national conference on criticism in cooperation with our Quebec colleagues, the AQCT. The proposal has been made to host such an event in Montreal during the Festival Transamerique (May-June) and this year, Boards of both organisations approved the idea and funding applications went to the Quebec Ministry of Culture and negotiations were begun with the Canada Council.

The topic was to be Theatre Criticism in the Age of Bloggers

It was hoped we could actually announce the event on these pages. Sadly, the only thing we can announce at this moment is that the Quebec Ministry has just turned us down for funding and the Canada Council has just indicated that theatre critics did not fit into their programs since theatre critics were not artists. That is, we shouldn't even bother to apply.



Don Rubin

Suffice it to say here that we will be starting our search for funding once again both in Quebec and nationally. With a little luck, the event will now happen in 2015.

But more clearly, we need to remind and educate the Canada Council a bit about what we do and our importance to theatre activity from one end of the country to the other. That process should now become a priority for CTCA. If we care about our own art – writing and thinking and arguing theatre – then we need to take the next step and convince funding agencies that what we do really is worthwhile, really is an art, a skill and a passion.

In lieu of our own event, we'd like to draw your attention to a two day event at Brock University to be held in late February. It's a similar subject but with significantly different players. See the full story on the Brock event elsewhere in these pages.

* * *

One of the more important decisions made at this past fall's Annual General Meeting was to upgrade and update our organizational website. In case you haven't looked at it for a while it's at www.canadiantheatrecritics.ca.

The site has stayed pretty much the same for many years now and is surely in need of being brought into the 21st century. Even in its basic form, it gets a surprising amount of hits from across Canada and abroad. It is looked at by theatre people generally and publicists in particular as well as by theatre students and researchers looking for information on Canadian theatre. It's also a base for contacts with Canadian theatre writers.

Included on the site is information about each of our members, a section called webplay (links to reviews of recent shows of note), links to *Critically Speaking* (the e-bulletin that you are now reading), information on our awards, organizational history, our Code of Ethics and a link to the international site of our parent organization, IATC. The goal is to make this material more user friendly as well as to add sections to it including an archive.

The estimate is that such an upgrade would cost between \$1000 and \$1500. At the meeting, long-time member Bill Watt pledged \$500 personally toward making the upgrade a reality and his generous offer was accepted with sincere gratitude.

As well, it was agreed that Board members will try to find additional funds from a variety of external sources including the Strategic Cultural Investment Fund, the Ontario Arts Council, the Canada Council, the Museum and Technology Fund and the Ontario Government Museum Assistance Fund. Anyone with other thoughts on funding do please let us know.

A committee – Martin Morrow (our current webmaster), Byron Laviolette (*Critically Speaking's* Managing Editor), Anton Wagner, Jeniva Berger and yours truly -- was charged with planning the upgrades and meeting with potential designers. Anyone with ideas for the website is asked to contact any member of the committee to get involved. It can surely be an important part of our "educational" initiative to raise the profile of theatre criticism in Canada.

* * *



Martin Morrow

Also coming from the AGM, I am delighted to report that Martin Morrow was elected vice-president of CTCA. Martin has been an active member for many years and is a long-time member of the CTCA Board. Former theatre critic for the Calgary Herald and a regular freelancer for the Globe and Mail, he has been particularly active in the Webplay section of the website and has served as the site webmaster. In his spare time, he authored a history of Calgary's One Yellow Rabbit Theatre company entitled *Wild Theatre* published by the Banff Centre Press in 2003.

CTCA has been operating over the last biennium with just a President and a Secretary-Treasurer and has not had a Vice-President as such. I am delighted that he has agreed to take it on and look forward to working closely with him.

Several pieces of international news.

Critics rarely get to run theatres but it does happen from time to time (our own Urjo Kareda, after all, ran the Tarragon for many years). In this case, the critic running a theatre is none other than the President of the International Association of Theatre Critics Yun-Cheol KIM. In addition to his extensive work for IATC including chief fundraiser and Editor of IATC's web journal *Critical Stages*, he has been an active member of planning committees for South Korea's leading theatre festivals.

Now he has been named General Director of South Korea's prestigious National Theatre. For the record, Kim will be stepping down as president of IATC this fall after running the organization for six years (the maximum term of office – three two year terms). He has also indicated that he is planning to step down as editor of *Critical Stages*. That means a lot of decisions will have to be made at the next IATC world congress in Beijing in October.

And speaking of Beijing, our sister organization, the Quebec Centre (AQCT) is expected to be taking over Canada's seat on the IATC executive at that time. The two Canadian Centres – AQCT and CTCA – alternate two year terms. I have been a member of the Executive of IATC for the last 18 months and will join with the Quebec representative, Brigitte Purkhardt, in Beijing to support Canada's bid for a continuing seat on the Board. At the last few congresses, Canada has tallied among the highest number of votes internationally.

* * *

On the downside, many in the critical world were shocked in January when we learned that the popular New York freelance critic Randy Gener (you've probably read his stuff in the *New York Times*, *American Theatre* and numerous other theatre outlets) had been viciously beaten up and left for dead near his apartment at 53rd Street and 7th Avenue in Manhattan. Randy – who is openly gay – survived the attack, however. It is expected to be at least a year or more before he gets back to any sort of even vaguely normal life.



Randy Gener

Clearly the victim of a hate crime, Gener has had to undergo numerous brain surgeries. When the news first broke, it was assumed he had no health coverage. Happily, it turned out that he had officially gotten married to his long-time partner two years ago and that he did have coverage through his spouse. But the costs of rehabilitation are expected to be prohibitive and a campaign was set-up to find funds to help support him during this time.

The fund – operating in \$25,000 segments – started out hoping to raise the first \$25,000 in a month but contributions from around the world reached that figure in less than a week. The goal quickly jumped it to \$75,000 and was nearly there when we went to press with this bulletin.

The IATC itself made a donation to the fund as did numerous individual IATC members. CTCA has begun a campaign to try and raise up to \$1,000 to contribute. Before the CTCA campaign was even announced, \$400 had been pledged by board members. Anyone who wishes to contribute to the Randy Gener Fund can do so through CTCA by sending a cheque in any amount or by going directly to the US campaign site – www.youcaring.com/medical-fundraiser/for-randy-gener/130589.

* * *

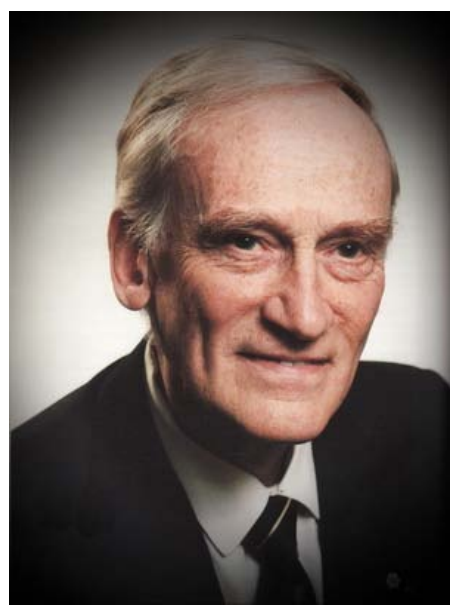
Elsewhere in this issue you will be able to read about a Young Critics seminar that recently took place in Bucharest. It is one of many such international seminars that IATC sponsors and which are open to both established and younger theatre writers. The Young Critics seminars are for those in the early stages of their careers and are under about the age

of 35 (it's a loose 35). The Established Critics seminars are usually held in conjunction with various theatre festivals and usually have themes and participants are asked to present papers connected to the generally fairly open themes.

We had two of our members attend the Young Critics seminar in Bucharest and their reports and insights are of real interest here. There's another one scheduled for Hungary at the end of March planned to take place during the Contemporary Hungarian Drama Festival in the eastern city of Debrecen. All seminars work in English and French. Anyone interested in participating should take a look at the IATC website – www.aict-iatc.org – for announcements and application forms and usually require a letter of support from the national centre (in this case, CTCA).

* * *

The Canadian theatre lost a major figure recently with the death of Montreal actor-director Jean-Louis Roux. I first met Jean-Louis when he was serving as President of the Canadian Theatre Centre, the Canadian branch of the International Theatre Institute. Back in the late 60s and 70s it was enormously active as a communications network for theatre professionals across the country and as a cross-cultural information centre for anglophone and francophone theatre workers. Roux was fluently bilingual (he worked at Stratford as well as in his own Theatre du Nouveau Monde in Montreal) and fought long and hard for communications across the two solitudes.



Jean-Louis Roux

He always had patience for young people (including me) and he taught me much about what it was to be a Canadian and why it was important to understand the cultural (rather than nationalistic) aspirations of our Quebec colleagues. At one point late in his distinguished career, Jean-Louis was named Lieutenant Governor of Quebec. Many of us were deeply saddened when he was forced to resign just months later for what was deemed to be pro-nazi remarks made when he was a student in the 1930s at the University of Montreal. "The carefree attitude of youth may be an explanation," he told a news conference called to announce his resignation, "but it can't in any way serve as an excuse..."

Jean-Louis fought hard for so many important things in this country – cultural subsidy, the creation of the National Theatre School, the recognition of Canadian artists and their rights, and he fought for Canada in the Quebec referenda against separation. Whether as Chair of the Canada Council or on a stage as an actor or at an international colloquium speaking about art in Canada, he was a giant and I learned much from him. He was 90 when he died in December.

* * *

On a more positive note, I would like to offer our organizations enthusiastic congratulations to *Critically Speaking's* managing editor, Byron Laviolette, who recently completed his Ph.D. at York University by defending his dissertation on interactive theatre and pervasive transmedia fiction.

Many also know Byron as a director and co-creator of the enormously popular and successful Morro and Jasp clown duo. The real question now is whether criticism can hold him for much longer or whether he will choose to move onto even greater successes as a director. Wherever he goes and whatever he does, he will make waves. We all wish him well.



Morro and Jasp

* * *

Finally, it's dues time again.

Please continue to support us and our work on behalf of our profession. Thanks to Anton Wagner, our treasurer, the notices have gone out. We are still a bargain at \$45.

And please be aware, we voted at the AGM to drop the senior's rate of \$25. We didn't mention the change on the dues notices and this was brought to our attention by member Ron Singer who entered into the following memorable series of e-exchanges with me about it:

Hi Anton and Don. Got the dues notice but whatever happened to the discounted Senior Membership category for those who have been full members of the association in the past? – Ron Singer

Hi Ron. At the AGM it was voted unanimously to eliminate the Senior category since we already have the \$25 Associate Membership category. – Don Rubin

Another attack on seniors. – RS

So many of us are aging so rapidly that we would quickly run out of funding for the organization if we didn't eliminate the senior category. Costing me more too. Even being old I can't get no respect. – DR

Money-grubbing Air Canada set the pattern...abolishing Senior fares and now everyone is rushing to emulate!! – RS

Look on the bright side. We don't charge for luggage. – DR

OK. I'll continue to fly CTCA, but I want points. – RS

OK. I will ask Anton to double your critics points. – DR

How about triple? – RS

How about we publish this little exchange in the e-bulletin as a reminder to everyone that it's dues time. – DR

Will I get paid? – RS

(Both exit sighing.)



Ron Singer

The National Newspaper Awards: Let's Keep the Light Burning

by Stephen Hunt

Every year, my editor at the *Calgary Herald*, where I work, asks each reporter and columnist and photographer to go through our work and submit some of it for consideration to the National Newspaper Awards. Every year for the first six, the first thing I did was chuck out all my reviews, because they weren't eligible for a National Newspaper Award.

In fact, there was no category for cultural criticism of any kind.

For six years, I saw that, and in my head simply diminished the value of reviews, as if they somehow represented some sort of devalued newspaper stock. Like a good, dutiful reporter, I tried to make the best of it by submitting just my features and columns, which of course, were far more deserving of consideration for such a prestigious honour.

Finally, I got a little ticked off.

CTCA President Don Rubin has written eloquently in these pages about the diminishment of arts sections in daily papers, most particularly the *Globe and Mail*. Well, the same thing is happening right across the Postmedia News network.

Arts coverage - particularly performing arts and local literary arts - will never generate the kind of clicks digital ad salesmen like to see. (Our Wednesday entertainment section is now dominated by *Gastropost*, a two page supplement

of reader food stories.)



Stephen Hunt

The fact is that the Canadian arts scene is a fragile ecosystem. Cultural criticism is a huge part of it.

There used to be a National Newspaper Award for cultural criticism, but somewhere along the line it was eliminated.

Last year, I wrote the NNA people an e-mail complaining about that. Recently I went to submit my 2013 entry and noticed that the Arts and Entertainment category now includes something called Criticism. But it is defined this way:

“For clever, entertaining and exceptional news, features, criticism or column coverage on arts and entertainment, working with any journalistic format(s). Ideally representing well informed, compelling and entertaining writing in any arts field. A single story or body of work of three related or unrelated articles or pieces; one submission per entrant.”

That’s certainly a change from last year, but I’m not sure it’s much of an improvement. It feels almost as if they have now thrown arts coverage into one large category the same way editors are throwing arts, pop culture and lifestyle into a single section. (Best Arts & Entertainment story of 2014: Let’s submit Gastropost!)

The newspaper business these days is looking for any excuse it can find to eliminate things. They’ve already done it to book review sections. They’re doing it to arts sections generally. They may not be excluding cultural criticism out of malice, but it might not hurt to fire off an e-mail to the National Newspaper Awards asking for cultural criticism to be restored as a stand-alone category.

The suggestion has already been made by at least one member of our organisation that CTCA offer our Nathan Cohen Award as the National Newspaper Award for cultural criticism. It’s an interesting idea that I think is worth pursuing.

Responses?

And if you do want to send an e-mail to the NNA (please copy me) , it should go to their Program Director, Lauraine Woods at info@nna-ccj.ca.

Let’s get something like this going. Let’s keep the light of criticism burning.



Criticism under review at Brock: The Changing Face of Criticism in the Digital Age

Princeton University Professor Jill Dolan, *Globe and Mail* critic Kelly Nestruck and *Toronto Star* critic Richard Ouzounian will feature later this month at a colloquium at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario on the changing face of performing arts criticism in the 21st century. The colloquium will seek to take stock of the current critical scene in Niagara area specifically and southern Ontario more generally while imagining possible futures.

The event will take place from February 20-22 and will be offered without charge as part of the Walker Cultural Leaders series. Dolan is a distinguished feminist theatre scholar and the creator of the award-winning Feminist Spectator blog. The colloquium is also funded by Brock’s Humanities Research Institute, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council and the St. Catharines Performing Arts Centre.



Richard Ouzounian

According to organizer Karen Fricker, a professor at Brock, "arts criticism is changing rapidly in the contemporary era, as outlets for print criticism continue to dwindle, and the internet grows ever stronger as a site for the dissemination of



Karen Fricker

thought and opinion via online professional publications, and group and individual blog sites. In some quarters, these changes are viewed as a significant crisis of authority: whence subject-specific knowledge and experience if everyone and anyone can be a critic?

"Another view sees this as an evolution rather than crisis, as a period of positive democratization of dialogue about culture in the public sphere. The academy has stakes in this debate in that scholars rely on (and sometimes participate in) popular criticism as documentation, and have the capacity to deepen these dialogues by proffering a broad scholarly perspective on the history of critical practices, questions of authority and value, and on the implications of the digitalization of culture.

"Part of the goal of this gathering is to think through ways to grow a more robust critical infrastructure to support the burgeoning performing arts scene in the region in anticipation of the opening in 2015 of a new downtown complex housing the Marilyn I. Walker School for the Fine and Performing Arts, and the St. Catharines Centre for the Arts."

Open to the public, all events will take place in Sankey Chambers on the Brock campus. For those unable to attend, events will be live-streamed and live-tweeted at www.brockvideocenter.brocku.ca (click "Live Videos") and at #DARTcritics. For more information please email kfricker@brocku.ca.

In addition to her participation in this colloquium Prof. Dolan will offer a public lecture, "Moving the Body Politic: How Feminism and Theatre Inspire Social Re-imaginings," co-sponsored by Brock's Department of Dramatic Arts and its Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, on 21 February from 10 a.m. to noon.

Schedule:

Friday, 21 February

*2- 2:30 p.m. Welcome and presentation by students in DART 3P96: Studies in Praxis - Theatre Criticism

*2:30 - 4 p.m. Panel discussion: Critics and the arts in Niagara Participants: Jill Dolan; Monica Dufault, artistic director, Essential Collective Theatre; David Fancy, Department of Dramatic Arts, Brock University and co-artistic director, neXt Company Theatre; John Law, arts and entertainment writer, Sun Media; Sara Palmieri, co-founder, In the Soil Festival; Stephen Remus of the Niagara Arts Centre; Steve Solski, director of the St. Catharines Centre for the Performing Arts; Candice Turner-Smith, managing director, Niagara Symphony Orchestra.

*4:15 - 5:45 p.m. Panel discussion: Embedded criticism: a new way forward, or criticism-as-PR? Participants: Maddy Costa, critic and blogger, London, UK; Karen Fricker, Department of Dramatic Arts, Brock University; Andy Horwitz of Culturebot.org, New York; Jackie Maxwell, artistic director, Shaw Festival; Jacob Gallagher-Ross, State University of New York at Buffalo; Lawrence Switzky, University of Toronto at Mississauga.

Saturday, 22nd February

*10-10:30 a.m. Welcome and presentation by students in DART 3P96: Studies in Praxis - Theatre Criticism

*10:30 - 12 pm. Panel discussion: Bloggers, critics, and cultural legitimization. Participants: Jill Dolan; Karen Fricker; Andy Horwitz ; J. Kelly Nestruck, Richard Ouzonian; Holger Syme, chair, Department of English, University of Toronto at Mississauga; and Odette Yazbeck, director of public relations, Shaw Festival.



Jill Dolan

Matthew Jocelyn: Rethinking the Regionals

by Patricia Keeney and Don Rubin

When the Vancouver Playhouse – one of Canada’s major regional theatres – was forced to close down a little over a year ago because of dwindling audiences and a decision by the Canada Council not to keep afloat theatres that were on shaky financial ground, other regional companies across the country began to reconsider yet again the relationship between bucks at the box office and risk on the stage. One such was Toronto’s Canadian Stage Company, Canstage as it now calls itself.



CanStage’s Bluma Appel Theatre
in the St. Lawrence Centre

Based at the St. Lawrence Centre in Toronto’s downtown core, Canstage has over the decades been dedicated to a variety of approaches – Canadian-only programming, modern “hits of the world” programming, classical programming and even a mix of all three. Its subscription audiences have gone up and down wildly through the years as Canstage tried to keep up with the winds of change. At its height, the company boasted some 30,000 subscribers; at its nadir, some 7,000.

Four years ago, the Board of Directors decided to go in an entirely new direction by hiring expatriate Canadian director Matthew Jocelyn who, though born in Toronto, was best-known for his work at a small regional theatre equivalent in France, the Atelier du Rhin (Workshop of the Rhine) in Alsace.

At the Atelier, Jocelyn had wide latitude to experiment. Of course the company – like most French and German theatres

– was subsidized at an 80 per cent level meaning that only 20 per cent of the budget needed to come in via ticket sales. Risk is certainly possible at that level. This is virtually the opposite of Canadian regionals where only 20 per cent is subsidized and 80 per cent has to come in through the box office.

Why did Jocelyn opt to leave the safety of French subsidy and risk taking on a company in Canada whose existence has always been precarious?

This was one of the first questions Jocelyn was asked in mid-January when he was a guest at a CTCA-sponsored luncheon held in Toronto at the Wallace Gastropub (formerly the Twisted Kilt) where Toronto-area critics have been regularly meeting for the last few years.

Jocelyn told the group that he had initially turned down the position. “I really had no reason to leave Europe. I had established a reputation over ten years at the Atelier for new work, especially music and dance-related theatre work. I had opportunities to freelance in both France and Germany. And in other countries.”

On a visit home to see his father (historical note: his father was a volunteer dresser in the first Stratford company back in 1953), Jocelyn was asked to meet the Canstage Board even though he had already turned the position down. “They wanted to know why I wouldn’t take it on so I was happy to tell them. My explanation stimulated a lively discussion and they were persistent. I finally couldn’t resist the opportunity Canstage presented.”

But Jocelyn had a lot to re-learn about North American audiences, about anglophone audiences particularly and their commitment to text rather than to movement or light or sound. As much as Europe tends to have a director-centred theatre, anglophones tend to be script-centred and Jocelyn’s first two years trying to change that were, to say the least, uncomfortable.

“I thought I could do unknown plays such as *Fernando Krapp Wrote Me This Letter* with unknown casts and rely on a culture of curiosity to fill the house. Unfortunately, audiences stayed away and I had to rethink the approach.”

Part of that rethinking involved breaking down the traditional four or five-week subscription season runs and replacing them with eight or ten “events” of different lengths. Another part involved offering his high budget facilities to other companies – especially smaller and more experimental companies – to bring their own work to a larger stage. Or to bring quasi-musical works like the recently-opened British show *London Road* (a series of semi-operatic recitatifs without a core aria and filled with Greek-like choruses commenting on actions that never quite happen) built around the multiple murders of sex workers in London.

Not everyone’s glass of tea.

And then there’s guest directors such as Robert Lepage and Kim Collier. No traditional fare here. And audiences have remained suspicious.

“I wasn’t used to looking at bottom lines. It wasn’t part of what I did in Europe. But at Canstage I have found myself studying box office receipts almost daily. It’s part of what you have to do here as an artistic director. And if you don’t hit certain numbers, things can get even worse very quickly. The Canada Council, for instance, recently announced that they were cutting us by 13 per cent next year. How do you keep risking with that hanging over your head? How do you create in that atmosphere?”



Matthew Jocelyn

Nevertheless, Jocelyn says that he believes in large theatres like Canstage, in what he likes to call “institutions.” But he hopes to find a way for them – and the councils – to offer more creative budgetary thinking.

As for critics, he recognizes that they too have a job to do. “Some have been very supportive of the new vision. Others have not. I can accept that as long as they understand what Canstage is attempting and at least articulate that.”

He is also not so sure that peer evaluation – the gold standard since the concept of arts councils emerged in Canada – is the best or only way to go.

“The arts community is really rather small and if you step on someone’s toes today, it will come back to get you down the road. So perhaps we need something other than peer review.” One idea discussed with CTCA was the creation of travelling teams of professional evaluators who would move across the country regularly seeing as much theatre as possible and truly understanding what each company was really attempting to do.

(Editor’s Note: Professional evaluators used to be called critics.)

“In the end,” said Jocelyn, “we need big institutions like Canstage. They are the real carriers of metaphor in our society and cultures need metaphor to grow. That’s what I want Canstage to offer. I keep that idea front and centre with the work we do and the people we hire. I could have stayed in Europe and would have continued taking from ‘the centre’ for my own work. Here I have an opportunity to be at the centre and to give back to the whole theatre community.”

A challenge at every level. A challenge for every regional theatre in the country.

Conservative Politics and the Canada Council

by Robin Breon

Well the cat’s out of the bag now, and the caterwauling is just beginning.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his cabinet have not put one penny of new money into the Canada Council’s operations budget since coming into office. Indeed, many within his circle of conservative ideologues do not even

believe in public money going to support artistic endeavors - and their funding record to date proves it.



Kate Taylor

In an attempt to triage the crisis, the CC has turned inward on itself and Kate Taylor's recent article in the *Globe and Mail* ("Why the Canada Council's theatre budget decision left some companies crying foul" 7/02/14) indicates that this is only the beginning. In its wisdom (or lack of it) the CC has decided to set aside 8 per cent of its 22-million dollar theatre budget and apply cuts to 117 English language companies in order to make room for 11 new companies to receive small operating grants (core funding) for the first time.

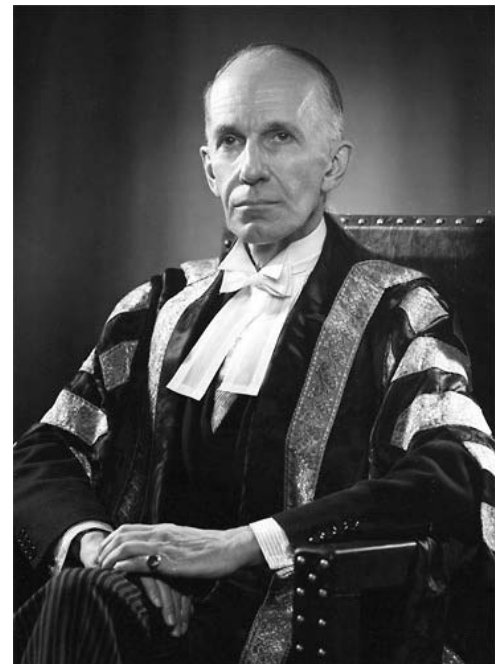
This death by a thousand cuts is being carried out by the faceless bureaucrats of the CC with larger companies being forced to take the hardest hits. The Neptune Theatre in Halifax saw their grant cut by 8 per cent and the Canadian Stage Company is seeing a whopping 13 per cent of its CC grant cut. Before the beneficiaries in the smaller companies start

to clap their hands in glee with the thought of the fat cats finally being cut down to size, a word of caution.

These cutbacks, which are being ironically heralded by the CC under the grand rubric of "generational renewal" are essentially carving smaller pieces of what is already a very small pie. To put this in a little bit of easily recognizable spending priorities, the Canada Council received just over 100 million dollars annually out of the federal treasury last year to support all of the disciplines that fall within its mandate. This equates to just about 1/10 the cost of one F-35 jet fighter airplane that the federal government wants to purchase at a cost of almost 1 billion dollars per plane (they currently estimate that the Air Force needs 65 new fighter jets). This is a political decision that comes with its own rationale of what and where our infrastructure needs to go over the next 20 to 30 years.

When the Royal Commission on Development in the Arts (the Massey Report) came out in 1951, it was very wary about direct federal funding to artists and arts organizations. It was more of a bricks and mortar support the arts kind of endeavor back then. But since there were no dedicated arts councils at the provincial level that worked evenly across the country, there was seen to be a need to establish a federal coordinating body, thus the Canada Council was born.

Perhaps it's time that federal funding for the arts be distributed to the provinces by way of dedicated transfer payments (the same way health and education have a separate funding envelopes) to be then apportioned by a more localized jury system. The present system is so starved and disjointed to the extent they cannot even harmonize on-line arts applications between municipalities, province and federal arts councils. Some parts of the Canada Council application cannot even be filled out on-line. One must print it out and then fill it in by hand! Convening juries at three different levels (city, provincial and federal) is a huge duplication of effort resulting in a waste of human resources.



Vincent Massey

The Canadian Conference for the Arts claimed to represent over 400,000 Canadian artists. When the organization shuttered in 2012 you didn't hear a peep out of any of them. The CCA had long ago ceased being relevant to the daily lives of working artists and wouldn't dream of being proactive on any of the issues I raise here. So there exists a vacuum to my mind. One that will be addressed when the artists themselves organize and begin to speak out. Matthew Jocelyn is part of that awakening.

He is quite right to be baffled by the recent cut back of 13 per cent. Right now, CanStage is enjoying a very strong season. If there is any justice at all in the merit system and jury ranking of the Canada Council, Canadian Stage - on artistic merit alone - should be rewarded with an increase this year!

How did the CC arrive at this decision? In what artistic and administrative areas did one of Toronto's premiere civic

venues fall short and by how much? And how does this compare with venues of similar size across the country, say in Edmonton or Montreal?

When Matthew Jocelyn calls for "more transparency" with regard to how these judgments are made, he is referring essentially to his "grade" from the Canada Council this year and he is asking no more from his federal funders than you or I would ask of a professor who gives us a B- on an end of term paper rather than the A that we think we deserve. When we ask for a meeting with the professor to see the grade breakdown we would expect to see some basic arithmetic there that would form the rationale behind the letter grade. This is pretty basic stuff and the Canada Council has an obligation and a responsibility to their clients to show them some evidence based math when they cut so deeply.

But Jocelyn and his colleagues at Canadian Stage should not have to shoulder this protest all by themselves. Every artist, every arts journalist and every performing arts union should be supporting Canadian Stage very publicly right now. Where are they? The unions (and I include here Equity, the Musicians Union, IATSE and, by extension, ACTRA) sometimes are so nearsighted from looking so closely at the fine print of their own collective bargaining agreements that they forget to speak out on the big picture. And in this case it is the big picture federal cut backs that will eventually trickle down as unemployment for the membership they represent.

There are two big elections looming over the next two years, one provincially in Ontario and of course the federal election in 2015. Today, the state of the arts in our country is not even on the agenda. It needs to be.

Report from Victoria: Home is a Beautiful Word at the Belfry

by Sheila Martindale

Victoria – where snow is the blossoms that fall from the cherry trees in February; where elegantly-groomed horses pull tourists in decorated carriages around the beautiful city; where it is possible to live on the streets without freezing to death; where homelessness itself is the visible underbelly of this west coast jewel.



Joel Bernbaum

Actor, playwright and journalist Joel Bernbaum, founder of Sum Theatre in Saskatoon, has spent the last few years here, interviewing homeless people -- on the streets, in the shelters, in soup kitchens, in jails and rehab centres. Bernbaum also gathered comments from office workers, from ordinary people in ordinary neighbourhoods, from folks in coffee shops, even from elementary school students. Everybody, he found, had an opinion on homelessness.

And he has created from his many interview transcripts a powerful play called *Home is a Beautiful Word*. This is in other words a 'found' play, otherwise known as verbatim theatre, constructed from the very words of those on the streets, those who try to make their lives better, and from residents of Victoria who live with this uncomfortable situation on a daily basis.

The Belfry Theatre (now under the artistic direction of Michael Shamata) is well-known for presenting premieres (which the rest of Canada only gets to see later on, with any luck and good sense on the part of theatre directors across the country.)

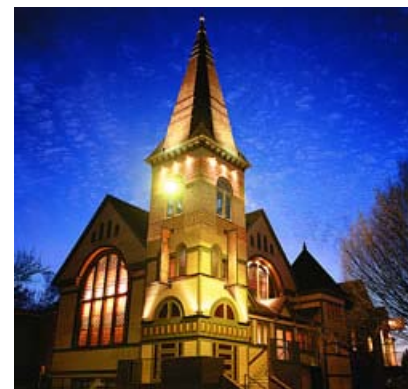
The three men and two women (Kelt Eccleston, Kayvon Kelly, Kevin Loring, Tracey Moore and Yoshié Bancroft) who comprise the cast, have multiple roles: from teenagers to old and seasoned street people, from failed business owners to First Nations survivors of the notorious 'residential schools.' They also portray a smattering of social workers, do-gooders, and genuine generous souls devoted to addressing this challenging problem. And sometimes they speak in the voices of everyday citizens.

For two hours they keep us riveted to our seats as they tell their characters' stories. For two hours we stop seeing the faceless, nameless beggars we pass every day, and start seeing real people with histories and emotions – people who

are all someone's son, daughter, brother, sister, one-time sweetheart.

Co-directed by Shamata and Bernbaum, *Home is a Beautiful Word* owes a lot to set designer April Viczko and lighting designer Rebekah Johnson; the backdrop screen not only sets the stage, but helps guide us through the maze of characters and locations.

This is not entertainment in any traditional sense of the word, it is not romance or comedy (although it has some surprisingly humorous moments.) It is cogent, challenging theatre; it is real-life drama which makes us look at others, and maybe even at ourselves, differently.



The Belfry Theatre

Ottawa Report: Capital Critics Circle Award to Mamet's *November*

by Iris Winston

The Capital Critics Circle's 14th annual theatre awards for plays presented in English in the National Capital Region during the 2012-2013 season were announced in December in ceremonies at the National Arts Centre. The Best Professional Production award went to Seven Thirty Productions' version of David Mamet's *November* directed by John P. Kelly.



Jackie Richardson

Todd Duckworth, who played the President in *November*, was named Best Actor. Best Actress was Jackie Richardson for the title role in *Big Mama! The Willie Mae Thornton Story* by Audrei-Kairen, a Belfry Theatre production from Victoria seen at the National Arts Centre.

The Award for Best director went to Rona Waddington for her production of *Hamlet* done at the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival in Prescott while Best Design went John Webber (lighting) and Jamie Griffiths (projection) for *The Edward Curtis Project*, written and directed by Marie Clements, a co-production of the National Arts Centre and the Great Canadian Theatre Company in association with Red Diva Projects.

The Audrey Ashley Award, named for the late Audrey Ashley, the *Ottawa Citizen's* longest serving theatre reviewer, and sponsored by theatre producer Barbara Crook, a former theatre critic at the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Vancouver Sun*, went to Paul Rainville.

Additional awards were made for Best Community Theatre production and, for the first time, Best Student production.

Members of the selection committee for the 2012-2013 season English theatre awards were Alvina Ruprecht, Patrick Langston, Jamie Portman, Connie Meng, Rajka Stefanovska, Maja Stefanovska, Barbara Gray and Iris Winston. The awards were sponsored by Coyle Publishing, Barbara Crook Greenberg, the *Ottawa Citizen*, Alan Dean Photography, Nick Wojtas Photography, L-D Tool & Die, Jim Robertson, the Ottawa Bagelshop and Deli, and OYP Theatre School.



Rona Waddington

Harping on Harper: Ottawa's Friday Night Fights

by Alvina Ruprecht

The following appeared as an opinion piece in the Hill Times, a daily paper published for civil servants and members of Parliament. It was written following a debate organized by the Great Canadian Theatre Company after the late September opening of Michael Healey's play Proud. Could public debates after shows be an idea picked up by other theatres?



Eric Coates

The Friday Night Fight debates organized by GCTC artistic director Eric Coates, *The Hill Times* and Embassy after each of this season's plays, are an excellent idea. Inviting guests who are not necessarily involved with theatre, but who have reputations in other fields, could be a good way to attract a non-theatre-going public, and even incite the more passive of us to speak up.

That first Friday evening, moderated by a wise, thoughtful, and thoroughly engaging Jim Creskey, publisher of *The Hill Times*, generated an excitement I have rarely seen in a theatre.

The place was packed for the first debate, the atmosphere was relaxed, free beer helped of course, and the audience was of all ages, which is very important. It seemed the perfect event to satisfy all the expectations generated by the poster add showing two people snarling at each other.

We saw David Akin (Sun Media, journalist and TV personality) and Michael de Adder (*Hill Times* editorial cartoonist) facing off and there was a promise of blood on the floor! In fact, this turned into an evening of promotion and voyeurism: promotion for the play, promotion for Sun News, *The Hill Times*, and a slightly voyeuristic trip through the world of the journalist on the Hill.

Both guests began by praising *Proud*, written and starring Michael Healey, and assuring us that Healey captured Prime Minister Stephen Harper on stage. De Adder spoke about his vision of Harper. His books on display showed us how his sense of humour explodes in his cartoons. As a visual artist who does not deal with words, it seems fair to say that his best arguments are no doubt visual rather than verbal and his contribution to the discussion was therefore the odd very funny statement that had us all in stitches.

However, he did not express himself quite as glibly as his opponents. Akin told us about all the books about Harper that Healey had to read in order to get into his character. He recognized how closely the play represented the Prime Minister because Akin spends his professional life as a journalist on the Hill, dealing with the PMO and Harper's entourage as well as the man himself. So how could we doubt such excellent credentials?

And then he moved over to his own journalistic experiences which were interesting because how often do we get off-the-cuff and intimate chatter by a professional who sees what we do not see?

Thus, the play quickly disappeared and we listened to personal stories about Akin, who dominated the evening, as any hope of debate evaporated. Surprisingly, it never occurred to Akin (a former theatre critic) to say that theatre is essentially fiction. Of course, Harper inspires the play, but it is not supposed to be a precise imitation of the man. Why do people get caught in that trap of looking for reality? But this speaker went further; he insisted that journalists don't always get it right either because they accuse Harper of cutting budgets in such and such a sector, but in fact he cut certain budgets a lot less than one might think.



Prime Minister
Stephen Harper

Why, the Prime Minister has even increased the number of people in the PMO when journalists accuse him of cutting personnel (of course the slashing of civil servants is never mentioned). Suddenly, some journalists are compared to "bad" playwrights when they don't get the character right. This became a promotional speech not for the play but for

Harper himself.

By now, the evening had nothing more to do with theatre, but it did show that Harper is a hot commodity and that he attracts people because we know very little about him. In fact Harper, not the play, was the centre of attention and it was all positive attention for our Prime Minister, the best he could ever hope for, especially coming from the arts community.



Michael Healey

Thus, it is a shame that the two guests were not able to extract things from the play that could have engendered controversy and thus created some real debate about the play, and perhaps even about the man. Is Healey's portrait too positive? not critical enough? What kind of parody is this really? Is it possible to make serious fun of a leading political figure in Canada? What about censorship?

Of course, the play is well-written and beautifully performed, but there are a lot of questions that could have sparked a stimulating discussion. Some timid voice in the audience dared to ask about journalists not doing enough in-depth research into Conservative budget miscalculations.

That was the sole suggestion of controversy all evening, but it did put our guests on the spot and it was dismissed rapidly.

Makes you think doesn't it?

Notes From Bucharest: CTCA Members at Young Critics Seminar

by Carly Maga and Maja Stefanovska

As the ad says, membership has its advantages. Membership in CTCA means that you are eligible to attend international events, including seminars for established critics, the biannual IATC world congress and seminars specifically for young critics up to the age of about 35. Seminars in each of the categories take place about twice a year in different locations. This past October, two CTCA members – Carly Maga of Toronto and Maja Stefanowska of Ottawa, both freelancers – attended a young critics seminar in Bucharest, Romania and supplied the following reports to Critically Speaking.

The Seminar

By Carly Maga (Toronto)

While young actors, directors, and playwrights are fortunately able to pick and choose between various development programs, educational institutions, and artistic internships to sharpen their skills, a young theatre critic can feel quite professionally isolated.

In the very early stages of my theatre criticism career, I felt a kind of empathy with other emerging artists as a 20-something woman attempting to break into a competitive (and apparently dying) field. A lack of resume cred or formal training, however, felt like a barrier, and at times gave way to a "What makes me so special?" mentality.

The idea of mentorship and instruction in criticism came up several times during the recent International Association of Theatre Critics young critics' seminar in Bucharest, Romania – one of the few resources I've come across that is designed specifically for the development of critics at the start of their careers.

The four Romanian members of the group were in the middle of a post-secondary program in theatre criticism, the existence of which took many of us by surprise. Meanwhile, a participant from Moldova argued that a reason for the decline in new writers in her country was a lack of seasoned critics willing to share their knowledge with greener colleagues. Interestingly, in some parts of the world, criticism is just as based in theory and tradition as the art form they critique.

Clearly, it's a much different story in countries like Canada where, as Scottish critic Mark Brown, leader of the English seminar, pointed out, there are few opportunities for practical training of any sort in the field. My fellow young critics from central and eastern Europe were speaking of training opportunities – grants included -- of which I was unspeakably jealous.

But Brown, hailing from Glasgow, didn't have that educational support either when he entered criticism. Neither did the member of the seminar from New Zealand. It certainly doesn't seem to be in the Anglophone tradition.

For Brown, theatre criticism is "first and foremost about style." One that's individual to the particular writer, and likely one that's best discovered on their own. We all tried to evolve our particular style during the busy week of theatergoing and discussion.

Indeed, the IATC seminar in Bucharest was more than just a boost to my resume, and even more than just a purely educational experience (which it definitely was; Brown's 21 Asides on Theatre Criticism has a few exceptional gems I hope to make part of my own practice). But it was also, unexpectedly, a cathartic exercise to meet with peers from around the world.



Carly Maga

Instead of being asked to put our thoughts down on paper, we were asked to discuss our ideas, to toss them around and, I must say, they took us in some very exciting directions. Certainly we realized that we were all facing similar challenges: increasing job insecurity, the fact that very few full-time female critics have families, and the potential danger of the blurring lines between blogging and critiquing.

I would certainly go back to another IATC young critics seminar, not just to add another bullet point to my resume, but to remind myself again that there is life in theatre criticism outside of the city I cover, and that criticism itself can be just as lively as the work we write about even when not tied to the formality of education and training.

The Festival

By Maja Stefanovska (Ottawa)

The 2013 edition of Romania's National Theatre Festival, held this past fall in Bucharest, was also the meeting point for a fascinating Young Critics Seminar which I was happily able to attend as one of two Canadian delegates. Such events, regularly sponsored by the International Association of Theatre Critics, involved attendance at a myriad of plays ranging from re-workings of classical pieces to more modern creations.

The first thing that struck me was the excitement and bustle surrounding the Festival as a whole. Everywhere I turned, there were theatre critics and other members of the audience milling about. Almost every opening night performance also had at least two or three television cameras transmitting. The Festival was also attended by a plethora of international theatre critics as well, most members of the IATC.



Mark Brown and English Language
Young Critic Seminar Group

The seminar was essentially a series of round-table discussion, with Scottish critic Mark Brown serving as seminar leader. During the sessions, we discussed everything from the plays we saw to the state of modern theatre criticism. Some participants came from countries with a long and rich critical history (mostly these were from central and Eastern European countries), while others (mostly those of us from North America and New Zealand) came from countries where the critical tradition is not so formal and we are expected to find our own individual voices. It was exactly this variety which made the discussion so interesting.

Coming from Canada, this was certainly not a cheap trip to make, especially for someone just out of school. However, the richness of the experience, including the Festival's diverse range of plays and the discussions around them, broadened my perspective in an invaluable way. What struck me most was the approach Romanian theatre makers and critics (and, as many other participants informed me, Eastern European theatre people in general) take to theatre production generally. It is far different than the North American approach I am used to.

The Festival seemed to present two distinct types of theatre. There were the classics, some staged very faithfully to the original script (such as the Romanian (German) State Theatre's production of Chekhov's *The Seagull*); and those taking liberties with the text such as Liviu Rebreanu's *Târgu-Mureş* National Theatre (this company did a brilliant production of Molière's *School for Wives*) and UNTEATRU's production of Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire*.

On the other hand, there were quite a few modern, more avant-garde productions which hinged on the absurd such as the Bălcescu Cultural Centre's *Pictures from the Insect's Life* and Nord Theater's *Paparazzi or Chronicle of an Aborted Sunrise*. Whether it was a faithful representation of a classic or a daring approach to a modern work, the director's hand was always evident. Indeed, a topic of discussion that kept coming up time and time again during the seminars was the idea of the "tyranny of the director" in Central and Eastern Europe versus the "tyranny of the text" that reigns supreme in most Anglophone countries.

For me, the classics were stronger than the more avant-garde productions. A particular standout was Cristian Juncu's production of *School for Wives*, which was a perfect example of balance between story and directing. This was also one of the few plays we saw without subtitles, yet I followed the action easily and, indeed, was much more entertained than in some of the plays with subtitles. Juncu set his version of this classic in a vaguely modern era and Kaszoni Attila's lighting imbued the story with a movie-like quality. The set served as a constant underpinning of the play's main themes. A strong cast was led by Nicu Mihoc whose Arnolphe managed to be modern while still staying true to the character's essence.



Festivalul National de Teatru

The Nord Theatre's version of Matei Vişniec's *Paparazzi or Chronicle of an Aborted Sunrise* was aesthetically beautiful and full of interesting directorial choices but ultimately suffered from too many gimmicks. The story in the end was lost under all the directorial trappings. While some of the scenes worked beautifully as tableaux, unfortunately, the production as a whole suffered from the heavy hand of the director, which ended up obscuring even the acting. Having said this, Ovidiu Caiţa and Bekesi Robert's lighting design was magical and added an eerie atmosphere to the production.

The Festival's offerings were diverse and the discussions surrounding them during the young theatre critics' seminar were valuable, opening up debate on the nature and place of theatre criticism today. Such cross-cultural exchange will surely impact the breadth and depth of my own criticism in the future.

The Schedule

Wednesday, 30 October.

Arrival Day in Bucharest.

Thursday, 31 October.

1:30 to 5:30: Introduction to seminar leaders: Jean-Pierre Han (French group); Mark Brown (English group). First meeting with seminar participants.

6 p.m.: See the Nord Theatre of Satu Mare's production of *Paparazzi or Chronicle of an Aborted Sunrise* by Matei Vişniec, directed by Ovidiu Caiţa. 1 hour 40 minutes. At the Radu Beligan Hall of the Comedy Theatre.

8:30 p.m.: See the National Theatre of Targu-Mures production of *School for Wives* by Moliere, directed by Cristian Juncu. 2 hours 30 minutes. At the Liviu Ciulei Hall of the Bulandra Theatre.

Friday, 1 November

3:30 to 5:30 p.m.: Seminar. Introduction to theatre and theatre criticism in each participating country.

6:00 p.m.: See the German State Theatre of Timisoara's production of *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov, directed by Yuri Kordonsky. 3 hours 10 minutes. At the National Opera.

10:00 p.m.: See the Unteatru's production of *Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, directed by Andrei and Andreea Grosu. 1 hour 40 minutes. At Unteatru.

Saturday, 2 November

10 to 1 p.m.: Seminar

2:30 to 4:30 p.m.: Seminar

5:00 p.m.: See the Unesco Cultural Centre's production of *The Insect Play* by Karel and Josef Capek, directed by Victor Ioan Frunza. 1 hour 20 minutes. At the Unesco Cultural Centre.

9:30 p.m.: See the National Theatre of Timisoara's production of *Adam and Eve*, directed by Alexander Hausvater. 1 hour 45 minutes. At the Majestic Hall of the Odeon Theatre.

Sunday, 3 November

10 to 1 p.m.: Seminar

2:30 to 6:30 p.m.: Final Seminar

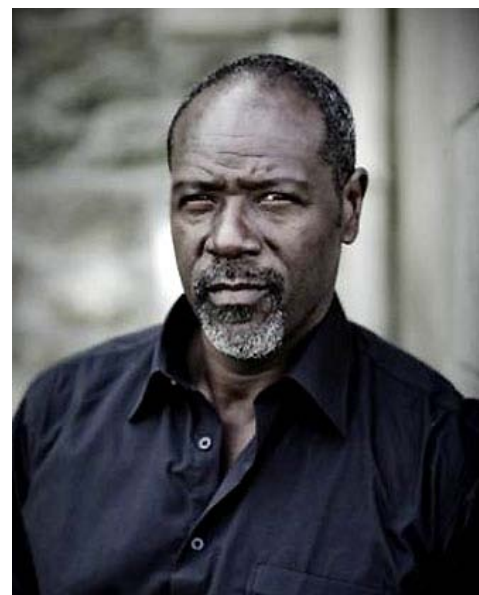
Departure Day. For those staying, free choice of evening performances

Series Launched in Paris: Plays of the Caribbean To Be Published by Alvina Ruprecht

For the past four years, I have been collaborating on the publication of a Repertory of Caribbean Theatre that seeks to bring together the most emblematic plays of the region. A series of groundbreaking works are now being chosen because of their form and/or their importance in drawing attention to critical moments in Caribbean history.

The director of the project is Jean-Michel Martial, actor, director and artistic director of the Theatre company l'Autre Souffle. Originally from Guadeloupe (but whose professional career developed in Paris) his collaborators are specialists on the region and come from African, Spanish, French, English, Dutch and Creole-speaking backgrounds.

Our main task over the last few years has been to exchange information, draw up lists of plays, determine the selection criteria and finally decide upon the 30 or so plays that will be published in individual volumes. Each volume will contain a single play translated into all five languages, as well as an analysis of the work by a specialist, an introduction by Martial and a commentary by the director of the play's first production, as well as bibliographical and biographical material.



Jean-Michel Martial

The project will obviously break down old barriers among the islands as well as the cultural obstacles imposed by colonial education that predetermined the legitimate forms of theatre in many of the areas concerned.



Simone Schwarz-Bart

Thus, the project will create new ways of seeing the world and the region by offering a new visibility to these plays, allowing them to circulate, not only in the Americas but also throughout the rest of the world.

The launch of the first volume took place in Paris in November and included a symposium on Caribbean theatre at the Petit Palais. The honour of being first in the series went to Guadeloupian Simone Schwarz-Bart for her play *Ton beau capitaine*. Published by Éditions de l'Amandier, the volume came in at 188 pages.

The symposium included writers, directors, actors and French government representatives including the Minister of Culture and Communications. The event was supported by the French Ministry of Overseas Territories, by the regional councils of Guadeloupe and Martinique and by the City of Paris.

The launch symposium was attended by some of the most prestigious names in Caribbean theatre. Among them were Vivian Martinez, editor of the theatre journal *Conjunto* from Cuba; Roberto Ramos-Perea, executive director of the Spanish theatre archives at the Ateneo puertorriqueño; French critic Irene Sadowska-Guillon who has done much to disseminate translations of Spanish theatre in Europe; Ghislaine Gadjard and writer Ernest Pepin from Guadeloupe; Michael Reckord, theatre critic for the Jamaican daily *The Gleaner*; Trinidad playwright Rawle Gibbons; and playwright Alwin Bully from Dominica whose play *The Ruler* will be published later in the series.

The hope is that publication will allow students, artists and all the populations concerned a chance to discover the writing of "other Caribbean" theatres. Ideally, directors from all the areas would become interested in staging these plays. In this sense, the project has as much a theatrical focus as it does an inter-Caribbean one.

Among those titles selected for publication are the English-language plays *Odale's Choice* by Edward Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados), *The Ruler* by Alwin Bully (Dominica) *Couvade* by Michael Gilkes (Guyana), *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* by Erroll John (Trinidad), *The Dragon Can't Dance* by Earl Lovelace (Trinidad), *Smile Orange* by Trevor Rhone (Jamaica), *An Echo in the Bone* by Dennis Scott (Jamaica), *Eight Bellywoman Bangarang* by the Sistren collective (Jamaica) and *Dream on Monkey Mountain* by Derek Walcott (St. Lucia).

French and Creole plays chosen include, from Martinique, *La véredique histoire de Hourya* by Daniel Boukman, *Une saison au Congo* by Aime Césaire, *Rosanie Soleil* by Ina Césaire, *La Nef* by M. Césaire, *Une autre histoire ou Le Malentendu* by A.J. Laou, *Dessalines our la passion de l'indépendance* by Vincent Placol and *Don Juan* by Georges Mauvois; from Haiti, *Théodora* by Syto Cavé, *Anacaona* by Jean Métellus, *Foukifora* by Frank Étienne and *Antigon* by Feliks Moriso Lewa; from Guadeloupe, *An tan Revolisyon* by Maryse Condé, *Trames* by Gerty Dambury, *Boni d'oro* by E. Stephenson and *Moun Koubari* by Jose Jernidier.

Other plays may be added later.
