



New Stage Plays From Canada: The Jury's Choice in 2009

In 2006, the Embassy of Canada in Germany (Berlin) set up a jury of experts to study and select new Canadian stage plays with the potential for success in German-speaking countries. Since 2007, this initiative has been held in close cooperation with the Québec Government Office in Berlin. Wanted: Contemporary drama!

Over 100 plays in English or French were submitted in 2009, all written within the last three years. While some had already premiered in Canada, others lay undiscovered. The variety of subject matter was impressive, the plays concerned not only with identity, sexual liberation, partnerships or family, but also with globalization, immigration or the situation of the Aboriginal communities in Canada. They dealt with the biographies of historical figures, real events, the impact of genetic manipulation, fictitious social systems, mythical themes, and much more.

The jury comprising Remsi Al Khalisi (dramaturge, Potsdam Theatre), Eva Behrendt (theatre critic), Barbara Engelhardt (publicist, editor and translator), Christian Holtzhauer (dramaturge, Stuttgart State Theatre) and Andrea Zagorski (project coordinator, German Centre of the International Theatre Institute and jury chair) chose five plays that stand out due to the choice of subject matter as well as their linguistic and dramatic qualities.

The following plays were selected:

Le sourire de la morte by André Ducharme (Québec)

Grounded by Miranda Huba (British Columbia)

The December Man by Colleen Murphy (Ontario)

Choke by Cathleen Rootsaert (Alberta)

If We Were Birds by Erin Shields (Ontario)

We hope this selection arouses your interest. We are more than happy to send you the full scripts. Please direct your enquiries to:

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This year we are especially pleased that all the selected plays will, for the first time, be translated into German by renowned translators. The translations will be available from January 2010.

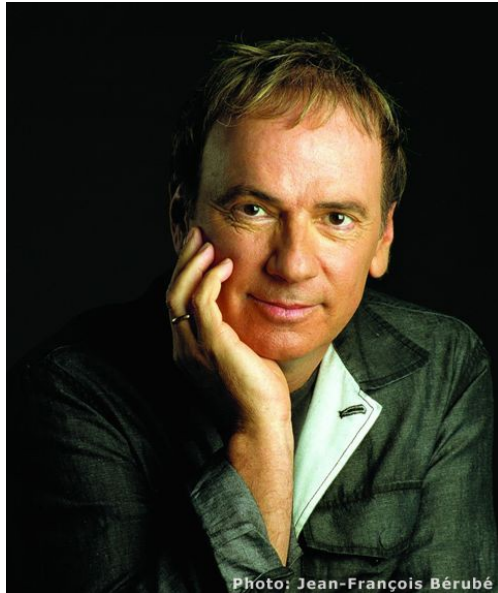
We would like to thank all our Canadian partners and supporting organizations, in particular Heritage Canada and the Canada Council for the Arts in Ottawa, the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec, the Centre des Auteurs Dramatiques (CEAD) in Montreal and the Playwrights Guild of Canada in Toronto.

Andrea Zagorski

Jury Chair

André Ducharme, *Le sourire de la morte* (Québec, 2008)

(Cast: 2 f, 3 m)



It took Jeanne five long years to go to the prison. There she visits Louis, who is serving a sentence for murdering her sister, Emilie. Yet nothing is clear in this case: Why did Emilie die an allegedly violent death with a smile on her face? Is the eccentric Louis really her murderer? And why is Jeanne still struggling today with feelings of guilt about her crazy little sister?

During the prison visits, a past world unfolds, but not the truth. It is a world between the city and the forest, between family and seclusion, between proclaimed normality and pathological stubbornness. Childhood in particular has left scars, which open up one after the other to reveal humiliation and drill, a fight for attention and gnawing jealousy. All three fight like wounded animals, including Emilie, who, although deceased,

is present as she remains alive in the memory and daily lives of the others. Their wounds make them vicious and aggressive. But, time and again, their hurt allows profound insights into the three characters. Like cat and mouse, Louis and Jeanne provoke each other, manipulate, scheme and seduce in quick-witted dialogue. In their recollections and the scenes looking at their lives, questions concerning guilt and truth are posed subjectively. André Ducharme's dense language and his impartiality in refusing to provide evidence or explanations create a crude world, glossing over nothing, in which no-one is ever completely with it. And, in a somewhat incidental manner, he poses the question of freedom, also of life and death, from a different perspective.

Barbara Engelhardt

André Ducharme (b. 1951 in Berthierville, Québec) works as a cultural journalist and has written various radio features; a play (*Léola Louvain écrivaine*, 1989); a story (*Papa, maman*, 1990); a pamphlet (*Pour en finir avec les casse-cul*, Boréal, 1992); a short story (*Dialogue au thé noir*, 1993); a biography of Diane Dufresne (*Cendrillon kamikaze*, Mnémosyne, 1994); a novel (*L'homme en morceaux*, Leméac, 2004) ; a Christmas story (*Ma sœur mange des boules*, Contes urbains 2008). His play *Le sourire de la morte* (Dramaturges Éditeurs, 2008) premiered in February 2009. Ducharme lives in Montréal.

Miranda Huba, *Grounded* (British Columbia, 2008)

(Cast: 4 f, 1 m)



Once upon a time there were three little girls whose names corresponded to their ages: Three, Five and Eight. They were told the fairy tale of the king and queen who could not have children. This made the little girls very sad and they bravely signed an agreement obliging them to have babies for other people as soon as they were grown up. But first they were sent on a long journey that was to take them to six large, connected airports. To prevent anything happening to them on the way, the little girls had their pussies removed so that they could later be reinserted intact for reproductive purposes...

As with every good fairy tale, *Grounded* contains a dark horror story. Miranda Huba sends the three girls, condemned to become breeding machines, on an educational journey through the globalized world of femininity, to the airports of love, stardom, consumerism, war and hunger. In each of these dystopian “non-places”, the trio gets involved in discussions with an ancient, though bigoted, deity,

whereby the three prove themselves to be quick-witted and eager to learn - tough bitches in fact. But the sixth, decisive stage of their journey is approaching inexorably: the airport of broken dreams. There awaits Jack, the inseminator... *Grounded* is wicked, crazy fun, post-feminist cynicism at its best, without demographic debates, simple accusations or even explanations—and a real challenge for theatre directors.

Eva Behrendt

Miranda Huba (b. 1980 in Ashcroft, British Columbia) is a playwright, actor and founding member of TigerMilk Collective in Vancouver, Canada. Writing credits include: *The History of My Domestication*, *Terrible girls, who are not really terrible*, and *Victory of course*. She was a recipient of the Enbridge Award for an Emerging Playwright which went toward the development of her play about the fashion world, *House of KOSA*. She has performed with numerous companies and is currently working on a new one woman show, *Candy Tastes Nice*. Huba lives in Ashcroft.

Colleen Murphy, *The December Man* (Ontario, 2006)
(Cast: 1 f, 2 m)



Photo: Theresa Ho

In her 2006 play *The December Man*, Colleen Murphy tells the story of the growing estrangement and subsequent tragic end of a family of three, which is all the more moving due to its unemotional tone. The play is based on a real event that took place in December 1989, when a man ran amok at the *École Polytechnique* in Montreal, killing 14 young women. But neither the event itself nor the direct victims or their relatives are at the centre of the play. Rather, the author directs attention towards the long-term impact of such a tragedy, also involving those who actually escaped with their lives.

Kathleen and Benoît Fournier, a couple around 60 from a modest background, cannot get over the death of their only son, Jean. Also a student at the *École Polytechnique*, he had managed to flee the shooting, only then to be plagued by feelings of powerlessness and a fear of failure. He starts to neglect his studies, spending his time in front of the television or at karate class, which he hopes will help him overcome his anxieties. His parents are not capable of finding appropriate words of comfort and the bond with their son weakens. When Jean commits suicide, Kathleen and Benoît lose the strength to go on and decide to kill themselves too.

Murphy's play begins with the final preparations for the couple's suicide. Then, in eight stages, it goes back to the incident that triggered the tragedy. This device of telling the play backwards allows the author to focus attention away from the concrete event to the increasing lack of communication among the family members and their inability to listen to, let alone help, one another.

Christian Holtzhauer

Colleen Murphy (b. 1954 in Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec) grew up in Northern Ontario. She is an award winning playwright and filmmaker. Her play *The December Man* won numerous awards, among them the 2007 Governor General's Literary Award for Drama. Other plays include *Beating Heart Cadaver*, performed under the title *Herz schlägt Tod* starring Katja Riemann at the Hans Otto Theatre in Potsdam, *The Piper*, *Down in Adoration* *Falling* and *All Other Destinations are Cancelled*. Currently she is playwright in residence for Tapestry New Opera Works in Toronto where she is writing the libretto for a five act opera.

Cathleen Rootsart, *Choke* (Alberta, 2007)

(Cast: 1 f, 2 m)



Photo: Darren Greenwood

The notion of having a career or taking responsibility has so far played a somewhat subordinate role in the lives of Dylan and Greg. Dylan is in his early thirties and lives with his mother. He has neither a traineeship nor an occupation and dreams of working for NASA as an astronomer. That would be a great job, but, until then, he will continue to smoke hashish, play on his Xbox and tell his online girlfriend, Mai-Lee, about the challenges of his daily life. His older brother, Greg, has never given up his student job and can now look back on a 15-year career in the vegetable section of a supermarket. Although he has his own apartment and has been engaged for six years, he also spends much of his time at his mother's house and eventually moves back in when his girlfriend asks him to choose between marrying her or splitting up. The widow Cathrine certainly has a great deal of understanding for her boys and sees to all their needs. But then Cathrine has a stroke and needs

constant care herself. Now it is Dylan and Greg's turn to look after her...

Cathleen Rootsart describes neither a perfect nor a dysfunctional family, but rather she follows the lives of three people in an exceptional situation. For Dylan in particular, this new circumstance marks the changing point in his life. In short scenes and pointed dialogue, Rootsart tells a moving story without sentimentality. *Choke* is a true tragicomedy.

Andrea Zagorski

Cathleen Rootsart (b. 1970 in Winnipeg, Manitoba) is a playwright, actor and director. She has written for stage, radio and television. Plays include *Choke*, *After You*, *House of Cats*, *Make Me*, *Legacy* and *Mimi Amok*. Cathleen has twice received the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award for Outstanding New Play. Her magical-realist work, *Abigail in Twilight*, was the grand-prize winner of the Alberta Playwriting Competition. Cathleen has been playwright in residence for Theatre Network and Teatro La Quindicina, both in Edmonton, Alberta.

Erin Shields, *If We Were Birds* (Ontario, 2008)

(Cast: 7 f, 2 m)



The blissful world of the adolescent daughters of King Pandion, Philomela and Procne, is invaded by the reality of war and violence in the form of the soldier Tereus. With his militaristic tall stories, he wins the favour of the somewhat dumb king and the hand of Procne. What starts as a parodic war game between two machos turns serious at the latest when the chorus makes its entrance. The five women in the chorus,

representing the rape victims of five of the cruellest wars of the 20th century, accompany the action with their own stories from Bosnia, Rwanda, Bangladesh, Nanking and Berlin. Philomela, who is left on her own following the marriage of her sister, ignores all the warnings of these women. Tereus responds to the pleas of his wife to fetch Philomela and then something terrible happens. Overcome by fierce, brutal lust, he rapes and mutilates Philomela on the return trip. The five women in the chorus form an alliance with the sisters on their journey to seeking unspeakable revenge up until the end when they are transformed into birds as in Ovid's myth.

Erin Shields retells Ovid's myth of Tereus, Procne and Philomela against the backdrop of the wartime atrocities of the 20th century. She gives her characters a multifaceted range of possibilities to express themselves, from the naively touching to the grotesquely overdrawn, from sober reporting to mourning. Creating tension, she deftly interweaves reports of female war victims with the archaic force of the myth, producing a powerful story for the stage. Fear and pity, those strong emotions of drama, are skilfully acted out, giving rise to questions about the complex relationship between victim and perpetrator, crime and revenge, reason and barbarity in the here and now.

Remsi Al Khalisi

Erin Shields (b. 1977 in Hamilton, Ontario) is a playwright, actor and founding member of Groundwater Productions through which she creates, develops and produces her work including *If We Were Birds* which premiered at Summerworks 2008 and is part of the Tarragon Theatre's 2009/2010 season. Other plays include *The Unfortunate Misadventures of Masha Galinski* and *Goblin Market*, both nominated for a Dora Award, as well as *Montparnasse*, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and *Ubu Roi Massacred*. Shields lives in Toronto.

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Gabriele Naumann-Maerten will gladly forward you the full scripts by email.

For further information on Canadian drama, please do not hesitate to contact us.