



Layne Coleman
Georgina Beaty
Jonathan Seinen
Greg Gale
Charlotte Corbeil-Coleman
David Fennario
Annabel Soutar
James Forsythe
Isabelle Zufferey Boulton
David Diamond
Nisha Sajani
Seth Soulstein
Sandeep Bhagwati
Caroline Künzle
Alejandro Yoshizawa

ORAL HISTORY &
PERFORMANCE
(PART I)

alt theatre
cultural diversity and the stage

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Teesri Duniya
THEATRE

Teesri Duniya opens its 31st season with the English premiere of *The Poster* this fall. *L'Affiche*, the original French version of the play, was a finalist for the 2009 Grand prix de la dramaturgie (France) and was named 2009 Play of the Year by AQCT (Association québécoise des critiques de théâtre).

THE POSTER

Written by Philippe Ducros
Translation by Shelley Tepperman
Directed by Arianna Bardesono

Nov. 17 to Dec. 4, 2011
Bain St-Michel, Montreal, Qc.
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JAN SELMAN reviewing *The Applied Theatre Reader*.

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alt.theatre

cultural diversity and the stage

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on Oral History and Performance

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James Louder in *Lamentations*

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EDITORIAL



EDWARD (TED) LITTLE

is a professor of theatre at Concordia University, editor-in-chief of *alt.theatre*, and associate artistic director of Teesri Duniya Theatre. He is a member of the coordinating committee and leader of the performance working group for the Montreal Life Stories project, and he is currently embarking on the new research project, Going Public: Oral History, New Media, and Performance, with Liz Miller and Steve High.

ARTICLES



LAYNE COLEMAN

is a former artistic director of Theatre Passe Muraille and a writer. He was nominated for a national magazine award for his story "Oasis of Hope," published in *The Walrus*. Layne taught acting at the University of Saskatchewan in 2010-2011, and this past summer (2011) he produced and directed the film *The Shape of Rex* (which he co-wrote with Bill Hominuke) in Saskatoon.

CHARLOTTE CORBEIL-COLEMAN

graduated from the playwriting program at the National Theatre School of Canada in 2008. Her writing credits include a CBC radio play, *The Summer of February; The End of Pretending* (2002 Summerworks Eye Audience Choice); and *Scratch* (2007 Herman Voaden award), which opened Factory Theatre's 2008/2009 season and was nominated for a Dora award (Outstanding New Play) in 2009 and a Governor General's Award in 2010. Charlotte most recently worked for the radio series *Afghanada* (CBC).

GEORGINA BEATY (see production photos pages 10 to 15)

is an actor, creator, and co-founder of Architect Theatre. She has appeared in *The Shape of a Girl* (Greenthumb, Jessie award), *Unity (1918)* (Alberta Theatre Projects), *And So It Goes, Bone Cage* (Downstage), *Suspended* (Boca del Lupo), *Pig* (High Performance Rodeo, Canoe Festival), *Queen Lear* (Urban Curvz), *Easter and Ah, Wilderness!* (Chemainus) and the collective creation *Highway 63: The Fort Mac Show* (Architect Theatre/ Passe Muraille).

JONATHAN SEINEN (see production photos pages 10 to 15)

is a theatre artist working primarily in collective creation. An associate artist with lemonTree creations and co-artistic producer of Architect Theatre, he directed *Still Life (SummerWorks)* and Jean Genet's *Deathwatch* (lemonTree), and performed in *As You Like It* (Banff Centre/Citadel). In the fall of 2011, Jonathan will appear in *The Normal Heart* (Studio 180) at Buddies In Bad Times Theatre. Jonathan is a graduate of the University of Alberta and the National Theatre School.

GREG GALE (see production photos pages 10 to 15)

was most recently seen onstage in *Vimy* at the Blyth Centre for the Arts and in *Highway 63: The Fort Mac Show* at Theatre Passe Muraille. Other recent credits include *Sir John A. Back from the Dead Concert Tour* (MacDonald Festival, Kingston) and *Red Fightin' Blue* (Talk is Free Theatre, Barrie). Greg is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada, where he was the recipient of the Hnatyshyn Foundation's Emerging Artist's Grant for a student showing promise in their area of study.



DAVID FENNARIO

is a playwright/performer, social activist, and former weekly columnist for the *Montreal Gazette*. Award-winning plays published by Talonbooks: *On The Job* and *Balconville* (Chalmers 1976, 1980), *Joe Beef* (Prix Pauline-Julien 1986), *Death of René Lévesque* (*Montreal Gazette*, 2003 Play of the Year). Twice profiled by the NFB, his plays have been televised on CBC and Bravo. His 1974 memoir *Without a Parachute*, republished as *Sans parachute* (2010), won poet Gilles Hénault a Governor General's Award for translation. Fennario was the 2007 candidate for Québec solidaire in Vielle Verdun, where he was born and still resides.



JAMES FORSYTHE

is professor and head of the Drama Program at Brandon University. He wishes to acknowledge the support of professors Ted Little and Steven High, the Brandon University Research Council, and the volunteer soldiers and Afghan Canadians that participated in this project. Special thanks to Lib Spry.



ISABELLE ZUFFEREY BOULTON

is a Canadian actress and writer based in New York City, where she graduated from the Stella Adler Studio. She holds a BA in Economics and English Literature from McGill University, where she founded a local student chapter of Oxfam Canada. Isabelle is currently collaborating with choreographer Shannon Gillen and director Sherri Kronfeld on a new dance theatre piece, in a dual residency at Springboard Danse Montreal and the Stella Adler Studio.



SETH SOULSTEIN

is a playwright, actor, and activist currently pursuing an MA in Theatre Studies at the University of British Columbia. He is studying ways theatre can be made politically powerful while remaining dramaturgically engaging. His sketch comedy ensemble, the Late Night Players, toured the US from 2003-2009. In 2004, he co-founded the Harry Potter Alliance, a non-profit alliance aimed at engaging youth in social justice by seeking inspiration from modern storytelling.



NISHA SAJANI

is the director of Creative Alternatives and the director of the Drama Therapy, Community Health and Prevention program at the Post Traumatic Stress Center (New Haven). Nisha is on faculty at New York University where she teaches arts-based research and at Yale University where she teaches a course on "Theatre, Trauma, and Change." Nisha is the president-elect of the National Association for Drama Therapy.



SANDEEP BHAGWATI

is a multiple award-winning composer, theatre director, and media artist with Indian and diverse European backgrounds. As Canada Research Chair for Inter-X Arts at Concordia University, Montreal, since 2006, he currently directs matralab, a research/creation centre for intercultural and interdisciplinary arts. His current work centres on improvisation, intertraditional aesthetics, the aesthetics of interdisciplinarity, gestural theatre, sonic theatre, and interactive visual and nonvisual scores.

DISPATCHES



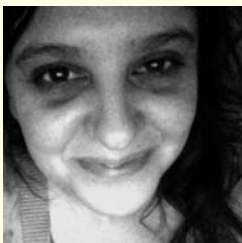
ANNABEL SOUTAR

is the artistic director of Porte Parole, a documentary theatre company based in Montreal. Her play *Sexy béton* will tour around Quebec in November-December 2011 and her play *Seeds* will premiere at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto in February 2012 in a co-production with Crow's Theatre. She lives in Montreal with her husband, actor Alex Ivanovici, and their two daughters, Ella and Beatrice.



DAVID DIAMOND

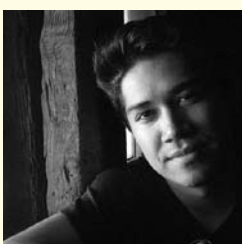
is co-founder and artistic director of Headlines Theatre (1981-now). He has directed over 450 community-specific Theatre for Living projects and trainings throughout N. America and Europe, as well as in Namibia, Rwanda, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Palestine, and Singapore. He has received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of the Fraser Valley and the Otto René Castillo Award for Political Theatre, and is the author of *Theatre for Living: the art and science of community-based dialogue* (winner of the American Alliance of Theatre and Education 2008 Distinguished Book Award).



CAROLINE KÜNZLE

works as a researcher and radio producer for Montreal Life Stories, an oral history project gathering the stories of Montrealers displaced by war, genocide, and other human rights violations. In her free time, she writes, paints, and plays music. Künzle collaborated with Shahrzad Arshadi and Moe Clark on the production of *It Is Only Sound That Remains*.

BOOK REVIEW



ALEJANDRO YOSHIZAWA

is a Masteris student in the department of history at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. His current research investigates the history of *Matsutake* (Pine Mushroom) picking in the Japanese-Canadian community. The project, partly funded by the NAJC, will be chronicled in a film, *The Hunt For Matsutake*, set to be complete in late 2011- early 2012.

Why Oral History and Performance?

BY EDWARD LITTLE

This two-part expanded issue of *alt.theatre* has its genesis in the five-year SSHRC-funded Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and Other Human Rights Violations project. Launched in 2007, the project brings together twenty-eight researchers, three Montreal universities, and eighteen community partner organizations—an interdisciplinary mix of academics, artists, educators, and activists. At its heart, Montreal Life Stories is an oral history project. Principle investigator Steve High is a Canada Research Chair in public history, and we are conducting and archiving hundreds of interviews. From the project's inception we have been concerned that Montreal Life Stories reaches beyond the archive to sensitize, educate, bridge generational and cultural divides, forge relationships, and engage the broader public in deeper social and political engagement.

Four of our seven working groups represent specific communities—Cambodia, Rwanda/Great Lakes of Africa, Haiti, and the Holocaust. The remaining three—education, performance, and refugee youth—work across the project to develop curriculum for schools, explore how the arts might engage with collected material, and create additional community relationships. We seek sustainable public engagement through mutually beneficial community-university partnerships

modelled on “shared authority” (Frisch) and a commitment to the life story as a whole. As Steve High puts it,

The shift from testimony to life history is fundamental. It considers how mass human rights violations are experienced and remembered. What does it mean to be a ‘survivor’? How do individuals and communities construct and transmit their stories to their children and to people outside their social networks? When, where and why are particular stories about mass violence told, and by whom? (n.p.)

This marks the fifth and final year of the research phase of Montreal Life Stories. From now to March 2012 we are focusing on legacy and dissemination through exhibitions, performances, and publications; workshops in ethics, interview techniques, and digital storytelling; and longer-term initiatives that include community-based documentation centres and an online Montreal Life Stories database housing interviews, digital stories, maps, timelines, and contextual information (the database's Stories Matter software is an application developed specifically for our project).¹

We begin this issue of *alt.theatre* with an appropriately co-authored article about *Highway 63*—a collective creation about Fort McMurray and the Alberta Tar Sands. Layne Coleman, his daughter Charlotte Corbeil-Coleman, Georgina Beaty, Greg Gale, and Jonathan Seinen travelled to “Fort Mac,” lived with the locals, and created a play. Their reflections resonate with the community-engaged storytelling—the “direct relationship between actor and material” and “emphasis on truth (whether actual

or ‘mythic’)”—charted by Alan Filewod in early collectively created documentary drama (TPM's 1972 *The Farm Show* and 25th Street Theatre's 1977 *Paper Wheat*) (27).²

Next up is an excerpt from David Fennario's new one-man show *Bolsheviki*, an anti-war play written to be performed in a Brechtian, non-illusionary storytelling style. *Bolsheviki* is not verbatim theatre, but it takes its “tone and timbre” from an interview Fennario did some 30 years ago with a WWI veteran gassed in the trenches. Fennario explains, “I did not write *Bolsheviki* to mourn or honour the Dead—it was written to avenge their slaughter. I tried my best to design *Bolsheviki* as a weapon to be used against warmongering by anti-war activists.” When Fennario himself performs, it is also deeply “self-revelatory” (Emunah)—incorporating anecdotes from his life in Point St. Charles and references to his own struggle with neurological disease. The goal is to forge deep personal connections between storyteller, story, audience, and the issue at hand. Essentially, this is a twenty-first-century vision for the kind of acting pioneered by the likes of Brecht and Meyerhold—a self-revelatory artist-activist political antidote to the contemporary “hierarchical dominance of illusionary theatre.” For Fennario, “theatre produced as a political vehicle—documentary, neighbourhood, verbatim, etc.—is better served when performed in a non-illusionary style. The illusionary approach dulls and lessens the political and artistic effect by putting up that infamous invisible fourth wall.”

Following Fennario is a dispatch from Annabel Soutar—artistic director of Montreal's *Project Porte Parole*. Soutar creates documentary theatre with mixed francophone-anglophone audiences in mind. *Porte Parole* has tackled the Quebec health care system (*Santé* 2003), the treatment of Algerian refugees (*Montréal la blanche* 2004), and the legal battle between a Canadian farmer and GMO seed manufacturer, Monsanto (*Seeds*, 2005). *Porte Parole*'s latest three-part piece, *Sexy Béton* (2008, 2010, 2011) examines the 2006 collapse of the De La Concorde overpass—a disaster labelled a traffic accident to reduce insurance and public liabilities. For Soutar, expressing “reality as poetic narrative” allows audiences to recognize their complicity in the shaping of public narratives, and thus their capacity to re-write the story through socio-political action.

James Forsythe of Manitoba's Brandon University writes of deploying verbatim theatre to bridge ideological and cultural divides. Between 2006 and 2008, Forsythe created *Soldier Up* from interviews conducted with soldiers and families in CFB Brandon who had direct experience of the mission in Afghanistan. He writes of "using verbatim theatre to justify or allow unpopular points of view to be heard." His stance as interviewer and playwright/director is key:

As I stated at the start of rehearsals to the cast, I did not believe that my views on the mission were relevant and I would prefer if they kept theirs to themselves. All I wanted was for them to honour the material and not comment on it. Verbatim is someone else's truth, and as an actor you have to insure that nothing is filtering any truth you don't agree with. My intention to appear to be subjectively on their side regardless of what opinions were being offered was constant.

Forsythe became an affiliate of Montreal Life Stories in 2011 when he came to Quebec to conduct interviews with Afghani-Canadians. He is now back in Brandon combining this material with *Soldier Up* to create an "intra-cultural conversation" with the new play, *From Soldier Up to Safer Ground*.

Isabelle Zufferey Boulton's piece on *The Gaza Mono-Logues* in New York City considers the impact of direct participation in creating and performing community-engaged documentary theatre. The play consists of monologues from thirty-three Palestinian youths (ages 13 to 18) who experienced the 22-day Israeli offensive on Gaza between December 2008 and January 2009. An initiative of Gaza's Ashtar theatre, the play was created over a seven-month period and involved training in creative writing and aspects of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre. Nadel Sha'ath, the project's psychologist, observed a measurably "significant psychological improvement" in the participating adolescents. On the international stage, the Gaza Monologues project has become the theatrical equivalent of a YouTube video gone viral. On the day of the play's premiere in October 2010, "more than 1500 young people in fifty cities in thirty countries also performed the monologues." In November 2010, when Palestinian youth were prohibited from leaving Gaza to

perform, by invitation, at the UN, other companies and youths stepped up. The play continues to be performed around the world. Zufferey Boulton describes the play as "a compelling argument for peace," with the potential to "engage a true dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians."

Caroline Künzle's dispatch considers Montreal Life Stories artist-in-residence Sharzad Arshadi's exploration in "Sound Theatre"—where lights are dimmed and the audience focuses intensely on the act of listening. Arshadi set out to express how time spent with the archival remnants of the personal and familial life of Ziba Kazemi—the Montreal photojournalist executed by Iranian authorities—evoked in Arshadi a deep post-mortem personal friendship.

Seth Soulstein takes up the theme of community-engaged resident artists in his piece on Vancouver's Headlines Theatre and the Us and Them project. Headlines, like Ashtar Theatre, has deep roots in the sociopolitical ecology of its geographic community. The Us and Them project, typical of Headlines' work, solicits stories from a wide range of community perspectives, then works with these stories using Theatre for Living (TFL)—an approach developed by Headlines' artistic director David Diamond. TFL is an evolution of Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre combined with a "systems theory" approach that posits that social structures that "create divisions between 'oppressors' and those they oppress are simply manifestations of repeated behaviors; investigate those behaviors and learn how to change them, and you may just change the structure of your society."

Following Soulstein, David Diamond's dispatch reflects on links between the Us and Them and the Gaza Monologues projects and his decision to stage the monologues in Vancouver.

Next up is Nisha Sajjani, a community partner with Montreal Life Stories. She and other members of the project have been adapting and expanding the range of Playback Theatre to work with both interviewers and interviewees in ways that "seem to shrink the distance between researchers, actors, and audiences" and "make our interdependence and accountability to each other palpable." Playback is an improvisational form where audience members publicly share stories that are then acted out in improvisation by the

Playback ensemble. Sajjani describes this as foregoing "the premeditated architecture of other forms of biographical theatre, such as verbatim or documentary theatre" while approximating "the unpredictable, liminal, and relational process of oral history."

Sandeep Bhagwati is also a member of Montreal Life Stories. To create his "Gestural Theatre," Bhagwati and his actors turned off the audio in videotaped interviews in order to work with moments of social and cultural rupture and displacement in the gestures, facial expressions, and body language of Montreal Life Stories interviewees. Citing Richard Sennett's notion of the "tyranny of intimacy," Bhagwati's work critiques the confessional voice—questioning assumptions that an emotional truth makes a social and political point more valid and pertinent.

The issue concludes with Alejandro Yoshizawa's review of *Verbatim, Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*. Yoshizawa effectively summarizes many of the issues raised by the contributors in this issue—the relationship of this work to journalism, questions of ethics and integrity, the role and positioning of the audience, and notions of reality and fiction, "truth" and accuracy. These themes will be further taken up in our December issue (Vol. 9.2)—Oral History and Performance Part II.

NOTES

- 1 Visit www.histoiresdeviemontreal.ca
- 2 Coleman is a former artistic director of both Saskatoon's 25th Street Theatre and Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille (TPM).

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