

DIRECTOR'S NOTE by Rebecca Northan

For those who are wondering...

NO: the detective this evening is not a "plant." We really do choose a different audience member nightly, in part because we are adrenaline junkies who relish the *risk* and *spontaneity* of an unknown co-star, but more so because we have a *curiosity* about each of you, an *intuition* that everyone has a "detective" inside them, and that active *play* is a glorious thing.

The challenge, of course, is how to rehearse an improvised play.

We start with story and character, then create a structure in which the improvisation can happen. This allows us to have some degree of quality control and repeatability, while simultaneously liberating the imaginations of the performers inside it. It's not dissimilar to professional sports - the players run drills, work on high-level skills, and then abandon themselves to the random elements of the game.

At some point, we start to run beta testers through the scenario. We could not have built this show without the generosity of Shaw Festival docents and staff who eagerly volunteered to be our "rehearsal detectives." We learned far more from each of them - what works, what's confusing, where *empathy* is needed - than we ever could have on our own.

What struck us throughout rehearsals was just how marvellous it is to watch a non-actor open up, get playful, and then to play *with* them. Behavioural and developmental psychology has long recognized the importance of play for children - it improves their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. There is clear evidence that it does the same for adults - we just might need a bit more encouragement than the average six-year-old. Through play, we can relieve stress, deepen learning, and make profound connections.

With the rise (and some might say inherent threats) of AI, coupled with our current modern disconnects, I find myself madly concocting opportunities to inject every project, every relationship, every interaction, with our Spontaneous Theatre basic tenets, which we have called SPICE: *Spontaneity, Play, Intuition, Curiosity, Empathy*. The REAL "AI": Authentic Intelligence, perhaps the very values that add magic and spark to live theatre, whether scripted or improvised.

In the case of *Murder-on-the-Lake*, it is my sincere hope that, in addition to enjoying a brand-new murder mystery, you will also simultaneously see SPICE in action - put into practice not only by a very talented cast, but you may also witness its real-time blossoming in our Guest Detective. The Shaw Festival's namesake said it best: "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."

Whoever ends up on stage with us to play Detective might solve the case, or they might not - what matters most is that they accepted the call to adventure and dared to play!

And if it happens to be YOU who ends up on stage: "Happy Opening and Congratulations on your Shaw Festival debut!"

PREVIEW PROGRAMME

ROYAL GEORGE THEATRE, JULY 26 TO OCTOBER 4

SHAW 20 FESTIVAL 25

TIM CARROLL, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | TIM JENNINGS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MELISSA NOVECOSKY, ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
KIMBERLEY RAMPERSAD, ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

World Premiere

MURDER-ON-THE-LAKE

A Spontaneous Theatre Creation
by Rebecca Northan and Bruce Horak

with KRISTOPHER BOWMAN, COSETTE DEROME,
SOCHI FRIED, VIRGILIA GRIFFITH,
MARTIN HAPPER, BRUCE HORAK,
REBECCA NORTHAN and TRAVIS SEETOO

Directed by REBECCA NORTHAN
Sets designed by JUDITH BOWDEN
Costumes designed by ROSE TAVORMINA
Lighting designed by JEFF PYBUS
Original music and sound designed by JOHN GZOWSKI

This year's Royal George Theatre Season is
dedicated to the memory of Charles Balbach.

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We acknowledge and honour the land upon which we gather today as the historic and traditional territory of First Nations Peoples. In particular, we recognize and thank the Neutral Nation, the Mississauga and the Haudenosaunee for their stewardship of these lands over millennia. We also wish to thank all of the First Nations Peoples in Canada, and the Indigenous Peoples of the United States, for their ongoing and important roles in the caretaking of the lands beneath our feet.

Any video and/or audio recording, streaming or distribution of this production is strictly prohibited.

SPONTANEOUS THEATRE

CREATED BY REBECCA NORTAN AND BRUCE HORAK

Spontaneous Theatre is a multi-award-winning company that has been creating original and irreverent productions for two decades.

Their fourth wall-breaking work sits at the intersection of improvisation and scripted performance and often (though not always) incorporates an Audience Member in a lead role. All of their work prioritizes taking exceptional care of the audience.

Their inaugural production, *Blind Date*, has toured across Canada and the US, played Off-Broadway, Off-West End, at the Edinburgh Fringe, and to date has had over 1,700 performances. In 2018, *Blind Date* premiered overseas with Det Andre Teatret, in Oslo, Norway.

Spontaneous Theatre is also responsible for *Legend Has It*, an interactive fantasy adventure that was invited to play the prestigious Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York.

Murder-on-the-Lake is the second installment of their "*Undercover Series*", which kicked off in 2017 with the world premiere of *Undercover* at the Tarragon Theatre, which subsequently toured to the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton and Vertigo Theatre in Calgary.

Most recently, Spontaneous Theatre has taken Canada by storm with *Goblin:Macbeth*, which played sold out runs at Bard on the Beach in Vancouver, the Stratford Festival, and the Citadel Theatre. Their second installment, *Goblin:Oedipus* debuted at the High Performance Rodeo in Calgary in 2024, and is being presented by the Stratford Festival this October. *Goblin:Macbeth* will play the Centaur Theatre in Montreal in March 2026. Future *Goblin* projects are currently in the works, as the *Goblin* empire expands into 2027.

In addition to their theatrical work, Spontaneous Theatre also designs and delivers custom workshops for corporate clients, focusing on "Authentic Intelligence." They also offer custom improv comedy performances for meetings and events.

www.spontaneoustheatre.ca

IG: @spontaneoustheatre

UNDERSTUDIES

BRUCE HORAK, Ensemble, RON KENNEL, Ensemble;
ALLISON McCAUGHEY, Ensemble; ANDRÉ MORIN, Ensemble
JANE VANSTONE OSBORN, Stage Manager

THE ENSEMBLE *In Alphabetical Order*

KRISTOPHER BOWMAN
COSETTE DEROME
SOCHI FRIED
VIRGILIA GRIFFITH
MARTIN HAPPER
BRUCE HORAK
REBECCA NORTAN
TRAVIS SEETOO

Setting: Niagara-on-the-Lake

Today

Act 1 Scene 1 Offices of Niagara Regional Police Department

Scene 2 A Row Boat

Scene 3 Butler's Island Bed & Breakfast

Intermission

Act 2 Butler's Island Bed & Breakfast

Stage Manager DORA TOMASSI
Assistant Stage Manager JANE VANSTONE OSBORN
Production Stage Manager LISA RUSSELL
Associate Production Stage Manager LEIGH McCCLYMONT

Assistant Director ALLISON McCAUGHEY
Assistant Set Designer AURORA JUDGE
Assistant Lighting Designer ALEX SYKES
Design Assistant SAHDIA CAYEMITHE
Voice and Dialect Coach JEFFREY SIMLETT

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

The Shaw Festival Docents and all our Volunteer Detectives
(without whom this production would not have been possible!)

Mark Bellamy, Dennis Cahill, Tim Carroll, Georgie Collins, Stephen Gray,
Detective Sgt Gary Grinton, Craig Hall, Tammy-Jo Hiemstra, Keith Johnstone, Hal Kerbes,
Kathi Kerbes, Ellis Lalonde, Christopher Oldfield, Dr Sam Polak, Kimberley Rampersad,
Shadow Productions, Dr Oxana Shapley, Dustyn Wales, Gail Whiteford, Kelly Wong

Additional Props assistance provided by Ryan Mahon.

For Artist photo and bio information, please go to
shawfest.com/playbill/murder-on-the-lake/

Running time is approximately 2 hours 30 minutes including one intermission