

WILL BROOKS

Hello SPC'ers!

Thanks one and all for a wonderful Spring Festival. Thanks to the volunteers, the actors, the directors, the bartenders, the interns, Nicole, Heather, Sheila, and Sarah. Congrats to Heather on her first and very successful Festival and most of all, congratulations to the playwrights who put pen to paper and said what they thought.

It was a treat this year to see so many completely different plays from every corner of style, language, and content. There are moments from each reading that will stay with each of us and sit in the back of our brains until we figure something out, ask the next question, or hopefully write something ourselves. It's never too early to start thinking about our own next or first draft. And it's never too often to remind everyone that submitting to Festival, just like all of SPC's services, are open to all members. Please take advantage of

everything there is to offer, and most of all, write! Write, write, and did I mention... write.

See you at next year's Festival and all of the points in between. Have a great summer.

Will Brooks
SPC President

HEATHER INGLIS

Spring Festival 2008

Spring Festival was a rich and remarkable time.

After hearing so much about the Festival I was quite naturally anxious that my first Festival would live up to expectations. I found the experience to be more than I had hoped for.

My initiation to Spring Fest was guided by a 'sacred book' that contained the recorded wisdom of our elders. In the Spring Festival Bible I found a carefully recorded template of Spring Festivals past. The accumulated and careful thinking of Ben Henderson, Stephen Heatley, Don Kugler, Pam Bustin and Festival dramaturgs past provided an invaluable map that made navigating the sometimes difficult waters possible.

Sarah Stanley was outstanding as the Festival dramaturg for 2008. From her first reading of the plays to the last meeting with the last playwright, Sarah was brilliant. Her commitment to theatrical storytelling, her eloquent personable honesty, her firm commitment to artists and the development of new work is pretty damn special. What a gift it was to have her wisdom and her passion

In This Issue

Spring Festival 2008

Sarah Stanley	page 2
Bob Armstrong.....	page 4
Brent McFarlane.....	page 5
SPC Scholarship award.....	page 6
MAP Colony.....	page 7
Regina Fringe Festival.....	page 7
Saskatoon Fringe Festival.....	page 7

in Saskatchewan for those 10 days.

Nicole Olszewski worked tirelessly as coordinator with seemingly endless good humour to make it all happen. The endless stream of tasks she was responsible for were always performed with a smile, from the updating of the callboard to providing the plentiful food at each evening's reception. Nicole greased the wheels that put playwrights in rooms together with directors and actors to discover the potential of their new plays.

Our Interns, Ash-Lee Hommy, Sharon Warren, Misty-Lee Selinger, Megan Leach and Donovan Johnson set up rooms, took them down again, ran errands and thought really hard about plays and the process while providing essential support to the playwrights and directors throughout the week. They are unsung heroes of the Festival. Their contribution to the life of this event must not go unrecognized.

Technician Nicole Bergen never missed a beat the entire week. Watch for her, she is a rising star of the theatre.

Sheila Angelstad was a wealth of knowledge throughout the weeks of prep leading up to Festival, patiently taking me through the maze of administrative muck and going above and beyond the call of duty to assist me in the storm of administration. After the whole thing is over Sheila silently starts making bookkeeping

entries, one of the least fun, least recognized and most essential tasks in an organization.

The 2008 Spring Festival included: nine playwrights, seven directors, thirty-two actors, and five interns. All told fifty-six talented, skilled and committed people worked in the service of seven new plays. It was a marvel to behold so many artists coming together to help make new theatre happen. It was a joy to watch so many talented actors grace us with their readings. To witness the satisfaction of playwrights hearing their work in front of an audience for the first time, to see the looks of determination on their faces as they learned about themselves and their work. It was enriching to hear about the process of each director-dramaturg at the end of each day and to open up discussions of how we can serve playwrights even better in the future. What a marvelous community to be apart of for that short period of time.

I think I have come to understand a bit of why Spring Festival is at the centre of the life of the Centre. It brings fantastic people together to do what they love best.

I look forward with relish to next year.

Heather Inglis
SPC Dramaturg

SARAH STANLEY

Spring Festival Dramaturg

Spring Festival 2008 was a fantastic and full time. A period marked by the addition of many and the absence of several. Hard not to begin by nodding to Ben Henderson and Yvette Nolan without whom – in recent SPC history – me and new SPC dramaturg (the wonderful Heather Inglis) would not have been able to carry on towards a rich and rewarding 10 days of playwriting in Saskatchewan today.

We had excellent people all round, and it is perhaps because of this that early in the Festival a series of linked questions emerged, and they remained an area of discussion throughout. What is the relationship

between the writer and his or her director/dramaturg? And are there ways, within the Festival context, to help to make this relationship as fertile as possible?

Should a director/dramaturg be asked to read and respond to the scripts they have agreed to work on (in advance of accepting the gig to direct), in order that the playwright can feel represented in a positive way by the choice of the director in tandem with their work? In brass tack terminology – how do writers ensure that they are being served by director/dramaturgs? And, moreover, what can a writer do to get the most out of the relationship that exists during the

Festival? (Regardless of whether or not the relationship is ideal...) What can help to make it *more* ideal?

Would it better serve the Festival to have the writer and director/dramaturg spend a whole day together before things get underway in a rehearsal room context? A day for talking about art, family, background, going for a hike or a burrito, sharing works that have been triumphs in each of the two collaborator's past experience... In brief, a daylong period mandated to finding areas of commonality – most specifically language.

In a comedic nod to content, this Saskatchewan Fest began with Manitoban writer Bob Armstrong and his satirical look at the politics of waste and other matter...called *The Offal Truth*. It was wonderfully performed and delightfully realized under the careful eye of Pamela Haig Bartley. The company had a brief time together but I believe that Bob was inspired to do some rewriting during the process and I know that he left Regina with a very clear sense of the areas he wished to focus on next. A great start and an excellent process!

Next up was the stunning reading of B.D. Miller's *Kobyla*. This terrific play takes an unflinching look at the life of a woman who was convicted of horrific acts during the Nazi reign in Poland. Sharon Pollock was the director for this piece and she and B.D. hit it off extremely well. Some very fine rewrites came in during the workshop and the reading took the audiences' breath away. It was a stellar night in the theatre.

The Freaks! And Living Wonders! Circus Sideshow! by William Brooks was a trip. Not only is the piece a devilishly good yarn about being wary of what you wish for... it is also told through the whirligig of the sideshow, and it must be said that this ethos slipped right into the process! Director Doug Curtis ended up staging much of the piece and the playwright grappled with how best to use time when writing was not necessarily the next best thing to do. Hmm...what does that mean? Perhaps, in large part something about listening to our instincts and trusting that time does not always line up with opportunity. The reading/performance was fantastic and Will was re-ignited by the play's possibilities and left Doug hoping that he might be able to produce the play in Calgary someday.

Swamp Fever written by James Misfelt and directed by Michael Clark culminated in an extremely charged night in the theatre. The post-show discussion was alive with questions surrounding responsibility of the storyteller and intent of the writer in dangerous waters. A very exciting piece and a roller coaster ride for all involved. James came away from the process with a very clear sense as to 'what next for the text' and we look forward to seeing what that looks like.

Old Farts by Madeleine Dahlem was in many ways not unlike its title. A play that had been following or perhaps dogging the writer (?) in both official languages for some time. Yet this past year seemed to be its 'time', as it was done in French in Saskatoon and under Emma Tibaldo's directorship it had an inventive reading for the Festival in English in Regina. Madeleine continued to make some tweaks and looks forward to seeing it have a future life with...a brand new title. Aside from an engaging night of theatre, Madeleine provided us with the most interactive post show discussion...lottery tickets for the most clapped for title suggestions. While her new title did not come from that night, the exercise gave her the clarity to choose one that really excites her. Stay tuned!

The Last Windwalker by Catherine Harrison was beautifully dramaturged by Amy Lynn Strilchuk. I use these words with purpose, as it was beautiful to see how instantly well these two women related to one another and how this relationship fed their process. They accomplished a huge amount in a short time and the matinee reading got a really good workout from a terrific cast and a nice staging.

Johnny Zed! The Musical! was the surprise show of the Festival. As you know, the Festival dramaturg does not know who the writers are when they choose the scripts. It was, therefore, only over the fullness of time that I understood just how ambitious this choice was. Written by Daniel MacDonald, Henry Piovesan and Sheldon Davis, and directed by Daniel Macdonald this full-out musical got the best dramaturgical support we were able to offer them: the opportunity to get it up (full cast, full score) in front of an audience! It was a monumental accomplishment and a great opportunity for them to take stock of where next they need to go in order to more fully tell their tale in the manner they wish it to be told!

The wrap-up. The biggest question was one of relationship and week-long observation revealed some distinct tactics used to get the most out of the work. Some of the words that bubble to the top of my think-tank with respect to the approach are - conflict, consensus, absence, environment, pulling it off, rigour and clarity... oh yeah, and fun. Serious fun.

From my perspective it was terrific. Beginning with a writer from away, a totally different perspective with alarming thematic similarities to the Saskatchewan writers and then a week of diverse yet linked stories painting a field of harvest dreams for the province. (Forgive

me - I couldn't resist!) I look forward to seeing where some of the discussions surrounding the nature of relationship between director and writer can go, but more I look forward to seeing these incredible Saskatchewan writers, actors and directors onstage again soon.

Sarah Stanley
Spring Festival Dramaturg

BOB ARMSTRONG

Big-ass thanks to a creative community

As a playwright – and one who pays a lot of bills by freelance writing from home – I've often envied actors and directors. They're not stuck at home all day staring at a computer screen and tuning their radios to Shelagh Rogers and Jian Ghomeshi just to create the illusion of human company.

That's why participating in the SPC Spring Play Festival as the visiting Manitoban playwright was more than just an opportunity to inject new creative life into a play, my play *The Offal Truth*.

For three days in May I joined a lively creative community at the University of Regina. In the residence building, in the food court, in the theatre department and across the street at the local coffee house I joined a group of actors, playwrights, directors, dramaturgs and students sharing their passion. As people working in theatre, this is what we live for: that thrill of making new worlds appear out of nothing.

I've had three other plays workshopped professionally and I've always enjoyed the process of working intensively on a script with smart and talented people. As a playwright who came to theatre as something of an outsider – my career background is in journalism and my degree is in history – I've found workshops to be a valuable opportunity to learn the craft.

My workshop at the Spring Festival was no exception. Pamela Haig Bartley asked questions of my play that

forced me to look at its structure, characters, emotional truth and dramatic logic. Actors Joey Tremblay, Amy Matysio, Timothy Allen, Kathryn Bracht and Brent McFarlane brought a willingness to experiment and turn on a dime when I made changes. Together, they showcased all the script's strengths and weaknesses. Heather Inglis and Sarah Stanley provided an outsider's perspective in pre- and post-workshop meetings and daily discussions that combined sympathy for the work with honesty and directness. Nobody involved in the workshop sought to hide the play's flaws, nor to change my play into their own. The goal was to make *The Offal Truth* into the best *Offal Truth* it could be.

This was all very productive, as one would hope a workshop would be.

But by some kind of mysterious, alchemical process, the excitement and creativity stimulated by my intense sessions on *The Offal Truth* were intensified by the atmosphere in which they occurred. Simply knowing that in other rooms in the same building other playwrights were working with other directors and actors on other visions made the experience that much more potent.

This reminds me of Jane Jacobs and her latter-day acolyte Richard Florida, and their writings on creative communities. Jacobs pointed out that innovation of all kinds has historically come about by bringing together diverse talents in close proximity. Florida has famously

written on the role of creative cities in building prosperity and the importance of artists in building creative cities.

Both writers stress that informal connections are essential to building creativity. That is, we don't just come up with new ideas when we're on the job. New ideas spring from bumping into people on the street, sharing drinks and dinner, chatting and joking and playing with others.

And so for me, the pre-workshop dinner, sipping wine with my roommates (Sharon, Cindy and Pam), dropping by Hectik Theatre's Saturday night fundraiser, the opening night reception and post-reading bar all contributed to that alchemy of creation.

Living on the prairies of Western Canada, we tend to think of creative cities as distant, Oz-like places: London and Paris, New York and San Francisco, Montreal and maybe even Toronto. But Winnipeg? Regina? Get serious. The lesson of the Spring Festival, though, is that wherever people come together with a desire to experiment, with a commitment to focus their talents and energy, with curiosity and sympathy and intensity you can have a creative city.

No wonder that when I came home, I was buzzing

with new ideas and energy. Before going to the Spring Festival, I'd been wondering if perhaps *The Offal Truth* would be one of those plays that die before they're born. But following my time in Regina I was so excited about the play that a song sung by one of the characters began playing in my head – with new verses and full instrumentation and harmonies (Blue Rodeo with guest vocals by Neko Case and Kathleen Edwards). The only way to drive the song out of my head was to put on a George Jones mix CD Pam made for me and write.

Within a few days, I'd finished a new draft, incorporating a new relationship between two of the characters, trimming elements that caused the script to lag, and moving and expanding upon the song in order to make the play end with what the stage directions currently call 'a big-ass honky tonk flourish.'

In that spirit, I'd like to offer a big-ass thank you to the Saskatchewan Playwright Centre for this playwright exchange (and to the Manitoba Association of Playwrights, for the airfare) and the chance to be part of this creative community.

Bob Armstrong
Manitoba Association of Playwrights Project

BRENT MCFARLANE

Spring Festival Raconteur

raconteur *noun*. someone who tells anecdotes in an amusing or entertaining way.

raconteuring *noun*. **raconteuse** *noun*.

ETYMOLOGY: 19c: French, from *raconter* to relate or tell.

From *The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary*, which is evidently a much better dictionary than the OED, as suggested by Rob Benz (and cut from my Festival Raconteur's address).

I met Joni Mitchell once in an elevator.

- an anecdote

There you have it—that, fellow SPC members, is the answer to the question I was asked all week. As the inaugural Festival Raconteur at Spring Festival this year, I was met with not a little curiosity—most of it of the “ill-fashioned dog” sort Tennessee Williams wrote about, some of it more of the “you'd better not repeat this” variety.

Setting out to document this great beast “Festival” seemed a daunting task. At first, I imagined myself glad-handing, making great new friends and regaling them later with the inside jokes we had all so knowingly shared. This illusion lasted for perhaps five seconds.

By the end of the first day of documenting, I was

exhausted. Festival is, well, overwhelming. The day begins (in terms of keen observables, at least) at 9am, with the interns' meeting and ends, traditionally, when Mansel's done drinking—this year, sadly, it was more of a consensus/critical mass-type decision.

What went on was a bunch of collective brilliance—which is pretty hard to capture, and pretty hard to really follow. Best possible scenario for a story: the director says, "Hey, what about this?" The playwright responds, "Hmm, what if we do this?" The actor reads it, and it's magic.

The collective brilliance story goes kind of like this: these people go out to catch a fish, and either they catch it or they don't, and they either bring the thing back to shore or they don't. The vicissitudes are not the mentionable things. There's a sort of insular secrecy about rehearsing—as if planning the lies were the sinful part of the whole business—and a strange need to ensure the appearance of harmony is kept up—vaguely like the mafia, or an abusive family or racist Southern town. (Ah, but goodness, how I love it.)

In short, I decided to focus on the plays themselves

instead—believing passionately in my tag line, "what happened this week was theatre"—summing up some of the great moments we'd seen over the past week—or which I'd seen.

After my oration was over, a gentleman approached me by the snack table (which I unfailingly frequented). He asked me if I'd intended to turn the speech into a Stuart McLean thing, because I'd started to sound like Stuart McLean (of CBC Radio's *Vinyl Café Diaries*.)

"No," I answered, somewhat pleasantly taken aback, "but I'm flattered. I'll take that as a compliment, if you'll allow me."

"Yeah," he said. "It's been years since I could stand Stuart McLean."

Oh well.

People clapped at the end.

Brent McFarlane

Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre Scholarship

Sage Hill Writing Experience Inc. has announced that Daniel Macdonald will receive the partial tuition scholarship (\$500) offered by the SPC to a Saskatchewan playwright who is a participant in the Sage Hill Playwriting Lab.

Sage Hill Playwriting Lab

July 21 - 31, 2008

in Saskatchewan's Qu'appelle Valley at St. Michael's Retreat



The Sage Hill Playwriting Lab Facilitator this year is Colleen Murphy. Colleen Murphy is a playwright whose recent play *The December Man (L'homme de Décembre)* premiered at Alberta Theatre projects in 2007, won the 2006 Enbridge playRites Award and the 2007 Governor General's Award for Drama. Her first published play, *Beating Heart Cadaver*, was nominated for a 1999 Governor General's Literary Award and a Chalmers Award. Murphy's distinctive award-winning films include *Desire*, *War Holes*, and *Girl With Dog*. Murphy is the President of the Board of Playwrights Canada Press.

Manitoba Association of Playwrights Colony

As part of an exchange initiative between the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre and the Manitoba Association of Playwrights (MAP), SPC members were invited to submit plays to be considered for participation in MAP's Colony, August 7-16, 2008. The selected SPC member (the final selection will be made by MAP) will participate in the ten-day Colony free of charge. The deadline for applications was June 23, 2008.

MAP's Resident International Dramaturg this year will be Jens Boutrup from Denmark, a graduate of the University of Copenhagen, and Brooklyn College, City University of New York (Masters in Directing). Jens is the former Executive Director of the Momentum Theatre in Odense, Denmark and Artistic Director of Bornholms Egnsteater, Denmark. Other dramaturgical staff and local directors will visit throughout the week.

MAP's Colony is geared towards scripts in advanced stages of development. It offers an opportunity for intensive work on a play in progress, access to dramaturgical support with a maximum of two readings with the resident company of actors. Artistic Directors from Winnipeg may be invited to readings at the playwright's request. The successful applicant will have a wonderful opportunity to take part in a creative exchange with artists from another region of the country, while also having concentrated time dedicated to honing a play in progress.

Regina International Fringe Theatre Festival

July 9 - 13, 2008

www.reginafringe.com

It's the 4th annual Regina International Fringe Theatre Festival
July 9-13, 2008 in the heart of the Cathedral Village.

We know you are as excited as we are! Our schedule is posted and we're ready to go! We have a great lineup this year. Check our performers page at www.reginafringe.com for all the info. Our tickets will go on sale soon so check our website often.

If you would like to volunteer during festival, check our volunteer page or send us an email at reginafringe@yahoo.ca and include 'volunteer' in the subject line.

The big kickoff is on July 9th at 10:00am - 11:00 am at the Oddfellows Hall - 2080 Rae St.
Come out and meet the performers and organizers and have some fun!

Saskatoon Fringe Theatre Festival

July 31 - August 9, 2008

www.25thStreetTheatre.org

Join us at Fringe 2008, July 31 to August 9, which will include the best theatre venues in Saskatoon featuring an exceptionally strong line-up of independent theatre.

The Broadway Theatre, Off Broadway Arts Centre, The Refinery, and The Frank and Ellen Remail Arts Centre will set the stage for ten days of theatre magic at the Saskatoon Fringe.

Check out our first environmental theatre show on the riverbank with artist Shawn Erker.

SPC Board of Directors 2008

President: Will Brooks
williamallenbrooks@yahoo.ca
(306) 341-4089

Past President: Dan Macdonald
macdan@sasktel.net
(306) 522-5098

Vice-President: Trenna Keating
trennaheatster@gmail.com
(306) 539-4032

Treasurer: Pamela Haig Bartley
pamela.haigbartley@usask.ca
(306) 665-2639

Members At Large

Cheryl Jack: cheryljack@sasktel.net
(306) 668-8039

James Trettwer: wormwer@yahoo.com
(306) 789-8022

Jamie Lee Shebelski: jshebelski@hotmail.com
(306) 341-4089

Terry Jordan: lmnop@sasktel.net
(306) 931-3437

Rob van Meenen: getnthevanmeenen@sasktel.net
(306) 652-2859

The Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre

PO Box 3092
Saskatoon, SK S7K 3S9

Office address:
7th Floor, Delta Bessborough Hotel
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Phone: (306) 665-7707
Fax: (306) 244-0255

E-mail: sk.playwrights@sasktel.net
Website: www.saskplaywrights.ca

Staff

Dramaturg: Heather Inglis
hdi1@telus.net

Administrator: Sheila Angelstad
sk.playwrights@sasktel.net

Publication mail agreement #40063014
Postage paid in Regina
Please return any unclaimed copies
SPC

PO Box 3092
Saskatoon, SK S7K 3S9

**The Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre acknowledges the following
for their generous support:**



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



UNIVERSITY OF
REGINA



Printed by: The Administration Centre Printing Services
111 - 2001 Cornwall Street, Regina, SK S4P 3X9
Phone: (306) 780-9210 Fax: 780-9271
E-mail: adminprint@sasktel.net