



# Playworks

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## CHERYL JACK

### SPC president

Hi everyone,  
Well, we have had a very successful last few months at the SPC. Heather and I had a fantastic time working together with some great writers in our Aboriginal Playwriting Circle this year. Then it was on to the 24 Hour Playwriting Competition that took place in Regina. I had a lot of fun watching writers who were determined to put their thoughts down in a completed first draft. The event went very well and we have welcomed a few more members into our fold as a result of the competition.

Spring Festival was held in Saskatoon this year and was, as usual, an exciting time for writers, actors, directors and dramaturgs. I was fortunate to be a writer this year. I worked with a great group of actors and my director Stephen Heatley, as always, was a gem to work with.

I want to thank all those who participated in our events this year. We hope we will be able to continue to serve our membership to the best of our ability.

**All my best,  
Cheryl Jack  
SPC President**

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## HEATHER INGLIS

### Spring Festival 2009

Spring Festival 2009 was a full and memorable week. It was a week that was a testament to both the diversity and richness of our members artistic practice and the many people who have helped develop the Festival over the years.

The plays chosen by Jim DeFelice, to be developed and read, represented a terrifically diverse range of styles and world views. Each and every writer— James Misfeldt, Joel Bernbaum, Cheryl Jack, Betty Ternier Daniels, Ian Nelson, Blaine Newton and Mansel Robinson— offered unique and surprising gifts to the packed houses that attended. Each evening was a distinctively engaging evening of theatre, which enabled us to view the richness of our lives though the lens of the featured writer's vision of the world. The tone of this theatrical cornucopia was set by the unforgettably wise and generous leadership of Jim DeFelice, our Festival dramaturg, whose breadth of knowledge of Canadian theatre is as vast as it is accessible. Jim is a true enthusiast and promoter of artists across the country and we were honoured to be able to pin him down for our Festival this year. Thanks, Jim, for sharing your leadership, vision, and wisdom with us. It was

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a true gift to our community.

Spring Festival is certainly about play development, but it is also about artistic exchange in the broader sense. Playwriting is primarily a solitary affair and the opportunity to exchange ideas, perspectives, and approaches with other artists can take some doing. Spring Festival certainly provides this for the writers who are directly involved, but the interchange at Spring Festival goes far beyond the opportunities for a small handful of artists. Spring Festival is a time for Saskatchewan's theatre community to come together each year for a week-long creative conversation. This exchange is fed by the director/dramaturgs from across the country joining us to work on individual projects. This year's team—Conni Massing, Michael Shamata, Stephen Heatley, Amy Lynn Strilchuk and Johnna Wright—brought their own unique brands of insight, garnered from years of commitment to their own theatrical practices, and the bigheartedness to share it over the course of the week. Each of our director's one-of-a-kind gifts to the Festival will leave important creative resonances in the work of the artists who participated and in the audiences who were the final link in the chain of the week's proceedings.

Every year the SPC hires Festival interns who seek to learn about play development, on the ground, from some of the best theatrical minds in the country. This year interns made important offerings to the Festival and must be recognized. Lacey Eninew, Danny Knight, Charlie Peters, Meagan Rankin and Louise Seidel coordinated each workshop room, but also became a very vital part of the artistic discussion over the course of the week (in the rooms, in the public discussions and at our intern meetings). Thank you all for your work and your input into the chemistry of Spring Festival 2009. I learned something from each and every one of you.

It was terrific to see so many new and old friends in our audiences: many returned night after night. The participation of the audience—be it in words, applause, laughter, or silence—is the true test of a script. Public reading is an essential right of passage in the development of their new plays. To all of you who attended: thank you for your time and enthusiasm. You really can't beat a Saskatchewan audience anywhere.

Finally, I'd like to thank Diana Domm, our near perfect

Festival coordinator; Sheila Angelstad, SPC's administrator; SPC's terrific Board of Directors; and of course our volunteers and sponsors who made all of the many Festival wheels go round.

I think that's a wrap for this year. The deadline is Oct. 31st for next year's Festival in Regina.

I'll see you between the words of your next script submission.

**Heather Inglis**  
**SPC Dramaturg**

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## **JAMES DEFELICE**

### **During a lovely Saskatoon spring**

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On a bitter cold November Edmonton day I received two boxes of plays from the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre. I spent the next five weeks reading the high quality submissions with the challenging task of ranking the top six. I made more than fifty pages of notes on all of the submissions and shared my observations with Heather Inglis, the SPC Dramaturg. We communicated by e-mail, phone and had meetings at the Sugar Bowl, a favourite Edmonton haunt, over lattes and fresh cinnamon buns.

During a lovely Saskatoon spring, with flowering trees starting to blossom, I spent a productive, demanding, and exhilarating ten days working with playwrights, directors, and interns and the SPC team watching plays first read in the dark of winter come to fruition during meetings, rehearsals, and six evenings of readings. In addition to the six plays that were selected for workshops, *Curtain Call* by Blaine Newton of Red Deer was chosen from submissions sent by the Alberta Playwrights Network. In an important collaboration between SPC and APN, a Saskatchewan play will be selected for presentation at PlayWorks Ink 2009 in Calgary.

A gifted and dedicated group of directors worked with the playwrights during the three days of workshops allotted to each play. Directors included Michael Shamata, Stephen Heatley, Conni Massing, Amy Lynn

Strilchuk, and Johnna Wright. Michael is the Artistic Director of Victoria's Belfry Theatre. He was responsible for *My Rabbi* by Joel Bernbaum and *Two Rooms* by Mansel Robinson. Conni is an award-winning playwright with *The Myth of Summer*, *Gravel Run*, and *The Aberhart Summer* among her many produced plays. Her adaptation of W.O. Mitchell's *Jake and the Kid* will be presented by Theatre Calgary in September, 2009. Conni worked with James Misfeldt on *Random Acts* and Betty Ternier Daniels on *Singing the Farmer's Market Blues*. Amy Lynn Strilchuk directed the reading of *Interrogating the Sphinx* by Ian C. Nelson. Amy Lynn is the Assistant Dramaturg at Alberta Theatre Projects. Johnna Wright directed the workshop of *Curtain Call*. Johnna was the co-Artistic Director of Vancouver's Solo Collective Theatre. She received a Jesse Award as Outstanding Director for her production of *The Triumph of Love*.

I was very impressed by the very talented Saskatchewan actors who took on the twenty-seven roles in the seven plays. Robert Benz had the distinction of being the only actor in two plays, Murdoch in *Two Rooms* and the Old Man in *Diligence*. Heather Morrison played the twins, Star and Bella, in *Random Acts*. The seven plays offered a gender balance and a range of ages, filled with distinction by the acting ensemble. The actors were most committed in supporting the work of the playwrights. Five interns were an important part of the workshops, contributing to the readings in varied and valuable ways. Louise Seidel, Charlie Peters, Meagan Rankin, Lacey Eninew, and Danny Knight were integral to the process.

As Spring Festival Dramaturg, I seemed to be involved from early morning informal discussions with the playwrights at our dormitory breakfasts, to meetings with the interns to start the day and gathering with the directors and interns to end each day. In between I attended an average of three or four workshop rehearsals a day. And I hosted the talkback sessions after each reading. Heather and I would meet with each team of director, playwright, and intern before the workshop process commenced. And we would have debriefing sessions with the teams the next day following the readings. An important question that we asked in the pre-rehearsal meetings was "What do you want from this workshop?" At the post-reading sessions, we shared responses about the journey and discoveries during the week as well as asking the question: "What

next?". The goal of all of the workshops is the future life of the play as envisioned as a production or continued development.

In support of the key question to each playwright about their important objectives in the workshop process, I would spend time with the playwrights during the afternoon of the reading to form the questions they wanted asked or the format for the talk back sessions. Each talk back was shaped by those questions that were most valuable for the playwright. And each workshop had the goal of what would best show the play to the writer. Workshop presentations ranged from the very physical presentation of *Interrogating the Sphinx*, a very dense language play, to the austere but eloquent reading at two connected tables of *Two Rooms* by Robert Benz and Carol Greyeyes.

Because of the differing technical requirements for each play reading, Aaron Hursh was tireless and invaluable in trying to support the needs of the playwright and director. He responded to decisions that, by the very nature of the process, were not clear until the afternoon of the tech in the theatre. And Diana Domm managed the office/nerve centre of the Festival with patience and imagination. She seemed to have the capacity to be in five places at the same time, making certain that everything ran smoothly. In addition to all of the important work as Administrator, Sheila Angelstad got us all to Saskatoon from far-flung places and made sure we had a place to sleep. Heather Inglis, who must be aware of every actor in Saskatchewan and every director in Canada, gathered and shaped the perfect teams for each play. The seven plays could not have been more different in style and content. And the fortnight of rehearsals and readings had a sense of deserved excitement and importance.

**James DeFelice**  
**Spring Festival Dramaturg**

**A perspective from West of Kerrobert**

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You'd better sit down for this. Relax. Make yourself comfortable. And while you're at it, you'd better slather on some of that SPF 34 sunscreen and grab one of those iced drinks with the little umbrellas, because this is going to be one long, glowing review of the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre's 2009 Spring Festival. So glowing you may need welder's goggles. So long, it may require its own workshoping and a staged reading.

Where to start.

I think the best thing about the event, for me, was the chance to fully immerse myself in Writer World. To mis-quote P. J. O'Rourke, writing is a solitary activity—so solitary that you should probably wash your hands afterwards—so to spend seven days breakfasting with playwrights, working with professional directors and actors, receiving input from dramaturgs, learning the four different ways of pronouncing dramaturg, seeing the progress of other works, pushing the limits of your own work, experiencing a new play every night, and testing the limits of the Saskatchewan liquor laws by drinking wine into the wee hours with aficionados who know a thing or two about theatre was more than I could have hoped for. Sometimes writers need to get out of that sensory deprivation unit they call their writing room and find out what the hell is going on.

As an Alberta writer, I think I assumed that any plays written in Saskatchewan would emphasize wheat, winter and the benefits of a universal healthcare policy (just as Saskatchewan writers likely assumed that any play coming out of Alberta would sing the praises of high oil prices and a two-tiered US-style health system—like my new play "Ralph! - the Musical", for example.

But regardless of whether you're from the next block or the next province, the chance to sequester yourself from the trials and trivialities of the outside world is a godsend. And the chance to see a new play every night reminds you of the diverse and exciting work being created. The themes I saw were universal, whether the setting was just east of Saskatoon or somewhere in the

imagination of the audience.

I'm very thankful for the arrangement between the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre and Alberta Playwrights Network that allowed me the opportunity to submit my play for consideration and be selected the Alberta playwright for this adventure.

On a Sunday back in late May, I packed up my laptop and my red pens and my Alberta-Saskatchewan dictionary and hopped on the slow plane to Saskatoon. There I was greeted by warm weather, kind people and a pretty city by the river (the "Paris of the Prairies", I've heard it described, but without the language barrier, the snooty waiters or the race riots).

Monday morning brought my first meeting with SPC's Heather Inglis, Jim DeFelice (senior dramaturg), and director/dramaturg Johnna Wright, the team responsible for making me face my writing demons and learn the location of my computer's delete button ("If only they'd been available to read this article," I hear you say). From this trio I learned that the phrase "on the nose" is not a good thing, but a piece of dialogue that tells the audience the bleedin' obvious: something that should be evident from the action, or characters or situation, or implied by other dialogue.

But that's really one of the strengths of this process: to be honest enough to be able to break your play down—to listen to the comments and identify the weaknesses—so that you can rebuild it into something more coherent and, therefore, stronger. This doesn't mean giving up ownership of your story—the changes you make, and the choices to make them, are always yours.

Another strength is the opportunity to work with professional actors and directors. Watching the play through this process, as it moved from the page towards the public reading, helped identify where the text didn't support an intention—where an actor, perhaps, wasn't given enough to work with or was required to "turn a corner" too quickly. A playwright may think there's consistency in a character's through

story, but there's nothing like seeing it up on its feet to show you where the story clunks or sags. Sometimes the voices we hear when we're writing are wrong or mistaken (except the one that insists you need another glass of red wine).

But beyond the whole writer thing, this is about people—the opportunity to connect with people with similar artistic goals—to be reminded that I'm not the only one with freshly washed hands.

And what surprised me most, after the week of meetings and rehearsals and re-writes, was sitting in the darkened theatre, part of an audience of 70 or more, and seeing my play as if it were new. That, I think, is

what it's all about.

I came away from this experience with a better play and solid ideas to improve it further. My thanks again to the SPC for this opportunity.

*Blaine Newton is a Red Deer, Alberta playwright, described by the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service as "a person of interest". His play "Curtain Call" was presented on the last night of the 2009 Saskatoon Festival. Thanks to Blaine, the theatre bar receipts were high enough to finance free lifetime dental care for the entire SPC staff.*

**Blaine Newton**  
**Alberta Playwrights Network**

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## JOEL BERNBAUM

### Zen and the art of dramatic action

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We were all in search of the path. We had tried getting to the destination with our own roadmaps, but even the journey was somewhat unsatisfactory. We sat, all at different levels of experience, training and ages. We had one thing in common. We were there to be enlightened in the art of Dramatic Action. Our Buddha would be Stephen Heatley.

Lacking the traditional bald pot-bellied outline of Buddhas past, Stephen entered the room with a kind smile and caring eyes. He had not even bothered to put on any robes for the weekend's session. Instead he dressed seemingly incognito, a red t-shirt tucked into his slightly faded jeans, bottomed off with clean white sneakers. A man has to have great awareness to keep white sneakers white. He wasn't the usual Buddha, but he would guide us none the less.

We students sat quietly in a circle of chairs. The atmosphere smelt slightly like a support group, as opposed to the first stop on a writer's journey. The thirteen of us fidgeted and doodled as we quietly awaited the first words of the session. Everyone had a different background, and up until now (for many of us) our writing had been a solitary experience. Now we were going to embark on a journey of group discovery, led by a teacher with decades of experience in the craft, and not a single scuff on his sneakers.

#### "There are no rules"

The wisdom began. It was clear from the outset that Stephen had finely tuned his knowledge through years of practical explanation. When he spoke, he was engaging yet easy to understand. Thought provoking, but not high-falutin.

#### "Sometimes there are rules"

The classic philosophical reversal.

Each of us had a different reason for attending the workshop, officially billed as "exploring the mechanics of dramatic action". Stephen began by asking each of us to talk about what we wanted to get out of the 11-hour sitting. The answers were as diverse as the people in the room.

Some wanted to write more imaginatively. Some craved the perfect endings. I hoped to gain a strategy or two on how to start writing a play; as I had plenty of ideas but few plays to show for them. The next go-around involved us sharing how we started writing plays. Some people start with "What if", others have an ending first, some just hear voices. I was lucky to be able to steal all of these ideas—my goal had already been achieved before the end of the ice breakers! The learning in the following ten and a half hours would be a bonus.

### **"You don't need to change what you do"**

As soon as we had shared our methods for starting to write, Stephen told us kindly but very clearly, that we should not change what we do. This workshop would only give us tools to use on our very personal process. Tools are good, I thought.

### **"You don't need a hammer to unscrew a screw"**

Stephen shared a story about one of his acting students. Eager to learn and apply all of her newly acquired tools, she began preparing for a role in a show by cycling through each and every exercise she had learned in class. By the first rehearsal, she was exhausted. I empathized with this story. As an emerging actor and writer, I have often felt I was running into the very same roadblocks over and over, and that the solution was throwing every single strategy at the challenge. This can be frustrating at times and even confusing, because it often feels like I am dealing with the same lessons, over and over.

### **"Come back to the basics"**

Stephen shared with us that he too used to think that once you had learned a lesson you moved on to the next one—like grades in school. However, after over a decade of teaching both crafts, he came to the realization that almost every challenge in acting and play writing relates to the basic fundamentals. We learn everything we need to know when we learn the basics, we just begin to understand it as we journey on the artist's path. Hearing this was more than a bonus, it was a

great feeling of relief and empowerment. For each different challenge—or different project—we can refocus our lenses of understanding, using the proper tools.

...And that was just the ninety minutes.

The following nine and a half hours were filled with laughter, learning and yes, enlightenment. We played with the tools to get to know them better, connecting the right implements and elements. The simple confidence I gained in hearing that my process (whatever it was) was fine the way it was, was enough to boost me forward into my next projects. The tools could be used as launch pads, or checklists, or best yet lenses to see those ever important basic lessons in a different way.

### **"You don't need to change what you do"**

Stephen made sure he reiterated this point at the end of the two days. We had come to take a journey, and he showed us that all we needed was inside ourselves. How very Buddhist indeed.

After the workshop I saw Stephen standing outside the John Mitchell building, under a tree. He gazed off into the distance. Perhaps he was thinking about his flight home to Vancouver or his summer projects, but I prefer to think our teacher was just being there, ever so Zen, white sneakers glistening in the Saskatoon sun.

**Joel Bernbaum  
Playwright/Actor**

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### ***SPC member David Sealy to attend Alberta Playwrights Network's PlayWorks Ink in Calgary***

As part of the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre's Playwright Exchange initiative, David Sealy will have the opportunity to attend PlayWorks Ink in Calgary October 22-25, 2009.

PlayWorks Ink is an annual festival featuring new play readings, guest speakers, educational workshops per a variety of theatrical topics, and panel discussions that provide a full weekend of exciting theatrical learning, networking and collaboration opportunities.

David's play, *The Bob Shivery Show*, will receive a three-day workshop with a director from Calgary and a staged public reading on the evening of Friday, Oct. 23.

Visit [http://www.theatrealberta.com/playworks\\_ink.htm](http://www.theatrealberta.com/playworks_ink.htm) for more information about past conferences.



## 24 HOUR PLAYWRITING COMPETITION RESULTS

Seventeen contestants wrote throughout the night in the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre 12th Annual 24 Hour Playwriting Competition. The event was held at the Education Building's Computer Lab on the University of Regina campus from 4:00pm Friday, May 1st until 4:00pm Saturday, May 2nd, 2009. A special thank you to 24 Hour coordinator Jodi Sadowsky

An esteemed panel of judges (Heather Inglis, Kelley Jo Burke, Joey Tremblay, Dan Macdonald, Michele Sereda and Kathryn Bracht) read and completed their assessment of the scripts, all of which were written in 24 hours. At an Awards Brunch on Sunday, May 4th at the Copper Kettle Restaurant, four professional actors (Cavan Cunningham, Marianne Woods, Jonelle Gunderson, and Mike Thompson) gave a script-in-hand reading of excerpts from the prize-winning plays in each category.

The first prize in both categories (Open and Student) was \$500. There were also second and third place prizes, as well as an Honourable Mention in both categories. The winners are:

### Open Category

- 1st Prize *The Interview* by Ken Wilson (Regina)
- 2nd Prize *Stillborn* by Terry Mialkowsky (Regina)
- 3rd Prize *Ribald Tales of Remington Academy* by Matt Price (Saskatoon)
- Honourable Mention *Veritas* by Brita Lind (Regina)

### Student Category

- 1st Prize *Under the Apple Tree* by Cassidy McFadzean (Regina)
- 2nd Prize *Salvation Blvd* by Morgan Murray (Saskatoon)
- 3rd Prize *Lack of Attention, Total Retention* by Sydney Gross (Regina)
- Honourable Mention *Bars and Bedrooms* by Meagan Rankin (Regina)

### Major sponsors of the 24 Hour Competition

City of Regina, University of Regina Theatre Department, Saskatchewan Arts Board, Saskatchewan Lotteries, SaskCulture and the Canada Council for the Arts. Local businesses that supported the event include Coteau Books, Playwrights Canada Press, Saskatchewan Writers Guild, 25th Street Theatre/Saskatoon Fringe Festival, Connie Gault, Globe Theatre, Do It With Class Theatre for Young People, Regina Fringe Festival, Regina Symphony, Hagios Press, Hectik Theatre, Cathedral Village Free House, Regina Folk Festival, Chapters, Grain Magazine, CBC Saskatchewan, Tourism Saskatchewan, Sage Hill Writing Experience, Ramada Hotel, Regina Public Library, Canada Safeway, Culligan Water, Great Canadian Bagel, Abstractions Café, Stats Cocktails and Dreams Pizza, Cathedral Bakery and the Copper Kettle.



Photography by Eric Eggertson

**24 hr Student Category Winner  
Cassidy McFadzean with Heather Inglis**



Photography by Eric Eggertson

**24hr Open Category Winner  
Ken Wilson with Heather Inglis**

### SPC Newsletter Format Change

Many thanks to David Sealy for his assistance in editing the SPC newsletter.  
Look for new layout and design changes in the next issue.

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