

Nightwood Theatre's

Night Talk



Nightwood – a unique feminist theatre with a non-traditional perspective

First National Tour Launched

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February 16, 1990 *On the road:*

Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) is in the middle of its 5-city Canadian tour. The cast and crew have weathered the frenetic days of opening in Ottawa and the -34°C of Edmonton. The show has been an enormous success in both cities, with audience members packing the aisles and the occasional standing ovation. **Great Canadian Theatre Company** and **Northern Light Theatre** have been warm and gracious hosts.

...The cast is exceptional. And the accoutrements of Rubess' production —R.H. Thomson's fight choreography and Susan MacKenzie's dances — are apt and funny.

- The Edmonton Journal

The run in Ottawa had the adrenalin of any first run, complete with last minute cuts and, once or twice, props becoming invisible on stage. With fairly little room behind the set, the backstage traffic was a show in itself. There is a track of activity for each actor. For example, Derek Boyes is one minute a macho Tybalt and the next, a flirty nurse. In between he has to remember to make the right Crypt sounds, sing as the *Castrato's* tenor brother, and hand prop X to actor Y. And then of course there are the rambunctious stage fights. No wonder the actors feel like professional athletes with a track meet every day.

The highlight of the stay in Ottawa was the visit of the **Honourable Ed and Lucille Broadbent** at the last matinee, and the Desdemonites made sure a photo was taken to immortalize the occasion. (Ed and Lucille loved the show). The best review came from a ten-year old who declared *Goodnight, Desdemona* was "better than *Cats*." Who are we to disagree?

Apart from the searing frost in Edmonton – a five minute jaunt for coffees could result in frostbitten fingers – this stage of the tour will be remembered for the beautiful, green Kaasa theatre, a theatrical gem of a 200-seat theatre, graced by a spacious, utterly bourgeois lobby and we loved it. Located at the bottom of the Jubilee Theatre and across from the bright yellow University of Alberta sports facilities, this was where the play tightened up and the artistic value of the

...*Goodnight Desdemona* brims with exuberance and penetrating wit...

- Maclean's

tour was legitimized. **Gyl Raby**, Northern Light Artistic Director, hosted a talk on feminist theatre given by our own Artistic Coordinator **Kate Lushington**, and were

were overwhelmed to see some 150 feminists (we hope) pack the room. They gave the show a rousing welcome, and the reviewers were united in their raves.

Next stop: Vancouver, then on to Toronto. — **Banuta Rubess**
Director

The Nightwood Theatre production ... is zesty and satisfying with fine performances all around...

- The Ottawa Citizen

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A Word, or two, from the Artistic Coordinator

"Now I've enjoyed a modicum of success (with *Desdemona*), people are dying for me to deny that I'm a feminist" as if to suggest that a funny, accessible, entertaining play can't possibly have come from a feminist pen.

— conversation with **Ann-Marie MacDonald**,
The Edmonton Journal

It may not be strictly correct of Monique Mojica, politically speaking, but her larky humor and irreverence in bringing five centuries of native women back to life would probably meet with the gleeful approval of her subjects...

— review of *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, *The Globe and Mail*

As a theatre committed to exploding stereotypes of all kinds, Nightwood often finds itself jammed into another kind of straitjacket — received ideas of what exactly a feminist theatre must be. Rule #1 it seems is that "feminist comedy" is somehow a contradiction in terms, as implied by the above quotes. And indeed, when asked to give a pre-show talk in Edmonton on Feminist Theatre, the only feminist joke that sprang to mind was that old chestnut about changing the light bulb ("one — and it isn't funny").

Northern Light Theatre under the direction of Gyllian Raby had emphasised Nightwood's position as a feminist theatre more than most of our host companies on the National Tour of *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, and as a result I found myself in Edmonton for three heady days in February for talks, interviews and meetings trying to define it. Here are some of the results:

1. Feminist Theatre challenges fixed ideas.
2. Feminist Theatre is woman-centred.
3. Feminist Theatre offers access to the means of production to women theatre artists.

4. Feminist Theatre is collaborative and non-hierarchical in process, yet unafraid to seize and wield power.
5. Feminist Theatre combats isolation — reaches out to other under-represented groups to promote alternative visions of the world.

The truth is that there are many different kinds and styles of feminist theatre in Canada, and although Nightwood's mandate, like that of any theatre company, is unique, there are many women artists and companies across the country pursuing similar ideals and desires. Part of the joy of the Tour has been the opportunity to meet with them, thanks to Barb Lysnes in Ottawa, Gyl Raby and Juliet Kershaw in Edmonton, and Teri Snelgrove in Vancouver.

Here in Toronto we had the great delight of working with Muriel Miguel, of Spiderwoman Theatre, who came from New York to direct *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* by Monique Mojica, a Nightwood co-production with Theatre Passe Muraille. In that play Monique, a Cuna-Rappahannock half-breed, sends out a warning: "Do not mistake me for a crowd of Native Women I am one", and she speaks of spending years "trying to fit into feminist shoes". Similarly, Nightwood does not represent all feminist theatre, and looks forward to trying on many different shoes in the future.

And for those who still think that "feminist comedy" is an oxymoron, just come on down to this year's Five Minute Feminist Cabaret, grown far too big for its boots and now bursting into Young People's Theatre on March 12th. We guarantee fast, feminist and funny, or your money back. (Only joking).

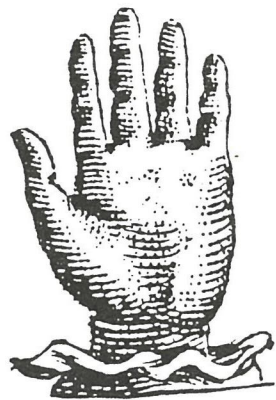
—Kate Lushington

The Eighth Annual

FemCab

Spend 5 Feminist Minutes with:

The Bird Sisters
Meryn Cadell
Susan G. Cole
Ana Coutinho
Empress Productions
Hurtin' & Hootin'
Hysterical Women
Jan Kudelka
Elvira Kurt
Maria Lukofsky
Monique Mojica
Marcy Rogers
Staro Selo
Sandra Shamas
Paula Wing
and many others



No Turning Back

March 12th
8:30 p.m.
Young People's Theatre
165 Front St. E.

Tickets \$15

Princess Pocahontas AND THE BLUE SPOTS

Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots, written and performed by the mercurial **Monique Mojica** with music by **Alejandra Nunez**, has just completed its run at Theatre Passe Muraille's backspace. The electrifying dance/performance, co-produced by **Nightwood** and **Theatre Passe Muraille**, takes audiences on a journey through 500 years of history in the Americas, tracing the mythic and real relationships between native women and white colonizers. Tapping the superb storytelling of Mojica and the unique sounds of Nunez' ancient native instruments was the play's director **Muriel Miguel**.

Miguel, who has a long-time artistic association with Mojica and whose New York based company **Spiderwoman** is famous for story-telling in its own right, was delighted with another opportunity to give dramatic life to native stories. "Making a theatre piece really isn't about writing only. You have to move around, exercise and work the piece. I know how to do that." says the Brooklyn-born Miguel.

The play had been workshopped extensively, most recently at

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Nightwood's Groundswell Festival last fall, but there were still fresh ideas generated for the new production. "For example, we exercised and worked on the section in which Matoaka (the young Pocahontas) got to express herself. We asked ourselves the question 'what would Pocahontas have been like without the white man's civilization? And we hadn't even begun to work on Nubile Child, (a song that describes an Indian girl at an age when her selling value to whites will be highest)".

Miguel also makes a point of describing Nightwood's central role in bringing Princess Pocahontas to the stage. "Monique and I have a way of working together on a piece. You start from scratch and take it through the process," she says. "Often, there are scraps of ideas on scraps of paper all over the house. It was Nightwood that gave Monique the time to go through her process and get it down on paper."

Muriel Miguel's next project is with her own company, Spiderwoman, and uses storytelling to explore her psychic connections with her mother. The performance taps her family's talents, as did Princess Pocahontas (Monique Mojica is her niece) and features her two sisters. Says Miguel about the members of her family circle — "One day I'll write something and put them all in it. Look out."

Getting Involved in Nightwood

Nightwood Theatre is celebrating its tenth season as a producing company. The process of building a feminist theatre committed to the development of plays written and directed by women has provided a challenge and excitement for both artists and audiences. The result has been theatre which questions the status quo, presenting women in a diversity of roles and relationships. Nightwood Theatre seeks to include the experience of all women and has drafted guidelines for building an anti-racist feminist theatre.

Nightwood Theatre depends on the volunteer efforts of women with knowledge and skills. Women who volunteer as

board members serve a two-year term working as a team to provide direction and stability for the theatre. Other volunteer efforts assist with front of house, production and script reading. Please consider a commitment of your time and skills to Nightwood Theatre during our productions or by serving on one of its committees. It's this kind of involvement that can lead to a closer association with our theatre in the form of board membership. Find out more about joining our team by contacting Jennifer Trant at 961-7202.



In celebration of
 Nightwood Theatre's
10th Anniversary Season
 and the triumphant return of
 the national tour of

**Goodnight Desdemona
 (Good Morning Juliet)**

by Ann-Marie MacDonald
 directed by Banuta Rubess

The Board of Directors
 cordially invites you to

**The Goodnight
 Gala**

Thursday, March 22, 1990

The Stage Downstairs
 26 Berkeley Street
 Toronto

\$100 per person*

For tickets, call 961-7202

* A Charitable tax receipt will be issued
 for the maximum allowable amount.

New Faces

Nightwood Theatre welcomes **Pegi McGillivray** as its new general manager. Pegi comes to Nightwood with a degree in fine arts, a passion for theatre and extensive experience in arts administration. With *Goodnight Desdemona* on tour and Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas* and the Blue Spot opening the week she arrived, Pegi's entry was exquisitely timed to introduce her quickly to the hectic and heady energy that drives Nightwood. Pegi replaces **Linda Brown** who has been a mainstay of the theatre for the past five years. Linda was instrumental in moving Nightwood through its important transition from a collective to a company with a community-based board. Although she has left her post, Linda remains closely involved with the company.

Talk Tidbits

Nightwood's playwright-in-residence **Sally Clark's Moo** has been awarded a 1989 Chalmers Award for best Canadian play. Watch for Nightwood's production of Clark's **Life Without Instruction** during the 1990-91 season... Nightwood's Playgroup member **Djanet Sears** has been working on a new project with **Crossroads Theater**, creators of **Colored Museum**, in New York. The project will present the writings of 22 black women in a stage setting... Actor **Martha Burns** missed a Playgroup meeting last month but was productive nevertheless. Martha gave birth on January 12th to a baby girl, Hannah...

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