



The Vancouver East Cultural Centre will premiere battery opera's tale of cockfights and sex, *Spektator* (with Jennifer Murray and Billy Marchenski, left), and the Stanley will present Gabrielle Rose in Timothy Findley's *Elizabeth Rex*.

## Getting Up to Some Theatrics This Season

The curtain will rise on everything from some tried-and-true musicals to a play set in an IKEA store

BY COLIN THOMAS

**Y**ou might as well be reading your horoscope. If you're looking for informed recommendations about specific shows to catch in the upcoming year, adjust your expectations: except for a remount or two, I haven't seen the proposed productions. That said, larger patterns—and contradictions—emerge unambiguously from the stack of good intentions called season brochures. Partly due to the Canada Council's preference for funding homegrown works, the upcoming year will feature more Canadian content than ever. We will also see more large-scale American musicals. There's convergence at the top of the theatrical food chain as the programming at the Arts Club and the Playhouse becomes virtually indistinguishable. And, most excitingly, Vancouver's experimental theatre scene has finally achieved critical mass.

For years, Vancouverites have been treated to isolated adventures in form, but those forays have always felt like lonely monologues. Now, at last, a dialogue has begun. This fall and winter, so many small companies will be floating similar

concerns that their explorations will inevitably enrich one another.

The discussion is rooted partly in concerns with site. As Vancouver companies invite audiences to leave the comfort of traditional theatres, they link us to the international investigation into the relationship between place and identity.

On October 21, for one performance only, Radix Theatre will present *The Sniffy the Rat Tenth Anniversary Bus Tour*. In 1990, Vancouver artist Rick Gibson threatened to squash a feeder rat he named Sniffy as a performance event. His announcement provoked a hysterical public debate that made the papers as far away as Tasmania. The tour will include video presentations on the bus, a Sniffy sing-along, commentary from actor Ian McDonald, and visits to sites such as the Railway Club, where Gibson and his supporters were given free drinks after escaping angry protesters.

Next spring, Radix will present *The Ikea Plays*. Co-artistic director Andrew Laurenson says that Radix has preliminary approval from IKEA to mount the performance in the Richmond IKEA store during weeknight business hours. "People will travel in groups of four or five and there will be three or four actors," he explains.

The performers will wear radio transmitters and audience members will get earphones so that we can hear them voice their inner thoughts. "IKEA is an iconic global entity," Laurenson says, "so I guess you could say that the show will be a look inside the modern mind. Besides, with IKEA, you get all of these ready-made sets."

In March of 2002, the Electric Company will plunge into another ready-made set, the indoor-pool complex at Vancouver's Jewish Community Centre. That's where they'll mount Kendra Fanconi's *The One That Got Away*, the story of a girl with a fish where her heart should be. On a more literal level, the spectacle will explore Fanconi's relationship with her late Jewish grandfather, a millionaire scam artist who married nine times.

Architecture is the subject as opposed to the medium in the Electric Company's other show this season. January 24 to February 2, they will present *Flop* at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. This celebration of failure concerns three talented young architects at work on an unstable building. The show looks like it might be a kind of exorcism for a company that had enormous success early on. "If you experience success, you get set up to fail," co-artistic director David Hudgins comments. "People hope for disaster."

During its engagement at the Fringe Festival (which runs until September 16), boca del lupo will explore relationships based on absence. *Inside* will take place in a large Plexiglas cube on the mound beside Performance Works. In May, the company will offer *Hold Your Head Tight*, part two of its doppelgänger trilogy, at Performance Works as part of the See Seven series.

At the other end of the theatrical spectrum, the most interesting thing about this year's season is just how savvy the Arts Club's artistic director, Bill Miller, is. Miller's nimble responsiveness to his audience has sustained the company for 29 of its 35 years. (This year, his choices for both his Stanley Theatre and the Granville Island Stage are an instructive mix of financial practicality and artistic adventure.)

The Granville Island season opens with the much-anticipated *Flying Blind* (October 31 to November 24), which was inspired by the international success of the physical comedy *The Number 14*. Once again, the unassuming but tremendously creative director Roy Surette will pilot the trip, and many of our finest clowns, including Lois Anderson, Peter Anderson, Manon Beaudoin, Colin Heath, and Wayne Specht, will wreak havoc. The Granville Island season also features a new script by Morris Panych, who is one of Vancouver's—and Canada's—most original and prolific play-

wrights. It looks like Panych may be about to explore politics: *The Dishwashers* (April 3 to April 27) features the labourers who toil in the basement of a four-star restaurant.

Terrence McNally's *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* mistakes obsession for romance, but in programming the show, Miller demonstrates another set of strengths: he keeps his ear to the ground and he champions local talent. *Frankie and Johnny*, which was originally mounted at the Firehall Arts Centre as an Equity co-op last season, features two of Vancouver's most compelling actors, William MacDonald and Gina Chiarelli, and runs December 5 to January 5.

Miller says he chose the final show in the Granville Island season, *Dames at Sea*, because *Dames'* self-mocking stance fits the off-kilter sensibility that distinguishes the venue this year.

Miller says that the Stanley Theatre, on the other hand, demands a whole other kind of programming: "It's funny how venues tend to dictate things. The Stanley has a history, and the sense of expectation that audiences bring to a building like that is helping to stretch us as a company." In other words, his programming there is getting more uptown.

The Stanley season opens with Timothy Findley's Governor General's Award-winning *Elizabeth Rex* (October 3 to 28), which will star

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## PERFORMANCE ART GOES ABOVEGROUND

Mainstream arts like music and theatre have dozens of nonprofit societies representing their needs in this city, but now performance art, one of the most underground forms, is getting its own new society. The move promises to ensure it a regular roster of biennial festivals and a long-term future in this city. "Performance art goes on in the city all the time, but very rarely aboveground," explained the grant gallery's Glen Alteen. It all started with *Live at the End of the Century*, an event organized by the grant two years ago to mark 20 years of performance art in Vancouver. Alteen said it was never intended as anything but a one-off festival, but the galleries and artists involved pushed for the event to be held every two years. The result,

October 13 to November 30, will be the first LIVE biennial of performance art. "When you've got 15 galleries willing to work on anything together, it's worth pursuing," Alteen quipped. "We program performance art regularly [at

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the grant], but it was the excitement from these groups who don't do it regularly that made it happen." That, and a \$20,000 boost from the Vancouver Foundation, support that allowed the grant to fulfill its hopes of a six-week schedule with more than 30 events.

LIVE will have its own society set up

by the time the festival ends, and that group will lead it into regular biennial events, he said. LIVE kicks off October 13 with a performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery; see its lineup detailed in the Visual Arts Season Preview in this issue. More schedule information will soon be at [www.livevancouver.bc.ca/](http://www.livevancouver.bc.ca/), and brochures are to appear at galleries at the end of this month.

### POETRY NOT IN MOTION

Stimulation-starved commuters will have to wait for the latest batch of Poetry in Transit writings to appear on Greater Vancouver buses. "Because of the transit strike, there was a delay," Margaret Reynolds, executive director of the Association of Book Publishers of B.C., told the *Straitline*. Reynolds, whose

association organizes the literary project with TransLink, said all the pieces that will appear in the usual bus-ad format are ready to roll, but the transit authority has been unable to organize its end due to backlogs caused by the spring-and-summer strike. "I have a letter saying it's going to happen this year," Reynolds said. "Normally we would launch in September. We're hoping it will be up in October." For more than five years, Poetry in Transit has featured poems by writers from across the province.

### ON THE HOUSE

The venue may come free, but they still have to raise money for the show to go on. The three companies chosen to take part in Presentation House's second annual

On the House project are holding a fundraiser at the North Vancouver playhouse for their productions this Saturday night (September 8). Starting last season, Presentation House offered up its space to three small, venue-starved companies, and this year features *Stepping Stones' Faces of Love*, the Out to Lunch Players' *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Rock-Paper-Scissors' *Design for Living*. Those three troupes will provide improv, music, and short plays at the Make Me a Star fundraiser. In an added twist, they'll hold a contest, in which the winning character actor will get a walk-on part in RPS's April debut of *Design for Living*. Phone 604-990-3474 for tickets.

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