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The Raw Times

Volume VII • Number 1 • THEATRE IN THE RAW'S FREE NEWSLETTER • Vancouver, BC Canada • Summer/Fall 2015

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The Untold Stories of Vancouver – Three original musicals over 11 years

Original Musical Theatre with a Historic Local Twist – Origins of the Plays:

Eleven years ago Bob Sarti wrote a radio drama titled *The Raymur Mothers* as part of the Carnegie Theatre Workshop's 13 Radio Dramas series produced by Theatre In the Raw. *The Raymur Mothers* was a 3-act drama, based on a non-violent demonstration by women in the Raymur-Place Housing project trying to get safe passage to school for their children across busy railway tracks. Though the 2003 Live Broadcast of the piece was very successful, Bob envisioned the piece as merely the first part of a series which would aim to bring to the public an awareness of heroic individuals in the DTES and Strathcona. These plays would focus on people in the community and their efforts for social justice and the positive community building moments that resulted.

Recapping the Plays Excerpts of Bob Sarti's Playwright's Notes:

Vancouver is full of untold stories - important events that helped shape the history of the city, but haven't always gotten their full recognition. At Theatre In the Raw, we initiated a cycle of three plays, "Untold Stories of Vancouver," that brought these tales into a new realm through the musical theatre stage.

Bruce: The Musical - 2008



The Roaches of *Bruce: The Musical* (Photo: Sindy Angel © 2008)

In 2008, we produced the first full-scale musical – *Bruce-the Musica*l – that revealed how the Downtown Eastside transformed its identity from a Skid Road to a residential neighbourhood. *Bruce - the Musical* is an "unauthorized" biography; it combined real-life "heroes," Bruce Eriksen, Jean Swanson, Libby Davies, with other fictionalized residents of the neighbourhood this time in action singing and dancing upon the stage.

Inevitably, there were gaps in the record. The result is that some of the dialogue and incidents in the show were […] embroidered. That's where the drama in historical drama comes in. To my knowledge, Bruce, Libby, Jean and Harry did not actually sing and dance in beer parlours or at City Hall. But as Jay Hamburger kept reminding me, "Bob, it's not a newspaper article, it's a play!"



Bruce and Libby and Chorus (Photo: Sindy Angel © 2008)

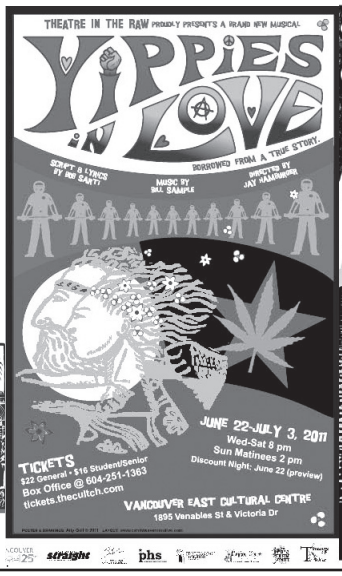
Then in 2011 TITR produced the second musical *Yippies In Love*, the untold story of a '60s-era tribe of radical political provocateurs who rocketed across the Vancouver landscape in just two years, leaving a new, more direct-action style of politics as their legacy.

In a way, the Yippies play takes the opposite tack from Bruce in its characterizations. Rather than portraying real-life heroes, its heroes are fictionalized composite of Yippies I have known. While Yippies were ultra-focused on media and image, it was not primarily about individual personalities, but about the ideas that were creative, outspoken and produced positive change. The real-life characters that do appear in the play are far from heroes; they are the establishment figures who reviled and attempted to suppress the Yippies.

Ironically, 40+ years after it all happened, the establishment now seems ready to embrace the Yippies as a legitimate part of Vancouver history. *Yippies In Love* helped to spur this change, and the play had been officially

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Yippies In Love - 2011



The cast of *Yippies In Love* unfurl their flag (Photo: Evan Digby © 2011)

recognized in the city`s 125th anniversary celebration. The City actually encouraged people to take in the show! The show at The Cultch was actually sold out for many a performance.

Then came the last of the three original musicals in the series. I originally wrote *The Raymur Mothers* as a radio play in 2003 for a theatre workshop conducted by Jay Hamburger at the Carnegie Community Centre and was broadcast over Vancouver Co-op Radio CFRO. It was the first play I had ever written, and conceived as a straight-forward recounting of the events leading up to the mothers' blockade of the railroad tracks and the courtroom scene that followed it. As such, it was an extension of my career's work in journalism – telling a story as literally ("undramatically") as possible.

The final version of *The Raymur Mothers* was greatly expanded over the original radio version. It takes in not only the blockade, but the lifestyle and problems faced by low-income women trying to raise children in Vancouver in the early 1970's. I envisioned about a dozen songs in the popular genres of the day – pop, folk, ballads, rock, country, anthemic, highlighting the range of issues facing the protagonists, from relationship problems and courting rituals to the challenges of being a single parent to the



Karyn Mott, Toby Verchere, and Julia MacLean in *The Raymur Mothers* (Photo: Colin Beiers © 2014)



The cast of *Yippies In Love* levitate the cop shop (Photo: Evan Digby © 2011)

liberating power of taking matters into one's own hands through direct action.

I came to learn of many of the traditions of the theatre. One that appealed to me a great deal was the use of music and choreography to help make difficult and complex ideas and emotions more accessible to the audience.

I was especially drawn to artists who had tackled many-sided social issues, including Brecht & Weill and Rogers & Hammerstein. Though all the plays in the "Untold Stories of Vancouver" series are dramatizations of events, what is as totally true to life as I could make it is the heroic struggle of a community to assert its identity and its dignity, and the role of some very remarkable people in bringing that about.

- By Bob Sarti (edited by Jay Hamburger)

The Raymur Mothers – 2014



Karyn Mott, Toby Verchere, and Julia MacLean in *The Raymur Mothers* (Photo: Colin Beiers © 2014)

Thank you...

to the three choreographers Yvonne Chartrand, Ella Batten, and Anna Kuman as well as our faithful costume designer Stephanie Jones, and Stage Manager Jennifer Magajes and assistant Adeline Martin.

The Winners of Our 8th Biennial 2012/2013 One-Act Play Writing Contest!

First Choice $200:
Saitama by Erik Champney

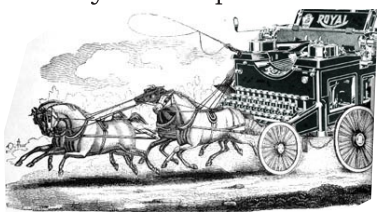
Second Choice $100:
Catch and Release by Robert Burns
Finders, Keepers by Linda McCready

Third Choice $75:
For the Dream by Makenzie Jahnke
Look up, America by George Johnson
Power Play by Barry Oshry

Honourable Mentions:
A Walk in the Park by Anthony Arnold
A Week from Today 30 Years Later by Pat Kaufman, and ***How to Get Published*** by David Sard
Wild Dawn Fever by Pat Kaufman

Social Issues Script Recognition:
Subway Extension to the Marianas Trench by Andrew Lee and
The Way You're Holding Me Now by Jeremiah Bartram

Youth Play Recognition:
Stosh by Paul Manuel Kane
Miracle by Jose Espinoza



Announcing Theatre In the Raw's 9th Biennial One-Act Play Writing Contest

For 16 years TITR has held this contest to give up-and-coming and established writers alike an opportunity to have their work staged by a professional theatre company. Following in the tradition of our mandate: we are dedicated to artistic grassroots theatre in the Lower Mainland/ Vancouver, as well as to presentations beyond B.C. borders. We are risk takers, creating and responding to the cultural needs of those in Canada and the International community. We want to provide an open, creative, and supportive atmostphere for struggling artists and give exposure to tried and untried playwrights.

We're looking for the best, new and fresh One-Act plays never before performed for payment or published. (Plays can be previously workshopped.) The contest is open to all. Entries will be accepted until **December 31, 2015** at midnight. We particularly look forward to plays submitted on themes of cultural/social diversity!

For more specific guidelines please visit:
www.theatreintheraw.ca/contest

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Thank you to Bob Sarti, Bill Sample & Earle Peach

With a project that spanned 11 years it was an honour to work with Bob, Bill, and Earle on such a large project. The creativity flowed. Looking back, with the talent we were working with, the writing of, and then mounting, all three musicals in the "Untold Stories of Vancouver" each for 10 performances on Vancouver stages was quite an accomplishment. Your award winning original musical theatre pieces embodied all aspects of TITR's mandate to assist in the creation of socially relevant original works.

"It seems that in order to succeed - or even function - in the world, a certain tolerance for moral and cognitive dissonance is necessary." **John Vaillant**; *The Golden Spruce* ch. 14; pg. 220.



JAY'S THOUGHTS ON A RECENT GATHERING OF LEADING VANCOUVER THEATRE PRACTITIONERS

There is an odd recurring outcome when leading theatre practitioners get together to address community concerns about the health of the theatre arts in Vancouver and BC. At the end of the day there are few if any answers forthcoming to the pressing problems discussed with such theatre engagement gatherings in the city.

Points of dialogue were recently brought forth at a Vancouver day-long conference seeking to build a healthy creative future for further development and stronger engagement with the performing arts in and around Vancouver, the Province and Canada. I went as representative from our Theatre in the Raw (TITR) attending the meeting hoping to see results from such a gathering. I am not sure there was any outcome whatsoever. Matters were to my knowledge left hanging.

We are a small independent theatre company in Vancouver whose practitioners are doing their best to get productions up at least once a year. Primarily our presentations are original play works. On occasion we produce reputable well-known theatre pieces previously performed by other companies. After over 20 years of continuous work for TITR I've found myself looking in the mirror, thinking that no matter what our small to medium sized theatre in Vancouver says or does we are at a huge disadvantage. But why…?

No doubt the theatre community discussion meetings over time have come and gone but to what avail or result? The notion that after lengthy production work (which by all standards has been successful) TITR would step right in line for proper performance work funding, is a complete fiction. Few to my knowledge for that matter manage to live off of the funding that comes into the Arts without finding subsidiary financial means via lucrative movie contracts; out-of-town placements or have deep deep-pocketed backers. Many end up simply quitting the business.

All the discussion in the world at a practitioner's gathering is not going to change matters until the approach to the non-profit theatre arts funding scene with its massive rigmarole of restrictions, rules, and bureaucratic grant apparatus is either revamped or redone. Input and roundtable discussions from a number of the groups that have been around for over 20 years such as TITR need to have a greater say and be listened to. Setting-up for increased funding and promotional support aimed towards small to medium sized theatres mounting significant shows in the Lower-Mainland or touring plays to outlying communities want adequate attention to be met with real financial results. Action in the form of real support, not just winks and nods is called for by such theatres and their followers.

The larger and older theatre groups seem to be in charge, receiving what looks to be a good portion of the available funding. Smaller organizations that are developing invaluable and original theatre work (often with emerging actors on the stage), are left not only by the wayside, but falling back to "square one" with what to do, where to do it and how to get the backing to support their critical work. This has occurred time and again to TITR, even after producing popular sold-out musical works that audiences appreciate.

It took TITR 11 years to complete a three-part musical project titled The Untold Stories of Vancouver by Bob Sarti, (music/songs by Bill Sample; incidental music/songs by Earle Peach). It was a huge project that told remarkable true stories fictionalized to music and dancing about local issues significant to the Vancouver community. It took over a decade of work with complex bumps in the road. In 2014 we finished the last of the plays. Over 900 audience members came to

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Thank You to Our Sponsors & Supporters!

The Board of Theatre In the Raw Society (Paul Manson, Paul Beckett, Roger Howie, Jan Blanchet, Donald Todd, Jan Janovick, Faune Johnson, Ruth Kozak, Adeline Martin, Tristan Broom, Sylvan Hamburger), and the members and supporters of Theatre In the Raw Society over the years.

The original participants in the 1971 railroad track blockade – the so called "Militant Mothers of Raymur" and their children; especially to Carolyn Jerome, Liisa Atva, Barbara Burnet, Joan Morelli, Sheila Turgeon and Muggs Sigurgeirson to name a few of the heroic women.

As well as the Hamburger/Gell family, Jason Logan, Steve Prokopenko, Audrey McClellan, John Pappenheimer, Martha Brouwer, Sandi McGinnis, Jeni Mastin, Melissa Cooper & Richard Hamburger, John Field & June Malaka, Faune Johnson, Anne & Patrick Auborg, Sylvia Woodsworth, Ann Hepper, Sheryl Melnyk, Diane Sarti, Maria Zaremba, Robert Sarti and Muggs Sigurgeirson, Judith Lawrence, Carol O'Dell, Ernest Hekkanen, Marian Collins, Joe & Solveigh Harrison, Ezra Manson, Gary Kent, Cathrine and John Howard, Cynthia Verchere, Ramona Orr, Robert Kinnard, Murray Bush, Sharon Kravitz, Kathleen Flaherty, Jodi Smith and JLS Entertainment, carol weaver, Thea Sample, Vancouver Moving Theatre and the Heart of the City Festival, Teresa Vandertuin, Terry Hunter, and Savannah Walling, Carnegie Community Centre, and the Ray-Cam Co-Operative Centre.

We acknowledge the support of the Province of British Columbia, The Vancouver Foundation, The BC Arts Council, the Hamber Foundation, as well as the Canada Council for the Arts for support.

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The Raw Times is written by Jay Hamburger and Scott Broom
Original drawings by Atty Gell and Maurice Spira.
Editorial Assistance: Scott Broom, Jay Hamburger, Atty Gell.
Original Design: carol weaver.

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Email: theatreintheraw@telus.net

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see that 10 performance run. Yet we have remained with minimal funding in the kitty to prepare for another mainstage show or a remount of one of the three Sarti plays. Going forward contending with all kinds of rules and regulations to the funding application processes doesn't make sense to a group with over 20 years under its belt, that has performed and toured with professional/ semi-professional artists in BC.

This commentary should not to be seen as a complaint towards the theatre arts scene here in BC or in Canada. It is a call for action; a focus for a better healthier future for the performing arts. Yet, let's pose a question: why is there such a struggle to do creative projects when larger older theatre groups are getting what looks to be continuous ample funding and smaller more risk-taking theatre groups go to huge efforts only to receive miniscule amounts or nothing at all to do significant ground breaking work?

When theatre symposium groups are called for and practitioners attend, one asks where the results of such gatherings end up. With all our concerns and aims raised, what is the outcome intended to be and what then is accomplished? Why do a number of us find ourselves further out on the periphery of the theatre arts scene at the close of day? Who really is in charge at the top and why? How did they get to where they are now? How and by whom are grant application decisions made from venerable theatre groups applying; do we need "inside" pull to "get there" beyond the actual work we do?

When forums concerning live performance works are brought forward, we need to be more open to seasoned creative voices that have been at it a long time; voices that know something about the lay of the land yet find doors difficult "to open" and obstacles everywhere along the way. Not listening to voices seldom heard makes the



Aadin Church, Danielle St. Pierre, and Karita Sedun in *The Raymur Mothers* (Photo: Colin Beiers © 2014)

creative process problematic for a serious theatre company that continue to aim on a meaningful learning curve of development; one focused on substantial plays placed in front of the community.

Do the powers that be within the BC theatre and Canadian Arts Community have a predetermined mindset with answers to pressing issues about creative sustainability? What are the outcomes and summaries of such gatherings with reputable theatre artists; those giving their time to have their concerns about the BC performing arts improved for the better? What will enhance matters for the theatre arts companies taking a chance producing new works year in, year out on low budgets during uncertain times and circumstances?

TITR has years of worthy performance work on record that includes plays about drug addiction among youth; First Nations Residential Schools; gay rights and coming out; injustices within the judicial system; loneliness of the elderly; women seeking to come out from under oppressive circumstances; dramas that show the terrible effects of war as well as the dangers of government surveillance within the bedrooms of the populace. And we have produced well-known classical plays by Chekhov, Beckett, Gogol, Mamet, Lill to name a few well-known playwrights. Yet how can such a theatre company be practically "cupboard bare" within the arts community with little to no support for the next production? Thus I find myself with a recurring thought: that no matter what our theatre does in Vancouver we are at a huge disadvantage. Twenty plus years of production and performance seems to have no bearing or substance to it in Vancouver, or B.C. or Canada.

Is the answer blowing in the wind or is it submerged with outcries for change from within by the artists in the present field seeking to grow in order to survive, yet to what avail? - by Jay Hamburger - artistic director of Theatre in the Raw

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"*If the story is good enough, if it's imaginative enough, if it's moving enough it is going to reach deeper than the level of sheer information and change somebody's life two degrees. That is an enormous achievement."* **David Remnick** - speaker at the ProPublica/ New School conversation on "Long-Form Storytelling in a Short-Attention-Span World." 2011.

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