Editorial

by Dalbir Singh and Chris Dupuis

A cursory glance at the SummerWorks Performance Festival's website, and a series of historical facts confronts the reader like the following: Toronto's (and by extension, Ontario's and more generally, Canada's) premier fringe turned juried festival was initially founded by a small group of friends in the early 1990's who desired to expand their community's theatre ecology.

We're told that this ecology opened up to successive leaderships to become more engaged with varied modes of theatre interrogating how we view performance styles and modes of expression. The ever-expanding breadth and scope of the kinds of theatrical performances that took place at the festival over the past few decades opened up new possibilities as well as questions to its many audiences.

How can theatrical exploration flourish in a festival setting? How do we interrogate and interpolate music and dance with theatrical expression? How is the theatre made accessible to the hordes of people who flock to its stages every summer in terms of linguistic and ethnic diversity?

We, the editors, sprung into editing this issue almost by happenstance as well as a sheer interest in how an issue can highlight all of the above questions, but also on its 30th anniversary reflect upon the many fascinating facets of its continued longevity and relevance. This anniversary of the festival also gave us the opportunity to fully explore pivotal moments in SummerWorks' history, artists' reflections on their own experiences and the material and creative concerns of their conditions there.

Our remove and distance from the festival (as interlocutors as opposed to insiders) gave us the opportunity to fully appreciate the breadth of a festival from its original gestation to a fully formed performance festival that attracts thousands of spectators.

There are articles that examine specific works such as Dr. Bruce Barton's "Traces" (in part also a critique of experimental theatrical practice), Tita Kyrtasak and Andreea Hluscă's look at The AMY Project as a space for supporting youth voices at the festival, and Anna Chatterton and Evalyn Parry's story of performing their show *Clean Irene and Dirty Maxine* in a parking lot during the Northeast Blackout of 2003. Other pieces reflect upon personal moments during the organization's trajectory including the interview with the festival founders and a conversation with leaders who have helmed the organization at various points. Luke Reece offers a humorous account of personal growth through the festival's leadership program. Dr. Spy Dénommé-Welch and artist Yolanda Bonnell discuss Indigenous performance making at the festival. Shaista Latif's poignant musings on an award presented by SummerWorks also serves as a reminder of equity concerns amidst the machinations of programming. Jonathan Seinen

looks back at his own participation at the festival during various productions through a welcome non-nostalgic lens by pointing to diversity concerns that should be made more pronounced and addressed for future seasons.

Part of the task in composing this issue was to convey the broad range of performance styles the festival has hosted, something addressed through the conversation by curators Amelia Ehrhardt, Cathy Gordon, and Jenn Goodwin, Kesha Patel's article on the history of francophone programming, Coleen MacPherson's text on the festival during COVID-19, and the insert created by bluemouth inc. We've tried to gather an assortment of excerpts from plays that have been produced at the festival since its inauguration in this issue rather than the typical solo piece that often bookends an issue of Canadian Theatre Review. These scripts have all been unpublished (or gone out of print) and have created an indelible impression upon us editors. As a complement to this, festival photographer Dahlia Katz's photo essay offers a unique view on the artists, works, and audiences that passed in front of her lens over a five-year span.

Again, no compendium of work focusing on a festival's output can adequately claim that these plays represent SummerWorks as a whole. They should, along with the articles, simply be presented to the reader as a sampler or as an introduction to what SummerWorks has offered in the past; what it appears to be in its present and with an eye to how the festival may change in the future.

The guiding advice we gave to those writing articles for this issue, was to think of the future scholar or general reader who may pick up this issue on SummerWorks. How would this issue speak to the past, and how does it convey to the future reader the semblance of a festival struggling during a global pandemic to make sense of the world and theatre's place in it.

About the Editors

Dalbir Singh has taught theatre courses at the University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, and the University of Guelph. At Waterloo, he taught the first theatre course exclusively focused on racial identity and Canadian theatre. He has edited five collections of plays and critical essays on topics including Tamil culture and identity, post-colonial theatre, South Asian Canadian drama, and queer Canadian theatre.

Chris Dupuis is a writer, creator, and curator, originally from Toronto. Dupuis holds a BFA in theatre from York University, an MA in Cultural Studies from KU Leuven, and a post-graduate diploma in Curatorial Practice from KASK (Ghent University of Applied Sciences and Arts), and has served as guest faculty at Concordia University, DAS Arts, and HKU (Utrecht School of the Arts).