

A Great Place to See Great Theatre

showguide

Belfry
Theatre

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Our Community. Onstage.

HOME IS A BEAUTIFUL WORD

collected and edited by **Joel Bernbaum**

January 7 – 19, 2014

www.belfry.bc.ca

Performance Schedule

January 7–19, 2014

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
JAN			1	2	3	4 11am B4Play
5	6	7 Preview 8pm Afterplay	8 Preview 8pm Afterplay	9 Opening 8pm Afterplay	10 8pm Afterplay	11 4pm Afterplay 8pm Afterplay
12 2pm Afterplay ASL	13	14 8pm Afterplay	15 1pm Afterplay 8pm Afterplay	16 8pm Afterplay	17 8pm Afterplay	18 4pm Afterplay 8pm Afterplay
19 2pm Afterplay VocalEye Closing	20	21	22	23	24	25

Greater Victoria Public Library Talks
January 10 at 10:30 am – 11:15 am / Bruce Hutchison Branch
January 17 at 10:30 am – 11:15 am / Central Branch

ASL January 12 at 2pm / An American Sign Language (ASL) interpreted performance for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Certified interpreters, standing to the left side of the stage, interpret the script and language used by the actors at the same time it is being performed.

VocalEye January 19 at 2pm / Audio describers provide descriptions of the visual elements of the show, allowing people with low vision to enjoy the theatrical experience without missing any of the details.

BOX OFFICE HOURS During Performance Weeks
 Monday 9:30 am – 5 pm
 Tuesday – Saturday 9:30 am – 7 pm
 Tuesday – Sunday one hour prior to curtain time for in person sales only.
 During Non-performance Weeks
 Monday – Friday 9:30 am – 5 pm

Tickets

250-385-6815 or
www.belfry.bc.ca

B4PLAY

Saturday, January 4 at 11am
 Belfry Theatre, Studio A, 1291 Gladstone Avenue

Join CBC Radio's Gregor Craigie for a live talk show featuring artists from *Home Is A Beautiful Word* and some very special guests.

Free event.



Why I Chose This Play

Within half an hour of the first day of the first workshop on this new script, my perception of homelessness in Victoria was totally changed. My eyes were opened to aspects of the issue that I had never understood.

When I first moved to Victoria six years ago, I quickly became aware that homelessness is both pervasive and highly visible. And it seemed a source of constant stress within the community, with everyone acknowledging that we live side-by-side with it, but unable to contribute to alleviating it. Everyone has an opinion on it: "why did they ever...?" "I wish I could..." "why hasn't someone...?" The longer I stayed, the more I became interested in using the Belfry stage to further the conversation.

The theatre is a place for a community to gather and share stories. Theatre's goal, to quote Hamlet, "is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature," to reflect back to us our selves and our society. Theatre enables us to see the world from new perspectives, and

to help us challenge our preconceived ideas.

My problem was finding the appropriate form for this piece of theatre. A traditional play, with a beginning, middle and end, felt like a trap for clichés and trivialization – "cynical journalist discovers that homeless people are real people, too" – that kind of thing. A happy coincidence brought about the solution to my dilemma. The 2011 SPARK Festival contained three pieces of verbatim theatre: *The Middle Place*, *Kismet one to one hundred* and *Do You Want What I Have Got: A Craigslist Cantata*. These three plays covered very different territory, and while they all used real words in very different ways, the power that comes from harnessing real thoughts and words to create a comprehensive portrait of a topic or idea was compellingly evident. At around the same time, actor, playwright and colleague Joel Bernbaum returned to Victoria, having just received his Master's Degree in Journalism. His thesis topic had been verbatim theatre. It seemed like a sign –

and it was pointing to verbatim theatre.

Commissioning Joel to compile and edit these interviews was one of my more inspired decisions. I couldn't have found anyone better for the job. One has only to read a couple of the transcripts to realize how at ease Joel put everyone with whom he met and conversed: everyone is so willing to share their stories.

I can think of no other medium or forum that could allow for such a 360° perspective on this issue. Audiences will be listening to voices from every possible walk of life in Victoria. Perhaps a documentary film could achieve the same breadth of participation, but it would lack the anonymity that allows our interviewees to speak with such candor and honesty. Their words make me proud to be a part of this community. And this production makes me proud of the Belfry's role in this community.


 Michael Shamata
 Artistic Director

What They Said

by Joel Bernbaum

Hello

Welcome to the Belfry Theatre and the world premiere of *Home Is A Beautiful Word*, collected and edited by Joel Bernbaum.

Home Is A Beautiful Word is a piece of verbatim theatre. The script is made entirely from interviews, much like a documentary.

We originally commissioned this project in 2011 as a way to explore homelessness in Victoria on our stage. Joel spent the better part of two years interviewing hundreds of people. The interviews were then transcribed, and distilled into an engaging script.

The play is spoken by the people of Victoria – our neighbours, leaders, children, seniors and more. It is a hyper-local look at the issue that everyone has an opinion about.

Moving, funny, enlightening and surprising, *Home Is A Beautiful Word* takes us all on a journey as seen through the eyes of our city.

We hope you'll join us for this very special production and we look forward to seeing you soon.

Listening to people talk fascinates me. Pregnant pauses. Rapidly repeated words. Ums and Ahs. These chunks of verbal gold are just the tip of the iceberg. Original turns of phrase. Complex argument structures. Personal emotional stories. As a journalist and theatre artist I have spent a lot of time thinking about how people talk, and of course, what they say. Several years ago I was explaining my infatuation with the spoken word to the Belfry Theatre's Artistic Associate Erin Macklem. I told her how I was planning to take a year at graduate school to study the undisputed territory where journalism and the theatre overlap. "Oh, you mean verbatim theatre," she said. This was the first time I'd heard this fancy term – and it was the beginning of an in-depth investigation of the art form.

"Verbatim," means word for word, or in the exact words. "Verbatim theatre" is a term for making plays out of transcripts. Transcripts of interviews, trials, or public hearings. Very much like documentary films, there is a wide spectrum of verbatim plays – ranging from those mixing verbatim material and creative license (such as *Frost/Nixon*) to plays combining verbatim material and commentary (such as *The Laramie Project*) to plays strictly using words spoken by a given community (such as *Home Is A Beautiful Word*).

British theatre scholar Derek Paget first coined the term "verbatim theatre" in a 1987 journal article. Paget was writing his thesis on the form, explaining it had been around in various forms since the 1960s, and was a direct

product of the portable tape recorder. For the first time, anyone could take it upon himself or herself to become an interviewer, investigating and presenting issues they were passionate about. Paget wrote that verbatim theatre empowered those normally disempowered, adding voices to public debate and "seeking to extend the space left by the 'official' recording and reporting media." He concluded however, that because it was extremely time consuming to collect and transcribe interview material, there was not a lot of hope for the future of the medium. He was wrong.

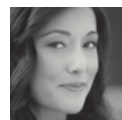
Almost thirty years later verbatim theatre is thriving. By the time I was writing my thesis on verbatim theatre's relationship to journalism, there were several examples on the Canadian theatre scene alone of powerful and popular verbatim theatre productions. Oonagh Duncan's *Talk Thirty To Me* – about aging. Annabel Soutar's *SEEDS* – about a Saskatchewan farmer's fight against big business. Andrew Kushnir and Project: Humanity's *The Middle Place* – about shelter youth (which was presented at the Belfry's 2011 SPARK Festival). Among others, these examples show the appeal of the real. The theatre is a place where we come to imagine, and to believe in lies. But it can also be a place where we come together to hear real people speak their truths.

I was curious how we could innovate on the art form. How could the world of journalism help grow this very journalistic theatre practice? When Michael Shamata contacted

me about the possibility of applying my research to a project at the Belfry I was immediately interested in the subject matter: Homelessness. As a theatre school student in Victoria I remember walking home from downtown and being shocked by the amount of people sleeping on the streets. Michael said he wanted to address this pertinent issue on stage. We quickly agreed that verbatim theatre would be a perfect vehicle for this dialogue, and that our project would take a holistic look at homelessness in Victoria. Instead of focusing only on homeless people (who of course would be a crucial part of the story), we would interview the entire community. Homeless people, housed people, children, teenagers, senior citizens, lawyers, doctors, police officers and others. After all, homelessness is an issue involving and affecting the entire city.

This was no simple task. The secret ingredient was time. For over two years I spent time with the community. I visited schools, shopping malls, shelters, churches, jails, and offices. I helped deliver early morning coffee to people sleeping outside, played pool with youth at shelters, stood on street corners and knocked on doors in random neighborhoods. Almost every person I talked to had something to say about the issue of homelessness. I was consistently humbled by how open all of these strangers were with their stories. Interviews ranged from five minutes to five hours. The words were all spoken so differently, but what was said was always fascinating. It was a life changing experience. Over and

cast & creatives



Yoshie Bancroft



Kelt Eccleston



Kayvon Kelly



Kevin Loring



Tracey Moore



Joel Bernbaum
Playwright



The Belfry Librarian

We've unleashed the GVPL Librarians on our season scripts. For *Home Is A Beautiful Word*, our Librarian has put together a list of books to help you get even more out of our production.

NON - FICTION

Dying For a Home: Homeless Activists Speak Out / Cathy Crowe (2007)

Family Violence and Homelessness: A Review of the Literature / National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (2006)

Home and Away: In Search of Dreams at the Homeless World Cup of Soccer / Dave Bidini (2010)

Homelessness: Causes & Effects / B.C. Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security (2001)

Homelessness: Clear Focus Needed / British Columbia Office of the Auditor General (2009)

Homelessness: How to End the National Crisis / Jack Layton (2008)

Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness / John Hagan (1997)

No Fixed Address: Tales From the Street / Susan Scott (2000)

FICTION

The Beggar's Garden: Stories / Michael Christie (2011)

Waiting for Joe / Sandra Birdsell (2010)

CHILDREN - NON - FICTION

Homelessness / A.M. Buckley (2012)

List Compiled by June Sinclair Smith, GVPL.

over again my assumptions about this issue were shattered. There is no use trying to predict what is happening inside someone's head. It is crucial that we have conversations.

After over five hundred interviews, we were left with a fantastic problem: way too much material for a play. A faithful team of transcribers turned hundreds of hours of recordings into thousands of pages of transcripts. We worked tirelessly to accurately record the stories, with all their pauses, laughs and inflections. Interview transcripts were read aloud by actors, and carefully edited for brevity, without alerting meaning. I made every effort to reconnect with the original interview sources so they could approve of the way their interview was being presented. I did follow up interviews, asking people to pose questions as well as answer them. I then took those questions, and posed them, verbatim, to members of our community. This is one of my innovations of verbatim theatre practice – empowering sources to ask questions that create a dialogue between people that may not ever otherwise meet, except for their exchanges onstage.

Citizens of Victoria spoke every word you hear in *Home Is A Beautiful Word*. I hope you have a similar experience as I did, hearing stories you recognize and stories that challenge your assumptions. And I hope when the house lights come up, you'll stay in your seats and join the conversation.

Joel Bernbaum is an actor, playwright and journalist. He wrote his thesis on *Verbatim Theatre's Relationship to Journalism* at Carleton University, under the supervision of Prof. Dave Tait.



Michael Shamata
Director



April Viczko
Set Designer



Mara Gottler
Costume Designer



Rebekah Johnson
Lighting Designer



Erin Gruber
Associate
Set Designer



Laura Krewski
Choreographer

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

AFTERPLAY WEEKS

January 7 – 19

Ever want to "debrief" after seeing a show? Or maybe you're curious how other audience members interpreted the play. Following every performance of *Home Is A Beautiful Word* you can stick around and chat with fellow audience members.

BELFRY AT THE LIBRARY

Delve into the themes and peek behind the scenes of the world premiere of *Home Is A Beautiful Word* during this casual conversation with an artist from the show and an expert from the community. Register online at www.gvpl.ca or call your local branch for more information about these free events.

January 10, 10:30 am – 11:15 am

Bruce Hutchison Branch

January 17, 10:30 am – 11:15 am

Central Branch

THE FLAME

Monday, January 27 at 7pm

Deborah Williams, actor and one of the creators of *Mom's the Word*, is putting together an evening of storytelling later this month.

The evening will feature storytellers from Vancouver and Victoria. Please check our website for further details.



Single Tickets
\$25 – \$40
on sale now.

PROUD

by **Michael Healey**

February 4 – March 9, 2014

Funny and foul-mouthed, yet surprisingly sweet. GLOBE & MAIL

Dazzlingly witty, surgically precise and scathingly satirical. TORONTO STAR

Award-winning playwright Michael Healey (*The Drawer Boy*) takes on his biggest subject yet: The Right Honourable Stephen Harper. His sexy, cheeky and surprising play will have you rolling in the aisles – regardless of your politics. You may even find yourself liking the man! *Proud* imagines a different outcome to the last Federal election – the Tories took Quebec and won a huge majority. A young, attractive and very inexperienced MP provides the Prime Minister with a new tool in his arsenal. Unfortunately for him – she may be the smartest man in the room!

www.belfry.bc.ca

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Facebook, Twitter, tumblr, Vimeo, YouTube, LinkedIn

WORLD PREMIERE

Single Tickets

\$ 25 (plus GST)
at 250-385-6815
or www.belfry.bc.ca

Belfry
Theatre

HOME IS A BEAUTIFUL WORD

collected and edited by
Joel Bernbaum

SEASON SPONSORS, FOUNDATION AND GOVERNMENT FUNDERS



HOME IS A BEAUTIFUL WORD

JANUARY 7-19, 2014

BELFRY THEATRE

**1291 GLADSTONE AVENUE
VICTORIA, BC V8T 1G5**