

# THEATRE DIRECT

EXCEPTIONAL THEATRE FOR **YOUNG PEOPLE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 11 to May 3, 2009**

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**Theatre Direct presents the Canadian premier of *Walking the Tightrope*, an enchanting and moving play for children by England's Mike Kenny.**

Theatre Direct, one of the country's most respected companies dedicated to young audiences, continues the tradition of producing thoughtful and engaging theatre for young people and families with its newest production *Walking the Tightrope* by **Mike Kenny**.

Directed by **Thomas Morgan Jones** (*Pyasa*, *Letters to my Grandma*) and presented at the Loop, Theatre Direct's newly opened theatre for children, youth and families, *Walking the Tightrope* will run from April 7 to May 3.

Five year old Esme's annual visit to Grandad Stan's and Nanna Queenie's is a time full of games, laughter, and family. This year...this year something is different. Where is Nanna Queenie?

Never one to shy away from deep and sensitive messages, Theatre Direct's Canadian premier of *Walking the Tightrope* is a delicately written and charming drama exploring a child's first experience of loss and change through a story that celebrates the special bond shared by grandparents and grandchildren.

Using song and story within a colourful seaside setting, *Walking the Tightrope* will be performed by two actors: veteran stage and screen actor **Wayne Robson** (*The Red Green Show*, *Welcome to Mooseport*) in the role of Grandad Stan and **Sharmila Dey** (*Sanctuary Song*), as young Esme.

Music by Dora Award-winning composer **Mike Ross**; Lighting Design by **Geoff Bouckley**; Set and Costume by **Kelly Wolf**.

**Mike Kenny** is the recipient of numerous awards and was named to The Independent Sunday's list of Top Ten Living UK Playwrights and his plays are performed regularly throughout the UK, France, Germany and Scandinavia.

"Walking the Tightrope held special appeal for the very young but also spanned the generation gap, to grip parents and grandparents alike." - Falmouth Navigator, UK

"Theatre Direct has never stepped back from confronting some of today's more difficult issues and presenting them to young audiences in a theatrically accessible manner. May the show and the organization have a long life in their new home." Richard Ouzounian, The Toronto Star

## **Walking the Tightrope**

By Mike Kenny (UK)

Directed by Thomas Morgan Jones

For ages 5 -8

**April 7 – May 3, 2009**

**Media opening: Tuesday, April 14 at 4:30 PM**

Artscape Wychwood Barns | 601 Christie Street, Studio 174 (Christie & St. Clair St. West)

**Performances:** April 18, 19, 25, 26, May 2 at 1:00 PM and 3:00 PM

**Tickets:** \$5 to \$20 - **great family pricing and special discounts for grandparents!**

**Box office:** 416.537.4191

[www.theatredirect.on.ca](http://www.theatredirect.on.ca)

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## **WALKING THE TIGHTROPE**

### **SYNOPSIS**

Every summer Esme goes to stay with her Grandad Stan and nanna Queenie. But this summer is different. Nana Queenie's not there. Where is she? Grandad Stan says she's gone to join the circus. Esme can't understand why. After all she knew she was coming. She does it every year. This is a play about love and loss. Why some things stay the same and some things have to change.

A beautiful and magical play, full of moments of remembered childhood, *Walking the Tightrope* takes us on a journey to the sea, to the circus and to the changing worlds of both Granddad Stan and his granddaughter Esme.

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## WALKING THE TIGHTROPE BIOS

### THOMAS MORGAN JONES - Director

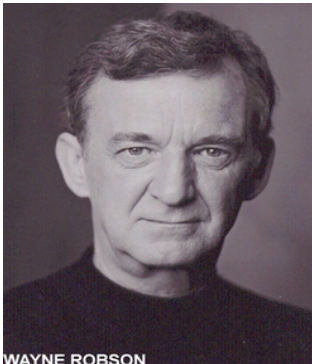
Thomas' work as a director, playwright, dramaturg, fight and movement coach, and instructor has been seen across Canada as well as in Ireland and the United States. Recently he directed the award winning production of *Pyasa* (one of NOW Magazine's Top Ten productions of 2008) and the critically acclaimed *Letters to my Grandma*, both by playwright Anusree Roy. A company member of the Charlottetown Festival from 2002-2007 he is currently Co-Artistic Director of Theatre Jones Roy and Associate Artistic Director of Theatre Direct, one of the country's leading theatres for young audiences.

### SHARMILA DEY – Esme



Sharmila is very excited to be working with Theatre Direct once again. Her other credits with this company include *Sanctuary Song* and *Beneath the Banyan Tree*. Most recently Sharmila toured *Kindness* across Canada with MTYP/Roseneath Theatre and has toured theatre for young audiences across the United States with *Danny*, *King of the Basement* and *Wrecked*. Sharmila has also appeared in several Shakespeare productions and is a graduate of the theatre program at George Brown. You can see her soon in an episode of CTV's new drama *The Listener*.

### WAYNE ROBSON - Stan



Wayne Robson has had a substantial film and television career with roles on *Black Harbour*, *Road to Avonlea* and *Cold Squad* and *Due South*. He has been nominated for 3 Gemini and 2 Genie Awards for his roles in *The Diviners*, *The Grey Fox*, *Bye Bye Blues* and *The Red Green Show*. He has appeared in numerous radio dramas for CBC. Wayne returns to his theatre roots with this production and most recently at Sudbury Theatre Centre in *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

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## **GEOFF BOUCKLEY** - Lighting Design

Geoff is a theatrical designer and manager who has participated in a diverse range of productions spanning the genres of theatre and dance across Canada. He has been involved in over 60 productions to date with companies such as Fujiwara Dance Inventions, Cat-In-The-Box Theatre, Kaeja d'Dance, Mocean Dance, Moonhorse Dance, Carlos Bulosan Theatre, Green Tea Collective, Definition: Blood, Spark Productions, Buddies-In-Bad-Times Theatre, Platform 9, Corpus Dance Projects, The Empty Collective, Praxis Theatre, Theatre Gargantua, 2B Theatre, Black & Blue Dance Projects, Theatre Direct (The Demonstration) and Toronto Dance Theatre. His work has taken him to Europe and coast to coast in Canada with extensive tours of Eastern Quebec and Ontario. Geoff has taught at and is a graduate of York University's Theatre Program

## **MIKE ROSS** - Composer and Sound Designer

Mike Ross is a Toronto based multi-faceted performer. He has worked as a composer and actor at many theatres across Canada including Soulpepper Theatre Company, The Charlottetown Festival, Great Canadian Theatre Company, Tarragon Theatre, The Grand Theatre, Theatre Calgary. He holds a degree in music from the University of Prince Edward Island and is a graduate of the inaugural Soulpepper Academy where he trained extensively as an actor. This summer he will study Shakespeare for a month at the prestigious Globe Theatre in London, England and in the fall he will premiere his co-creation (with Lorenzo Savoini) of an adaptation of Dennis Lee's *Civil Elegies* at Soulpepper.

## **KELLY WOLF** - Set and Costume Design

Kelly Wolf is a Set and Costume designer who is interested in exploring ways that design can augment the theatrical experience. Her most enjoyable experiences have been projects developed in a collaborative nature. Most recently for Theatre Direct, Kelly designed *Sanctuary Song* at the Berkeley Street theatre as part of the Luminato Festival; other productions for Theatre Direct are *Andrews Tree* and *I Met a Bully on the Hill* both of which were nominated for a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Production in the Theatre for Young Audiences category.

Other recent projects include: *Toronto the Good*, *Scratch (Factory)* *A Field Guide of Fevers and Curses* (Humber College) *The Incredible Speediness of Jamie Cavanaugh* (Roseneath), *The Wars*, *A Christmas Carol* (Costumes, Theatre Calgary), *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (costumes – Stratford) *Too True to Be Good* (Shaw). Kelly enjoys the interaction with students and has been an instructor at Humber College, Brock University and Ryerson Theatre School and has designed for George Brown College. Kelly is a graduate of York University, Central St. Martin's College of Art and Design and will complete her MA from the Drama Centre, U of T in April. Member of ADC

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## Reviews for Mike Kenny

“Arguably one of the most reliably imaginative and theatrical of children’s playwrights...”  
What’s On Stage London, UK

## MIKE KENNY

Mike Kenny is one of England’s leading writers, specialising in young people’s theatre. He is the recipient of numerous awards, was included in the Independent on Sunday’s list of Top Ten Living UK Playwrights and his plays are performed regularly throughout the UK and all over the world.

Current and recent productions include *The Railway Children* for the York Theatre Royal in association with the National Railway Museum; original play *Twin Stars* for Unicorn Theatre, London; original piece *Electric Darkness* for Comédie de Valence (France). Up-coming commissions include a new Christmas version of *Hansel and Gretel* for The Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company; original play *Cartoon* for Polka Theatre, London; *Straw Headed Peter* for NTC.

### Credits include:

*Who Cares?* – a contemporary version of *As You Like It* (Region Theatre, Vaxjo, Sewden); *Cotton Wool* – part of the Playhouse Project (York Theatre Royal, Polka and Plymouth); *Whiter Than Snow* (Graeae and national tour); *Flat Stanley* (West Yorkshire Playhouse and Polka, London); *The Snow Queen* – new version for Cork City of Culture (Graffiti, Ireland); *Beauty & the Beast* (Oxford Touring Theatre Company); *The Little Mermaid* (York Theatre Royal and Polka Theatre); *Cloud Pictures* (Polka Theatre); *Swan Songs* (Sherman Theatre and National tour); *Boy With a Suitcase* (SNAP theatre Company and national tour); *On the Verge* (Mind the...Gap and national tour); *Caitlin* – one woman show about Dylan Thomas’s wife (Sherman Theatre, York Theatre Royal, New York); *The Gardener* (AJTC and Nottingham Roundabout); *Flesh ‘n Steel* (Manchester Royal Exchange and national tour); *Diary of an Action Man* (Graeae and Unicorn Theatre, London); *Walking the Tightrope* (New Perspectives, Nottingham Roundabout, Travelling Light); *Fittings – A Freak Show for the Millennium* (Graeae Theatre Co); *Of Mice and Men* (Mind.....the Gap); *Big Sister, Little Brother* (Blah Blah Blah, Oxford Touring Company and Nottingham Roundabout); *The Elves & The Shoemakers* (Polka, Sherman, Barnstorm Eire, West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Matilda* (Sherman Theatre, Cardiff)

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## **MIKE KENNY (CONT)**

### **AWARDS & NOMINATIONS**

'The Gardener' - Shortlisted for Deutschen Kindertheaterpreis

'Diary of an Action Man' - Best Children's Play (Time Out Critics Choice)

'The Last Freak Show' - Edinburgh Festival Pick of the Fringe Manchester Evening News nom. Best Fringe Show

'Stepping Stones' - Best Children's Play (Writers' Guild of Great Britain)

'Stuck' - Short listed for Writer's Guild Best Children's Play

'Sink or Swim' - Best Children's Play (Time Out)

'Flags and Bandages' - Best Children's Play (British Theatre Institute)

Barclays TMA Award for Special Achievement in Regional Theatre (with Mind the ...Gap) - 2002

Arts Council of England – first ever recipient of The Children's Award for playwriting for children (2000)

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## About Theatre Direct

Founded in 1976, Theatre Direct has enjoyed praise and respect from young people, parents and educators for their award-winning productions that consistently tackle difficult subject matter with directness, honesty and integrity using sophisticated theatricality supported by innovative education programs and participatory workshops.

The company tours its productions and education programs to schools and theatre venues throughout Toronto and the GTA. Productions of *Beneath the Banyan Tree*, *Binti's Journey*, *Getting Wrecked* and *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* have toured nationally to such prestigious theatres as the National Arts Centre, Manitoba Theatre for Young People and the Vancouver and Toronto International Children's Festivals.

Our work is driven by a belief that young people deserve truth not diversion, that they have a cultural right to meaningful content and compelling, relevant theatre. We view our audience as thinking, feeling, complex individuals, not a market, not just future audiences but our present audience that needs and demands theatre that engages all their faculties and feelings.

Our audience inspires us to tackle big questions in the same way children and youth ask them, honestly, directly, courageously and passionately.

Last season Theatre Direct premiered two critically acclaimed ground breaking works including *Binti's Journey*, the first play aimed at young people addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS on children in Africa which returns for two weeks in the Loop February 18 – March 1; and *Sanctuary Song*, an opera and dance work premiered at the 2008 Luminato Festival in partnership with Tapestry New Opera Works.

## The Loop Theatre Direct's Centre for Lively Arts and Learning

On December 4, 2008, Theatre Direct, one of the country's leading theatres for young people, announced the creation of a unique centre devoted to arts education and performing arts serving children, youth and families.

As the largest arts tenant of the newly opened *Artscape Wychwood Barns*, Theatre Direct is programming a theatre space dedicated to young people and families and a spacious rehearsal, education and event space. In honour of the site's transit history and to express the creative dialogue that flows between our artists and audience

In addition to showcasing Theatre Direct's award-winning productions for young people and hosting the company's innovative education programs, The Loop will cultivate dynamic relationships with the artists and organizations residing in the Artscape Wychwood Barns and host some of the country's leading dance, music, and puppetry companies. Future programming also includes guest productions from Quebec and the UK.

Creating year-round programming that nurtures our audience's love and appreciation of the arts in our very own home is the fulfillment of a long held dream of Theatre Direct.

Visit our website regularly to find out how you can get involved!