

# POSTMARGINAL

Cultural Diversity as Theatrical Practice

## BEYOND REPRESENTATION

Aki Studio & Ada Slight Hall, Daniels Spectrum, Toronto  
9 - 11 April 2017

Organized by Modern Times Stage Company  
Part of the company's Postmarginal project



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## BEYOND REPRESENTATION: CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS THEATRICAL PRACTICE

This symposium intends to move the discussion beyond representation, beyond identity politics, and beyond tolerance to explore and propose ways in which diverse cultures can actively, productively, and creatively come together in theatrical practices that issue in exciting and challenging new theatrical forms.

We honour and acknowledge the traditional caretakers of this land: the Mississaugas of New Credit, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Huron-Wendat.

### For Postmarginal

Symposium Co-Chairs **Natalie Alvarez** and **Ric Knowles**  
Producers **Sue Balint** and **Peter Farbridge**

ASL Interpreters **Kimberly Banks, Anna Lee**

Opening and Closing Reception Catering **Les Louises, leslouises.com**

Videographer **Juan Pablo Pinto**

Volunteers (Theatre Ontario's Youth Advisory Committee)  
**Jason Carlos, Lara De Vries, Julia Hunter, Davinder Malhi, Sophie Mercer, Norah Paton, Laura Phillipps, Alex Rand**

Canadian Actors'

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## WELCOME FROM MODERN TIMES

When we began Modern Times in 1989, Peter and I didn't think about the concept of diversity much. Principally, our dream was to explore our theatrical practice. Of course, this came through the lens of my cultural background as an Iranian-Canadian and Peter's British heritage and residency in Quebec, but the work we created was always theatre that we were passionate about as director and actor.

From the beginning, we needed to navigate our two cultures, but this never seemed a problem. In fact, I would point to it as a great benefit in our collaborations. When we were translating Iranian dramas, for example, speaking the Farsi text out loud became a tool for me to get Peter to feel what Bahram Beyza'ie was trying to communicate viscerally. Similarly, when Peter spoke Shakespeare, I could begin to absorb the harmony that thought and text in English offers a director.

It might have been through these experiences that working with different cultures, accents, and cultural backgrounds became typical practice for us. Peter introduced me to wonderful Québécois actors--so we were confronted by accents, and by different emotional responses to text. I also found myself often choosing to work with actors recently arrived to Canada; exposure to fabulous artists with histories of displacement like my own fed the psychological layers of character work.

When starting a new rehearsal process, I often take a few workshop weeks to establish a common vocabulary between director and actors. For me part of this means that we must all leave behind our individual cultural norms of what we believe theatre and acting to be, and to find a mutual theatrical language together that suits the piece. It's shaped by my directorial approach, but I think this approach has also been shaped by those actors and designers I have worked with—the Stavroulas, René-Madeleines, Costas, Beas, Baharehs, Trevors, and Davids of productions past.

When audiences recently came to see Modern Times' *Blood Weddings* | *Bodas de Sangre*, they saw actors from various cultures play the roles. What I saw as unique in each actor, both culturally and individually, became a seamless part of that production. Diversity was not the point: Lorca was the point.

*Diversity was not  
the point: Lorca  
was the point.*

Could this way of thinking become common practice? Perhaps rather than pointing out the lack of diversity on our stages, we might also invite everyone to practice diversity, and with that possibility, we may find the togetherness that is needed to solve the problem.

That's what we're here to talk about.  
Discuss. Debate. Respect. Enjoy.

Soheil Parsa

## SUNDAY APRIL 9

### Opening Reception and Keynote Address, 6pm - 10pm

*Opening Reception sponsored by Modern Drama and Canadian Theatre Review.*

*Keynote Speaker sponsored by the Canadian Consortium for Politics and Performance in the Americas (funded by SSHRC).*

### 6pm: Registration open, hors d'oeuvres and bar service

### 7:30pm: Opening Remarks

Soheil Parsa and Peter Farbridge, Modern Times Stage Company  
Natalie Alvarez and Ric Knowles, Co-Chairs of Beyond Representation  
Alex Rand, Theatre Ontario's Youth Advisory Committee  
R. Darren Gobert, *Modern Drama*  
Jennifer Stephenson, *Canadian Theatre Review*

### 8:15pm: Keynote Address by Donna-Michelle St. Bernard

*To be followed by a question period*

### 9:15pm: Bar and food service continues

### 10:00: End of Evening

*Throughout the evening, please visit displays hosted by Playwrights Canada Press, The Drama Centre, Canadian Theatre Review, Modern Drama (University of Toronto Press), alt.theatre, Theatre Ontario's Youth Advisory Committee and Canadian Actors Equity Association.*

## DIVERSE VOICES from stage to page

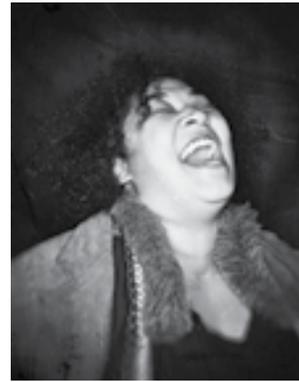
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## KEYNOTE SPEAKER



### Donna-Michelle St. Bernard

Donna-Michelle is an emcee, playwright, agitator who is constantly transgressing someone's territory. She is artistically inquisitive, politically messy, a Dora-award-winning playwright, two-time nominee for the Governor General's Award for Drama, a mentor, editor, and administrator. As coordinator of the AdHocAssembly and artistic director of New Harlem Productions in Toronto she stands behind her company's motto: "speak truth. hold power".

## SYMPOSIUM CO-CHAIRS



### Natalie Alvarez, Associate Professor, Brock University

Natalie is Associate Professor in the Department of Dramatic Arts at Brock University. Her performance studies scholarship on cultural difference and political performance has been published widely in international journals and essay collections and she is currently at work on three forthcoming books: *Immersions in Cultural Difference: Tourism, War, Performance* (in press; U of Michigan Press), funded by SSHRC; *Theatre & War* (Palgrave Macmillan); and the co-edited collection *Sustainable Tools for Precarious Times: Performance Actions in the Americas* (Palgrave Macmillan). She is

the editor of two books on Latina/o Canadian theatre and performance: *Latina/o Canadian Theatre and Performance* and *Fronteras Vivientes: Eight Latina/o Canadian Plays* (both with Playwrights Canada Press), winners of the Patrick O'Neil Prize in 2014 and 2015 by the Canadian Association for Theatre Research.



### Ric Knowles, Professor Emeritus, University of Guelph

Ric has worked as a director and dramaturge in Canada for over 30 years, most recently working with Modern Times, Factory, Cahoots, the MT Space, the Red Snow Collective/Aluna Theatre, the Chocolate Woman Collective, and Article 11/NAC. Ric is Professor Emeritus of Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph and the award-winning author and editor of 18 books on theatre and performance, including *Theatre and Interculturalism*, *"Ethnic," Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*, *Performing Indigeneity*, and *Performing The Intercultural City*.

## MONDAY APRIL 10

### Directing Across Difference, 10am - 12pm

This panel will be concerned with “practicing difference,” exploring techniques for how directors working with actors, dramaturges, and designers can take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the presence of people of different cultures, abilities, backgrounds, training, and traditions in the rehearsal hall and studio, and in performance.

**Jivesh Parasram** (Chair) is a multidisciplinary artist, facilitator, and cultural worker. He is the founding Artistic Producer at Pandemic Theatre ([www.pandemictheatre.ca](http://www.pandemictheatre.ca)), Associate Artistic Producer at Theatre Passe Muraille, and a core member of The Wrecking Ball. He was part of the 2016 Cultural Leaders Lab with the TAC and Banff Centre.

**Jill Carter** (Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi) is a Toronto-based theatre practitioner and scholar. She has worked as a performer, director, dramaturg, and acting instructor. Currently, she is Assistant Professor with the Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies; Indigenous Studies; and the Transitional Year Programme at the University of Toronto.

**Ravi Jain** founding artistic director of Why Not Theatre, has established himself as a seasoned international producer and award-winning artist with collaborations with internationally-acclaimed companies like the SITI Company and Complicite. Ravi was the inaugural Artistic Director in Residence at The Theatre Centre and is a member of the Artistic Director’s Cabinet at Souleppper Theatre Company. He was awarded the Ken MacDougal Award for Emerging Director and most recently the Ontario Arts Council’s Pauline McGibbon Award as Emerging Director.

**Karin Randoja** is a director, actor, teacher, and singer/composer working mostly in devised performance. Award nominations include Dora Awards, The Capital Circle Critic’s Award and the Prix Rideau. Her work has been seen in Australia, Denmark, India, Italy, France, England, Japan, and Mozambique. She is also a teacher/director at Humber College.

**Guillermo Verdecchia** is a multiple-award-winning writer, director, dramaturge, and translator. He is currently working on an adaptation of *The Conference of the Birds* with Soheil Parsa.

## MONDAY APRIL 10

### Beyond Accents, 1:30pm - 3:30pm

This panel focuses on the various languages of the theatre, on translation, on acting with accents, on signing, and on supertitles in order to explore techniques by which linguistic differences (interpreted broadly) can be used as tools for the creation of new theatrical forms.

**Marjorie Chan** (Chair) is a multidisciplinary artist born and raised in Toronto, working as playwright, librettist, dramaturge, and director. Her works for the stage have been performed in the United States, Scotland, Hong Kong, Russia, and across Canada. Marjorie is Artistic Director of Cahoots Theatre since 2013, where her focus has been on artist incubation and development, community arts access as well as advocacy for a broadening inclusivity in theatre for artists and audiences alike. [www.cahoots.ca](http://www.cahoots.ca)

**Cynthia Ashperger** has worked as a theatre director, writer, actor, and producer for the last thirty years. She teaches Acting at Ryerson School of Performance where she is also the Director of Acting Program. The question of language and identity is the main theme of her satirical *Tongue Play* with an upcoming production at Parados Festival at Ryerson in June.

**Julia Lenardon** is a professional Voice/Speech/Dialect coach for film/tv and theatre. Theatre: Broadway: voice coach for *Matilda the Musical* at the Shubert Theatre; Off Broadway: English Clarification coach for Gad Elmaleh at Carnegie Hall. Film/TV includes: Dialect coach for *Cardinal*, *X-Men: Apocalypse*, *Brooklyn*, and *On the Road*. Teaching: The American Academy of Dramatic Art, The National Theatre School of Canada, The Banff-Citadel Professional Theatre Program.

**Shelley Liebembuk** is a theatre scholar and dramaturge. She is conducting research on multilingual dramaturgy in Canadian-Latinx performance as a 2017 postdoctoral fellow funded by the Canadian Consortium on Performance and Politics in the Americas. She holds a PhD from the University of Toronto’s Graduate Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies.

**Catherine Joell MacKinnon** is a co-founder and Festival Director of the Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival, and an award-winning filmmaker internationally known for her work in documentaries, film, and television. She is the recipient of the ACTRA Woman of the Year Award 2016. Catherine was also a Deaf Community Consultant for DATT-Deaf Artists and Theatres Toolkit, Cahoots Theatre. As an actor, her film/TV credits include: *Silent Hill*, *Kenny vs Spenny*, and the digital media series, *Widow’s Web*.

**MONDAY APRIL 10**

**The Critical Difference, 3:50pm - 5:50pm**

How can theatre critics find inspiration from theatrical practices that emerge from diverse cultures (interpreted broadly)? How can they learn to watch culturally specific and intercultural shows with new eyes, welcoming difference beyond clichés about tolerance, tokenism, representation, and universalism? Have the professional practices of the Euro-American theatre tradition limited our understandings of what “good theatre” is or can be? What is the critical practice of difference?

**Harvey Young** (Chair) is Chair of the Department of Theatre and Professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. His research on the performance and experience of race has been widely published in academic journals, profiled in *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and cited in *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. Former editor of *Theatre Survey*, the journal of the American Society for Theatre Research, Harvey has published seven books, including *Embodying Black Experience*, winner of Book of the Year awards from the National Communication Association and the American Society for Theatre Research and, most recently, *Black Theater is Black Life: An Oral History of Chicago Theater* (co-authored with Mecca Zabriskie).

**Ric Knowles** has worked as a director and dramaturge in Canada for over 30 years, most recently working with Modern Times, Factory, Cahoots, the MT Space, the Red Snow Collective/Aluna Theatre, the Chocolate Woman Collective, and Article 11/NAC. Ric is Professor Emeritus of Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph and the award-winning author and editor of 18 books on theatre and performance, including *Theatre and Interculturalism*, *“Ethnic,” Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*, *Performing Indigeneity*, and *Performing The Intercultural City*.

**Carly Maga** is a theatre critic for the *Toronto Star*, and has covered Toronto theatre since 2010. She has a Bachelor of Journalism from Ryerson University and a Master of Theatre and Performance Studies from York University. She also serves as a board member for the Canadian Theatre Critics Association.

**J. Kelly Nestruck**, a two-time winner of the Nathan Cohen Award for Excellence in Critical Writing, has been the theatre critic at *The Globe and Mail* since 2008. He has also previously held positions at the *National Post* and *The Guardian*, and was a guest critic at the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung in 2013. He grew up between Montreal and Winnipeg, two great theatre cities, and holds a Master’s from the Centre for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies at the University of Toronto.

**Glenn Sumi** is Associate Entertainment Editor at *NOW Magazine*, where he assigns, edits and contributes to the film and stage sections. For three years he was a weekly contributor to CTV NewsChannel’s arts coverage. He’s a member of the Toronto Theatre Critics Association and the Toronto Film Critics Association.



## Pluralism and Organizational Change Through Inclusive Equity Education in the Arts 2016-2018

CPAMO is committed to develop and sustain pluralism initiatives that have a particular focus on impact, cultural and artistic diversity and clear sets of practices that will forward our education and actions on pluralism and equity in the arts.

### Our goals are to:

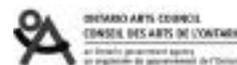
- Increase personal and organizational cultural competencies, and develop an understanding of the opportunities and challenges that they represent and how that presents opportunities/challenges to pluralism;
- Assess barriers to participation and leadership by Indigenous, racialized and other historically marginalized artists and communities, and how to remove them;
- Develop a community of practice to learn from each other and share;
- Develop resources/strategies to sustain this work; and
- Connect with Canada’s rapidly growing Indigenous and racialized communities to engage them as creative and interpretive artists, board members, managers, volunteers, audiences.

### How do we achieve this?

1. Working Sessions involving project participants working together in monthly meetings. The project staff and external consultant will design and facilitate these meetings.
2. Small group projects involving project participants who are addressing similar issues.
3. Toolkits. Developed with project partners to enable and facilitate initiatives to promote pluralism/equity.
4. One-on-One meetings with project staff to support the development and implementation of their organizational change initiatives.
5. GoogleGroups/Slackforshareddocuments providing an archive of materials shared with participants.
6. Meetings with Indigenous and ethno-racial artists/arts organizations to enable project participants to develop working relationships through forums and show-cases of artistic practices of Indigenous and ethno-racial artists.

More information at [www.cpamo.org](http://www.cpamo.org)

under What CPAMO Does -> Equity Education in the Arts



## SUBJECT AND CREATION: THE INTERCULTURAL REHEARSAL HALL

From April 1 - 9, 2017, Modern Times' Artistic Director Soheil Parsa led this professional training workshop designed to provide a unique opportunity to artists interested in new approaches to creating culturally-diverse theatre. Supported by Montreal accent coach, Kent Waters, a selected group of two directors and seven actors from different cultural backgrounds explored scenes from *Waiting for Godot* to find the essence of an actor's subjectivity in the rehearsal hall. Over four sessions participants examined their own intrinsic spatial, emotional, and corporal approach to text work. Waters worked with the group to explore how actors and directors can effectively use the accents of audible minority actors as a subtle tool in character development. The experiences of the group were documented to create a potential toolbox of techniques that could serve in a wider discussion of cultural diversity as theatrical practice.

Participants: Roshan Ahmadvand, Aaron Jan (Directors), Simon Casanova, Adriana Lavinia Salinas Diaz, Roshanak Jaber, Ahmed Salah Moneka, Azeem Nanthoo, Melanie Santos, Peter Van Wart (Actors), Shelley Liebembuk, Maxime Robin (Documenters).

*Participant busaries for Subject and Creation have been generously provided by Mr. Kory Gorgani and Mr. Ardeshir Zarezadeh.*



## TUESDAY APRIL 11

### Intercultural and Activist Theatrical Practice, 10am - 12pm

What are the ethics of staging the stories of immigrants or refugees, especially when the creative team does not share the same experiences? Can a multilingual theatre re-script how cultural difference is understood? What are the creative potentials of thinking about cross-cultural translation as a performance practice? How can street-level activism generate new culturally pluralistic theatrical forms? Four scholar/practitioners examine the ethics, problematics, and possibilities of working in the spaces between cultures and languages.

**Spy Dénommé-Welch** (Chair) is a writer, composer, and scholar of mixed Indigenous descent. He is Assistant Professor at Brock University, and has an active research/creative portfolio. He co-created the Dora-nominated opera, *Giiwedín*, and is now completing his second opera with collaborator Catherine Magowan. His latest vocal-chamber work (composed with collaborator Magowan) entitled, *Sojourn*, will premiere at the Luminato Festival as part of Signal Theatre's dance opera *Bearing*.

**Diana Manole** is a Romanian-Canadian writer, translator, theatre director, and scholar. She has published nine books (poems, short fiction, plays), as well as peer-reviewed articles/chapters on exilic, multicultural, and postcolonial theatre, the performance of national identity, directing, and transcultural adaptation. Her article, "Accented Actors: From Stage to Stages via a Convenience Store" (*TRiC*, 2015), pioneered the study of foreign/immigrant accents in theatre and performance.

**Yana Meerzon** teaches for University of Ottawa, Department of Theatre. Her research interests and publications include theatre of exile and migration; cultural and interdisciplinary studies; and Russian drama and theatre. Her recent publications include *Performing Exile – Performing Self: Drama, Theatre, Film* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); co-edited volumes *History/Memory/Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and *The Routledge Companion to Michael Chekhov* (Routledge, 2015), and *Theatre and Immigration* (special issue), *Theatre Research in Canada* (Fall 2015).

**Yasmine Kandil** is Assistant Professor at Brock University's Department of Dramatic Arts. Her areas of research are in Theatre for Development with people who are marginalized, the ethics of applied theatre practice, and testimonial theatre in post-revolution Egypt.

**Harvey Young** is Chair of the Department of Theatre and Professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. His research on the performance and experience of race has been widely published in academic journals, profiled in *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and cited in *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. Former editor of *Theatre Survey*, the journal of the American Society for Theatre Research, Harvey has published seven books, including *Embodying Black Experience*, winner of *Book of the Year* awards from the National Communication Association and the American Society for Theatre Research and, most recently, *Black Theater is Black Life: An Oral History of Chicago Theater* (co-authored with Mecca Zabriskie).

TUESDAY APRIL 11

**Gender Fluidity and Theatrical Practice, 1:30pm - 4:30pm**

*A community discussion organized by the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts.*

This facilitated community convening as a guided open forum, asks how performance award categories might better acknowledge artistic practices that move beyond the gender binaries of “Outstanding Performance-Female” and “Outstanding Performance-Male.” Using Toronto’s Dora Mavor Moore Awards as the conversation starter, an invited panel of speakers will help unpack the practice of gender fluidity and equality beyond issues of representation and identity politics. What new aesthetic and political possibilities are generated for directors, designers, and actors in rehearsal and performance? How might critics and juries take such opportunities and possibilities into account? Audience participation will be strongly encouraged during this discussion.

**Brendan Healy** (Chair) is a Toronto-based director. His shows have garnered multiple Dora Mavor Moore Awards and he is a recipient of the Ken McDougall and the Pauline McGibbon awards for directing. Between 2009-2015, he was Artistic Director of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. Brendan is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada (where he is also a regular instructor) and he recently completed a Masters in International Arts Management, in a program jointly offered by the Southern Methodist University (Dallas, Texas), l'École des hautes études commerciales (Montréal, Québec), and the SDA Bocconi School of Management (Milan, Italy).

**Sze-Yang Ade-Lam** is a queer asian dancer, martial artist, storyteller and community developer. Sze-Yang shares stories through movement for self love and empowerment, as an independent artist, and as part of ILL NANA/DiverseCity Dance Company. Sze-Yang is committed to creating more accessible dance education and performance opportunities for communities underrepresented in the arts.

**Alec Butler** is a Non-binary activist, awarded the Toronto Community Foundations “Vital Person Award” in 2006 for their leadership in the community, they have presented over 300 workshops as a policy analysis and workshop facilitator with the Trans Access Project at the 519. An award-winning playwright and filmmaker, their play *Black Friday* was a finalist for the Governor General’s Award. Alec is the author of the plays *Shakedown*, *Claposis*, *Medusa Rising*, and two one-person shows, *Hardcore Memories* and *Ruff Paradise*, performing as a “dyke punk iconoclast” in the 1990’s and as a Two-Spirit trans man in 2005. Recently, their story of growing up Intersex was featured on the BBC. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36092431>

**Gein Wong** is an interdisciplinary director and artist of First Nations and Asian descent who is Two-Spirited and Queer. She sits on the Board of Directors of the Toronto Arts Council and is a member of the inaugural TAC Cultural Leaders Lab. She conceived and directed *Say Their Names, Remember*, a 500 person performance piece, which opened the Ai Weiwei exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario. She co-created *The Forgetful City*, a site specific interactive video installation that reopened the RC Harris Water Filtration Plant in Toronto - an art-deco castle closed to the public for a decade due to 9/11. In 2014, World Pride commissioned her to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots by creating a large scale immersive performance experience to remember Stonewall. Gein is Artistic Director of Eventual Ashes and a co-owner of the world’s oldest LGBT bookstore, Glad Day Bookshop.

**Closing Reception, 4:30pm - 6pm**

*Sponsored by Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario.*

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## ABOUT MODERN TIMES STAGE COMPANY

Modern Times Stage Company was founded in the belief that individual voices experiences and backgrounds can unite in a common vision and create theatre that expresses the essence of a shared human spirit. As artists we believe that human identity is multi-layered, so our theatrical aesthetics draw from many styles of theatre. Within this diversity, we seek beauty in simplicity and truth in the vulnerability. Our process and award-winning productions are rooted in this unique approach, resulting in a timeless, placeless expression of reality. Since 1989, Modern Times has explored stories from across the globe producing adapted, translated and original works for audiences in Canada and Internationally.

### Staff

Artistic Director **Soheil Parsa**

Co-Artistic Director **Peter Farbridge**

Head of Administration **Gia Nahmens**

Director of Development **Banafsheh Taherian**

### Board of Directors

President **Christine Moynihan**

Treasurer **Richard Shimoda**

Members **Lili Nabavi, Charles C. Smith, Gale Zoe Garnett**

## ABOUT OUR VENUE, NATIVE EARTH PERFORMING ARTS

Native Earth Performing Arts is Canada's oldest professional Indigenous theatre company. Currently in our 34th year, we are dedicated to developing, presenting, and producing professional artistic expressions of the Indigenous experience in Canada.

### Staff

Managing Director **Isaac Thomas**

Director of Marketing & Patron Services **Kat Horzempa**

Venue Coordinator **Bryan-Clifford Batty**

Administrative Assistant **Sherry Meawasige**

Patron Services Representatives **Annie MacKay, Samantha McCue, Joelle Peters, Smith Purdy, Amanda Trapp**

### Board of Directors

**Ashley Stacey, Georgia Quartaro**

**Bob Crawford, Kaitlin Ritchie**

Website: [www.nativeearth.ca](http://www.nativeearth.ca)

Twitter: @nativeearth

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/nativeearthperformingarts](http://www.facebook.com/nativeearthperformingarts)

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