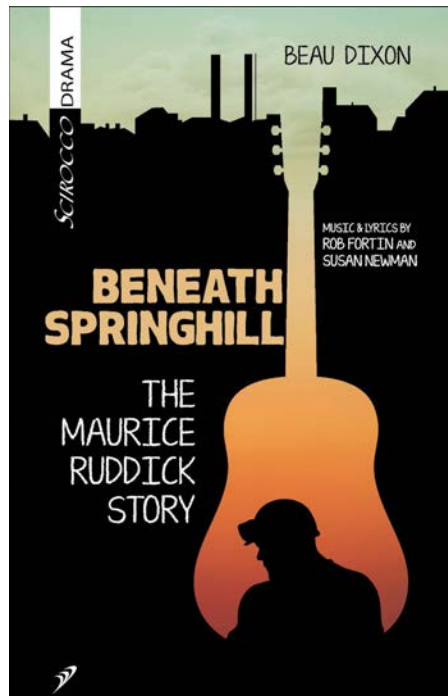




J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD
P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

ESSENTIAL READING



"This play tells what Margaret Atwood once described as the quintessential Canadian story: a strong, modest Canadian hero pitted against a hostile environment, refusing to be its victim. Maurice Ruddick fit the role perfectly."

—*Vancouver Sun*

"A celebration of the human spirit."

—*Calgary Sun*

"This is what theatre is about."

—*GetDown*

"A gripping Canadian story of heroism."

—*The Slotkin Letter*

"A spellbinding solo show."

—*Calgary Herald*

Our featured title this month is [*Beneath Springhill: The Maurice Ruddick Story*](#) by Beau Dixon, with original music by Susan Newman and lyrics by Rob Fortin.

The play is a perfect Black History Month read since it features the true story of "the singing miner of Springhill." During the Springhill mine disaster of 1958, when the collapse of a coal mine shaft in Nova Scotia resulted in seventy-four deaths, Ruddick and six of his fellow miners were trapped more than a mile underground for nine days. Although some men were injured and they had little water or food, Ruddick kept their spirits up by singing until they were rescued. In honour of his actions, Maurice Ruddick was named Canada's 1958 Citizen of the Year. *Beneath Springhill* explores the racial tension present in the

community, the cave-in, and the resulting effects on Ruddick's family. Ultimately the play is a celebration of hope and the power of music.

[See More](#)

THE INTERVIEW

Toronto playwright, television writer, and producer [Adam Pettle](#) was one of the creators of the CBC Radio drama *Afghanada*, and has worked on several television series, including *Rookie Blue*, *Saving Hope*, *X Company*, *The Detail*, *Burden of Truth*, and *Nurses*.

His plays include [Therac 25](#), [Zadie's Shoes](#), [Sunday Father](#), and an adaptation of Miklos Laszlo's *Parfumerie* (co-written with Brenda Robins.)



Your play [Therac 25](#) is a moving story about two young people who fall in love while receiving cancer treatment. I know that many years ago you underwent cancer treatment—can you tell us how that experience informed the play?

Therac 25 was based on extensive journals I kept while undergoing treatment for papillary thyroid cancer when I was 21. I always fantasized about meeting a beautiful woman with terminal cancer and the torrid, tragic love affair we'd have. I never met her so... I made her up.

Therac is a one-act, two-handed love story—a dark comedy about cancer—set in the corridors of the Princess Margaret Hospital where I spent the better part of 1995. *Therac* was the first play I ever wrote (if you don't count "Skyrats," which I penned in the ninth grade, about grifters who lived in an abandoned warehouse on the Lakeshore, an homage or complete rip-off, depending on who you ask, of a Judith Thompson play.)

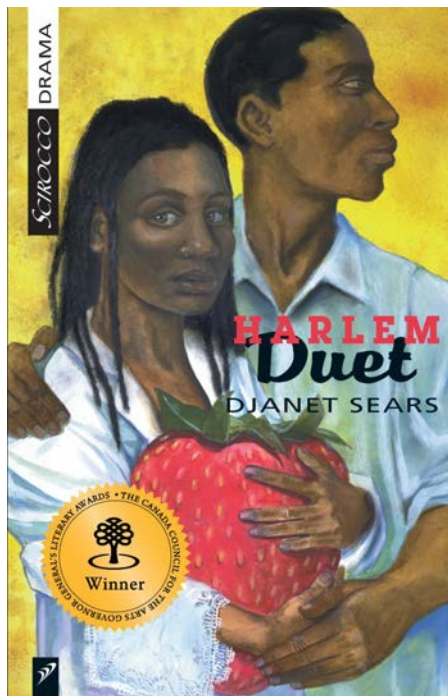
And even though it clocks in at less than an hour, *Therac* is probably still the most important piece of writing I've ever done. Not only did it keep me sane during a terrifying chapter of my life but then, a decade later, it also brought the greatest love I've ever known into it. When my brother Jordan (who was directing the Factory production) asked an actor named Trish Fagan if she'd play the part of Moira—where she'd basically have to carry me in this pas de deux, for I was not, and still am not, a very good actor—Trish agreed to take the gig. And since it was just the two of us at the opening night party well... we've been together since opening night, over twenty years ago now, have two of the most hilarious

and beautiful children together and so, turns out, she did exist, I just had to wait to meet her and it was well worth the wait. So, yeah, *Therac* launched my writing life and brought Trish into it. In short, *Therac 25* made it rain.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

CLASS NOTES

Want to share your story about how you use JGS titles in your classes? Let us know. We'd love to talk to you!



Winner of the Governor General's Award for Drama

Winner of the Chalmers Play Award

A rhapsodic blues tragedy, [Harlem Duet](#) could be the prelude to Shakespeare's *Othello* and recounts the tale of Othello and his first wife Billie (yes, before Desdemona). Set in contemporary Harlem at the corner of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X boulevards, *Harlem Duet* is Billie's story, exploring the space where race and sex intersect.

Available in print and ebook formats.

This month we interview Kristina Watt Villegas about how she uses [Harlem Duet](#) by [Djanet Sears](#) in her course at the University of Ottawa.

Kristina is an award-winning theatre performer and creator, Artistic Director of 100 Watt Productions, instructor, dancer, and emerging writer. Currently based in Ottawa, she has performed with the National Arts Centre, Great Canadian Theatre Company, St Lawrence Theatre Festival, New Theatre of Ottawa, and Tactics, among others.

In which course do you use *Harlem Duet*?

In a course called "Theatre in Canada" in the Department of Theatre at the University of Ottawa, with a group of about 30 theatre students. I focus on Djanet Sears' body of work, and, in particular, *Harlem Duet*.

Why did you choose to use Djanet's play?

In this course, we continually question “What is theatre in Canada”? What stories are told, by whom, and in what theatrical form? What is the relationship between the complicated history of this country and the present—and how does that relationship reveal itself in certain plays? In *Harlem Duet*, we study how Djanet Sears uses the 17th-century *Othello* by English-born Shakespeare and uses it as a launching point into a rich and conflictive story set in Harlem about race, love, the challenge to belong in your own skin, and the tragedy of internalized racism. Djanet Sears’ unique form of writing—how she plays with time, includes music, and how she incorporates contemporary news clips, is something that opens up the potential of playwriting for many students.

How do you use the play with students?

Our path of study starts with the students reading the play independently and watching/listening to interviews with Djanet Sears—not just about her work on this play, but other plays she has written, her directing, her own relationship to Canada, and her music composition. We then gather for a discussion, starting with the students’ visceral response to *Harlem Duet*. I transition to questions, asking them: What questions does the play provoke in you? What questions do you have for the characters? And if Djanet Sears were in the room with you, what would you ask her? Last year, thanks to the Playwrights Guild of Canada and Rebecca Burton, Djanet Sears joined my class. She gifted us with her reading of sections of the script aloud and allowed the students to pose those questions directly to the powerful source!

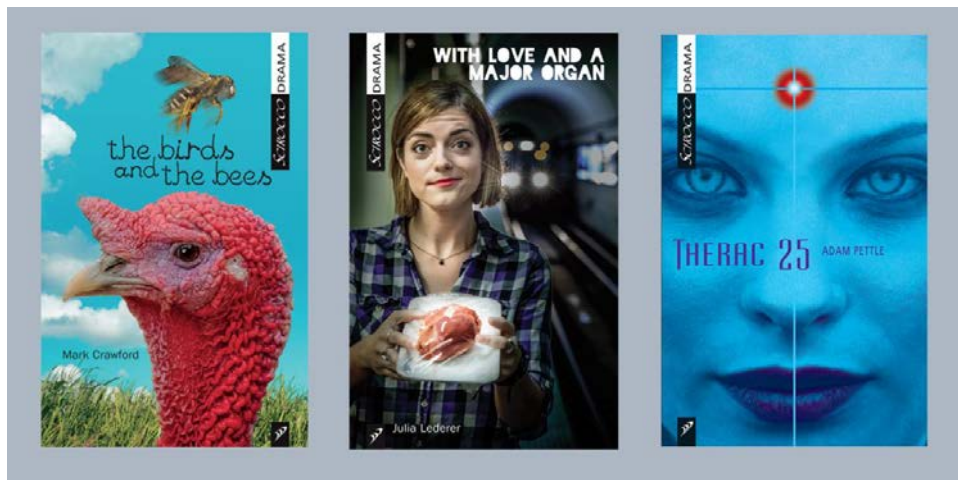
Many of our authors are available for classroom visits, in person or via Zoom. If there’s an author you’d like to invite to your class, [contact us](#) for more information.

FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH



[See More](#)

ACTS OF LOVE



See More

COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

Beneath Springhill: The Maurice Ruddick Story by Beau Dixon
[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax NS, January 25–February 13.

Salt Baby by Falen Johnson
[Magnus Theatre](#), Thunder Bay, ON, January 27–February 12.

The Runner by Christopher Morris
[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, March 30–April 16.

Orphan Song by Sean Dixon
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, March 23–April 24.

The Herd by Kenneth T. Williams
[Citadel Theatre](#), Edmonton, AB, April 2–April 24.

The Herd by Kenneth T. Williams
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, May 11–June 12.

The Great Shadow by Alex Poch-Goldin
[4th Line Theatre](#), Millbrook, ON, June 28–July 23.

Stag and Doe by Mark Crawford
[Capitol Theatre](#), Port Hope, ON, July 7–July 30.

The Ex-Boyfriend Yard Sale by Haley McGee
[Soulpepper Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, October 18–November 6.

• ONLINE •

Year of the Rat monodrama by Rosa Labordé
[Factory Theatre](#), February 24–March 6.

Deer Woman by Tara Beagan

[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, April 20–April 24.

• ON SCREEN •

The Swearing Jar by Kate Hewlett, starring Kathleen Turner, Adelaide Clemens, and Patrick J. Adams, [Spring 2022 release](#).

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