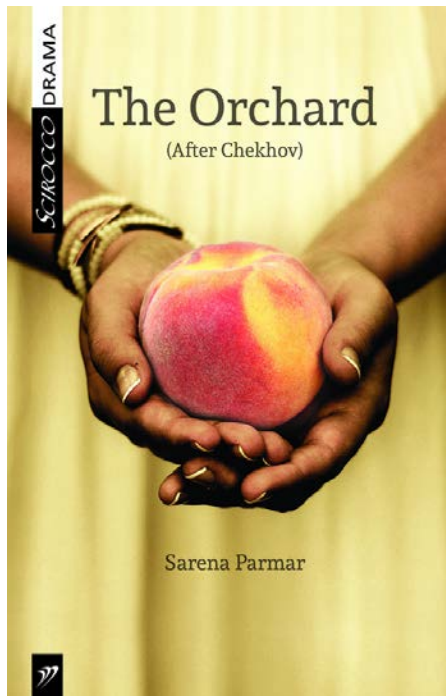




J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD
P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

ESSENTIAL READING



“Builds a legacy of its own...the brilliance of Parmar’s adaptation is that she creates full, relatable, sympathetic characters who are up against challenges that extend far beyond their personal flaws.” — *Toronto Star*

“*The Orchard (After Chekhov)*...is simply extraordinary. But the real star of the show is the story itself. It’s heartwarming, funny and devastating at times, but mostly, it’s frighteningly familiar and relevant to the current political climate.” — *Buffalo Theatre Guide*

April’s must-read title is [The Orchard \(After Chekhov\)](#) by [Sarena Parmar](#), an adaptation of Anton Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*, told through the eyes of a Sikh farming family in BC’s Okanagan Valley. Set in 1967, the play offers a fresh perspective on history and a subversive look at ethnicity within the classical western canon.

Still grieving the loss of her youngest son, the matriarch of the Basran family returns home after five years abroad in India. But all is not well; the family she left behind is unravelling and their orchard has fallen into foreclosure. With the bank calling and relations strained, will the Basrans be able to save their beloved orchard in time?

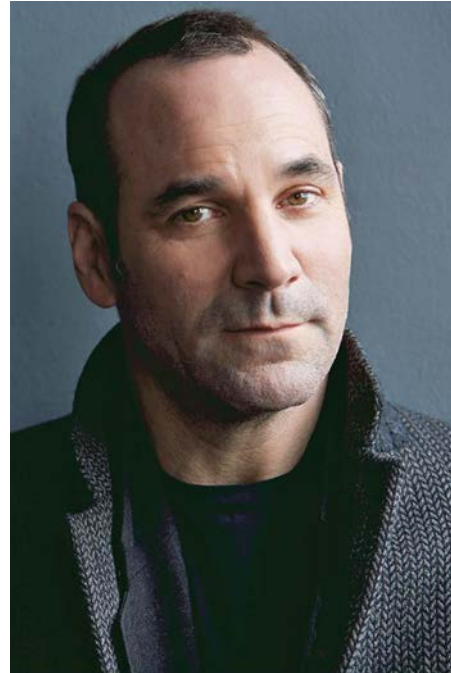
Inspired by the playwright’s own childhood, *The Orchard (After Chekhov)* confronts life,

loss, and the immigrant experience with bravery and beauty.

[See More](#)

THE INTERVIEW

[Alex Poch-Goldin](#) is an acclaimed playwright and actor whose work has been produced internationally. His plays include [The Right Road to Pontypool](#), [Anybody and Nobody](#), [Jim and Shorty](#), [The Bad Luck Bank Robbers](#), [Cringeworthy](#), [Internazionale](#), [The Life of Jude](#), [This Hotel](#), [Yahrzeit](#), and [This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen](#), adapted from the work of Tadeusz Borowski. [Cringeworthy](#) and [This Hotel](#) were both nominated for the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play, and the French version of [This Hotel](#) (*L'Hôtel*) won the 2004 CBC/*Le Droit* prize for best production in Ottawa. Alex has also written for television and radio. He lives in Winnipeg.



Many playwrights are known for a particular type of play, but your work ranges widely—from the suspenseful three-hander [Cringeworthy](#), about crime and addiction in [Edwardian England](#), to the epic 21-character biblical musical, [The Life of Jude](#); from [Jim & Shorty](#), a glimpse into the lives of men living on the streets, to [Yahrzeit](#), a family play that tackles issues of war and peace. Do you think there is a common thread that runs through all of your work?

My friend David Jansen once said that my work was about the underdogs of society. I hadn't ever thought of that before, but I think it's partly true. The heroes in my stories always have to overcome great odds that are often shaped by the structures of society. I think that gives them an "everyperson" quality and makes them very identifiable for the reader.

Your play [The Right Road to Pontypool](#) is an affectionate and nostalgic look back at the Jewish summer resort town in Ontario that thrived from the 1920s to the 1970s. It's a piece of history that hadn't had wide attention until the play debuted at 4th Line Theatre. Can you tell us why you wanted to tell this particular story— and how you researched it?

The Right Road to Pontypool was a labor of love, and my first commission from 4th Line theatre and Artistic Director Kim Blackwell. My parents grew up in Montreal and used to

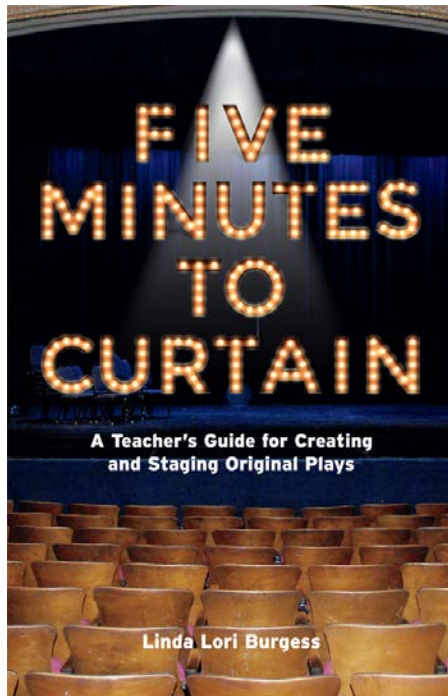
vacation in the Laurentian mountains outside of the city. It was like a smaller version of the Catskills in New York. And there were areas where Jews were not allowed to go. Many places had signs that said, “No Jews or dogs allowed.” So when Kim asked me, an ex-pat Montrealer, to write about Pontypool, I was curious to say the least. I’d never heard about the resort before, and I was shocked to find out how many Jewish and non-Jewish people in Toronto and the Kawartha region had connections to a place that, for 60 summers, took over a small Protestant town of 300 people, swamping it with 2,500 poor Jewish garment workers and their families who came to vacation in ramshackle cottages by a tiny lake, which eventually blossomed into larger resorts, with entertainment and activities for the community.

So I felt a connection to the story because my parents had imbued a sense of Jewish community in me. And when I met Doris Manetta, whose father had run Manetta’s resort in Pontypool, I began to hear her stories and an overview of that era. Doris had been a dishwasher and ran around doing odd jobs at the resort for many years and had struggled to get out of the small town so she could become a teacher in Toronto. I was so taken by her story that I turned her into one of the main characters in my play. She was delighted, as was I. 4th Line Theatre also does these reminiscences where the community comes together and talks about the events surrounding the play. I got a lot of information from that, as well as from Grant Curtis’s book called *Smile and the World Smiles with You in Pontypool*, which talked a lot about the establishment of the town itself, and then the influx of the Jewish community. So with all these snippets I had a wealth of material to draw from, and shaped a story that basically covered 100 years from the establishment of a homestead by the first Jew in Pontypool—Moishe Yukel Bernstein—to the demise of the cottage industry, when communities began to become more affluent and choose other holiday destinations.

[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!



This month, JGS talked with Linda Lori Burgess, educator and author of the new book *Five Minutes to Curtain: A Teacher's Guide for Creating and Staging Original Plays*, and Carrie Gillis, who has worked as a high school Drama and English teacher, and who is currently a vice-principal in the River East Transcona School Division in Winnipeg. Linda's recent book launch at McNally-Robinson Books featured a panel discussion moderated by Carrie and can be viewed [here](#).

Linda, over the course of your teaching career you developed the method for creating devised theatre (a.k.a. "collective plays") that's outlined in Five Minutes to Curtain. Can you tell us a little about why you began creating original plays with students?

Sure. In the early years of my first teaching assignment I became aware that there is a real scarcity of suitable plays for high school students, especially when you recognize that every class you teach will have its own unique mixture of students with varying degrees of experience, training, maturity, and other elements such as physical, intellectual, and emotional challenges. I began creating devised plays that might suit all of my students by stringing short published pieces together by means of an existing or invented location, theme or character that the pieces shared in common. This partial solution to my problem in trying to find plays was followed by modernizing Shakespeare plays and introducing new or reinvented characters into the mix. But even those plays were inadequate at times for accommodating all of the diverse qualities and needs of my students. Creating plays that were tailor-made for my students became the only viable solution for what is truly an ongoing challenge for every Drama teacher.

Carrie, as a high school student, you participated in creating plays in Linda's drama class. What can you tell us about that experience?

Linda's drama class was one of the best parts of my school experience. Her class was one where, as high school students, we felt like we were real actors, directors, designers and playwrights. We were empowered to use our creativity and ideas to devise theatre and to tell stories that meant something to us. Linda would guide us through the process, encouraging us and slowly releasing the reins as we learned to trust ourselves. She would often provide us with the framework of a play, but she trusted her students to bring their unique ideas to the process, too. It was through this process that I found a space to use my voice, to gain confidence, to learn what topics and themes I was drawn to. I don't know if she understood fully how transformative these experiences were for her students, but I can say wholeheartedly that they became part of the fabric of who I became both as a young person, and then as a Drama teacher myself years later.

Linda, your method differs from conventional ways of creating devised theatre in a number of ways. For one thing, casting is incorporated so completely into the process that it becomes a big factor in the play's development. How did you come up with the steps of the process?

The steps in the process came as a logical progression from: 1. deciding on the type of play we wanted, including its theme; to 2. what characters we needed (given the students in the class) and creating a story around them; then 3. putting that story into a framework of scenes. My idea for an open and democratic (so to speak) casting process followed quite organically from the process of creating the characters and then the scene framework or scenarios. Since students had been involved completely from the outset as co-writers of the play, it seemed only natural that they should be involved in the casting of those characters we'd written together as a collective. The auditions became the first opportunity for the dialogue (or script) to emerge. 4. Scenes involving the primary and secondary characters would be selected. Then improvisations on those scenes would be performed by the students auditioning for those roles. The entire class would watch these improvisations and decide who they believed could bring the characters of their play to life in the most effective way. They would also see how certain students had a more powerful chemistry together over others in the same scene. The students auditioning for, let's say, "Character A" would all leave the room, followed by a discussion and blind vote in each case.

After these four preliminary steps in the writing process, we would progress to the rehearsal of the play in much the same way as any scripted play is rehearsed, with the main exception that the dialogue would originate and develop through improvisation until it was solidly in place.

Carrie, can you tell us a little about your own experiences with creating devised plays? Have you ever used the method outside the classroom setting?

I was introduced to the concept of devising plays when I was a high school student in Linda's class. I then put the same process into practice when I became a high school Drama teacher. I realized very early on that suitable plays for large school casts were very hard to find, and that students wanted their creations to reflect their lives and the things they felt to be important. The collaborative process was one where I saw my students' creativity come to life as they contributed their own ideas and perspectives to the development of the play. It also allowed for shared ownership of the final product, leading to a real sense of pride and accomplishment for everyone involved. It became such a powerful way to not only put together impactful theatre, but to foster a sense of community and deepen students' understanding and love for theatre! We would use the process to put together class plays, but also to put together performances for whole-school events such as school assemblies and for events such as Remembrance Day. The possibilities really are endless when it comes to using devised theatre to create performances for whole-school events. We also used the process to devise plays for the Manitoba Drama Youth Festival, where I would let the reins go even more and really allow some senior students and newly graduated students to lead the student group through the process. Many of my former students have gone on to use this same process themselves to devise original plays for the Winnipeg Fringe Festival and other public performances, and one former student is now a Drama teacher herself and uses the same play creation process with her students today. Linda's impact has been far-reaching and, I have no doubt, will continue to be.

Linda, can you tell us how creating original plays benefits students? Is there something that this process gives to students that other ways of working do not?

In my experience, when students are involved in creating their play, they become invested in and committed to every other aspect of it—from their work on the backstage production elements, such as sets, costumes, or tech, to being present and on time for rehearsals, to

giving their very best effort in their performances. I've often used this analogy with my students...there is a powerful sense of ownership (even possessiveness) and pride that comes with the collaborative conception and nurturing of an artistic "baby," their play that is completely new and unique to that set of "parents." The experience of creating art has a beneficial impact on everyone involved. Apart from the learning outcomes it provides in an educational context (teamwork and theatre production/performance skills), it brings a feeling of individual empowerment and achievement that is incomparable in most other group activities.

Carrie, during Linda's recent book launch, participants used the word "magic" more than once to describe the way that the plays came together. Where do you think this magical element comes from?

"Magic" truly is the perfect way to describe the way the plays came together. It was a process that became a perfect blend of collaboration and creativity and was truly a transformative experience. The plays we were part of came together as a result of all the voices at the table, with every person involved supporting one another and trusting each other as we explored often quite complex ideas and emotions. It is a process that requires vulnerability and courage, but the result is powerful and authentic, and felt "magical" for those involved. Furthermore, devised theatre often involves the use of physical theatre and movement, as well as various other forms of expression like music and spoken word. This multi-disciplinary approach creates a sense of enchantment and "magic" that is experienced by both the performers and audience members. The final result of the play was a magical experience, as it was born from the fusion of our distinctive ideas and perspectives, blended with Linda's artistic talent, passion, and vision. We were truly lucky to experience theatre of this kind, under Linda's teaching and direction.

Linda, along with outlining your method, you provide a lot of practical advice for staging plays. What other aspects of the book do you think will be useful to Drama teachers?

For Drama teachers that are new to the profession, I think the appendices and glossary will be quite useful. The Improv Primer, in particular, provides exercises that can be utilized immediately for introducing and/or strengthening improv skills. The cue sheet template and directions on how to call tech cues will come in handy once it's time to perform any play, whether it's original or published. For Drama teachers of any level of experience, the chapter "Drama in the High School Jungle" is not only informative but will also comfort any Drama teacher out there to know that they are not alone, despite the isolation and pressures that often seem to go along with the job.

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.

POETRY FOR EARTH DAY—APRIL 22



[See More](#)

COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

The Birds and the Bees by Mark Crawford

[Persephone Theatre](#), Saskatoon, SK, March 29–April 23, 2023.

The Ministry of Grace by Tara Beagan

[Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society](#), Calgary, AB, April 13–23, 2023.

New by Pamela Sinha

[Canadian Stage](#), Toronto, ON, April 25–May 14, 2023.

The Curst by Kelley Jo Burke

[Dancing Sky Theatre](#), Meacham, SK, April 28–May 14, 2023.

Where You Are by Kristen Da Silva

[Theatre Northwest](#), Prince George, BC, May 4–24, 2023.

The Birds and the Bees by Mark Crawford

[Globe Theatre](#), Regina, SK, May 4–21, 2023.

Boom X by Rick Miller

[Crow's Theatre](#), Toronto ON, May 10–28, 2023.

Armadillos by Colleen Wagner

[Factory Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, June 3–24, 2023.

New Canadian Curling Club by Mark Crawford

[Drayton Festival Theatre](#), Drayton, ON, July 13–July 29, 2023.

The Waltz by Marie Beath Badian

[Blyth Festival](#), Blyth, ON, July 12–July 29, 2023.

Prairie Nurse by Marie Beath Badian

[Capitol Theatre](#), Port Hope, ON, July 14–30, 2023.

New Canadian Curling Club by Mark Crawford

[Huron Country Playhouse](#), Grand Bend, ON, August 3–20, 2023.

Where You Are by Kristen Da Silva

[Lighthouse Festival](#), Port Dover, ON, July 19–August 5, 2023.

Bed and Breakfast by Mark Crawford

[Orillia Opera House](#), Orillia, ON, July 26–August 12, 2023.

Where You Are by Kristen Da Silva

[Lighthouse Festival](#), Port Colbourne, ON, August 9–August 20, 2023.

Where You Are by Kristen Da Silva

[Port Stanley Festival Theatre](#), Port Stanley, ON, August 23–September 9, 2023.

The Real McCoy by Andrew Moodie

[Blyth Festival](#), Blyth, ON, August 24–September 9, 2023.

Bittergirl: The Musical by Annabel Fitzsimmons, Alison Lawrence & Mary Francis Moore

[St. Jacob's Schoolhouse Theatre](#), St. Jacobs, ON, October 4–December 24, 2023.

The Waltz by Marie Beath Badian

[Great Canadian Theatre Company](#), Ottawa, ON, February 13–25, 2024.

• ONLINE •

A Time to Dream, a documentary about the extraordinary women of the CASA project.

[Playwrights Guild of Canada](#) production, available online now.

Buff, a five-part podcast about Buffy Sainte-Marie by Falen Johnson.

[CBC Listen](#). All episodes online now.

• ON SCREEN •

With Love and a Major Organ by Julia Lederer.

Starring Anna Maguire, Hamza Haq, and Veena Sood. Coming to theatres soon!

The Swearing Jar by Kate Hewlett.

Starring Adelaide Clemens, Douglas Smith, Patrick J. Adams, and Kathleen Turner. Now available to buy or rent on various streaming services including Apple TV and Digital TIFF Bell Lightbox.

IN THE NEWS

Congratulations to [Michel Marc Bouchard](#), who was recently presented with the [Governor General's Literary Awards Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award](#) in theatre, which recognizes artists for their outstanding body of work and enduring contribution to the performing arts in Canada.

Congratulations to [Tanisha Taitt](#), winner of the 2023 [Gina Wilkinson Prize](#). Gina's Prize recognizes theatre artists from underrepresented genders which includes cis women, trans women, and non-binary folks with a demonstrated body of work, who are recognized by

their communities for their practice, leadership and dedication to their craft.

Congratulations to [Kate Hewlett](#), who won the [2023 Canadian Screen Award for Achievement in Music–Original Song](#) for the film adaptation of [The Swearing Jar](#).

Congratulations to [Kelley Jo Burke](#), winner of the 2023 City of Regina Writing Award for her submission “Rigby”.

Congratulations to [Haley McGee](#), whose latest solo show, *Age Is a Feeling*, was nominated for a 2023 [Olivier Award](#). *Age Is a Feeling* premiered at London’s Soho Theatre.

Don’t forget to visit your local indie bookstore this month! April 30 is Independent Bookstore Day in both [Canada](#) and the [USA](#).

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