

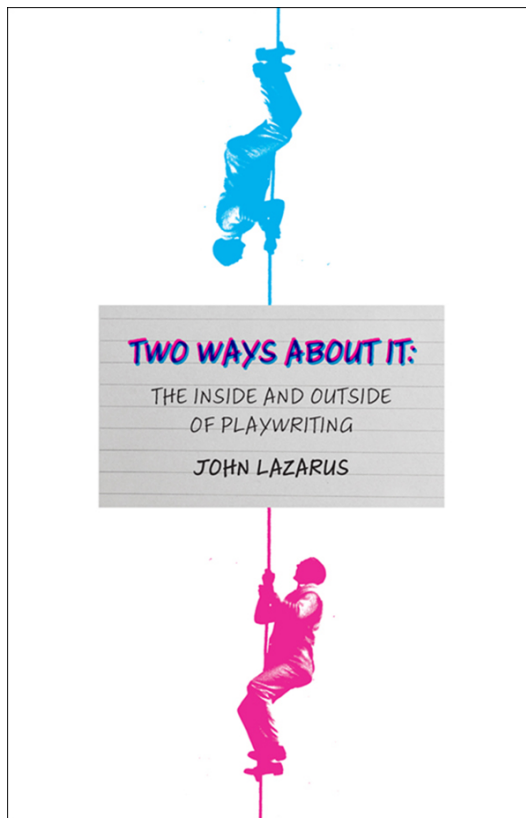


J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD

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ESSENTIAL READING



“Warm, funny, and written with such love for the artform, *Two Ways About It* offers practical guidance for the emerging playwright and a welcome refresher for the seasoned practitioner. Loaded with insight into both craft and process, this book is like having unlimited office hours with one of the country’s greatest teachers.”

—Kevin Kerr, playwright

“John Lazarus’s method for playwriting is practical and brilliant. Using his simple and innovative techniques you will see a story and dialogue for your play emerge. I have the career I have in theatre and television thanks to John.”

—Tracey Erin Smith, creator/host of award-winning TV Series *Drag Heals*

Like most Canadian playwrights of his generation, [John Lazarus](#) figured out the craft on his own. In doing that, he discovered a technique involving a dual approach: constructing plot on one hand and improvising dialogue on the other. In [Two Ways About It: The Inside and](#)

[Outside of Playwriting](#), John explains each of these “Two Ways” in detail, explaining why your characters won’t invent your story for you, how to construct a plot using cause-and-effect, and how to refine your dialogue for the actors by chewing on it yourself first. He also guides the reader through other aspects of the profession—from current issues around creativity, originality and cultural appropriation, to nuts-and-bolts concerns like script submissions, workshops, readings, rehearsals and opening nights. Informed by over 50 years of professional experience as an award-winning Canadian playwright, teacher and critic, and delivered with John’s breezy, informal style and sense of humour, *Two Ways About It* will give the beginner a dependable way into the profession and offer the more experienced playwright new and refreshing approaches to the art form.

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THE INTERVIEW

This month JGS interviewed [Leanna Brodie](#).

Leanna’s award-winning plays and libretti, which include *The Vic*, *Schoolhouse*, *The Book of Esther*, and *Ulla’s Odyssey*, have been performed from Halifax to Vancouver, London to Auckland.

Leanna is also a noted translator of Franco-Canadian and Québécois drama — including [I Am William](#) by Rébecca Deraspe and [The Weight of Ants](#) by David Paquet — and three of her translations have been nominated for Tom Hendry Awards.



Leanna, you are such a theatrical powerhouse that I hardly know where to start! But let’s begin with the project you’re working on now, which is getting a lot of buzz: *Salesman in China*, which you co-wrote with your husband Giovanni Sy, and which will be playing at Stratford this summer and fall. This is a huge project, based on Arthur Miller’s 1983 trip to China to direct a production of *Death of a Salesman*. Tell us how things are shaping up.

It is beyond exciting. You still have to do the work and put one foot in front of the other. And every project, no matter how large in scale or how big the stakes are, the work is the same. So how is it shaping up? We have a beautiful cast of... I'm trying not to think how many people because it scares me a little bit, but it's something like 17 people. (And we have understudies, of course, because this is 2024.) We have a beautiful design team, and it is the largest Asian Canadian contingent and creative team in Stratford's history. We continue to work on the actual script, and the designs are coming along apace. Jovanni is in the other room on Zoom with Joanna Yu, our set designer, going over preliminary designs. We had a meeting with the brass yesterday about securing some additional [outside] funding. So we're still pitching, believe it or not, because, as you say, it's big. But it is really, at its core, a simple story about fathers and sons and about crossing cultures. And as long as we hang on to that, I hang on to my lunch.

Is this the first time that you've co-written something with Jovanni?

It's the first time we have collaborated with each other in any way, and it is the first time either of us has co-written with anybody. So.

Wow, that's fantastic. How did you get the idea?

A battered old used bookstore copy of *Salesman in Beijing*, Arthur Miller's memoir of the experience, was sitting on Jovanni's shelf for years. I remember seeing it in Toronto, but I didn't get around to reading it until we were living in Richmond, BC, which is a majority Asian – I believe majority Chinese – city, and a city where a majority of people were born outside of Canada. And Jovanni was running a theatre which had something like a 95% white audience base when he moved there, in a city where white folks were the minority. So he came in with the mission of honouring the audience that had supported the theatre for many years and also bringing in an audience of the people in the place where we lived. So, cross-cultural, intercultural issues were very much on our minds. Of course, they are part of our experience as a couple, so they've been part of our lives for longer than Richmond has.

But I was living in a place where I would see really exciting kind of day-to-day collaborations and also a lot of anger and fear around the Chinese diaspora and around immigration and around real estate investments. I'd see fantastic initiatives like Todd Wong's "Gung Haggis Fat Choy," which was his Robbie Burns and Chinese New Year annual celebration. So there's all that kind of fabulous stuff going on... and there was also racist graffiti coming up all over. So it was a fraught, exciting place with a lot of potential and a lot of fear. And I read this memoir that took place in the height of the Cold War; it took place after a period of almost 50 years where China was cut off from the West for one reason or another, since the revolution, really. And before that there had always been geographic, linguistic and cultural barriers between China and the West. Those were intensified during the Cultural Revolution, where you could go to jail for knowing English, basically: for being seen as a decadent Western imperialist stooge.

And I read this account and on the one level, it's just, "Let's put on a show!" And on the other level, these people have pretty much all been in jail, been in re-education camps, been in struggle groups less than ten years earlier where this would not have been possible. And they bring over this guy. And often there are only two people in the room who speak English: Arthur Miller and this incredible figure of the Chinese theatre, Ying Ruocheng, who was his translator, his cultural interpreter, and his Willy Loman. So I mean, what's not to love about that story? There's drama, there are stakes. What I really loved was, it's a conflict, but it's not the way a lot of Chinese/Western stories are positioned, as a clash of civilizations, from *M. Butterfly* to *Chinglish* to *Chimerica*. This was something very different. This was around collaboration. It was trying to build a bridge across a huge chasm. And that was, to me, just as dramatic. I'm giving you a very long answer to your question, but, yeah, it was a document of a moment of hope between two societies that have often been at odds. And beyond Miller's memoir, we discovered that Ying had written a memoir in English, with an American academic and theatre scholar. So we discovered multiple points of view about this event: through Chinese theatre scholars, through journalists, through Inge Morath's photos—Arthur Miller's wife, an amazing photographer in her own right. So we had this incredible incident and we had so many viewpoints on it, and that was really exciting to us.

Read Leanna's full interview, in which she shares some fascinating aspects of translation, including dealing with "arias of swearing."

[Read the Full Interview](#)

BEHIND THE SCENES

This month we're introducing a new feature, a behind-the-scenes look at some of the most innovative work being done at theatres across North America.



Our first Behind the Scenes interviewee is Kayla Besse, Accessibility Coordinator for the [Stratford Festival](#). Prior to this, Kayla worked as the Public Education Coordinator at Tangled Art + Disability, a disability-led art gallery in Toronto. She co-produces and co-hosts the Crip Times podcast. She earned both her Bachelor and Master's degrees from The School of English & Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph. These days, she mostly wants to facilitate a nice time for disabled people in the arts, because it shouldn't be as hard as it is.

Kayla, you are working hard to make the Stratford Festival accessible to a wider range of audience members. Can you tell us about some of the types of accommodations you are able to make for patrons who need them?

Currently, we are excited to offer four specific types of accessible performances: Audio Described (where on-stage action is described via headset, designed with Blind and low-vision people in mind), American Sign Language Interpreted (for Deaf audiences), Open Captioned (for d/Deaf or hard of hearing audiences, and anyone else who benefits from captions), and Relaxed Performances (designed with autistic and neurodivergent people in mind, and welcoming to anyone who benefits from a more relaxed environment for a number of reasons).

The initiatives to make Stratford more accessible also extend to the Festival's workers, both on and offstage. How has the Festival become more accessible to theatre professionals living with disability?

There have always been folks with visible and invisible disabilities working as theatre professionals. Something I often say is that everyone has access needs, disabled or not, but we might not call them that. I'm glad to be in a position where I can invite everyone to be as transparent as they need to be about what might help them do their jobs as comfortably as possible. All acting company members are asked about their access needs at various points in the season, including in a welcome survey, and at our pre-rehearsal orientations. I believe when we are aware of each other's differences, it can help us form a more caring and supportive community. I am very open about the fact that I myself am disabled, and have seen the effect that "going first" can have in terms of having more open conversations about disability in the workplace. This is particularly powerful in the theatre,

where people's bodies are often asked to perform at a high level of "wellness" day after day.

What does a more accessible theatre space look like? This might look like physical changes to the space, like modifying dressing rooms to have things like grab bars and automatic doors. Last season, our wonderful carpenters made a custom lowered clothing rack for a wheelchair-using actor. Sometimes accessibility is more attitudinal. Many employees (myself included) have remote or hybrid work schedules, which means that we can be a part of the theatre community even when disability or other constraints make it difficult for us to be in-person every day. When we remove barriers in the environment people are working and playing in, they will have more space to make great art!

Audiences in Shakespeare's era were far more vocal and interactive than the usual "polite" theatre audiences of today. At Stratford, you've introduced relaxed performances during the runs, where audience members are free to make sounds, move around, and experience theatre in a more casual way. What can we learn from relaxing the usual expectations surrounding audience behaviour?

This is such a great observation, and an excellent thing to share with people who may be unsure or unfamiliar with relaxed performances. Relaxed performances really help us consider: What *does* it mean to be a 'good' audience? The vision of a still, silent audience is quite contemporary, and sometimes exclusionary. Relaxed performances were initially designed for autistic audiences, and in that spirit, invite guests to vocalize, to stim, or to take a break if they need to. We include a pre-show talk which illustrates design elements that may be startling and reminds everyone of the ethos of relaxed performances. I've learned from several actors that relaxed shows are some of their favourite days of the Festival season, because the joy and comfort in the room is palpable.

The accessibility initiatives that you and your team are implementing are part of a larger vision for equity, diversity, and inclusion at Stratford. What are some of your dreams for the future of the Festival?

Yes that's right, I work closely with my colleagues in the EDI department, who help me think about accessibility in intersectional ways. Some of our shared dreams and goals include expanding our theatre audiences to historically under-served groups. We want people to see themselves as theatre-goers, as well as seeing themselves and their identities represented on stage. Our pre-rehearsal orientation (PRO) process aims to give company and crew members the opportunity to spend time getting to know one another, and gain more familiarity with the Festival, before jumping straight into rehearsal. We also work closely with the City of Stratford to think holistically about how both locals and tourists can feel most welcome to work and play in town.

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And if you're interested in inviting an author to your class, [contact us](#) for more information. Many of our authors are available for classroom visits, in person or via Zoom.

JANUARY 15 IS MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY



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COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

Beneath Springhill by Beau Dixon

[Arts Club Theatre](#), Vancouver, BC, January 5–February 4, 2024.

Better Living by George F. Walker

[Alumnae Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, January 19–February 3, 2024.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green

[Soulpepper Theatre](#), January 23–February 11, 2024.

READING: Marcia Johnson, Janice Jo Lee, Johnny Widemann, Margaret Nowaczyk
[Toronto Writers Centre](#) Salon Series, January 28, 2024, 6 pm

Truth by Kanika Ambrose

[Young People's Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, January 29–February 23, 2024.

MacBeth: A Tale Told by an Idiot by Eric Woolfe

[Eldritch Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, February 8–24, 2024.

The Waltz by Marie Beath Badian

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

I Am William by Rébecca Déraspe, translated by Leanna Brodie

[Carousel Theatre for Young People](#), Vancouver, BC, February 14–18, 2024.

Boom YZ by Rick Miller

[Western Canada Theatre](#), Kamloops, BC, February 22–March 2, 2024.

Father Tartuffe: An Indigenous Misadventure by Herbie Barnes

[Touchstone Theatre](#), Vancouver, BC, February 22–March 24, 2024.

3 Fingers Back by Donna-Michelle St. Bernard

[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, February 27–March 24, 2024.

Diggers by Donna-Michelle St. Bernard

[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, February 27–March 10, 2024.

Café Daughter by Kenneth T. Williams

[Globe Theatre](#), Regina, SK, March 6–24, 2024.

By the Light of a Story by Kristen Da Silva

[Theatre Orangeville](#), Orangeville, ON, March 7–24, 2024.

Rise, Red River by Tara Beagan

[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, March 8–23, 2024.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls by Dave Deveau

[Roseneath Theatre](#), on tour in Ontario, March 2024.

Mad Madge by Rose Napoli

[Nightwood Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, April 9–21, 2024.

The Comeback by Trish Cooper and Sam Vint

[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, April 24–May 18, 2024.

The Outside Inn by Sharon Bajer and Elio Zarrillo

[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, May 7–19, 2024.

The Birds and the Bees by Mark Crawford

[Alberta Theatre Projects](#), Calgary, AB, May 7–May 25, 2024.

Doris and Ivy in the Home by Norm Foster

[St. Jacob's Country Playhouse](#), St. Jacob's ON, June 19–July 6, 2024.

Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz by Alison Lawrence

[4th Line Theatre](#), Millbrook, ON, July 1–20, 2024.

Halfway There by Norm Foster

[Drayton Festival Theatre](#), Drayton, ON, July 3–21, 2024.

Doris and Ivy in the Home by Norm Foster

[Huron County Playhouse](#), Grand Bend, ON, July 11-28, 2024.

Jim Watts, Girl Reporter by Beverley Cooper

[4th Line Theatre](#), Millbrook, ON, July 30–August 24, 2024.

• ONLINE •

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

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

Inose/Field Trip, a sound walk created by Yolanda Bonnell in partnership with Dr. Jesse Popp that encourages participants to connect with the natural world.

[Common Boots Theatre](#). (A video ASL version of *Inose/Field Trip* is now available.)

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

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

• ON SCREEN •

Les Filles du Roi by Corey Payette and Julie McIsaac

Premiered at the Rhode Island International Film Festival, with upcoming screenings at the Vancouver International Film Festival, the Hamilton Film Festival, the St. Louis International Film Festival, and the Orlando Film Festival.

With Love and a Major Organ by Julia Lederer

Starring Anna Maguire, Hamza Haq, and Veena Sood. Finalist for the Grand Jury Prize, 2023 Nashville Film Festival, winner Best Feature Film, Reelworld Film Festival.

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.

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