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**J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD**

P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

## ESSENTIAL READING

### THE MINISTRY OF GRACE

Tara Beagan



SCIROCCO DRAMA

“There’s a flood of human warmth and compassion in anything [Tara Beagan](#) creates.”

— *NOW Magazine*

“*The Ministry of Grace* is a force to be reckoned with—it will reach across the stage, grab your heart in its hands, and make off with it.”

— *NEXUS*

“Highly original... a layered, nuanced drama with comic touches.”

— *Victoria Times-Colonist*



It’s 1950 in the deserts of Southern California. Evangelist Brother Cain has a booming trade; his tent revival show moves from town to town, fleecing crowds desperate for something to believe in. When he discovers Mary, a Ntlaka’pamux woman from BC’s Nicola Valley, reading the Bible, he puts her onstage, renames her Grace, and displays her

as a miracle: an Indian who can read. A grand, sweeping story of friendship and redemption, [The Ministry of Grace](#) is a powerful look at people struggling to live, love, and retain dignity in a heartless world.

[See More](#)

## THE INTERVIEW

An Anishinaabe theatre artist from Aundeck Omni Kaning First Nation on Manitoulin Island, [Herbie Barnes](#) is an accomplished playwright, performer, director and arts educator whose 30-year career spans stages across North America. Herbie was raised in Toronto and was among the generation of young Indigenous artists in the 1990s breaking down barriers to forge professional careers in Canadian theatre. His theatre career began in 1989 with Debajehmujig Theatre Group and has since collaborated with some of North America's most prestigious artists. Herbie is the current Artistic Director of Toronto's Young Peoples Theatre.



**Herbie, the first thing that I want to talk about is your play, [Bentboy](#), which we published last year. How did you come to write the play?**

Well, I was doing a production of *The Hobbit*. I was playing Bilbo Baggins. And while it's called "*The Hobbit*" and Bilbo Baggins is the only hobbit in the room, every time we did that production, Gollum would steal the show.

Gollum in the book is four pages long. That's it! It's a very small moment, but everybody loved Gollum. Great character, wonderful character. And my roommate at the time happened to be Mr. Paul Lee, who was Opa on *Kim's Convenience*, and he's now doing *Star Wars*; he's now a hotshot in film and TV. He said, "Somebody should write Gollum's story. Somebody should write a play about Gollum." And I said, "Oh, well, there's a

challenge. I'll take it up." And I started writing it. Being First Nations, I said, "All right. What if it's a First Nations character?" And so I wrote Bentboy as a First Nations character, and as it developed, it became about how Bentboy was being ostracized from his community. And I thought, "What if he was positive, and being positive?" You get to see that tumble down. And that's where that all came from.

There have been a number of workshops and productions that have gone on, including the one at Young People's Theatre, and the young people really love it because it's the story of an underdog. I think everybody feels like they're a little bit "bent" in some way. Everybody feels like there's something wrong with them, and they all feel like they're the outsider, you know? I'm a lover of the Beatles. When the Beatles were splitting up, Ringo quit first, and Ringo went around to the houses of the other Beatles; he went to George's house first and said, "I'm quitting the band because you guys all seem like you're having fun and I'm the outsider." And George said, "*You're* the outsider? I thought *I* was the outsider." Then Ringo went over to John's house and said, "Just letting you know I'm quitting the band because you guys seem to be having so much fun, and I feel like I'm on the outside," John went, "You? *You're* on the outside? I thought *I* was on the outside!" So that's a feeling that we all have sometimes.

**I'm going to backtrack a little bit now, Herbie, and ask you about how you came to pursue theatre as a career.**

I'll tell you a little story. I always wanted to be an actor. I played high-level baseball as a kid, and I wanted to make it to the majors. I didn't, but I wanted to, and I thought that that would be my way to get into movies. I could become a Major League baseball player and then simply start doing movies. That's how easy it was in those days, or so I thought. But in grade four, the high school drama kids came over to my public school; they were doing a children's theatre presentation, an anti-smoking thing (or something like that) that they had written. They did the scene, and then they got the kids in the audience up to do it, and I got up to do it. And the teacher came over and she said, "I want to teach you. Come to my school." That teacher was [arts journalist] Paula Citron, who was teaching at CW Jeffries in North York at that time. And so that was my goal. I thought, "Now I know where I'm supposed to be going."

And I did go to that high school. Paula had already left, but I had a wonderful teacher there, Priscilla Costello. There was a group of us that were doing the high school improv course, and she said, "You guys are funny. There are free classes on Tuesday nights at Harbourfront for this thing called Theatresports; you should go." Twelve of us went down the first week. The second week, three of us went down. The third week I went down by myself, and I kept going down. I took the class just to have something on my résumé, but then I thought I'd better go down and see the show—because I hadn't seen the Theatresports show; I'd just taken the workshops. I went to see the show, and there was a troupe on stage called "Doctor Jekyll and Naugahyde," and it was Paul de la Rosa, Neil Crone, Maggie Matulic, Paul Anthony, and Moira Dunphy. And they were *so good*. I thought, "Why aren't these people famous? And if they're not famous and they're that much better than me, I have to work a lot more to get good!" So while I was in high school—I was

in grade nine, grade ten—I started focusing on improv. I took Richard Pochinko's clown classes; I was doing David Smukler's voice classes. I was studying Michael Connolly's voice stuff and doing mime classes with Paul Gaulin. I was doing Sears and Switzer classes. I was leaving school at 4:00 and rushing downtown, and I was taking classes from all of these fantastic teachers. I finished four years' worth of high school theatre credits in two years. The teacher came to me and said, "Look, you know more about this stuff than we do. *You* teach the course." So I started teaching in my high school during my last year of high school. Then that same teacher, Paula Citron, came to me one day and said, "Look, there's a show that I want to take you to. I want you to see it, and I'll buy the tickets, but you have to see this show." She took me down to Passe Muraille, and I was sitting up in the balcony. And on that stage, I knew all of the characters. I thought, "Those are all my uncles!" And that play was Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*.

I saw that the actors had all worked at De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre on Manitoulin Island, where I'm from. And so I thought, "I'm dropping off my résumé at this De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre to see if I can't get work." I dropped off the résumé, and a guy took the résumé and said, "Thank you very much." About a month and a half later, I got a phone call. My mom came up to the local hangout and said, "There's this guy who's offered you a job." And I went, "Nah, they don't do that. He wants me to *audition*." "No, no, no, it's an acting job. He's offering it to you. He said you can have it if you want it." And I said, "No, no, no, no, Ma, he's not offering me. I need to audition." She said, "Whatever. Phone him." So I went home and I phoned the guy and he said, "Yeah, the role is this, and you're going to tour; the pay is this. Do you want the gig?" And I said, "Well, I'm just finishing off my last year of high school. I've got to think about it." He said, "Okay, well, get back to me as soon as you can." And I went, "Okay, I'll do it." And that was *Toronto at Dreamers Rock* by Drew Hayden Taylor.

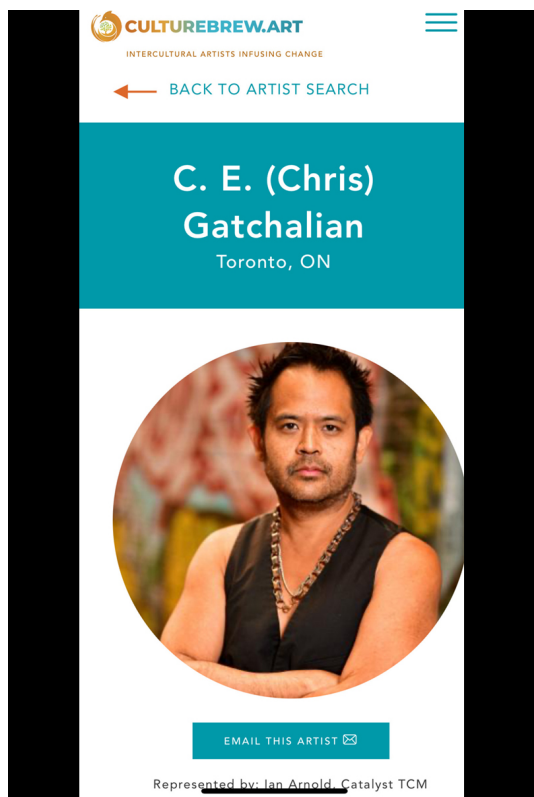
The guy who had taken my résumé was Larry Lewis, who became my mentor. He had dramaturged and directed *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* and *The Rez Sisters*. He was my and Drew's mentor for the first few years. I toured *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* for a good chunk of time. Then we moved it to Toronto and Tomson Highway saw the show there. He came over to me and he asked, "Can you cartwheel?" And I went, "Yeah, I can." He said, "Okay, I've got a part for you." And so he hired me to do another show. I was always planning on going back to high school, but from that show, I got nine offers and an agent!

So that was the start of it. And I've just been really lucky and successful ever since.

*See the full Interview with Herbie to find out why he hangs out with astronauts and Hollywood stars.*

**Read the Full Interview**

# BEHIND THE SCENES



*This month we talked to Scirocco author [Chris Gatchalian](#) about his work as Community Engagement Producer with [CultureBrew.Art](#), a platform designed to connect Indigenous and racialized artists with engagers and with one another.*

**Chris, for readers who may not be familiar with CultureBrew.Art, what can you tell us about the platform?**

[CultureBrew.Art](#) is an initiative of Visceral Visions, a nonprofit performing arts company based in Vancouver that was founded in 2003 by Valerie Sing Turner. The mandate of Visceral Visions has always been the development, production, and presentation of Indigenous and racialized work. The CultureBrew.Art initiative was formally launched in Vancouver just before the pandemic, in late 2019. It's a national digital platform for Indigenous and racialized artists to be seen by engagers and opportunity makers in the arts: theatre companies, galleries, curators, producers—people who generate job opportunities in the arts. The platform is multidisciplinary; it embraces all the arts. It's also unique in that it is truly national. It's also a community-building initiative; CultureBrew.Art allows artists to be seen by engagers, but it also allows Indigenous and racialized artists to form community with each other.

I've known Valerie Sing Turner for close to twenty years now, and from the beginning of our friendship she articulated her vision for a database that would essentially negate the excuse that a lot of gatekeepers in the arts use whenever they are called to task for not engaging in a diverse fashion—that excuse being: "We couldn't find anyone." But now, with this database in existence, they don't have that excuse anymore. All they need to do is subscribe to it! Everyone on the team that runs CultureBrew.Art is a POC working artist,

and we've all navigated challenges; we've all navigated the terrain of the Canadian arts ecosystem. At the moment, the database features more than 570 artist's profiles from across the country, and we're still growing.

### **How can artists join the platform?**

You can publish your profile on the database, where engagers can see you and potentially correspond with you, hire you, etc. It's also a way for artists from opposite sides of the country to get to know each another.

We try to erase barriers for joining. If you are an Indigenous or racialized artist in any discipline, you can join CBA. There is a nominal, one-time-only \$25 fee to join; however, we don't ever want finances to be a barrier. So if the fee is a barrier to joining, we have bursaries available and all you have to do is ask and you'll almost certainly be approved.

### **As an engager, how can you interact with the platform?**

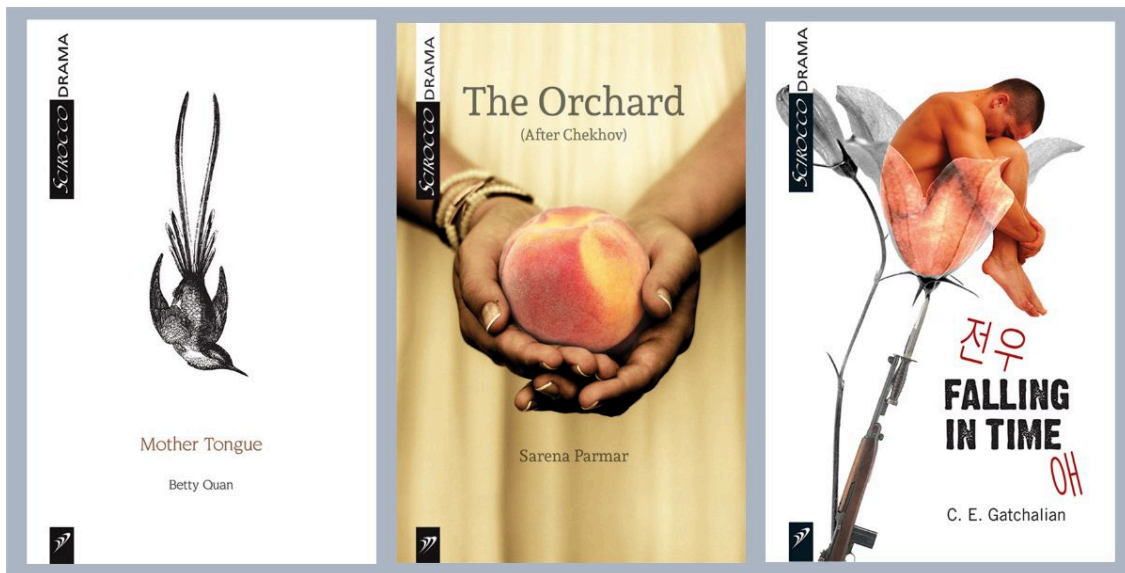
Engagers pay a fee to access the database. It costs more to join as an engager, but again, it's very affordable, and fees are based on the organization's annual budget, so there are various pricing levels. We have engagers who pay as little as \$6/month. Engagers can subscribe annually or by the month. If they subscribe annually, the first two months are free.

The platform is interdisciplinary, but it's worth noting that theatre is very well represented. A number of major theatre companies subscribe to [CultureBrew.Art](#). The Stratford Festival has been really, really supportive of us from the get-go. Other major supporters are the Arts Club in Vancouver, Musical Stage Company in Toronto, Young Peoples Theatre in Toronto, and Bard on the Beach in Vancouver; Alberta Theatre projects just signed up as well.

*Click on [Read the Full Interview](#) for more with Chris on the benefits of joining CultureBrew.Art.*

[Read the Full Interview](#)

**MAY IS ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH  
& JEWISH HERITAGE MONTH**



## COMING ATTRACTIONS

### • IN THEATRES •

***Sanctuary Song*** by Marjorie Chan (libretto)  
[Tapestry Opera](#), Toronto, ON, May 9–25, 2025.

***Halfway There*** by Norm Foster  
[Hudson Village Theatre](#), Hudson, QC, May 14–25, 2025.

***The New Canadian Curling Club*** by Mark Crawford  
[Lighthouse Theatre](#), Port Dover, ON, May 21–June 7, 2025.

***After the Rain*** by Rose Napoli and Suzy Wilde  
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, May 27–June 22, 2025.

***Bedtime Stories*** by Norm Foster

[Firehall Theatre](#), Niagara Falls, ON, May 28–June 1, 2025.

***Jake's Gift*** by Julia Mackey

[Invermere Legion](#), Invermere, BC, May 31 and June 1, 2025.

***Halfway There*** by Norm Foster

[Hamilton Family Theatre](#), Cambridge, ON, June 4–22, 2025.

***The New Canadian Curling Club*** by Mark Crawford

[Lighthouse Theatre](#), Port Colbourne, ON, June 11–June 22, 2025.

***Reading: Serving Elizabeth*** by Marcia Johnson

[New Stages](#), Peterborough, ON, June 14, 2025.

***Doris and Ivy in the Home*** by Norm Foster

[Port Stanley Theatre Festival](#), Port Stanley, ON, June 18–July 12, 2025.

***The Haunting of Sleepy Hollow by Fire*** by Allen Cole and Ken Schwartz

[Two Planks and a Passion Theatre](#), Canning, NS, June 28–August 16, 2025.

***On a First-Name Basis*** by Norm Foster

[Foster Festival](#), St. Catharines, ON, July 3–17, 2025.

***A Woman's Love List*** by Norm Foster

[Orillia Opera House](#), Orillia, ON, July 3–18, 2025.

***Bed and Breakfast*** by Mark Crawford

[Hudson Village Theatre](#), Hudson, QC, July 9–20, 2025.

***Humour Me*** by Beverley Cooper

[Here for Now Theatre](#), Stratford, ON, July 9–26, 2025.

***Hidden Treasures*** by Norm Foster

[Lighthouse Festival](#), Port Dover, ON, July 9–26, 2025.

***Chase the Ace*** by Mark Crawford

[Ship's Company Theatre](#), Parrsboro, NS, July 9–27, 2025.

***Screwball Comedy*** by Norm Foster

[Foster Festival](#), July 23–August 3, 2025.

***Hurry Hard*** by Kristen Da Silva

[Orillia Opera House](#), Orillia, ON, July 28–August 8, 2025.

***Chase the Ace*** by Mark Crawford

[Charlottetown Festival](#), Charlottetown, PEI, July 30–August 9, 2025.

***Hidden Treasures*** by Norm Foster

[Lighthouse Festival](#), Port Colbourne, ON, July 30–August 10, 2025.

***The Rules of Playing Risk*** by Kristen Da Silva

[Here for Now Theatre](#), Stratford, ON, July 30–August 16, 2025.

***Hurry Hard*** by Kristen Da Silva

[Gravenhurst Opera House](#), Gravenhurst, ON, August 12–22, 2025.

***Stag and Doe*** by Mark Crawford

[Thousand Islands Playhouse](#), Gananoque, ON, August 22–September 14, 2025.

***Here on the Flight Path*** by Norm Foster

[Lighthouse Festival](#), Port Dover, ON, August 27–September 13, 2025.

***Hurry Hard*** by Kristen Da Silva

[Upper Canada Playhouse](#), Morrisburg, ON, September 4–28, 2025.

***The Drawer Boy*** by Michael Healey

[Thousand Islands Playhouse](#), Gananoque, ON, September 5–28, 2025.

***Here on the Flight Path*** by Norm Foster

[Lighthouse Festival](#), Port Colbourne, ON, September 17–September 28, 2025.

***Home to Roost*** by Kristen Da Silva

[Chemainus Theatre](#), Chemainus, BC, September 26–October 19, 2025.

***Casey and Diana*** by Nick Green

[Yes Theatre](#), Sudbury, ON, September 27–October 19, 2025.

***The Stakeout*** by Norm Foster

[Foster Festival](#), Fenwick, ON, October 2–5, 2025.

***The Christmas Market*** by Kanika Ambrose

[Crow's Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, November 4–30, 2025.

***Serving Elizabeth*** by Marcia Johnson

[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, November 11–23, 2025.

***The Right Road to Pontypool*** by Alex Poch Goldin (staged reading)

[Winnipeg Jewish Theatre](#), Winnipeg, MB, November 22–23, 2025.

***Rogers vs. Rogers*** by Michael Healey

[Crow's Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, December 2–28, 2025.

***Munch Upon a Time*** by Debbie Patterson

[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, December 19, 2025–January 3, 2026.

***Easter Someday*** by Tanisha Taitt

[Cahoots Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, January 17–24, 2026.

***Mad Madge*** by Rose Napoli

[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, January 20–February 8, 2026.

***Boom X*** by Rick Miller

[Theatre Aquarius](#), Hamilton, ON, January 21–February 7, 2026.

***The Golden Anniversaries*** by Mark Crawford

[Arts Club Theatre](#), Vancouver, BC, January 22–February 15, 2026.

***Holland*** by Trish Cooper

[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, February 4–21, 2026.

***Rogers vs. Rogers*** by Michael Healey

[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, February 18–March 14, 2026.

***Queen Maeve*** by Judith Thompson

[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, March 3–29, 2026.

***A Killing Snow*** by Paul Ciufo

[Vertigo Theatre](#), Calgary AB, March 14–April 12, 2026.

***Chase the Ace*** by Mark Crawford

[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, March 24–April 12, 2026.

• ON SCREEN •

***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, winner, Best Feature, Canadian Film Festival. Available to rent or buy on Google Play, AppleTV or Amazon Prime.

***The Swearing Jar*** by Kate Hewlett

Starring Adelaide Clemens, Douglas Smith, Patrick J. Adams, and Kathleen Turner. Now streaming on Amazon Prime!

# IN THE NEWS

The Manitoba Association of Playwrights-Scirocco Drama High School Playwriting Program recently wrapped up for 2025. High school playwrights Adia Branconnier (Transcona Collegiate,) Brooklyn Frankfurt (Collège Miles Macdonell Collegiate,) Laureen Green (Vincent Massey Collegiate,) and Rita Sande (St. Mary's Academy) worked with dramaturgs Trish Cooper, Kara Joseph, and Ellen Peterson over the course of several months. A public reading of the plays took place on May 11th, at the Manitoba Theatre for Young People, directed by Kara Joseph and featuring MTYP students as readers.

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