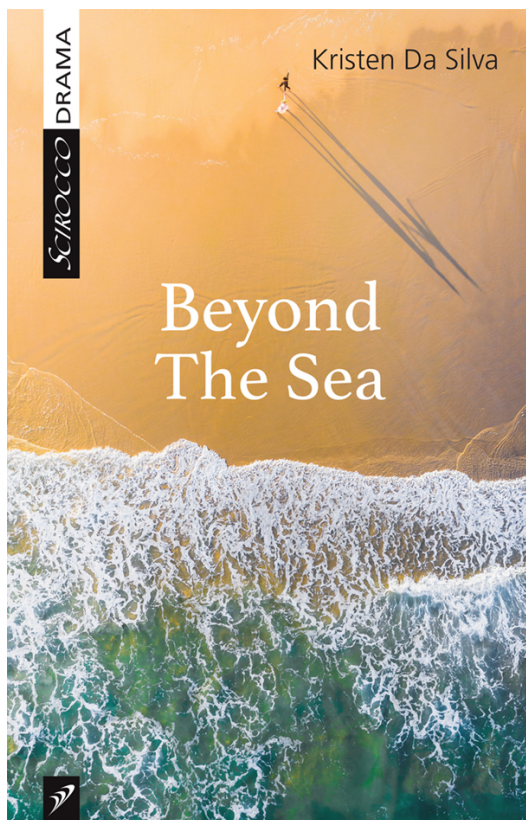




J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD
P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

ESSENTIAL READING



"Da Silva's two complex, likeable, fully human and slightly haunted characters share a great deal of themselves with each other and with us, and the result is an evening of superb theatre."

— *The Buzz*, PEI

"I didn't expect to have my heart broken by Gwen and Theo, the two exquisitely drawn characters in *Beyond the Sea*, Da Silva's heartwarming new play about loss, longing and the possibility of brave fulfillment."

— *Hamilton Spectator*

In this moving romantic comedy by [Kristen Da Silva](#), we meet two unforgettable characters: Theo, a recently single man with self-image problem, and Gwen, a good-humoured loner who works the ticket booth for a local boat tour company. It's a hot summer day on the pier in a small town, and Theo's date is running late...leaving him and

Gwen to stumble into an encounter that just might save them both. [*Beyond the Sea*](#) is a story about the emergence of hope through grief and the power of human connection.

[See More](#)

THE INTERVIEW

[Leeann Minogue](#)'s plays include [Dry Streak](#), which was nominated for a Saskatchewan Book Award in 2006, and [Homecoming](#). Leeann lives with her husband and son on a grain farm in southeast Saskatchewan.



Leeann, the premise of your play [Dry Streak](#) is very funny: It's 1988, and John, a farmer's son, brings his girlfriend Kate home to the farm to live. Kate is a city girl, a vegetarian, a free spirit, an obvious misfit in the fictional community of Stony Valley, Saskatchewan. What happens when city meets country?

That's where the humour comes—when two cultures clash. Rural people watching the play are sophisticated enough to know that it's funny to laugh at themselves. People in rural areas know we're not dressing or living the same as people in cities. In the play, the culture clash is played for humour, with—hopefully—both urban and rural people seeing that it's funny. We're not really laughing at anyone; we're just laughing at the differences.

Recently, my son's Grade 12 class read *Dry Streak* in school, and that was really fun. He kept hoping he'd have an inside edge on some of the questions, but somehow it didn't

work out. I didn't understand all the themes in the same way the teacher did!

To follow up, I want to ask you about “urban vs. rural” in real life. Most writers in Canada live in urban centres, but you have built a career in a small farming community: Griffin, Saskatchewan. Can you tell us about the challenges and advantages of being a writer in a rural location?

Let's start with the advantages. There's a real niche for rural plays. There are many rural dinner theatres looking for material. There are outdoor summer theatres looking for rural-based material, and there aren't a lot of people writing rural humour. (There's some rural nostalgia, there's some rural drama, but there's not a ton of rural humour made for this market.) So that's the advantage. And of course, the disadvantage is not being able to see shows or be part of a theatre community. I live ninety miles from the nearest professional theatre. It's hard to get to shows, and it's hard to spend time with other writers.

But I think that's one of the things that gives your work power: because you live the farm life, you understand the issues people face, and you can portray rural communities with authenticity.

In my twenties, I lived in Regina, and I thought I understood rural life because I had grown up on a farm. But until you live there, you really don't. The things that I thought I understood in Regina are just not the way it turned out to be when I moved back to rural Saskatchewan.

Your play *Homecoming* is also set in Stony Valley, and it tackles the subject of a family in transition, as the parents retire and the son and his wife move home to take over the farm. This time the conflict is generational, between the old ways and the new ways. Why did you want to write about this subject?

This topic is one of the biggest problems in farm management. How do farmers turn their farm over to the next generation in a way that's fair to the kids that stay on the farm, and to the kids that move off the farm? And also, how do father and son—usually son, but sometimes daughter—how do they work together to make this transition work? There are going to be clashes. And there's always humour in a clash! But it's also real, because it's so hard for farmers (and anyone with a family business) to walk away and let the son be in charge, or to stand back and watch the son do things wrong.

Playwriting isn't the only kind of writing that you do—you were the editor of *Grainews* for many years. What was that like?

Your readers might not be too excited about *Grainews*, because it's a publication designed to provide technical information to farmers. But one very fun job I had was writing a regular column in *Country Guide* that followed a fictional farm family. I did that for five or six years, telling stories about an intergenerational farm family. It was a serial; the stories would carry on from one episode to the next. You know, someone would get married and then next time the wife was in the story, and I really enjoyed that. At one point I killed off a character, the

older farmer, because I thought, you know, all this time has gone by, surely everyone can't be still alive. So I killed that character and I was really sad afterward because he had been so funny and I didn't have him there anymore. I was surprisingly sad after that! I'm trying to think of how I can bring some of that material onto the stage.

Do you want to give us a sneak peek of a project you're working on now?

I haven't written a play for quite some time, but I have something on my hard drive that I think is promising. And this time, instead of setting the play in a hot, dry summer, I'm working with a really cold, bleak winter. It's about rural isolation and how you can break through that to find your community. But of course, with comedy and death and all of that stuff.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

BEHIND THE SCENES



Summer festivals are in full swing in Canada right now, so this month we spoke to Artistic Director [Gil Garratt](#) about the iconic [Blyth Festival](#) in Blyth, Ontario.

Gil, could you give us a quick overview of the [Blyth Festival](#) for readers who may not know much about the history of the theatre and the kind of work you do there?

Absolutely. The theatre was founded in 1975, but incredibly enough, the building itself was built as a living cenotaph. In 1919, at the end of the First World War, the local Women's Institute raised \$26,000, and they built the Blyth Memorial Community Hall. When other communities were building marble monuments and bronze statues (which is in no way to deride those markers), the people in the village of Blyth and the surrounding area decided that they wanted a place to celebrate the culture that they felt their husbands and sons and fathers had sacrificed themselves for in the Great War. So they built this beautiful theatre, and for decades they filled it with concerts, and operas, and small plays, and lectures, and dances, and all kinds of things. There used to be two railroads that ran through the village

of Blyth, six trains a day through town, which included touring vaudeville shows and other entertainments. But after all the trains were shut down, the town had a lot of trouble keeping the theatre going, and eventually the building was condemned.

And then, about ten years after the building had been condemned, Paul Thompson, one of the founders of Theatre Passe Muraille, and a bunch of artists who he was working with at the time, had been touring a play called *The Farm Show* all through the surrounding region. And they saw this space and they thought, "We want to use it. We want to put a show in here." They were in the midst of creating *1837: The Farmer's Revolt* with Rick Salutin, and they needed a rehearsal space. And so they went to the township and said, "Hey, can we use this building?" And the township said, "Well, it's condemned." And Paul Thompson (being Paul Thompson, of course) refused to accept this answer, and instead he pushed and pushed. Finally, they were all told that if they signed waivers saying that they wouldn't sue the town if the roof fell in on their heads, that they could use it. So they did, and they got to rehearse in this hall, and they fell in love with it. And there were a few other local folks curious about what they were doing there: a man named Keith Roulston who would go on to be one of the people spearheading the founding of the festival, along with James Roy and Anne Chislett. (They all had a connection to the community; James had just grown up down the road.) They decided to gather a group of volunteers and restore the building. So they raised a bunch of money, they restored the building, and they put on the very first season of the Blyth Festival in 1975.

That season consisted of two shows. The sure bet was Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*. They thought, "Well, it's the most-produced English-language play in the world. Of course, obviously, we will put *that* on because it will be very popular, and it will bankroll the other crazy thing we want to do." What they wanted was to do an experimental play, working with the kind of the template they'd seen in Passe Muraille collectives like *The Farm Show*, and they wanted to create a play using local short stories by a man named Harry J. Boyle, who had grown up not very far from Blyth. He'd worked for CBC Radio, and he'd been kind of a local impresario and had written short stories about growing up on a farm in in the Depression in that part of the world, kind of loving remembrances. So they created a collective play called *Mostly in Clover*, based on Boyle's short stories. And famously, that first season of the festival went up and they could not *give away* tickets to *The Mousetrap*. Nobody was interested. And yet *Mostly in Clover* completely sold out; audiences just poured out for this thing, and they were blown away. So they brought it back the next year. And with that, they created a mandate. They realized that by some alchemy, some miracle, the people in Huron County, in our part of the world, were interested in stories about the region. They were interested in stories about Canada. They were not especially curious about this British murder mystery that meant nothing to them. They wanted to hear stories about their community. And so the mandate of the festival was born, and it's basically been untouched since. The mandate is to enrich the lives of our audience by giving voice to the region and the country.

That has led to the festival doing nothing but Canadian plays ever since. A lot of shows are very much locally focused: we commission writers, we develop the plays, and we premiere them at the festival. We try to bring Canadian classics to the stage as well. At the end of

this season, we will have premiered 158 Canadian plays, which is astounding! I mean, I should also mention, for anyone who doesn't know, that the population of the village of Blyth is one thousand people—that's what the sign says anyway. It's a very, very small town. And yet, in the midst of it is this four-hundred-seat theatre where we are able to put on premieres of plays. We have a loyal audience who are so excited about new Canadian plays that this is the thing they come back for, year after year after year. We run a rep season, and we just had something called the Bonanza Weekend. We do a special weekend in the middle of the summer where audiences can come on a Friday night, and if they stay until Sunday, they can see four different plays over the course of the weekend. It's really an amazing thing. There's a loyal group of longtime fans who come every year just for Bonanza Weekend. I talked to a couple this summer who has been coming for forty-five years! They've never missed a Bonanza Weekend, which is just amazing to me.

Must be a busy weekend for everyone!

It's a full-contact sport. It's quite a thing. I should mention that in 2021, we built a brand new bespoke outdoor space called the Harvest Stage in our local fairgrounds. We built it when nobody was allowed to put on plays, and we weren't allowed to have audiences gather. We thought the thing to do would be to take advantage of the environments we have. We're in this beautiful part of the rolling hills of Ontario farm country. And we built a purpose-built, open-air outdoor stage with 416 seats. We've continued to program shows there because audiences have really fallen in love with it. It's an amazing spot surrounded by poplar trees, and you get to watch the sunset over stage left, and on your way back to your car. At the end of the night, you get to walk under the open canopy of stars.

It would be impossible to run the Blyth Festival without significant community involvement. Blyth residents go above and beyond—I'm thinking of initiatives like the Country Suppers at the Legion, for example. Why do you think the people of the area have embraced the theatre so wholeheartedly? What makes that partnership work?

That's such a great question. I do think so, too, and this summer is a great example. We have a fleet of one hundred and sixty volunteers right now, which is amazing! These are the people who are tearing tickets on your way in the door; they're getting you to your seat. They're selling 50/50 tickets and concessions. They're also serving on our board of directors. We've got all these amazing volunteers who are deeply invested in the place; some of them have been doing it for decades. We couldn't do it without them. They are the salt of the earth, and very much the foundation we stand on. I do think often about that feeling of community and the depth of it.

This summer, our own Royal Canadian Legion Branch 420, along with the awesome force that is the Legion Ladies Auxiliary, are doing nineteen country suppers over the course of the summer, which is incredible. It's something that audiences love because they not only see the show, they also go and sit and pass the potatoes! I have audience members who love that so much, to be able to sit with strangers and talk about the plays, talk about being there and what it means to them. It's really important.

I do think so much of it has to do with not only seeing their lives reflected on stage but also seeing their local histories and local stories respected on stage. We treat these stories as equally valuable to the lineage of the Henrys, of the Tudors. I think there's something special about saying: our stories really matter. Whenever we put local stories on stage, local characters on stage (as well as sometimes as actual local people onstage,) there's so much celebration of it. It's a kind of vital transmission that is going on in that space, and it's much larger than any of us. It's profound.

An example: Last summer we did a play called *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz: The Farmerettes* [by [Alison Lawrence](#), based on the book by Bonnie Sittler and Shirleyan English]. It was about the initiative at the end of the Second World War where young women, teenagers really, were offered the opportunity to miss their school exams if they would go and work on farms across the country, mostly in Ontario. With the men away, the farms needed the labour. And so all of these teenage girls pitched in and planted and harvested food crops, and they were an essential part of Canada's war effort. They were heroes. The play told their stories, which were based on interviews that had been done with Farmerettes. Every night at the show, if we knew that living Farmerettes were going to be there, we'd make a point of introducing them to the whole crowd. There was one night where one of my favourite Farmerettes, a woman named Jean Brett who's been coming and seeing shows at Blyth for years, had come to the theatre to see the show, and she had just turned one hundred years old. So there was a one-hundred-year-old woman in the house to see this play, and there was a cast of young women, mostly in their 20s and early 30s, who were performing the story and commemorating the effort that Jean Brett had been a part of. And then there's another layer, which is that night at the theatre, there was a group of high school students who had come from Stratford Central, so there were all these teenage girls who were part of their school drama club who had come to see the show. So in the room there was a one-hundred-year-old woman who had lived the experience and these young women who were performing her story, putting a spotlight on it and sharing it. And then there were a group of teenage girls in the house who were receiving that transmission. And to me, it was the very thing that the richest filaments of culture burn with.

How is summer theatre different than theatre in the “regular season,” and why is summer theatre important?

I mean, for us who live in something affectionately referred to as “the snow belt,” running a season in the winter is basically impossible. We did have some local highways this year that were shut down for quite a while with tremendous snow. At my daughters' school, students had forty-three snow days this winter! But about summer theatre: I think there's something special about people choosing, as part of their restorative vacation time, to come and engage with these stories. I think that we get audiences who find that part of that restoration for them is taking the time to spend in community in that way. About a third of our audience comes from within a forty-five-minute drive from Blyth. Two-thirds of our audience are driving an hour or more; we get a lot of folks who are coming from London and Kitchener, and we still get a few people from Toronto. Last year we had attendees from

four hundred and twenty-three different towns and villages all over Ontario, which is amazing. Amazing! So I think that the summer affords them the opportunity to travel and see what we have to offer. It is such a beautiful part of the world, too... That's the other thing about coming to see theatre in the summer in Huron County—the farm fields, the Huron County sunset! Such a gorgeous, gorgeous place.

Click on [Read the Full Interview](#) for the story behind the Pigeon Ponzi scheme and how cathartic theatre can be for a community.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

LAZY, HAZY, CRAZY DAYS OF SUMMER



IN THE NEWS

Big congratulations to Scirocco Drama author [Nick Green](#), who is nominated for a [Lambda Literary Award](#) in the drama category for his smash hit play, [Casey and Diana](#). The 37th annual Lammies will be awarded on October 4, 2025.

IN MEMORIAM

We at JGS are greatly saddened to hear of the passing of [Mary Vingoe](#), playwright, director, artistic director, teacher, actor, and the co-founder of five Canadian theatres: Toronto's Nightwood Theatre, Ship's Company Theatre in Parrsboro, NS, The Eastern Front Theatre and Homefirst Theatre in Halifax, and the Magnetic North Theatre Festival at Canada's National Arts Centre. Mary's acclaimed plays include [Some Blow Flutes](#), [Living Curiosities](#), and [Refuge](#), which was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award. In 2011, Mary was made an Officer of the Order of Canada. Mary was a friend and mentor to many and will be remembered for her generosity of spirit as well as for her significant contributions to Canadian theatre. [Mary's Celebration of Life](#) will be held on Monday, October 20 at 7:30pm at the Alderney Landing Theatre in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

[Diane Bessai](#) was a lifelong arts scholar and a pioneering voice in 20th-century Canadian theatre and literature. Bessai's career encompassed Canadian theatre scholarship, editing, publishing, mentoring, teaching, and advocacy. Diane taught English at the University of Alberta in Edmonton for many years, and she was a member of the collective that founded [NeWest Press](#). Diane died in April at the age of 92.

[Kathleen Flaherty](#) was a dramaturg, director, scholar, journalist, and mentor who worked with many playwrights, including Scirocco Drama's Beverley Cooper, Dave Deveau, Leanna Brodie, and Jason Sherman. Kathleen worked at CBC Radio Drama and as a dramaturg with theatres across Canada; she also spent eight years as the resident dramaturg at Vancouver's [Playwrights Theatre Centre](#). A celebration of life was held at PTC in July.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

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.

Hurry Hard by Kristen Da Silva
[Orillia Opera House](#), Orillia, ON, July 23–August 8, 2025.

Chase the Ace by Mark Crawford
[Charlottetown Festival](#), Charlottetown, PEI, August 5–9, 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.

Gertrude and Alice by Evalyn Parry & Anna Chatterton, with Karin Randoja

[Touchstone Theatre](#), Vancouver, BC, November 6–23, 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.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green

[Western Canada Theatre](#), Kamloops, BC, January 22–February 1, 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.

The Golden Anniversaries by Mark Crawford

[Western Canada Theatre](#), Kamloops, BC, April 2–12, 2026.

On Native Land by Corey Payette

[The Cultch](#), Vancouver, BC, April 8–19, 2026.

• ON SCREEN •

Starwalker by Corey Payette

Starring Dillan Chiblow, Jeffrey Follis, and Stewart Adam McKensy. The film version of *Starwalker* opened recently at the Inside Out Festival and will be playing at theatres soon.

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.

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