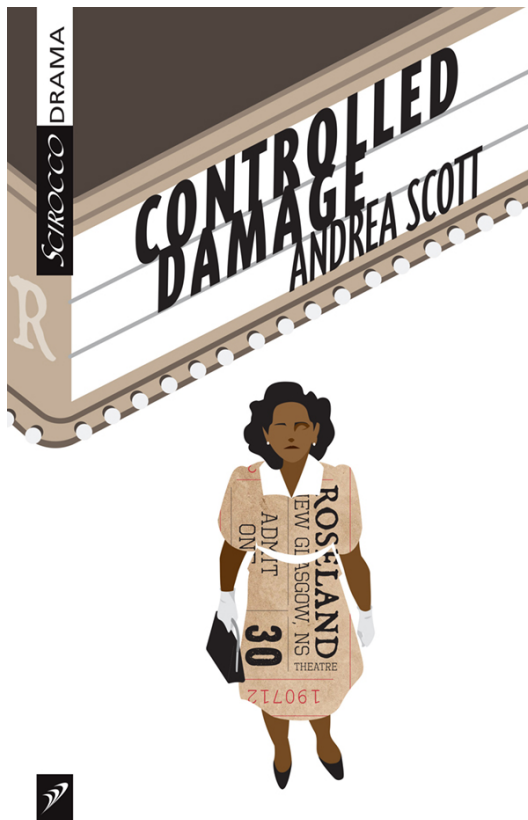




J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD
P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

ESSENTIAL READING



“As the play examines Desmond’s life, from her childhood to her death, revealing her aspirations and ambitions, her love for her work, and her relationships with her husband, friends, and community, we are provided with not just an isolated snapshot of history, but a nuanced look at one woman’s experiences.”

— *Intermission Magazine*

“***Controlled Damage*** is an important, necessary play.” — *The Slotkin Letter*

“There’s so much interest in seeing Desmond’s story dramatized that it’s actually a tougher ticket to get than *Hamilton*.” — *Globe & Mail*

Controlled Damage explores the life of Canadian civil rights icon Viola Desmond and how her act of bravery in a Nova Scotia movie theatre in 1946 started a ripple effect that is still felt today. An ordinary woman forced to be extraordinary by an unyielding and racist world, Desmond never gave up — despite the personal cost to her and those who loved her.

[Andrea Scott's](#) highly theatrical examination of Desmond and her legacy traces the impact she has had on our culture, but also casts light on the slow progress of the fight for social justice and civil rights in Canada.

"The play is a celebration of the courage it takes for anyone to fight the status quo." —*NS Reviews*

[See More](#)

THE INTERVIEW

[Meghan Swaby](#) is a first-generation Jamaican-Canadian actor, playwright and podcaster based in Toronto. Her play *Venus' Daughter* was produced by Toronto's Obsidian Theatre and she has participated in various playwriting residencies over the years with companies such as Nightwood Theatre, Obsidian Theatre, Diaspora Dialogues, Playwrights Workshop Montreal, and the Stratford Festival. Her work has been performed internationally. Meghan is a graduate of University of Windsor and an alumnus of Shakespeare Globe (UK).



Meghan, your play [Venus' Daughter](#) has been very successful, produced in Canada by Obsidian Theatre. Tell us a little about the play.

Venus' Daughter tells the story of Denise, a young Black woman whose life is ruptured by the arrival of Venus, the ancestral spirit of Sara Baartman. Baartman, a Khoisan woman exploited and exhibited in 19th-century Europe under the cruel nickname "Hottentot Venus," embodies a legacy of racial and sexual objectification. Through Venus' presence, Denise is compelled to confront the gaze imposed on Black female bodies, the weight of intergenerational trauma, and the possibility of healing.

How did you become interested in the story of Sara Baartman?

I started writing the play while participating in Nightwood Theatre's *Write from the Hip* program. I came across a YouTube video about the story of the "Hottentot Venus." The very next video in my queue was Nicki Minaj's *Anaconda* music video. Sparks went off in my head — I was flooded with questions about how we speak about Black women's bodies, the admiration, the outrage, the fascination, the curiosity, and the mimicry they so often provoke.

Too often, Baartman's story is told only through tragedy. *Venus' Daughter* explores her resilience, desire, and enduring impact, showing how the past and present constantly speak to each other. *Venus' Daughter* is not simply a historical retelling, it is about how the fragmented past and present speak to each other — at all times.

What themes are you exploring in the play?

At its heart, the play asks what it means to inherit a history of objectification and spectacle, all while living in a larger Black body — while also seeking to reclaim identity, pleasure, and agency. Writing this play raised me; the play is both a reckoning and a celebration, a way to confront difficult truths while taking the leap to embrace joy and ultimately healing.

You've also written a musical, *Parkdale*, (with composer Chris Tsujiuchi.) How did that project evolve?

During lockdowns, I was part of Musical Stage Company's Noteworthy cohort and was introduced to Chris Tsujiuchi through that program. It was wonderful. (That is also where I connected with my other collaborator, the incredible Jewelle Blackman.)

Parkdale came directly out of the First Drafts commission with the Sheridan Musical Theatre program. Chris and I live about seven minutes from each other and when we had our first brainstorming session on a bench on Church Street, something that resonated deeply with us was the idea of a home — an imperfect sanctuary, an apartment complex with individuals that may annoy you, but one you grow to appreciate and maybe even love. I think of some of my favorite neighbourhoods in the city, the storytelling on its sidewalks, its diversity, resilience, and the larger-than-life characters. It was actually pretty smooth to come up with a band of characters for this world. We both imagined *Parkdale* as *Urinetown* meets *Little Shop of Horrors*.

What are the particular challenges and joys of writing musicals?

This was my first time writing the book of a musical and I love it, it scares me, but it's so fun. The hardest part of writing a musical is making sure the book (the skeleton) moves the story forward, not just repeating what the music and lyrics communicate. Musicals are my first love; I always get goosebumps when the words and music click, it's truly magic.

The video project you wrote, *Derailed: The History of Black Railway Porters in Canada*, won the 2022 Heritage Toronto Public History Award. Tell us about that experience.

In 2019 I was commissioned by Museum of Toronto to adapt Cecil Foster's essential book *They Call Me George: The Untold Story of Black Train Porters and the Birth of Modern*

Canada.

The book chronicles the lives of Black railway porters in Canada, who, despite facing racism and being called “George,” fought for civil rights. Their activism helped challenge discriminatory laws and shaped Canada’s journey toward multiculturalism. The Black railway porters’ story is essential to Canadian history but is often overlooked. They endured long hours and systemic racism yet built strong communities and helped shape the labour movement. *Derailed* was about honouring that legacy and ensuring those voices are heard. Receiving the Heritage Toronto Award was affirming; it showed there’s a hunger for these histories to be recognized and remembered. As a first-generation Jamaican-Canadian, I benefit firsthand from the courageous and relentless folks who fought to overturn discriminatory labour laws that upheld the image of Canada as the “Great White North.”

The original idea was to write and direct a live theatrical adaptation at the Railway Museum at what is now the Steam Whistle Brewery. With Covid 19 and lockdowns the project was shifted to a digital presentation (which was great because it allowed more people to access the work). I was able to collaborate with director Byron Kent Wong and his team at zero11zero and Iron Bay Media and Union Station to bring this project to life. Major shout-out to Nadine Villasin Feldman (Director of Programming at that time) and her team for all their support!

You have a busy career as both playwright and actor. What is it about the art of storytelling that calls to you? Why are stories important?

Storytelling is vital. It is in my blood. I come from a line of amazing Black women who taught me the value of storytelling in grocery lines, church basements, hair salons and workplace breakrooms. Whether it’s the swelling of laughter on sidewalks between friends or recalling memories to family members across oceans, storytelling keeps me connected and reminds me of the importance of witnessing. It has the power to make someone feel seen or understood, while also having the power to do the exact opposite.

Tell us about your podcast *Beneath the Ceiba Tree*.

Beneath The Ceiba Tree is a podcast about Caribbean folklore that interweaves research, conversations, family and expert interviews. Exploring how its impact ripples through history to present day and beyond. The idea for this was birthed out of the Crow’s Theatre Podcast in Residence. I had been researching Caribbean folklore for a play I’m writing and came across so many stories and began talking to my mother about duppy stories she heard growing up in Jamaica. I asked my good friend and artist Sedina Fiati if she wanted to collaborate, and together we completed season one.

Ceiba Trees are sacred across the Western and Central Africa and throughout the Caribbean. The podcast is built on the idea that these sacred trees have magic in their roots, as it is the link between worlds.

Can you give us a sneak peek of what you’re working on now?

I’m currently working on a few projects; the first is a new musical with the incredible

Jewelle Blackman, called *TAR: A MUSICAL*. I'm co-writing the book for this story about mental health from a Black woman's perspective. We meet two women who on the exterior share many similarities, but due to their extremely different upbringings have very different views of themselves, their beauty, and their worth. The other is a play I've written which is an adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's short story, "Sweat."

[Read the Full Interview](#)

BEHIND THE SCENES



Hugh Conacher is a lighting and multi-media designer, and a photographer, whose practice is based in live performance. He has collaborated with choreographers, directors, visual artists, and dance and theatre companies throughout Canada and around the world.

Hugh, what drew you initially to the practice of lighting design?

When I was young, I thought I wanted to be a performer; I studied theatre, I studied dance, and I thought I was going to be a wonderful actor. But while I was in theatre school at George Brown College in Toronto, I got interested in the technical side of things. I ended up hanging out a lot in the shop and helping them with the builds, the lighting hangs, and then the installations, and I felt that I was not only good at it, but I discovered that I could also make a living! I could get work easily as a technician and less easily as an actor. And so that was part of it. But in the end, I also realized that I was better at it and better suited to the technical and design worlds. Now, many years later, I don't think it was a terrible decision.

Tell us a little about how you approach work on a new show.

I like to approach each show as if it's a brand-new thing to me. And, in fact it is! I try not to work by rote or in a formulaic kind of way, although invariably one does have one's tricks up one's sleeve. But I do try to create things that are unique to every show, or that at least

cater to the unique needs of each show, whatever they may be. I don't take an idea that I developed for one show and use it in another show. I try to create things that are unique for every circumstance.

I do lots of work in both theatre and dance. One of the differences between the dance and the theatre worlds is that in theatre, you can read the script before you agree to do a show, and it will teach you all you need to know, but in the dance world there is no script, so you are learning the work as it is being created specifically for that moment. They are different sets of challenges. I've been lucky—I've done lots of good shows.

Can you tell us a little about how the technical aspects of lighting design have changed since you first entered the profession?

Since I started, *tons* of things have changed, obviously—it's been over forty years. There have been several major improvements in the world of theatrical lighting design. The biggest change has been computers that allow you to program shows in a way that is repeatable and that doesn't need to be improvised—which is usually an advantage, although not always. Computers also allow you to improvise better (“Busking” is what it's called in the lighting world). You can improvise quite easily on modern computer lighting boards, and in a more sophisticated way than you used to be able to.

LED lighting fixtures, of course, have also changed everything. Now with one lighting fixture, you can have an infinite variety of colours, which is a huge thing. There are downsides to LED lighting fixtures, in that some of them don't show off skin tones very well. If you're doing saturated colours, they're great, but if you want actual white light for something, you can't get it with the less competent ones. Another thing that's really changed since I started is the advent of moving lights: one light that will do any number of different things, provide movement and texture and colour—all sorts of different possibilities with just one lighting fixture. Every light does multitudinous things. Smaller theatres now have the ability to hang fewer lights and yet produce a lot more effects. That can be an advantage from a labour perspective or from a cost perspective whether you're renting or buying.

Approximately how many shows do you work on in any given year?

It depends on a number of things. It depends on the size of the shows. It depends on where they are. It depends on how much work I want to do in the moment! As I get older, I'm consciously trying to do less, to be perfectly honest. When I started getting more work in big theatres like the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, or the Citadel, or the National Arts Centre, I made a point of deciding that I would not do other things at the same time, because bigger shows pay well enough and you don't need to work on five things together in order to make a living. So as a result, I'm doing fewer shows now than I used to, but they're bigger and they involve more commitment.

What are some qualities that you think a good lighting designer needs to have?

A good lighting designer is somebody who's interested in art. All painting is about light, especially the old masters. Filmmaking is all about lighting. Photography is all about lighting. The world is all about lighting! Everything is about light. I mean, quite literally.

So, a good lighting designer is somebody who is interested in art and art history... Somebody who's observant and interested in what's going on around them... Somebody who is able to think for themselves and not simply follow trends... Somebody who is creative and able to come up with their own ideas about things... It's an unpopular opinion nowadays, I know, but you also need an education. Most of all, you need to be interested in the world around you.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

SEPTEMBER 25 IS INTERNATIONAL PEACE DAY



IN MEMORIAM



We are saddened to mark the passing of JGS author [Elspeth Cameron](#), a renowned scholar and writer known for her biographies of Canadian literary figures. Elspeth wrote numerous books and poems; she was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award and won the W.O. Mitchell Literary Prize. Cameron pioneered one of the first Canadian Studies programs at Concordia University; she also taught at the University of Toronto and Brock University.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

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.

Playing Shylock by Mark Leiren-Young

[Polonsky Shakespeare Center](#), NYC, NY, opens October 16, 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 25–October 19, 2025.

The Stakeout by Norm Foster

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

The Weight of Ants by David Paquet, translated by Leanna Brodie

[The Cherry Arts](#), New York City, NY, October 17–26, 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.

Footnote to Freedom by Beau Dixon and Lance Dixon

[New Stages](#), Peterborough, ON, November 9, 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.

Munsch 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.

The Cull by Michele Rimi and Michael St. John Smith

[New Stages](#), Peterborough, ON, February 26, 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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