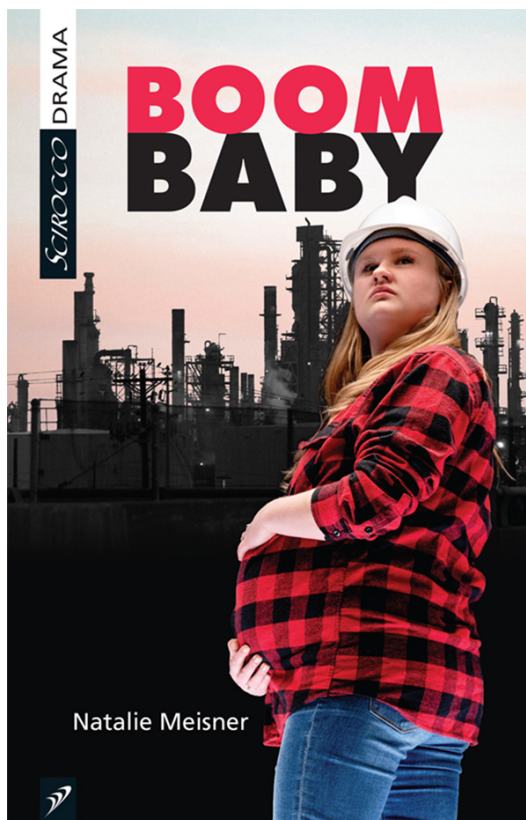




J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD
P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

ESSENTIAL READING



"*Boom Baby* offers a frank, and funny, look at life in Alberta's oilpatch."

—*Calgary Herald*

"Meisner has created some well-rounded characters and sharp dialogue to tell this story of desperation, homesickness, and greed."

—*Postcard Reviews*

Boom Baby explores the dilemma of a young woman from Canada's east coast who works as a heavy equipment operator in the Alberta oilfields. When Iona finds herself pregnant after a casual encounter with a friend, she knows she can't raise a child in a work camp. She considers having an abortion, but then she meets a couple working in management

for the company who are unable to have children. When they present her with a proposal to adopt the baby, Iona recoils from the idea that everything has a dollar value. What can and cannot be sold? Shared resources? A river? The future? [Natalie Meisner](#)'s provocative play explores complex questions with heart and humour.

[See More](#)

THE INTERVIEW

This month JGS spoke with [Kole Durnford](#), a mixed Metis/settler playwright and actor originally from Stony Plain, Alberta. Kole's professional playwriting debut came in 2025 with the world premiere of [Horseplay](#) at Workshop West Playwrights' Theatre in Edmonton. Kole is a graduate of Toronto Metropolitan University.



Kole, let's start with your wonderful play *Horseplay*, which was published under the Scirocco Drama imprint earlier this year. Could you tell us a bit about the play and about how you came to write it?

Horseplay follows two best friends, a horse named Horse E. and a jockey named Jacques E, as they try to become professional horse racers.

I wrote *Horseplay* for the Toronto Fringe's 24-Hour Playwriting Contest. At the time I was pretty artistically burnt out, and I wanted to use the playwriting contest to do a low-stakes creative project and write something lighthearted.

As the day continued on, however, *Horseplay* became more and more about my creative burnout and the difficulties of pursuing an artistic career — told through Horse and Jacques' attempt to become horse racers. The play ended up being almost a vow to myself to get back on my feet and keep running.

Why do you think the story of this unusual friendship strikes such a chord with audiences?

I think the main reason people connect with *Horseplay* is due to Horse's innocence. Horse doesn't really understand many aspects of the human world, like what money is, or what it means to have a crush on someone else. All he really knows is that he wants to do what he loves, horseracing, with his best friend Jacques. Because his heart is so pure, it breaks our heart to see him grapple with some of the harder truths of life throughout the story.

I think humour is another part of why people connect with *Horseplay*. Even in the darkest moments of the story, I wanted to find a sense of levity and joy — I mean it's a play about a talking horse! In a sense, I wanted to do right by the character of Horse, who I really came to love after months of writing, by embracing an imaginative, expansive view of the world through the way I wrote the story.

Kole, you were part of the cohort of young artists that experienced pandemic lockdown during their university years. How do you think that event affected your career path?

For me, I kind of look at the pandemic as a blessing in disguise. I was going to acting school when the lockdown happened, and because I didn't want to pretend to act over Zoom for a whole year, I was forced me to look at other ways to be an artist — namely writing.

That year I finished my first full-length play, which was admittedly not very good, but in the long run was a big step for me as a playwright. I don't think I would've continued forward as a writer without getting my truly worst writing out of the way while I was still young.

Do you have any advice for aspiring playwrights?

I think it's important to know that it takes a while to learn what your voice is, to learn what style you like to write, and to just get comfortable hearing your work out loud. I think it's important to not measure your artistic ability with one single project, especially when you're starting out as a writer. If I had taken my first play as an indicator of if I should be a playwright or not, I probably would have quit after the first reading.

Someone once gave me the advice to think of my creative projects as not individual, isolated pieces, but as one part of the overall tapestry of who you are as an artist. With that in mind, I think the best thing you can do starting out is just get to the end of a play, hear it out loud, share it with friends or a mentor who will encourage you, and keep moving forward.

BEHIND THE SCENES



[Debbie Patterson](#) is a Winnipeg playwright, director and actor. She is a recipient of the United Nations Platform for Action Committee's Activist Award and the City of Winnipeg's Making a Mark Award for her work as an advocate for disability justice. Debbie recently announced that she will be stepping down as artistic director of groundbreaking [Sick + Twisted Theatre](#) after being at the helm for the past eleven years. JGS spoke to her about her time at S+T.

Debbie, you've been the artistic director of Sick + Twisted Theatre since 2015, when you founded the company with Dan Augusta and Angela Chalmers. The impact of S+T's work has been felt not only in Winnipeg, but across the country and internationally. Can you tell us why it was important for you and your colleagues to create a platform for disabled artists?

I had been a theatre artist for a number of years before I became disabled. And when I became disabled, I thought there was no place for me in professional theatre. I didn't know any other disabled theatre artists. And I went through a number of different stages of that discernment, but one thing that really changed my thinking was going to see Cirque de Soleil and then going into a restaurant afterwards. When I went into the restaurant, I was

on forearm crutches, and everybody in the restaurant was suddenly on high alert; they were moving their bags out of the way and just making way for me to get through on my crutches. And I realized that they were watching me move the way I had been watching the acrobats—that on-the-edge-of your-seat, worried-someone's-going-to-fall way.

So I decided that the way I move is actually pretty compelling and watchable, so why shouldn't I be on stage? And then it made me start questioning why disabled people have been kept out of professional theatre for so long. It made me start looking at the stories we tell and what stories are missing. What stories are we not telling? What is the truth that we're afraid to confront right now as a society, and can I write about that? That was always my approach as a theatre artist. So that just gave me a lot of information and gave me a mission to explore this lived experience through theatre. And I knew Dan Augusta, who was an aspiring theatre artist and Ang Chalmers, who had been away from theatre for a while, but wanted to get back into it. And both of them identified as disabled, and they seemed like really good artists to get involved with.

The philosophy, values, and goals for the theatre are articulated beautifully on the [Sick + Twisted website](#). One of the statements in the Aesthetic/Curatorial Framework is: “We believe that there are deep universal truths of the human condition hidden behind the veil of disability.” Could you elaborate on that?

I don't know about you, but for me, my most profound experiences as an audience, or as a reader or listener, happen when someone articulates something that I know to be true deep down inside that I could never articulate for myself. Those moments when you recognize yourself in someone else's writing or expression and it gives you a language to describe something true that you could never confront or recognize on your own. I feel like that's the thing we're always looking for as artists, that thing that you can only find that when you go deep, when you strip away all the pretense and all the shame and fear that we all as individuals encounter through our lives, and go into those emotions and find what's at the core of it. And what's at the core of my shame is probably a lot like what's at the core of somebody else's shame; at the core of my fear is what's at the core of somebody else's fear. And until I'm willing to go there, I can't actually find those things. And so I really think that the experience of living with a disability exposes you to a kind of vulnerability that you can't hide, that allows you to explore ideas that you otherwise would never attempt to explore.

Could you tell us about one or two S+T projects during your tenure that stand out for you?

We produced five Disability Cabarets. We would send out a call for submissions to anyone who identifies as disabled to send us something that they wanted to explore as a short piece. And then we would pair every person with a mentor, a professional theatre artist who had some relationship with disability, either a lived experience or a shared experience, someone who shares their life with a person with a disability. And then we would mentor the person to develop their piece, but we would also mentor them as artists. And I gave everybody three rules:

1. You weren't allowed to complain about how hard it is to live with a disability because nobody cares.
2. You're not allowed to "raise awareness" of your particular condition because that's a PSA.
3. And you have to remember that you are there to serve an audience, and you have to give them something that they need.

So merely expressing yourself isn't enough. You need to actually think about what your audience needs. Those three rules unleashed this kind of visceral truth from all these artists.

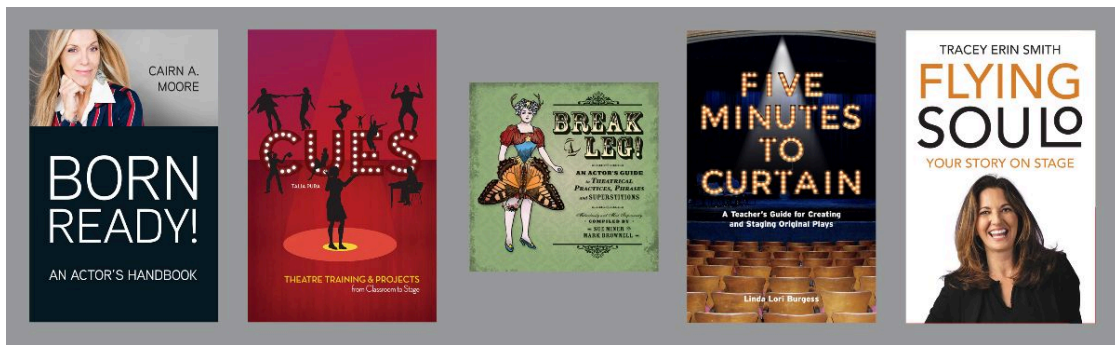
Up until our first cabaret, there hadn't been a disability theatre performance practice in Winnipeg out loud. And so I think most people thought that disability performance practice was mostly therapeutic recreation for people with disabilities. Audience members were expecting to come to support the performers, to be an indulgent audience—and that's not what they were there for at all. I think people were quite shocked and moved by what they saw, and it was certainly not what they expected. I mean, people *said*, "This isn't what I expected," and "It's way more than what I thought could ever be possible." So I feel like that was a big standout project.

The other one was the first time we did a big show, a musical; we collaborated with an ad hoc company called AA Battery to produce *The Threepenny Opera*. And we had an integrated cast of disabled and non-disabled artists working together. And because we were working from a disability framework, we made sure that everybody was able to articulate their access needs and that the scheduling was respectful of people's real lives. We worked at a pace that recognized that disability happens, and we can't always move at the ableist world pace. And I feel like it brought out the best in the non-disabled performers—they had never had the opportunity to work in this way and were amazed at how much easier it was to work, how much more efficiently the work got done, if you respect people's actual needs. It's easier to just show up and do the work if you're not trying to protect yourself within it. And it built this ensemble within the company because we were all actually looking out for each other. And that translates on stage to this really beautiful ensemble work that you can see—the actors are working together in a much more integrated and holistic way than in any other company.

Click on Read the Full Interview for more

[Read the Full Interview](#)

BACK TO SCHOOL



IN THE NEWS

- Congratulations to [Dave Deveau](#), whose play *Celestial Being*, produced by Edmonton's Concrete Theatre, won the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award for Best YA Production.
- And congratulations to the recipient of the Harry S. Rintoul Award for Best Manitoba Play in the Winnipeg Fringe, [Debbie Patterson](#), for her play *Happy Valley*.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

Settle Down, Ellie by Step Taylor

[Rising Tide Theatre](#), Trinity, NL, June 28–September 6, 2026.

Sugar Road by Kristen Da Silva

[Watermark Theatre](#), North Rustico, PEI, July 3–August 29, 2026.

The Last Mayor of Rusty River by Gil Garratt and David Scott

[Blyth Festival](#), Blyth, ON, July 29–September 13, 2026.

Euchre Night by Norm Foster

[The Foster Festival](#), St. Catharines, ON, August 6–23, 2026.

The Golden Anniversaries by Mark Crawford

[Theatre Baddeck](#), Baddeck, NS, August 6–September 4, 2026.

Sexy Laundry by Michele Riml

[Drayton Festival Theatre](#), Drayton ON, August 12–30, 2026.

Farley Mowat's And No Birds Sang by Dave Carley
[Capitol Theatre](#), Port Hope, ON, August 14–September 6, 2026.

Ship to Shore by Norm Foster
[Port Stanley Theatre Festival](#), Port Stanley, ON, August 19–September 5, 2026.

Beyond the Sea by Kristen Da Silva
[Globus Theatre](#), Bobcaygeon, ON, August 19–29, 2026.

A Woman's Love List by Norm Foster
[Lighthouse Theatre](#), Port Dover, ON, August 26–September 12, 2026.

Dragonfly by Lara Rae
[Vancouver Fringe Festival, Upstart & Crow](#), Vancouver, BC, September 10–20, 2026

A Woman's Love List by Norm Foster
[Lighthouse Theatre](#), Port Colbourne, ON, September 16–27, 2026.

Wake by Rachel Mutombo
[Persephone Theatre](#), Saskatoon, SK, September 23–October 4, 2026.

The Lodger adapted by Susie Moloney and Vern Thiessen
[Vertigo Theatre](#), Calgary, AB, September 26–October 25, 2026.

A Woman's Love List by Norm Foster
[Globus Theatre](#), Bobcaygeon, ON, September 30–October 10, 2026.

Sisters of '78 by Kristen Da Silva
[Theatre Aquarius](#), Hamilton, ON, September 30–October 17, 2026.

Jordan by Yvette Nolan
[Manitoba Theatre for Young People](#), Winnipeg, MB, October 2–11, 2026.

Jonas and Barry in the Home by Norm Foster
[Hildebrand Schoolhouse Theatre](#), St. Jacob's, ON, October 6–November 8, 2026.

Uncivilized by Ahmad Meree
[Theatre Passe Muraille](#), Toronto, ON, October 13–24, 2026.

Rogers v. Rogers by Michael Healey
[Great Canadian Theatre Company](#), Ottawa, ON, October 20–November 1, 2026.

Rogers v. Rogers by Michael Healey
[Canadian Stage/Crow's Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, November 8–December 13, 2026.

Jordan by Yvette Nolan

[Geordie Theatre/Carousel Theatre for Young People](#), Vancouver, BC, November 12–15, 2026.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green

[New Stages](#), Peterborough, ON, November 15, 2026.

The Night Logan Woke Up by Michel Marc Bouchard

[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, November 17–December 13, 2026.

Parfumerie adapted by Adam Pettie and Brenda Robins

[Soulpepper Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, November 18–December 20, 2026.

A Christmas Carol adapted by David van Belle

[Citadel Theatre](#), Edmonton, AB, November 21–December 24, 2026.

A Christmas Carol adapted by David van Belle

[Grand Theatre](#), London, ON, November 24–December 27, 2026.

A Christmas Carol adapted by Geoffrey Simon Brown

[Theatre Calgary](#), Calgary, AB, November 26–December 27, 2026.

The Office Christmas Party and **Widow Wonderland** by Norm Foster

[The Foster Festival](#), St. Catharines, ON, December 2–19, 2026.

The Thrill of Hope: A Holiday Concert by Beau Dixon, Raha Javanfar, and Luke Reece

[Soulpepper Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, December 15, 2026–January 3, 2027.

Munschbusters adapted by Debbie Patterson

[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, December 18, 2026–January 3, 2027.

Intrepid by Alex Poch-Goldin

[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, January 13–February 6, 2027.

The Veil by Keith Barker and Thomas Morgan Jones

[Vertigo Theatre](#), Calgary, AB, January 16–February 14, 2027.

Wake by Rachel Mutombo

[Western Canada Theatre](#), Prince George, BC, January 21–31, 2027.

She Shoots, She Scores! by Michele Riml

[Gateway Theatre](#), Richmond, BC, February 15–20, 2027.

Sense and Sensibility adapted by Jessica B. Hill and Daryl Cloran

[Theatre Calgary](#), Calgary, AB, March 30–April 25, 2027.

Age Is a Feeling by Haley McGee

[Great Canadian Theatre Company](#), Ottawa, ON, April 6–18, 2027.

The Ghosts of Mariupol by Christopher Morris

[Crow's Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, April 20–May 9, 2027.

Age is a Feeling by Haley McGee

[Theatre Orangeville](#), Orangeville, ON, April 29–May 16, 2027.

Six Degrees in May by Santiago Guzmán

[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, May 4–23, 2027.

fareWel by Ian Ross

[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, May 5–29, 2027.

Salesman in China by Leanna Brodie and Jovanni Sy

[Mirvish Productions](#), Toronto, ON, June–July 2027.

The Golden Anniversaries by Mark Crawford

[Lighthouse Festival](#), Port Dover, Ontario, June 2–19, 2027.

The Golden Anniversaries by Mark Crawford

[Lighthouse Festival](#), Port Colborne, Ontario, June 23–July 4, 2027.

Closing Time at Maple Leaf Gardens by Beau Dixon and Frank Cox-O'Connell

[Soulpepper Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, July 29–August 15, 2027.

• ON SCREEN •

Starwalker by Corey Payette

Starring Dillan Chiblow, Jeffrey Follis, and Stewart Adam McKensy. The film version of *Starwalker* opened at the Inside Out Festival in Toronto in May and went on to play at the Vancouver Queer Film Festival; the Flickrs Rhode Island International Film Festival, where it won the Grand Prize Alternative Spirit Award; the Asinabka Film Festival in Ottawa; the Whistler Film Festival, and the Portland Film Festival, where it was the opening night narrative feature film.

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.

Café Daughter by Kenneth T. Williams

Starring Viola Davis, Tom Lim, and Sera-Lys McArthur and is directed by Shelley Niro. Now streaming on Paramount+.

Steel Toes by David Gow (adapted from *Cherry Docs*)

Starring David Strathairn, Andrew W. Walker, and Marina Orsini. Directed by Mark Adam and David Gow. Now streaming on Amazon Prime.

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