

For Immediate Release
May 25, 2011

“Among the bravest stage projects I’ve seen...
This is life at its most naked.... the actors escape gravity.”

– Michael Evans, *SEE Magazine*

"It's **heavy** subject matter, but they keep it **light** and entertaining
while delivering a **powerful** message." - Phil Dupperon, *VUE Weekly*

“I did not expect this ...”



Rick McConnell, *Edmonton Journal*

LET'S PLAY HOUSE

Set to birth a culture of ecological imagination & collective creation,
Jonathon & Carlynn are sidelined into caregiving:
Jonathon for his mom with Alzheimer's and a bad attitude;
Carlynn for her son with mysterious pain that reduces him to couch and crutches.
How can they play on the world stage if fate forces them into domestic drama?

George Ignatieff Theatre

15 Devonshire Place, Toronto
(just south of St George subway station)

Tickets: 416-966-1062 (starting June 13)
or fringetoronto.com

Friday, July 8 - 8:45-9:45
Saturday, July 9 - 1:45-2:45
Sunday, July 10 - 3:00-4:00
Monday, July 11 - 10:15-11:15 pm
Wednesday, July 13 - 5:45-6:45
Saturday, July 16 - 12:30-1:30
Sunday, July 17 - 7:30-8:30

Fresh from leading workshops and performing at FICCDAT - a conglomeration of international rehabilitation & caregiving conferences - Imagiscape makes its premiere at the Toronto Fringe.

"Let's Play House" tests and showcases the power of art. Jonathon and Carlynn believed that with artistic thinking, anyone can live a rich life, regardless of constraints. Then Alzheimer's and

mysterious pain struck their families. Sleepless nights and fruitless doctor visits depleted their energy. Frustration bordering on rage slowly snaked its way into their homes, until it seemed only a matter of time before rage would erupt into violence. When they've done everything right, but still everything is wrong, what can they do? Explaining their "artistic thinking" was not enough. Badgering made it worse. Just when it seemed art had failed, they decided to submit themselves to the test: to create theatre with their families about their families. In the process, all the characters changed.

"Let's Play House" has been the keynote presentation at conferences and AGMs. It appeared at the Edmonton Fringe as "Heal Thyself" in 2005, and was featured in a 2-episode special on CBC TV's *Moving On*. The current performance includes elements from the upcoming documentary by filmmaker Danny Wilson.

***Let's Play House* pits the creative spirit against its ultimate test - chaotic caregiving.**

Can families rendered desperate by sickness create healthy homes?

torontoartsbouncil
Photos: DennisHassell.com
Laidlaw Foundation
LET'S PLAY HOUSE
Caregiving Takes Centre Stage
www.imagiscape.ca

What Excites Us about this Project

Caregiving is prime time for improv

Caregiving organizations suggest caregivers reminisce with their “loved ones” – but what about living now? *Let's Play House* "re-invents" caregiving through the principles and practice of theatre and dance. People with mid-late Alzheimer's really do live in the moment. They are ready and yearning to play. Caregivers need to learn to say “yes and” to whatever nonsense their play partner offers. Jonathon used to think he had to say nice lies to his mom; then he found she can be - and experience herself as - a source of delight.

Tackling Taboos

One of the major sources of stress for me, Jonathon - and one of the reasons I at one time thought I ought to kill mom - was because she was a burden on the planet. I was trying to be ecological but I had to buy chocolate bars and diapers and spend resources on someone who only lived to consume. People tell me I'm virtuous because I care for Mom, but how can I call myself a caregiver if I'm polluting the planet? How can I love Mom when she does nothing but consume? It's all very nice to say we want to keep people alive, but what if Mom lives another 20 years? That's 20 years of resources going to her instead of a child in need.

Now that I love her and enjoy her, I'm still in an ethical quagmire. I'm selfish: I want her to stay alive and well just so I can enjoy her cuteness.

It's not all bad news – when people acknowledge this struggle, they may discover A Convenient Truth – an ecological life is a rich life; being ecological is fun.

It's Not About Caregiving

It's about trying to change the world – and finding you can't even change your family.

It's about art - can theatre consciousness make any life rich regardless of constraints?

It's about trying to evolve from consumers to creators.

It's about trying to renovate your family without making everyone hate everyone.

It's about ... caregiving.

Is it good?

"I was too moved and astonished and raw after the curtain to stay but I want you to know how good and necessary you are." - Robin Haggerty, C.A.L.M.

"I left the theatre with a lightness I have not felt for a long time. ... a support group focused on Heal Thyself would be so much more healing and awakening than a LOT of other groups I have been to." - Linda Thornton, caregiver

"The rain was horrendous - and a nightmare to get my husband around in - but the answers to my questions about why I was bothering became abundantly clear.
- Cindy Pock, Calgary

"Profound is an over-used word, but this was profound. You saw it in the response of the audience. And you felt it in yourself." Keitha Lamey, Special Needs Ed., TDSB

"It continues to inspire important conversation" - Angela Bischoff, Toronto

"This should be required study - never have I experienced such rich learning - multiple levels, multiple intelligences." - Annita Maat, caregiver

But what do caregiving pros think?

"Brilliant - I was totally enthralled - you have a very important play here.
I can't wait to see it again."

- Joan Barrington, **Hospital for Sick Children**, Director, Therapeutic Arts Program

"Let's Play House prompts and enables people to talk about issues most people avoid. The dialogue and action are emblazoned in my mind."

- Tashana Thomas, Co-ordinator Support & Counseling, CANES Home Support Svcs

"Helps us all." - Dale Goldhawk, then-President, **Alzheimer Society of Canada**

"We look forward to using it to educate professionals and support caregivers across Canada." - Jane McCarthy, **A.L.S. Society Canada**, Director, Services & Education

"Excellent - very intelligently written; brilliantly performed"

- Barbara Perry, Regional Coordinator, **Alberta Association of Registered Nurses**

"You give everyone new hope." - Barb Beecroft, **Leisureworld Director of Nursing**

"Let's Play House gripped me throughout the show... Even now...!"

- Roy Bedford, Regional Director, **Alzheimer's Society of Alberta**

"I saw it on a whim and will be ever grateful that I did."

- Melinha Denholme, social worker, BC Forensic Psychiatric Service

The Artists

Kirk Reed (collaborator; composer of Kirkscape)

is Carlynn's son. Once a real living guitar god, with a body the envy of all men, Kirk suffered a soccer injury which mushroomed into a full-blown bizarre disease with no clear diagnosis. He wasted down to 96 pounds, could only sit up for a few minutes (so never ate with the family), and lost the strength to play his guitar and the ability to speak. Even whispering or mouthing his words was impossible when lying down. He now lives on his own (still on crutches), and has formed a band. For the last month he's been standing without crutches for 30 minute shows. And - he has a girlfriend.
www.facebook.com/ReedEffect

Christine Neville (collaborator; singer of lullaby)

is Jonathon's mother and nemesis. At 37 she entered university; at 40 she gave birth as a single mom; at 46 she completed a PhD in Aquatic Toxicology & Fish Physiology, and began working for the Ministry of the Environment and polluting her home with complaints. ... At 73, in 2007, Jonathon's godless prayers were answered - her aorta dissected (!) – alas by this time Jonathon had fallen in love with her. Told by emergency surgeons that if they operated she would still only have a 20% chance of survival – and would most definitely emerge more cognitively impaired, needing more care, he chose life. ... She could teach charm school – no longer does she try to manage people's impressions, she just effuses beauty. She is nothing ... but love. On March 1 she moved into a nursing home. The staff arranged an appointment with a psychiatrist because she was crying and screaming and lashing out. Now, for the first time in Jonathon's life, she has a boyfriend.

Jonathon Neville (co-author, performer)

develops Inspired Economies (he renders incentive economies obsolete). He leads workshops in personal theatre, helping people and organizations change the stories they enact, and is developing The Creative Workout – work the imagination, spirit, body and voice, while participating in “Creation”.

Carlynn Reed (co-author, performer)

says she changes with each script she writes, every rehearsal, every performance. Her students and parents of younger students claim new and liberating behaviour. Whether performing or directing, Carlynn recognizes the power of theatre and dance to transform without directly aiming to do so. Post-performance conversations with audiences reveal how deeply the show roots-out personal stories. She has taught diverse courses at schools and colleges, including contact improvisation dance at Rosedale School for the Arts, Drama in Ministry at U of T's Wycliffe College, and swing and blues dance at Dovercourt House in Toronto. She was a master teacher at the Sacred Dance Guild 50th anniversary conference, and has directed theatrical productions in numerous churches.

Dennis Hassell (Director/Dramaturge)

has produced over 50 plays, written 13 produced scripts, received 14 Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations and multiple awards. dennishassell.com

Peter Jarvis (composer/musician)

performed for a Cirque du Soleil TV special, was named Best Busker by both the Toronto Sun and Now Magazine, and performed for the Queen with his band The Subtonic Monks. His compositions include the scores for the Stratford Festival's *Be'reazed of Light* and Motus O's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
silverelvis.com

Danny Wilson (videographer)

is a Director/Digital Cinematographer whose diverse body of work includes short films, documentaries, music videos, commercials, dance films, a T.V. pilot, promotional videos and live event documentation.



Edmonton Journal .

**"Among the bravest stage projects I've seen...
Life at its most naked ... the actors escape gravity."
- Michael Evans, *SEE Magazine***

LET'S PLAY HOUSE

Jonathon cares for his mother with Alzheimer's and (he believes) a bad attitude.
Full of hope, he tries to inspire her to get off the couch and join him in ecological action.
When a caregiver does everything right, but still everything is wrong,
what can he do with repressed rage?

Carlynn cares for her son with inexplicable crippling pain.
When completely-debilitating pain hasn't been cured after 12 years,
what can a family do?

Artist Caregivers Create Theatre
with their Families about their Families
- and Change All the 'Characters' in the Process.

Heal Thyself sincerely tests the idea that caregiving can be rewarding.

SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 7:30

- followed by a discussion and a reception -

ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM

12845-102nd Avenue. Ample Free Parking

TIXontheSquare.com (780) 420-1757

presented by



**Alberta
Caregivers
Association**

Caring for Caregivers

"Heavy ... light ... powerful" - VUE Weekly

**"I did not expect this ... It is really about all of us.
Heartbreaking ... uplifting"**



Rick McConnell, *Edmonton Journal*

EDMONTON JOURNAL



WEATHER
8°
Partly cloudy

Experimental Gamble Pays Off

Tale zeroes in on the simple fears that haunt us all

Rick McConnell

HEAL THYSELF

Rating

"But I don't like experimental theatre."

I can't think how many times I've muttered that under my breath (two or three, at least), though I'm willing to admit it says more about me than it does about theatre.

Well... I shall mutter no more, because I have seen the light, or at the very least I've had the pleasure of watching two smart and very talented people use a stage and a few simple props to lay open their hearts and share their secrets, their deepest fears, their most fervent hopes. I've seen them dance on crutches and writhe on the floor like snakes. I've listened to their stories, and learned something about my own.

I did not expect this. What Jonathon Neville and Carlynn Reed have written is certainly experimental. It's a performance piece about their own lives, but it is really about all of us. The Toronto actors use dance and dialogue to tell two linked stories, alternating roles.

In some scenes, she plays his mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease. In others, he plays her son, who has a strange pain disorder doctors have been unable to diagnose.

"Will I forget my son?" "Will I come to hate my mother?" "What could I have done differently?"

Watching them work through these life-altering problems, watching them explore such raw emotions, is painful, heartbreaking and finally uplifting.

"Maybe if I'd let him have chocolate milk in Grade 3 at school," Reed says at one point, voicing a mother's regrets, her might-have-beens. Such simple fears haunt us all. In the final scene, the two afflicted patients meet, and find small ways to help each other.

The hope they discover allows the rest of us to think, 'yes, isn't that what we're all capable of?'

Project Team

Executive Producer
Director & Dramaturge
Authors & Performers
Co-Creators
Documentary Producer
Music
Movement Coach
Additional Choreography
Set Design
Crutch Design
Technical Directors
Imago Executive Director
Imago Auditor

Ralph Phillips
Dennis Hassell
Jonathon Neville & Carlynn Reed
Christine Neville & Kirk Reed
Danny Wilson
Peter Jarvis
Tom Brouillette
Jack Langenhuizen, Motus O
Cheryl Martin
James Croker, Motus O
Trevor Jablonowski, Rhonda Holmes
John Franklin, PhD.
PFK Hill, Inc.

Funding: Laidlaw Foundation Toronto Arts Council Private donors
Thanks also to: Imago Arts (provides charitable tax receipts for donors)



Media-quality **Photos, Music & Video** available via
www.imagiscape.ca/media