

Trouts bring puppet sex to Roxy in Don Juan

Last year's dark, intense plays give way to lighthearted shows

BY LIZ NICHOLLS, EDMONTON JOURNAL AUGUST 4, 2009 7:47 AM



The Erotic Anguish of Don Juan is the latest production from Calgary's Old Trout Puppet Workshop. It is part of Theatre Network's upcoming season.

Photograph by: Courtesy, Trudie Lee

Next season, the Roxy will be the confessional for one of history's most notorious sexual libertines.

Don Juan, on a nightly pass from hell (with flames nearby), will be reviewing his profligate life, in theatrical terms, in *The Erotic Anguish of Don Juan*. The latest from Calgary's highly original Old Trout Puppet Workshop is part of Theatre Network's upcoming 35th season, announced this week. The 10-year-old puppet troupe with the surreal visuals and the taste for the grotesque has been at TN before, with the macabre and playful Famous Puppet Death Scenes.

This time, in the Trout puppet world, the hero is played by a human actor, Peter Balkwill, equipped with a particularly striking codpiece, which has already become the most notorious prop in contemporary Canadian theatre. "Yes," says TN artistic director Bradley Moss, "there will be puppet sex; you can't have Don Juan without sex."

The dome-topped set, a cathedral that morphs into a succession of bedrooms and the interior of the Don's head, is so tall, at five metres, that modifications are required for the Roxy stage.

Fresh from a season of dark, intense and disturbing plays with political heft, among them *Palace of the End* and *East of Berlin*, the new lineup has a more lighthearted feel to it. The season opens with an intricately theatrical stage adaptation of the Victorian-style ghost story that's run for nearly two decades

in London's West End.

For Moss, the appeal of *The Woman In Black*, based on Susan Hill's 1983 horror story, is that "it's about theatre itself, set in a theatre, about how to tell a story....The ingenuity is fun; it's bare stage magic that demands a lot from the sound designer (Dave Clarke)." Marianne Copithorne directs; her actors are John Wright and Mark Jenkins.

Moss himself directs *Poster Boys*, a dark comedy by Vancouver's Michele Riml (*Sexy Laundry*) set in the pressurized world of advertising. It spins its complications from a bank's "queer-positive" ad campaign contracted to Caroline, a successful 40-something exec. The models turn out to be her ex-fiance and his decisively Catholic new partner. Davina Stewart, Jeff Haslam and Frank Zotter are in Moss's cast.

Lorne Cardinal returns to Theatre Network in *Thunderstick*. The *Corner Gas* star was the prime instigator, says Moss, for the TN/ Persephone Theatre co-production of this new comedy by Kenneth T. Williams, whose *Three Little Birds* was staged at Workshop West last season.

The Saskatoon-based playwright, the first aboriginal to graduate with an MFA in playwriting from the U of A, works in journalism himself. As Moss describes it, in *Thunderstick* he's fashioned an outrageous road trip for two journalist cousins who "get themselves into a lot of trouble from the moment one of them throws up on the prime minister." How this faux pas propels them, via jail, into an adventure in the Ontario backwoods is something to be discovered in the production Moss co-directs with Persephone's new artistic director Del Surjik. Cardinal's co-star is Craig Lauzon, whose very funny imitations of Stephen Harper graced *Air Farce*.

Nextfest 15 is a given. And the Roxy Performance Series, offerings hosted by TN, include the *Expanse Movement Arts Festival 2010*; the return of *Hey Ladies!*; four appearances by *Mostly Water Theatre*; plus an experimental production of a live comedy pilot. *Pilot Season* is the brainchild of Chris Craddock and Neil Grahn. The latter co-directs with Moss. See "Liz Nicholls on Theatre" at edmontonjournal.com/entertainment