

**Discord and Din Theatre**  
in association with  
**Seventh Stage Productions**  
present the Canadian premiere of  
**Cordelia Lynn's**

# **Lela & Co.**

September 21<sup>st</sup>-October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
The Theatre Center BMO Incubator



# Discord and Din Theatre



Founded by Artistic Director, Jenna Harris, Discord and Din Theatre was established in 2008 to provide work for emerging artists in a mutually supportive environment. Discord and Din Theatre's inaugural production was at the Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace and was a production of Cindy Lou Johnson's *Brilliant Traces*. Since then, Discord and Din Theatre has co-produced Ronit Rubinstein's *Sitting in a Tree* (2008 Toronto Fringe Festival), *I Got My STD at Work!* (2009 SummerWorks Performance Gallery), and Jenna Harris' *Mine* at the Next Stage Theatre Festival (2015).

In August of 2015, Discord and Din Theatre produced *This is Where We Live* by Canadian-born, Australian playwright Vivienne Walshe at the SummerWorks Theatre Festival. *This is Where We Live* received rave reviews and the only 5N review of the festival from NOW Magazine. Its two actors, Jenna Harris and Tim Welham, also received honourable mention for the festival's Spotlight Award for Performance.

## **Mandate**

To give space to underrepresented stories.

## **Mission Statement**

Discord and Din Theatre produces Canadian and International plays that are artistically outcast and are created outside conventional narratives; we seek to push the boundaries of traditional theatrical conventions. Of particular interest are theatrical performances that give a voice to those who feel voiceless and othered. We do not want to shy away from difficult topics—themes that scare us as individuals or as a society—but rather face them head-on through ground-breaking theatrical productions. As a company, our goal is to enter into an exchange with our audience about these topics, perspectives and voices, so as to work together to become a more accepting, empowered and cohesive society.

## **Focus on Audience Engagement**

As we continue to work together as a collective and produce, our goal is to make audience engagement a priority, with a particular focus on students, young and emerging artists, and those in the general audience who seek to be challenged artistically and want to learn more about theatre, the theatrical process and producing. We believe strongly that theatre brings people together and creates a sense of community. And since the work that we choose to produce often focuses on those who feel marginalized or disenfranchised, we feel it is vital for us to contribute in any way we can to building a stronger and more inclusive theatre community.

# Seventh Stage Productions



Melissa-Jane Shaw founded Seventh Stage Productions in early 2006, in artistic association with Rosa Laborde, Kelly Straughan and Kelsey Matheson. Having come across many other young, driven and talented female artists who were also struggling to find work, they wanted a company that would provide opportunities that are not typically available in the present professional arena.

In spring 2007, Seventh Stage Theatre produced the Canadian premiere of Anthony Minghella's *Whale Music*, which employed 27 women in their theatrical field; put to stage 17 new works by emerging Canadian female artists via our *whale riders* program; gave a portion of proceeds to Ernestine's Women Shelter and was both a critical and box office success. It was truly an amazing start for the company.

Our 2010 season began with a successful production of *The Red Queen Effect* at the Next Stage Theatre Festival. This original, collectively devised piece was part office drama, part grotesque cabaret, featuring an impressive cast of 12. We were honoured with rave reviews, sold out shows and a Dora Nomination for Outstanding Costume Design. In May 2010, we presented the Canadian premiere of Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* at the Theatre Centre featuring a cast of nine diverse women. The show was a critical and box office success, earning a Dora Nomination for Outstanding Performance Ensemble. The 2010 season ended triumphantly with two festival production including *This is About the Push* by then emerging playwright Rachel Blair at the Toronto Fringe Festival. The production received accolades, including NOW Magazine's Best Production, Best Director and Best Ensemble. We completed our season in August with Liz Duffy Adams' *OR*, at Summerworks, earning NOW Magazine's Best Ensemble.

In 2012, we presented a revised version of *The Red Queen Effect* for CanStage's workshop presentation week. Later that year we mounted the North American premiere of *Stockholm* by British playwright Bryony Lavery, in co-production with Nightwood Theatre. This multi-disciplinary piece reflected the combination of movement and text that we'd strived to create, combining the talents of director Kelly Straughan and choreographer Susie Burpee. The show received critical acclaim and Jonathon Young and Melissa-Jane Shaw were nominated for a Dora Award for Best Ensemble Performance.

## Mission and Mandate

Seventh Stage Theatre Productions is a professional not-for-profit theatre company that produces socially and politically conscious, thought-provoking and entertaining works by way of Canadian premieres of international work and/or international premieres of Canadian work. We place particular importance on telling stories by women, for women and generating opportunities for emerging and established female artists both on and off stage.

## Company Vision and Goals

- *Creating the highest caliber 'stage' productions:* Investing time, hard work and funds into creating quality productions for the growth and betterment of Canadian culture, via artistic collaboration, unique creative approaches, and socially conscious storytelling.
- *Career development and employment:* Providing artistic and professional opportunities to female artists with diverse talents, who are statistically the lesser employed by mainstream industry standards.
- *Cultural outreach and growth:* Reaching out to the broader community to attract a more diverse audience for live theatre, through education and community outreach initiatives and creative marketing and publicity.

## *Lela & Co.*

First premiered at the Royal Court in London in 2015 to rave-reviews, *Lela & Co.* is a searing 90-minute piece of storytelling narrative written by British playwright Cordelia Lynn, which will be having its Canadian premiere at The Theatre Centre from September 22<sup>nd</sup>-October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017

*Lela & Co.* is a gut-wrenching two-hander about the commodification of women, male privilege, consent, and the effects of war.

Based on a true story, *Lela & Co.* gives space for a woman to be able to tell her story of being brought into sex trafficking by her husband while living in a warzone. Starting off as a seemingly innocuous telling by Lela of her childhood, *Lela & Co.* dives headfirst into this story – eventually revealing that it is being told to a war crimes tribunal – while also exploring “truth” in storytelling, who gets to tell whose story, and the resiliency of the human spirit.

*LELA.*            *And as for what came next, things unspoken and untold until now, Lela’s story untold in its entirety,/it happened like this...*

*HUSBAND.*    *It happened like this.*

## **From Director, MJ Shaw...**

*Lela & Co.* is an enlightening and necessary piece of political theatre to bring to Toronto. The title *Lela & Co.*, it should be known, refers to the business of selling Lela for sex to countless men during war. In a back room of their house, Lela, a 15-year old girl, is forced into sex slavery by her husband. This is a harrowing and moving story of one woman ‘un-silencing’ herself to the audience each night of performance.

Using a specific story (that of Lela, and one in which textual clues point to it being set during the Bosnian War) to explore the universality of women’s place in the world, *Lela & Co.* feels sadly not only relevant, but necessary. In the wake of Jian Ghomeshi, at the precipice of Trump’s Presidency, and given the countless crimes against women that occur daily in this city alone (including human trafficking), it is a political act to give women a platform in which to speak about their experiences, tell their stories and to take up space in this world. Therefore, bringing this play to the stage is this, a political act.

## **Playwright, Cordelia Lynn**

Cordelia Lynn is a young writer whose debut play *After the War* has been performed in venues around the UK and abroad. Her second, *Believers Anonymous*, was staged at the Rosemary Branch Theatre in 2012 (Time Out Critic’s Choice). She has taken part in the Royal Court Young Writers Programme (2012) and is a member of the Soho Theatre Young Writers Company.

## **Key Issue Themes**

- Effects of war (and the business of war)
- Human trafficking and sex slavery
- Bystander effect
- Commodification of women
- Consent
- Male privilege
- Misogyny
- The other
- Silencing and invisibility
- 'Truth'
- Storytelling

## **Key Artistic Themes**

- Storytelling
- Who gets to tell whose story
- 'Truth' in storytelling
- The power that theatre has to give voice to those who have been silenced
- Tackling difficult subject matter in theatre/creating issue-based theatre
- The use of movement in text-based theatre

## Facts about this Production for Educators

- Canadian premiere
- Being performed at The Theatre Centre, 1115 Queen Street West (accessible by TTC)
- Student matinees are on:
  - Wednesday, September 27 @ noon
  - Wednesday, October 4 @ 11am
- Student matinee tickets are \$10 with a complimentary ticket for teachers for every 20 student tickets purchased.
- Pre-show chats and talkbacks with the actors, director and members of the design team are available to student groups.
- Workshops are also available for an additional fee in storytelling led by playwright, dramaturg, arts educator and actor playing the role of “Lela”, Jenna Harris.

This play deals with mature themes and imagery.

***Recommended for grades 11 & 12 and the script is available to read. We ask that all teachers interested in bringing students read the script.***

Educational materials will be provided prior to so that teachers and students have a context and prepared for what they will be seeing.

We will be partnering with several local and Canadian organizations who work to raise awareness about the trafficking of women and children, and also who support those who have been trafficked. Through these partnerships, there will be added opportunities for student engagement both directly with the show, as well as beyond.

## ***Lela & Co.* in the Media**

“Lela’s monologue about her journey from the mountains into a warzone is constantly interrupted by the voices of men in a **harrowing but surprisingly playful look at conflict and capitalism**... Everyone has a reason for telling a story, and we all construct a narrative around our lives. But only some voices are heard, and often the stories are told by men with vested interests. Many never get to tell their stories because they have been silenced by fear, violence or shame. Lela is one of those women.”

Lyn Gardner, THE GUARDIAN

• • •

“**Brutally powerful play forces us to confront a fearful reality...**”

Lettie Mckie, LONDONIST

• • •

“*Lela & Co.* is a story – but it’s also a reality – about the commodification and degradation of women by men. **This production is a tour de force in storytelling...**”

Charlotte L. Ross, EVERYTHING THEATRE

• • •

“Playwright Cordelia Lynn's Royal Court Debut, *Lela & Co.* takes a story of manipulation, entrapment and exploitation and creates a **tender, poetic 'interrupted monologue' that flickers with humour and humanity.**”

Lucy Brooks, CULTURE WHISPER