

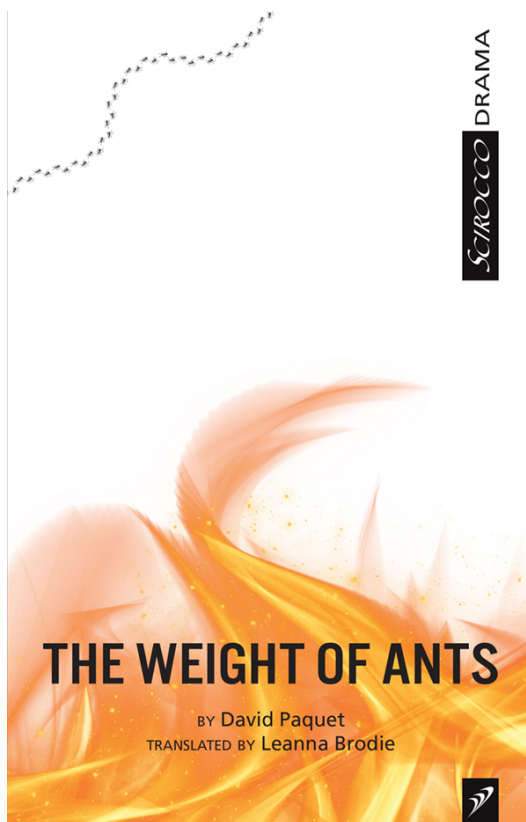
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**J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD**  
P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

## ESSENTIAL READING



"Wielding black humour and provocation with great elegance, David Paquet delivers a text full of finely honed lines that land like punches..."  
—*JEU, Revue de Théâtre*

"The generation gap, climate anxiety, and the urgent need for change are addressed with great humour and absurdity."  
—*Passion MTL*

In *The Weight of Ants*, an absurd and apocalyptic comedy filled with dazzling wit and wild imagination, two teenaged outsiders seem to be the only ones who understand or care that the whole world is a mess. Joan responds by attacking everyone around her; Olivier retreats. But when they are forced to run against each other for student council, it

unleashes their determination to change: the system, and themselves. A timely, hilarious, and provocative play by award-winning Quebec author [David Paquet](#), translated by [Leanna Brodie](#).

- Winner of the Dorothy Lees-Blakey Theatre for Young Audiences Award
- Winner of the 2022 Governor General's Literary Award for Drama in French

[See More](#)

## THE INTERVIEW

[Nick Green](#) is a Dora Mavor Moore Award-winning playwright who is originally from Vancouver, currently based in Toronto. Favourite writing credits include *Dr. Silver* (book,); *Happy Birthday Baby J*; *In Real Life* (book,); *Every Day She Rose* (co-written with Andrea Scott); *Dinner with the Duchess*; and *Body Politic* (Dora Mavor Moore Award, Outstanding New Play-General Theatre). Nick is a graduate of the University of Alberta BFA Acting Program.



**Nick, your powerful play [Casey and Diana](#) has earned rave reviews from critics and audiences alike, and it's getting productions across the country. Tell us about the play.**

Working on *Casey and Diana* has been one of the most special experiences of my life. I won't lie, it was a tough play to write. I remember going on a little mini-retreat to a friend's cottage in the middle of winter and the enormity of the entire thing kind of landed on me like an avalanche. There I was setting out to write about a beloved figure and a hugely

significant Canadian institution. WHO DO I THINK I AM! There were a lot of long walks, a lot of long baths, and a lot of days spent watching *Drag Race* when I should have been writing.

Eventually I forced myself to start writing. I always start with writing a monologue that is a character trying to get something they want by telling someone else a story. Sometimes it makes it into the play, sometimes it doesn't. In this case, I had an idea of who I wanted Thomas to be, so I sat him up in bed and got him to tell Princess Diana about the morning he watched her wedding. It unlocked so much for me about how he speaks, how he tries to relate to others, and what he ultimately wants from Diana, from life, from others. At the end of the exercise I found myself writing "When I go, I want my ghost to have a train. Is that too much to ask?" That became such an important statement for me. A train means grandeur and opulence and fantasy, yes. But a train is also something that follows behind, that lingers when you've passed someone. It is something of you that can be touched and held. Thomas wants to go out in a way that feels special, but also wants to leave something behind and be remembered. Writing that was a really exciting moment for me, which isn't to say I didn't go on to bang my head against every wall and consider quitting a million times...

The run at Stratford was an absolute dream come true. The director of the original production, as well as several subsequent ones, Andrew Kushnir, is an old and close friend of mine, so it was very special to share this experience with him, and I love his work on the show. From the beginning, the rehearsal room was just brimming with love from everyone who worked on the piece. The cast was remarkable and some of them have become great friends of mine. The Festival truly embraced this play and treated all involved, including those at Casey House, with huge amounts of respect and kindness, from the way they provided the reflection room to the various events they held.

All the same can be said for the Soulpepper production that followed, where the artistic leadership welcomed me and this production with the most incredible enthusiasm and generosity. Soulpepper was this wild ride of "YES!" From the start, I remember Luke Reece sitting me down and saying "We aren't going to string you along. We want this play, and if you let us, we are doing this play." Even on the night when I sheepishly asked if I could get comps for a bunch of Toronto playwrights—which is a thing I've been trying to get going in the city—and not only did Soulpepper say yes, Weyni hosted a party for us all at her house afterwards!

The play has many upcoming productions, which of course is such a dream for a playwright. It just finished its run at Theatre Aquarius, and that production will be opening in a few weeks at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre. In April, the play opens at Neptune Theatre in Halifax, then a week later a different production opens at the Arts Club in Vancouver (just two days before *Every Day She Rose* opens in Vancouver at the Cultch!) In the fall the play opens at Yes Theatre in Sudbury, and then in early 2026, there is a co-production with runs at both the Citadel in Edmonton and Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary. Beyond that there are four more productions—two in the US, two in Canada—that will be announced down the road.

I really, genuinely pinch myself every day. It's bucket list stuff.

**Several of your other plays—such as *The Body Politic*, *Every Day She Rose* (which you co-wrote with Andrea Scott), and *Happy Birthday, Baby J.*—could be considered “political,” in the best sense of the word. Do you consider yourself a political writer? Do you make a conscious effort to explore LGBTQ+ or gender issues, or do your characters lead you there?**

I think I would consider myself a political writer in that I certainly don't shy away from topics that are very politicized, and I tend to have a perspective that I am offering. These are very often related to queer stories because I love being queer and I love queer people and queer history. Plus there's still so much ignorance and intolerance to be battled, especially in these terrifying times! That said, I'm allergic to one-sided stories. I really do aim to present different perspectives, and I try to write characters who have perspectives that one could understand, as well as a humanity that makes them hard to dismiss.

***Dinner with the Duchess*, your drama about an artist at a critical moment in her life, premiered last summer at Here and Now Theatre in Stratford, and the production just had a successful run at Toronto Crow's Theatre. Why did you want to tell this story?**

You asked before about whether characters lead me in my writing, and I would say that this is definitely the case with *Duchess*. I sat down to write that during a crossroads in my life. I *hated* theatre. My entire life has been devoted to theatre. I mean since I was like eight, I have been eating and breathing this art form. And yet in my early thirties, after putting in almost a decade of trying to do it professionally, it all just felt so toxic. It was practically all that I was, and I resented it so much. So I set out on this play wanting to write about how a life devoted to your passion has the potential to destroy your love of it.

As I mentioned before, I started writing a monologue in which the central character Margaret was telling the story of Wilma Norman Neruda being humiliated at a concert, and by the end of that monologue I had met a character who was clearly going to tell me exactly what needed to be said in this play. From there, the play became about much more than the experience of working in the arts. It became about legacy and gender and transgression and forgiveness. The first incarnation of it during the developmental run at Next Stage didn't quite land the plane, but I'm really proud of where it got to, and all my thanks go to my dramaturg Marjorie Chan for helping me get there.

**Nick, I'd like to ask you about your life outside the theatre. You're a social worker, is that right? How does your work with youth feed your art—or vice versa?**

That is correct! After working full-time as an actor and a writer for many years, I came to the realization that it was not the life for me. I remember sitting in the dressing room of an A House theatre before a show I was acting in, thinking, “I wish I was home right now,” and then thinking “Ummm doing this play in this theatre is, like, an example of this career going

well, and you're wishing you were watching *Real Housewives*?" No no no, a full time artist career is WAY too hard. So that experience, paired with coming very close to a career-defining role but losing it due to my height, led to me going back to school in my late twenties.

After a year in Open Studies at University of Toronto—which I always recommend to anyone thinking they might want to try something else—I landed on social work as the path I was most interested in. I've always done a lot of volunteer work with the queer community and had just finished an incredible volunteer position in the palliative care unit at St. Joseph's, where I learned from the most amazing social worker. So I applied for a program at York and absolutely loved the training.

Social work is such a broad field. There's clinical work, community engagement, medical fields, family fields, school settings, grassroots organizing, radical resistance efforts, and so much more. Ultimately the study of social work is about opening your mind up to the ways that the structures of society advantage some and disadvantage many. In order to be someone who can provide supports to others, you need to learn to think critically about how society is built through language and power and history and violence, and really understand the ways that systemic/structural/institutional oppression have incredibly dire impacts on so many people's lives. Most of my work has been with children and families, as well as working with male perpetrators of domestic violence.

It's a tough, tough field, and some days there is NO WAY I can do any writing, much less work on something heavy. But most of the time it's a great escape for me, a place for me to put thoughts and feelings. Both jobs require such interest and observation in/of the human experience, so they definitely feed one another. That said, I have some firm boundaries around overlapping these aspects of my life. I've never brought any kind of experience from my social work life into my writing, and I pretty purposefully stay away from issues and topics I directly grapple with at work. I don't think it'd be healthy for me to take on some of these issues in both of my work days.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

**BEHIND THE SCENES**



*This month we talked with [Mary Francis Moore](#) about developing new musicals.*

*Mary Francis is a director, actor, and playwright who is currently the Artistic Director of [Theatre Aquarius](#) in Hamilton, Ontario.*

**Mary Francis, Theatre Aquarius produces a full season of excellent shows, runs a new plays festival, and offers a variety of arts programs for young people, among other things. But today I'm hoping that you can tell us about the [National Centre for Musicals](#) at Theatre Aquarius.**

I can tell you a little bit about how that came to be. When I took over here in 2021, I was flooded with submissions, most of them new musicals. Because I had been developing and directing new musicals prior to my coming to Theatre Aquarius, we were a natural place for people to be sending their musical work to. But given the number of submissions coming in, it was clear to me right away that I wouldn't be able to produce that many. I realized that I was looking at them through the lens of, "Is this something I could produce?" Not, "Is this something I could help develop?" or "Is this something I could help foster the growth of?" And when you get to be at a theatre like Theatre Aquarius and you have access to theatres across the country and to colleagues across the country, you start thinking, "What can I do to help? How can I meet a project where it's at and help to support it?" Or: "How do we get it to the next theatre or to the next phase of development?" There might be a piece that doesn't speak to this community or to my audience, but I know that it would really resonate with an audience at a different theatre elsewhere. That's what got me thinking.

I had been working at the time with Michael Rubinoff on a project, we were probably seven years into the development, but we hadn't had a professional production at that point. This process takes so long. For somebody to invest in a musical—really into the full development of it—it's a labour of love and it's a long-term commitment, both financially and timewise. I wanted to create a place where we could meet the project where it's at, help with the development of it, and then pass the project on without staking a claim on it. Often a project gets attached to a theatre. Then if the theatre can't do anything with it right

away, it can just atrophy. So that was all percolating with me. And then Michael and I started chatting and he said, "Do it. I'll be on your advisory committee." So I talked to a couple of other colleagues, Sean Mayes and Lily Ling, who are both Canadian music directors working on Broadway right now, two of my favorite music directors to work with. They said the same thing: "If you do it, we'll support it; we'll come on board." And we have an incredible team here at Theatre Aquarius who worked diligently to launch the program.

### **Can you tell us about some of the musicals that you have produced at Theatre Aquarius?**

The projects that we've been able to put on the stage didn't necessarily come out of NCNM because it just got off the ground last year, so they were works that we had already in development. We produced *MAGGIE* by Johnny Reid, Matt Murray, and Bob Foster in 2023; that was the first original new musical this theatre had done in quite a long time. The audience response was overwhelming—I feel like we could have run that show for much longer. Many people saw it more than once; they were coming back and bringing their grandchildren saying, "This is our culture, this is our history." It wasn't just Scottish people; it was people who had left their country of birth. They could talk with their kids and grandkids about what it's like to leave where you're from, what it's like to leave your family. What that does to a family and to a culture. That show really had a big impact on our community.

*Beautiful Scars* is by Tom Wilson and Shaun Smyth, who at the time were two local writers. (Shaun has since moved back to Calgary.) Tom is a hometown hero. He's an artist who has had incredible success and lives and makes his work here in Hamilton. Tom is a prolific artist with a beautiful soul, and to birth that show here, to invite the Indigenous community and the non-Indigenous community to meet and to gather in our space and to share this story of joy and reconciliation—the hope and the laughter and the tears that came through that, and through Tom's and Shaun's words—that was that was a gift.

We've also produced the premiere of *Pollyanna*, the musical by Linda Barnett and Stephen Gallagher (who's a local playwright). We produced the premiere of *The Nine Lives of Ross Fordham* in our Studio space in January by Brandon, Jason, Liam, and TJ McGibbon who are a mostly Hamilton-based family. They created an original piece about their grandfather, who basically escaped death nine times as a cop in Toronto in the 50s. It was performed by his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, through story and song, telling the story of his nine lives. His children, his grandchildren, his great-grandchildren, in the community where they live, telling this story in our studio, all original music. These shows have such significance and importance in different ways to us. That one felt very special.

These shows were further along in their development. By the time *MAGGIE* hit the stage, it had been in development for eight years. After the Aquarius production, *MAGGIE* was then picked up by Goodspeed Musicals in Connecticut, the first Canadian musical to be on the Goodspeed mainstage. The day they raised the Canadian flag over Goodspeed, it was just iconic.

But while all that was happening, the NCM program was getting started. We had multidisciplinary theatre artists from every province and every territory on our jury because we wanted to make sure that the submissions were being viewed through a really wide lens—dancers, choreographers, music directors, librettists, actors—they each had a chance to read the submissions and then the list would get narrowed down. This past year we chose five projects. One of the shows was just an idea, but the idea was great, and the sample they sent us from their idea was really exciting. The other four are in various stages of development. One piece is pretty much ready; after this year of development, it's ready to go on the stage. Other shows we've cracked wide open and taken them apart. And the needs of every show have been very different. It's been exciting to match the artistic teams with the writers. "I think you I think you'd really like this dramaturge. Why don't you chat and then see what happens?" One of the writers wants to explore the physical language of their piece. So, they've got a workshop with a movement director to explore the movement language of the work. We recently completed a public presentation in Toronto of one of the pieces and had artistic directors, producers and community there to hear the newest version of the draft and support the creative team.

We've been able to host events and invite the music theatre community. We had a speed-dating event and invited book writers, lyricists, composers, directors, choreographers. They met and talked about their projects or what they were looking for in a collaborator. There were quite a few matches, then they all came to see *Beautiful Scars*. Anything we do, we try to make it available virtually as well, so that people across the country can join in.

### **Are there any particular themes or styles you're seeing emerge in new Canadian musicals?**

What we want to say is "Don't limit your imagination." We want to encourage writers to not write from a place of scarcity. Maybe they're thinking, "If I write this thirty-seven-actor musical, will it ever get done?" But what we're trying to say is, "It's only in development right now. Dream big!" No one in theatre has ever said, "We've got too much money. Don't give us so much." But we want playwrights to know that they can write as large as their imaginations will let them. And then we can figure out all the logistics.

### **I did want to ask about the recent announcement about the Tragically Hip musical. Sounds exciting!**

We're thrilled to be a part of this project. And of course, it's great to work with Michael Rubinoff again after the success of *MAGGIE*. We hosted the workshop for *It's a Good Life If You Don't Weaken* last fall here at Theatre Aquarius. We are fortunate to have this venue because we can develop a piece here and move it to a commercial theatre quite easily. We held auditions for the project last week. The astonishing level of talent in this country continually blows my mind.

[Read the Full Interview](#)



# SPRING INTO NATURE



## COMING ATTRACTIONS

### • IN THEATRES •

***The New Canadian Curling Club*** by Mark Crawford  
[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, February 25–March 23, 2025.

***Performance Review*** by Rosamund Small  
[Outside the March](#), February 27–March 30, 2025.

***No Big Deal*** by Michael Kras  
[Roseneath Theatre](#), Touring ON, March-April 2025.

***Bed and Breakfast*** by Mark Crawford  
[Theatre Orangeville](#), Orangeville, ON, March 13–30, 2025.

***Casey and Diana*** by Nick Green  
[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, March 19–April 12, 2025.

***The Secret to Good Tea*** by Rosanna Deerchild  
[NAC Indigenous Theatre](#), Ottawa, ON, March 20–29, 2025.

***Children of God*** by Corey Payette  
[The Cultch](#), Vancouver, BC, March 21–29, 2025.

**Feast** by Guillermo Verdecchia  
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, April 1–27, 2025.

**Children of God** by Corey Payette  
[McPherson Playhouse](#), Victoria, BC, April 1–2, 2025.

**Children of God** by Corey Payette  
[Northern Arts and Cultural Centre](#), Yellowknife, NWT, April 5, 2025.

**Casey and Diana** by Nick Green  
[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, April 22–May 18, 2025.

**Casey and Diana** by Nick Green  
[Arts Club Theatre](#), Vancouver, BC, April 24–May 25, 2025.

**The Runner** by Christopher Morris  
[Harold Green Jewish Theatre](#), North York, ON, April 26–May 4, 2025.

**I'm in Love with Your Sister** by Norm Foster  
[Theatre Orangeville](#), Orangeville, ON, May 1–18, 2025.

**Macbeth: A Tale Told by an Idiot** by Eric Woolfe  
[Eldritch Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, May 7–18, 2025.

**After the Rain** by Rose Napoli and Suzy Wilde  
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, May 27–June 22, 2025.

**Serving Elizabeth (Reading)** by Marcia Johnson  
[New Stages](#), Peterborough, ON, June 14, 2025.

• ON SCREEN •

**[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!

# IN THE NEWS

Congratulations to [Lara Rae](#), recipient of a [King Charles III Coronation Medal](#) for her contributions to the arts and for working to bring food and resources to people during the pandemic. Well deserved!

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