

A History of Concrete Theatre

Concrete Theatre started in 1987 and was officially registered in 1989 as a Not-For-Profit Society. It began as a collectively run company committed to using theatre in the community to explore and analyze social issues. The founding artistic directors were Mieko Ouchi, Caroline Howarth, Kazimea Sokil, Jan Selman and Elinor Holt. Concrete Theatre operated on a project-to-project basis facilitating community groups to create theatre that reflected their realities. These early projects included work with street involved youth, teen mothers and single parents. The name Concrete was selected to reflect the company's commitment to the urban Edmonton community.

In 1990, Concrete Theatre began working in schools with a participatory workshop project called *Love, Anger and the Media* that explored relationships, gender roles, dating violence and the impact of media. This workshop toured to schools around Edmonton and Northern Alberta. In the early 90's new artists joined the collective. Padma Viswanathan and Philip McIntyre-Paul created a collective theatre and visual art project called *Acting Our Colours*. For this project, a group of young women from diverse cultural backgrounds and different high schools from the Edmonton area spent several months exploring race relations among teens and created a mural and theatre piece that toured to schools and teen conferences. The company also facilitated a number of community-based workshops and small performance projects with social service agencies, churches and schools.

In these early years, the company was administered by the Artistic Co-Directors, who worked for the company on a volunteer basis. Funding to cover the cost of projects came from social service agencies, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), Canadian Heritage and the City of Edmonton.

In 1994 Concrete Theatre partnered with four social service agencies to develop *Decisions, Decisions* a participatory theatre piece written by Mieko Ouchi for Junior High students that explored a wide variety of issues including racism, sexuality, drug and alcohol abuse and dating violence. This project was co-produced by Concrete Theatre, AADAC, The Sexual Assault Centre, Planned Parenthood Edmonton (now Options Sexual Health) and the Support Network with funding from The Wildrose Foundation and The Government of Alberta Early Intervention Program. Directed by Caroline Howarth, *Decisions, Decisions* was a highly successful program that toured to Edmonton schools from 1994 to 1996. In the casting and content of this project, Concrete Theatre made a commitment to promoting cultural diversity and reflecting the diverse nature of school populations.

As Concrete Theatre's connection to schools developed, other projects were created including *The Multi-Cultural Project*, which explored the issues of new Canadians and ESL students in the school community of Louis St. Laurent Junior High School and *Crossing the Line*, a participatory workshop on harassment and bullying which toured extensively to Junior Highs across Northern Alberta. Concrete Theatre also worked with individuals and community groups to provide theatrical forums for alternative voices. *Youth Under Pressure (YUP)* provided performance opportunities for young theatre artists, musicians, improv and visual artists at the Edmonton Fringe Festival and First Night Festivals for several seasons.

Crips Against the Law of Gravity and *Returned to Sender* were plays by and about the disabled community. The playwright Heidi Janz, a writer with Cerebral Palsy, worked extensively with Concrete Theatre and with the disabled community to create two shows that reflected a reality not often seen on the stage in Edmonton. These shows were performed at the Edmonton Fringe Festival and at the U of A Hospital Theatre in conjunction with the U of A Bioethics Committee and the Association For Community Living. We have continued our relationship with Heidi, most recently with her short children's play, *The Hare and the Hedgehog – A "Challenging" Fable* for the *Sprouts 2002 Festival* and is included in the *Sprouts Anthology* published by Playwrights' Canada Press.

The Road Show explored environmental issues and came out of a partnership with Eco-City, an Edmonton based organization committed to alternative forms of transportation and urban environmental issues, and the Edmonton Transit System. The project included improv based scenes performed at City Festivals and a full length show, performed on an ETS bus at the Edmonton Fringe Festival. The bus carried the audience from the bus stop at Gazebo Park on a fun and fact filled Eco-ride through Edmonton as characters got on and off the route.

During this period the company continued to operate as an artistic collective working on a project-to-project basis with no formal administration. The evolving membership of the Artistic Collective included Uma Viswanathan, Elyne Quan, Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull, Andrew Houston, Wendy Philpott, Lise Ann Johnson, Juleta Severson-Baker, Caroline Howarth, Kazimea Sokil and Mieko Ouchi. The company accessed funds from Foundations, The Provincial Government and the City of Edmonton.

1998/1999 Season

In 1998, the Artistic Co-Directors of the company decided to develop a performance piece that explored their own cultural diversity. *Triptych* was made up of three very personal performance pieces that explored aspects of culture: *Surface Tension* by Elyne Quan, *By This Parting* by Mieko Ouchi and *subtext* by Uma Viswanathan. *Triptych* was highly successful both critically and in its outreach to alternative cultural communities, and strengthened the company's commitment to continue to create theatre that celebrated alternative voices. It confirmed our commitment to reflecting the cultural diversity of Canada both in main-stage productions and theatre for young audience productions.

1999/2000 Season

Naomi's Road adapted from Joy Kogawa's novel by Paula Wing was successful produced for school and community audiences in 1999. Director, Mieko Ouchi, was able to cast the production using Edmonton based Asian Canadian artists, with the addition of former Edmontonian Yoshiko Shimizu. Out of our search for artists for the cast, we were able to assemble a database of Asian Canadian artists from coast to coast. This has proven to be very important, as other companies are beginning to use Concrete Theatre as a resource to contact Asian Canadian artists for their specific projects. *Naomi's Road* was awarded the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences for the 1999/2000.

2000/2001 Season

Building on the success of *Triptych*, the company developed *Rice-Stories with a Slant*, a multi-phased performance project exploring the experience of Asian Canadians, which included a multi-media installation in 1999 and a theatre performance in 2001. The performance of *Rice* wove together three stories: *The Story of the Little Bird* by Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull, *The Story of the Old Man and the Buddha* by Mieko Ouchi and *What?* by Elyne Quan. David Fraser's production design garnered an Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award nomination, and the script received a nomination for the Gwen Pharis Ringwood Drama Award at the 2001 Alberta Writers Guild Awards.

Are We There Yet? written by Jane Heather, grew out of our original collaboration with Planned Parenthood Edmonton on *Decisions, Decisions* in 1994. At the time, we spoke of the continuing need for young people to access information about sexuality and sexual decision – making. We felt that participatory theatre was highly effective with this issue, as it allowed us to open up discussion about difficult subjects such as responsibility and communication, key issues that Planned Parenthood had had difficulty in discussing in the context of a workshop. Over the past decade, the show has grown into one of our most popular productions. It has become an integral and integrated part of the Grade 9 sexuality curriculum, touring in Edmonton and area to both Public and Catholic schools each year in the spring. *Are We There Yet?* was awarded the

Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences for the 2000/2001 season.

As a result of the rapid growth and artistic success of the company, it became impossible to continue operating without a paid administration and a more formal structure. The Artistic Co-Directors began the process of developing a Board of Directors drawn from the community and began a search for a part time General Manager. In 2001, Concrete Theatre received a grant from the Edmonton Community Lottery Board and hired Marian Brant as General Manager. Along with formalizing our structure and infrastructure, at that time, we also began to create more structured seasons of plays, featuring shows aimed at Elementary, Junior High and Senior High and Family Audiences.

2001/2002 Season

In 2001, Concrete Theatre produced their first Theatre for Young Audiences production targeted at students in Kindergarten through Grade Three. *Lig & Bittle* written and performed by Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull and Elyne Quan is an adventure that explores and celebrates difference. The play directed by Tracy Carroll, was a great success and was awarded the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences for the 2001/2002 season. We also toured *Are We There Yet?* to Edmonton and Area Junior High Schools for four weeks in the Spring of 2002.

In the spring of 2002, Concrete Theatre also introduced an exciting new play initiative, *Sprouts New Play Festival For Kids*. The goals of this annual project were to expand the pool of new TYA scripts that specifically promote cultural diversity, to develop new playwrights who are interested in writing for young audiences, and to develop a stable of short scripts that could grow into full length touring and main-stage productions for Concrete Theatre. *Sprouts 2002* featured work by Trevor Anderson, Tololwa M. Mollel, Patricia Darbasie, Janet Hinton-Mann and Heidi Janz. Several of the scripts from this first year have gone on for further development with the company. *A Promise to the Sun* by Tololwa M. Mollel and *Carnival Magic* by Patricia Darbasie were developed into a 50-minute show, which toured Edmonton area Elementary Schools as part of our 2004/2005 season. *Nami Namersson, the Viking who Liked to Name Things* by Trevor Anderson was developed into a 50 minute musical with music by Bryce Kulak and toured elementary schools as part of our 2005/2006 season.

2002/2003 Season

Our 2002/2003 season included a fall/winter main-stage production of *The Shape of A Girl* by award-winning playwright Joan MacLeod at the Kaasa Theatre. Our production, directed by Caroline Howarth, was marketed to Junior and Senior High aged students and was very well received by audiences and critics. The show was awarded the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences for the 2002/2003 season.

A new workshop initiative *Getting In On It* focused on the new health curriculum on nutrition and healthy living for teens developed in collaboration with Alberta Learning. This workshop toured to several Edmonton and area schools and was presented in several junior high schools in Fort McMurray.

Lig & Bittle was remounted in Edmonton, and toured nationally very successfully to the Kids On The Waterfront Festival in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, both in the Spring of 2003. We also toured *Are We There Yet?* to Edmonton and Area Junior High Schools for four weeks in the Spring of 2003.

Sprouts 2003 featured new plays by Elyne Quan, Leona Brausen, Mark Haroun, Marty Chan, Maralyn Ryan and Jim De Felice.

2003/2004 Season

Our 2003/2004 season included a fall tour of *The Incredible Adventures of Mary Jane Mosquito*, a musical cabaret in English, French and Cree by Tomson Highway that toured to Edmonton area Elementary schools. This charming musical, by Governor General Award winning playwright Highway and directed by Mieko Ouchi, examines issues of difference, of cultural identity and learning to fit in and accept others, and includes gentle language lessons in French and Cree as well as the opportunity to sing-a-long with the lovely Mary Jane.

Lig & Bittle was remounted for a few public performances for Families in Edmonton, and then toured very successfully to The Lorraine Kimsa Theatre For Young People in Toronto, and to the idea Congress in Ottawa, both in the spring of 2004.

Are We There Yet? toured to Edmonton and Area Junior High Schools for four weeks in the Spring of 2004.

Sprouts 2004 included new works by Jared Matsunaga Turnbull, Jan Taylor, Chris Bullough, Beth Graham and Daniela Vlaskalic, and featured a preview of songs from the new musical *Nami Namersson, the Viking Who Liked To Name Things*.

2004/2005 Season

Our 2004/2005 season included a fall main-stage production of *The Plum Tree* by Mitch Miyagawa, performed at the Catalyst Theatre in fall/winter of 2004. This show was aimed at Junior and Senior High aged students, and explored issues of the Japanese-Canadian Internment and Redress Movement as well as issues of land claims and rights.

To celebrate Black History Month in February, we toured a double bill of the short plays *A Promise to the Sun* by Tololwa M. Mollel and *Carnival Magic* by Patricia Darbasie to Edmonton Elementary schools. Aimed at K-Grade 6, the show was performed for a sold out three week run.

In spring, we produced a short remount of *The Incredible Adventures of Mary Jane Mosquito* at the Library Theatre before the show traveled to be a part of the Alberta Scene at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in April 2005, as well as being presented at the Kids on the Waterfront Festival in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia in May 2005. In April/May we presented the 8th tour of *Are We There Yet?*, which traveled to Edmonton and area Junior Highs for four weeks.

In early 2005, Concrete Theatre and community partners including Planned Parenthood, the University of Alberta Departments of Drama and Human Ecology, Native Counseling Services, NeWorld Theatre in Vancouver, Saskatchewan Native Theatre in Saskatoon and Mulgrave Road Theatre in Guysborough, Nova Scotia, were awarded a major research grant worth \$952, 000.00 from the prestigious SSHRC Program through the CURA (Community University Research Alliance) for the ground-breaking participatory play program *Are We There Yet?* The grant will be used to tour, analyze and study the show for four years, develop and test the show in other communities across Canada, conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the learning outcomes of the project with young people around issues of sexuality, to write and publish the script along with a detailed description of the development process and participatory theatre training guidelines and to hold a national symposium to share the findings of this innovative project with other sexuality educators and theatre companies across the country.

We finished this busy season with *Sprouts 2005*, which featured readings of four short new plays, a newly minted kids art exhibit and a brand new bilingual project: a reading of a new TYA play from France, *Jeremy Fisher*, in both French and in an English translation, in collaboration with L'Uni Theatre, Edmonton's professional Francophone Theatre. The playwrights in 2005 included Mieko Ouchi, Portia Clark, Isabelle Rousseau and Sheldon Elter.

2005/2006 Season

We opened the season with a remount of our award winning production of *The Shape of A Girl* by Joan McLeod, directed by Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull. The play toured to Edmonton and area junior and senior high schools, as well as to Grande Prairie Live Theatre and Saskatoon's Broadway Theatre. *The Shape Of A Girl* is a powerful and thought-provoking one-woman show that examines the complex dynamics of teenage relationships and codes of behaviour between girls. The play, an emotional and poetic exploration of violence based on the brutal murder of Reena Virk by her peers in Victoria, B.C. in 1997, featured Clarice Eckford as Braidie.

In February we produced a second short remount of *The Incredible Adventures of Mary Jane Mosquito* at the Library Theatre before the show traveled to London Ontario for a very successful run at the Grand Theatre.

In February we also debuted our premiere production of *Nami Namersson, The Viking Who Liked To Name Things*, the first full length play to come out of our new play development program. Book and lyrics by Trevor Anderson, music by Bryce Kulak, the play toured to Elementary schools in Edmonton and area, as well as having three very well attended public performances at the Library Theatre.

In April/May we presented the 9th tour of *Are We There Yet?* which traveled to Edmonton and area Junior Highs for six weeks.

Sprouts 2006 included new short plays by Collin Doyle, Andrea House, Jana O'Connor and Marty Chan. We also presented a reading of Marty Chan's new full length play *Nearly Normal*.

2006/2007 Season

We opened the season with *Offensive Fouls* by Jason Long, which toured to Junior and Senior High Schools around Edmonton and area. The play explored an interracial relationship and the fallout from a race based act of violence. Directed by Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull, the play featured Nadien Chu and Chris Bullough and was stage managed by Gina Puntil.

In February, we were proud to present the world English language premiere of *Jeremy Fisher* by Mohamed Rouabhi, translated by Mieko Ouchi. The play was directed by award winning director Ron Jenkins and featured theatre veterans Sheldon Bergstrom, Patrick Howarth, Rebecca Starr and Guillermo Urrea. It was stage managed by Shaun Thronson and designed by David Fraser. It toured very successfully to Edmonton and area Elementary schools and enjoyed four public performances at Fringe Theatre Adventures' PCL Studio. In June, we were thrilled when the production received the 2007 Sterling Award for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences.

In April/May we presented the 10th tour of *Are We There Yet?* by Jane Heather, which traveled to Edmonton and area Junior Highs for a sold out six week tour. This year, we also went up to Fort McMurray for a full week of shows at the end of the tour. This production featured Ryland Alexander, Jeremy Baumung, Nadien Chu and Kristi Gunther Hansen. It was stage managed by Shaun Thronson and directed by Mieko Ouchi.

Sprouts 2007 included new works by Cathy Derkach, Mark Haroun, Mieko Ouchi and Guillermo Urrea. The plays were directed by Caroline Howarth and stage managed by Michelle Chan. In 2007, we also added new lobby activities by TalentoAmuz, who created a sound garden with kid friendly instruments fashioned into plants and flowers.

At the end of our 2006/2007 season we saw changes in our administration. Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull, Artistic Co-Director since 1994 moved on to pursue theatre projects with the Alberta Workers' Health Centre and Marian Brant, our GM since 2001, took on a new role as Production Manager with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. Caroline Howarth and Mieko

Ouchi continued on in their capacities as Artistic Co-Directors, with David Cheoros filling in as Interim General Manager.

2007/2008 Season

We opened the season, our 18th, with a return to one of our favorites: *The Shape Of A Girl* by Joan MacLeod. The play had a very successful sold out two week tour in Edmonton and area Junior and Senior Highs with public performances at Concordia University College. The show starred Tracy Penner, directed by Tracy Carroll and stage managed by Ha Neul Kim.

Our Elementary school show was also a return to one of our favorites: *Nami Namersson, The Viking Who Liked To Name Things*, book and lyrics by Trevor Anderson, lyrics by Bryce Kulak. The play had a fantastic 10 day run at Fringe Theatre Adventures in the Westbury Theatre, followed by a sold out two week run to Edmonton and area theatres. The production again directed by Mieko Ouchi with design by Melissa Cuerrier, featured Ashley Ball, Cathy Derkach, Jesse Gervais and Sylvia Wong and was stage managed by Ha Neul Kim.

2008 marked the 11th tour of Jane Heather's *Are We There Yet?*, hitting Edmonton and Calgary area grade 9's for six sold out weeks. This year's production featured Jeremy Baumung, Kristi Gunther Hansen, Mark Jenkins and Natasha Napoleao. It was directed by Caroline Howarth and stage managed by Gina Puntil.

Sprouts 2008 was a huge success this spring with a brand new twist. This year, the Festival featured sign language interpretation at all the performances. The Festival featured scripts by: Dave Clarke, Rita Espechit, Dave Horak and Conni Massing, the plays were directed by Caroline Howarth, stage managed by Michelle Chan and designed by Amanda Franklin.

In March of 2008, Debbie Giesbrecht came on as full time General Manager.

2008/2009 Season

We opened our 19th season with an exciting new teen script from David S. Craig, *Smokescreen*. The play turned out to be our most successful teen show to date, with 4 public performances at the Stanley A. Milner Library Theatre and 19 performances in Edmonton and area. The play drew a strong response from both Junior and Senior High audiences, and teachers were very supportive of the challenging subject matter. AADAC and the Youth Emergency Shelter gave tours and offered their support and expertise to the production. *Smokescreen* was directed by Caroline Howarth, production designed by David Fraser with sound design by Dave Clarke. It featured Mieko Ouchi, Garrett Spelliscy and George Szilagyi. It was stage managed by Jamie Betts with technical assistance by Josiah Hiemstra. We were pleased to have *Smokescreen* nominated for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences at the 2009 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Awards.

Our Elementary slot was filled by a play that had its start at *Sprouts*. *Apples and Oranges* by Chris Bullough enjoyed 6 performances at the Stanley A. Milner Library Theatre, and 25 shows in Edmonton with some rural shows in Elbow Valley. The production was directed and dramaturged by Mieko Ouchi with production design by Lisa Hancharek and musical direction by Julie Golosky. The show featured theatre vets Patricia Darbasie and Julie Golosky, and newcomers Scott Shpeley and Sara Vickruck and was stage managed by Lester Lee, again with technical assistance by Josiah Hiemstra. *Apples and Oranges* was also nominated for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences at the 2009 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Awards.

Are We There Yet? by Jane Heather enjoyed its 12th tour with Concrete, this year enjoying a sold out six week run in Alberta, as well as a two week run at Toronto's Lorraine Kimsa Theatre For Young People in its teen series. This year the show was directed by Mieko Ouchi and featured

the stellar cast of Ryland Alexander, Nadien Chu, Nick Green and Monice Peter. It was stage managed by Beth Dart. This year was also exceptional, as it included the filming of a training DVD on participatory theatre as part of the SSHRC CURA grant the project received in 2005.

Sprouts 2009 was a strong year with scripts by Todd Babiak, Julie Golosky, Twilla MacLeod & Gregory Shimizu, and Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull. The plays were directed by Mieko Ouchi, stage managed by Michelle Chan and designed by Amanda Franklin. The plays were again interpreted in ASL, a real hit with kids and parents alike.

2008/2009 was also notable for a renewal of our Artists in Residency Program after an absence of about 10 years. Our newly revamped program entitled *Acting Our Colours* did a trial run this year at Anne Fitzgerald School led by Tracy Carroll.

2009/2010 Season

We kicked off our 20th Anniversary Season with a great retrospective *Birthday Party* at Catalyst on September 26th, 2009 at 7:30 pm. It featured scenes from plays drawn from our 20 years of seasons and folks enjoyed food and dancing afterwards hosted by DJ Chris Bullough.

Our fall teen show was the much anticipated world premiere of *Routes* by Collin Doyle. A hard hitting one man show about the effects of violence on young people, the play was supported by the Alberta children and Youth Services Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying Community Incentive Fund, with assistance from our community partners: The Support Network, YOUCAN, the Canadian Red Cross RespectED program and Rat Creek Design who built an interactive website in support of the production. The show was directed and dramaturged by Mieko Ouchi, production designed by David Fraser with sound design by Dave Clarke. It featured Joshua Beaudry as Tom and was stage managed by Nicole Piotrkowski with technical assistance from Josiah Hiemstra. The show enjoyed 5 very well attended shows at Catalyst Theatre with a record breaking 28 shows in Edmonton and area schools and 5 sold out performances at the Broadway Theatre in Saskatoon as part of Persephone Theatre's Youth Series. This critically acclaimed show received 5 nominations at the 2010 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Awards for Outstanding Actor in a Leading Role (Joshua Beaudry), Outstanding Director (Mieko Ouchi), Outstanding New Play (Collin Doyle) and Outstanding Achievement in TYA for David Fraser's Set Design, ultimately winning the Outstanding Production for Young Audiences Award.

Our Elementary production in 2010 was also a world premiere, this time of *The Early Bloomer* by Jana O'Connor, another play that grew out of our *Sprouts Festival* incubator. The play was directed and dramaturged by Caroline Howarth, production designed by Lisa Hancharek with sound design by Dave Clarke. The show featured Ntara Curry, Ming Hudson, Farren Timoteo and George Szilagyi, It was stage managed by Nancy Yuen with technical support by Josiah Hiemstra. *The Early Bloomer* was also honored with two nominations at the 2010 Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Awards for Lisa Hancharek's Outstanding Design and Outstanding Production for Young Audiences.

Are We There Yet? by Jane Heather continued to grow with a second sold out eight week tour, this time that travelled across Alberta alone. The production enjoyed a record 33 performances outside of Edmonton including shows in: Calgary, Banff, Cochrane, Bow Valley, Canmore, Stony Plain, Pigeon Lake, Viking, Ardrossan, Airdrie and De Winton. This year's production was directed by Nadien Chu and featured Adam Beauchesne, Kristi Gunther Hansen, Richard Lee Hsi and Simone Saunders. It was stage managed by Anna Davidson.

Sprouts 2010 was special this year as the final event in our 20th Anniversary Season. It included four new plays by Mari Sasano, Ian Leung, Patricia Darbasie and Nick Green. It was directed by Caroline Howarth, stage managed by Michelle Chan and designed by Amanda Franklin. We also celebrated the launch of our new book *Sprouts! An Anthology of New Plays from Concrete Theatre's Sprouts Festival* right after the Sunday performance. The beautiful tome, published by

Playwrights Canada Press, Canada's foremost publisher of new Canadian plays was toasted with cupcakes, cookies and a good old fashioned book signing with 10 of the 17 playwrights included in the Anthology in attendance: Marty Chan, Portia Clark, Patricia Darbasie, Rita Espechit, Julie Golosky, Beth Graham, Heidi Janz, Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull, Elyne Quan and Mieko Ouchi. Unable to attend were: Leona Brausen, Sheldon Elter, Daniela Vlaskalic, Mark Haroun, Conni Massing, Tololwa M. Mollel and Guillermo Urra.

This season in its second year, our *Acting Our Colours* Artists in Residence program travelled to four schools, again led by Tracy Carroll.

2010/2011 Season

We opened our 21st Season with the world premiere of Under Cover by award winning playwright Mark Haroun. The production toured Edmonton and area Junior and Senior High Schools in October and November with public performances at the Stanley A. Milner Library Theatre in October.

In our post 9/11 world, media stereotypes and public misunderstandings abound about Islam and the ways in which Muslim people practice their religion. Many Canadians self-identify as Muslim. Despite Canada's official policy of Multiculturalism, mistrust and mistreatment of the 'other' continues in this country. Because of this, many Muslim-Canadians can describe incidents of discrimination they have experienced at the hands of fellow citizens. *Under Cover* attempts to educate youth audiences about the practices of Islam, experiences of being Muslim in Canada, and the need for a deeper understanding and acceptance of difference. The play offers many opportunities to engage in critical conversations in an effort to combat discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes. *Under Cover* explores the challenges faced by teenagers of Middle Eastern descent in Canada through the experiences of a group of high school friends. Ella is just like any other student you might see wandering the halls of a Canadian High School. When Ella makes a decision to wear the hijab, it becomes visibly obvious to everyone that she is Muslim, and suddenly her faith is front and centre. Faith, respect and acceptance are all questioned when even Ella's best friends have some unexpected reactions and are pushed to confront their own assumptions and prejudices.

Under Cover was directed by Mieko Ouchi and featured Andréa Jorawsky, Richard Lee Hsi, Carmela Sison and Garrett Spelliscy. The production design was by David Fraser with sound design by Dave Clarke. The stage Manager was Naomi Lagerweij. Concrete Theatre worked with The Centre for Race and Culture who assisted with research for the production and helped to facilitate post show discussions. *Under Cover* was awarded the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences and Mieko Ouchi was nominated for her direction of the production.

Also in Fall 2010, our production of *Routes* by Collin Doyle was presented in Toronto at the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People. Joshua Beaudry reprised his performance as Tom. The show was very well received in Toronto and was awarded the Dora for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences.

In the Winter we remounted a Concrete favourite for Elementary school and family audiences. *Jeremy Fisher* by celebrated French playwright Mohamed Rouabhi, in an English translation by Mieko Ouchi, and directed by Ron Jenkins toured Elementary schools in February and March.2011. On Family Day the show was presented at the Shell Theatre in Fort Saskatchewan. The show featured: Mark Ikeda as Jeremy, Jesse Gervais as Tom Fisher, Rebecca Starr as Jody Fisher and Patrick Howarth as other colourful characters in Jeremy's life. The tour was stage managed by Ha Neul Kim with production design by David Fraser and sound design by Dave Clarke. This tender, magical and moving exploration of growing up and celebrating difference was first produced by Concrete in 2007 and won the 2007 Sterling Award for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences.

Spring brought the 14th tour of *Are We There Yet?* by Jane Heather directed by Caroline Howarth with Garret Spelliscy, Cole Humeny, Ming Hudson and Monice Peter. The tour was stage managed by Anna Davidson. The production visited Grade 9 audiences across Alberta from March 21 through May 6, 2011. The tour this season was funded in part by a grant from the Edmonton Community Foundation.

We wrapped up the season with the 10th *Sprouts New Play Festival for Kids* on June 11 and 12, 2011 in the Stanley Milner Library Theatre and Lobby. The festival this year featured new plays by Valerie Mason-John (aka Queenie), Tololwa Mollel, Kevin Kerr and Christine Sokaymoh Frederick. The acting company was Carmela Sison, Monice Peter and Jesse Gervais with stage manager Gina Puntill. The workshops and readings were directed by Mieko Ouchi with design support from Cory Sincennes and sound design by Dave Clarke. Additional programming for Sprouts 2011 included a staged reading of a new full length version of Dave Clarke's *Songs My Mother Never Sung Me*, an opera in song and sign that explores the relationship of a hearing child and his deaf mother and a Coffee Klatch roundtable discussion about writing TYA. Both these extra events were supported in part by the Alberta Playwright's Network (APN).

This season was the third year for our *Acting Our Colours* Artists in Residence program. We travelled to schools in Millet and Brooks as well as Edmonton. The coordinator of the program this season was April Banigan.

2011/2012 Season

We opened our 22nd Season with a remount of Offensive Fouls by award winning playwright Jason Long. The production toured Edmonton and area Junior and Senior High Schools in November with public performances at Catalyst Theatre that same month. The play was directed by Caroline Howarth and featured Chantelle Han and Cole Humeny. It was stage managed by Betty Hushlak, with technical assistance from Josiah Hiemstra, and featured a production design by David Fraser and sound design by Dave Clarke. The production was nominated for two Sterlings Awards in 2012 for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences and Outstanding Director for Caroline Howarth.

Our second show was our winter Elementary show, which this year was a remount of Lig & Bittle by Elyne Quan and Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull. It was directed by Tracy Carroll and featured Ming Hudson and Paul Welch with production design by Marisa Kochanski. It was stage managed by Betty Hushlak, with technical assistance from Josiah Hiemstra. The production was also nominated for two Sterling Awards in 2012 for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences and Outstanding Director for Tracy Carroll.

Concrete Theatre worked with the Centre for Race and Culture to create a follow up program for both these plays called Revision Our World: Engaging Art for Change. Concrete Theatre, along with community partner The Centre for Race and Culture, received two major grants from the Edmonton Arts Council and the Human Rights, Education and Multiculturalism Grant Program that provided added benefits to schools that booked either of the plays. The Re-Vision Our World Project was a school based initiative designed to develop the capacity of students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 to work towards a future free from discrimination and racism through three steps. First, the students viewed an age appropriate piece of professional theatre with diversity and building friendships as a central theme. Secondly they participated in a follow-up interactive workshop provided by the Centre for Race and Culture that built on the concepts raised by the play which explored issues including identity, respecting and celebrating diversity and roots of discrimination. The workshop was designed to engage students in a discussion of the issues at an age appropriate level and was facilitated by Karen Chinaleong-Brooks and her team of volunteers. Finally with the help of professional artist facilitators provided by Concrete Theatre, students created their own piece of visual art or theatre that expressed each student's

own re-visioning of their world. These workshops were facilitated by professional artists: April Banigan, Nadien Chu, Caroline Howarth, Lynette Maurice, Mieko Ouchi, Bob Rasko and Cindi Zuby. The project culminated in the spring with a sharing of all the completed art pieces at a special Celebration held at City Hall, hosted by Councillor Amarjeet Sohi, which featured a visit from Mayor Mandel who stopped by the reception to have a snack and a chat with the students. This was a hugely successful final event with over 100 attendees, which was featured on OMNI Television.

13 Schools participated in the program: A Blair McPherson School, Anne Fitzgerald Elementary School, Balwin School, Bannerman School, Callingwood Elementary School, Highlands Junior High School, J Percy Page Senior High School, Norwood School, St. Basil's Junior High School, St. Catherine's School, Spruce Avenue Junior High School, Thorncliffe School and Westmount Junior High School.

Spring brought the 15th tour of *Are We There Yet?* by Jane Heather directed by Mieko Ouchi with Garret Spelliscy, Richard Lee, Jenny McKillop and Carmela Sison. The tour was stage managed by Anna Davidson. The production visited Grade 9 audiences across Alberta from April 2 through May 11, 2012. The tour this season was funded in part by grants from the Telus Community Board and the Stollery Foundation.

We wrapped up the season with the 11th *Sprouts New Play Festival for Kids* on June 9 and 10, 2012 in the Stanley Milner Library Theatre and Lobby. The festival this year featured new plays by Nadien Chu, Joel Crichton & Richard Lee, Joshua Dalledonne and Carmela Sison. The acting company was made up of veterans Julie Golosky and Jesse Gervais along with newcomer Zina Lee with stage manager Gina Moe. The workshops and readings were directed by Mieko Ouchi with design support from Cory Sincennes and sound design by Paul Morgan Donald. We had the largest houses in the history of *Sprouts* this year with 340 children and adults taking in the plays!

This season was the fourth year for our *Acting Our Colours Artists in Residence* program. We travelled to St. Paul's Elementary School in Lethbridge as well as to Mount Royal Arts Core School and St. Justin's Elementary in Edmonton. The coordinator of the program this season was April Banigan.

Organizationally, we said a sad farewell to our outgoing GM Debbie Giesbrecht and a warm welcome to our incoming GM Gail M. Yakemchuk in August 2011.

2012/2013 Season

To kick off the season, we decided to produce a remount of one of our most successful teen shows, ***Smokescreen*** by David S. Craig. The production was directed by Mieko Ouchi and featured Ntara Curry, in the role of Rayzee, played by Mieko in our first production, Matt Hulshof and Troy O'Donnell. A timely and essential exploration of a drug for which we have laws but no values... Last seen in Alberta in 2008, ***Smokescreen*** is a riveting exploration of adolescent drug culture and the clash of values between Trent, a charismatic high school student and the adults in his life over the damaging impact of his marijuana use and abuse. The 2012 production was a remount of the 2008 production utilizing the existing set designed by David Fraser and the sound design by Dave Clarke with Dawn Friessen as stage manager and Josiah Hiemstra providing tour production support. ***Smokescreen*** toured to Junior and Senior High Schools primarily in the Edmonton area with some limited rural touring supported by the Telus Community Fund. The production was supported by a comprehensive teachers' guide. The production utilized research and support materials from YESS (Youth Empowerment and Support Services – formerly the Youth Emergency Shelter Society) and Alberta Health Services Addictions Youth Services (formerly AADAC).

In the winter of 2013 we produced the premiere of ***Paper Song*** by Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull for our Elementary School tour. Paper can be anything! ***Paper Song*** is a new play for children and

families that weaves a traditional Japanese folktale about a crane (Tsuru) with the story of a young mouse and her grandfather, as they struggle against an oppressive overlord, the goblin Tengu. This magical performance integrates large-scale origami (the Japanese art of paper-folding) and shadow puppetry into the storytelling and design of the play. Focusing on the relationship between grandfather and granddaughter, **Paper Song** celebrates the ability for artistic creativity, ingenuity and love to transform despair into hope. The cast featured Ntara Curry, Zina Lee and Richard Lam and was directed by Caroline Howarth with production design by Cory Sincennes and sound design and composition by Dave Clarke. The production was stage managed by Rachel Rudd with technical support from Josiah Hiemstra. Brendan Neary provided consultation for puppetry. This premiere production was produced with support from Fringe Theatre Adventures who provided rehearsal and shop space for the production and presented the public performances of the show in the Westbury Theatre as part of the Arts at the Barns season. We are extremely pleased that this production was included in Persephone Theatre's Youth Series for a four day engagement in Saskatoon. The show will be remounted in our 2013/2014 season on tour to Young People's Theatre in Toronto. **Paper Song** received funding support from the National Association of Japanese Canadians.

In the spring we mounted the 16th and final tour of **Are We There Yet?**, which continues to be in high demand with schools across the country but sadly is no longer financially sustainable. This final tour featured the fabulous work of Peter Fernandes, Richard Lam Jenny McKillop and Carmela Sison directed by Mieko Ouchi with Stage Manager Dawn Friessen. We were very pleased to partner once again the Options Sexual Health who were able to supply health educators for the performances in Edmonton. We also worked with locally based sexual health educators and health nurses in Calgary and rural communities. The tour was funded in part by monies raised through the Edmonton Hash House Harriers (EH3) Red Dress Run fundraiser. In April 2012, Concrete Theatre worked with EH3 on this annual fundraising initiative that partners with a different charity each year.

We continue to build contacts with schools interested in our unique take on cultural diversity where students are guided through the creation of their very own world, and through the week of the residency bring elements of this world to life through music, drama exercises and storytelling. So far, **Acting Our Colours** seems to be striking a chord with Alberta schools and educators struggling with diversity in their communities. We had two residencies this season, at Afton Arts Core Elementary School in Edmonton and Vanier Community Catholic School in Edson, Alberta.

2013 marks the 12th Anniversary year of this innovative new play development festival for kids. This season new plays were commissioned from Minister Faust, Vern Thiessen, Tracy Carroll and Michelle Todd. The plays are the central event at the festival and kids are encouraged to give their feedback about the plays in writing or as a drawing. The festival also includes a variety of interactive activities that all celebrate artistic expression including a display of children's visual art, storytelling with authors and readers from Young Alberta Books, music making and musical storytelling, our ever popular audience feedback "art garden plot" and "Comment-Tree", where kids share their opinions and reactions to the plays through drawings and notes on a large, colourful fabric tree, and craft projects inspired by the plays.

Plays in development this season include the one act opera in voice and ASL: **Songs My Mother Never Sung Me** by Dave Clarke, which we plan to produce in partnership with Toronto's Theatre Direct. **The Antyssey** by Richard Lee and Joel Crichton is a new commission for Elementary School audiences. We are also beginning intense work on two new plays for the 2013-2014 Season: **I Am for You** a new teen play by Mieko Ouchi and **The Bully Project** (working title) a new interactive participatory play developed by Caroline Howarth and Mieko Ouchi that will explore the issue of bullying for Junior High audiences, which will replace **Are We There Yet?** as an annual touring show for the company.

Concrete Theatre Today

Concrete Theatre is a not-for-profit society and a registered charity (no. 89738 7478 RR0001), and operates as a member of PACT (Professional Association of Canadian Theatres) engaging performers under CAEA (Canadian Actors' Equity Association) regulations. The organization operates with a Board of Directors, two Artistic Co-Directors and a General Manager. Concrete Theatre employs professional artists on a contract per project basis. The various artists deliver workshops, design (set, lights, costumes, sound and graphics), create and perform in both our school tours and our main-stage productions. Concrete has worked in partnership with many community organizations, agencies and theatres such as: AADAC (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission), APN, Options Sexual Health, The Sexual Assault Centre, The Support Network, YOUCAN, Rat Creek Design, the Canadian Red Cross RespectED Program, Edmonton Public Libraries, Alberta Learning, The Centre for Race and Culture, Young Alberta Books Society, Native Counseling Services, the University of Alberta Departments of Drama and Human Ecology, University of Alberta Hospital and Bio-Ethics Committee, The Edmonton Japanese Community Association, the Citadel Theatre, NeWorld Theatre, Fringe Theatre Adventures, Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company, L'Unitheatre, Mulgrave Road Theatre and the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People among others.

Concrete Theatre continues to receive operating and project support from many different organizations and individuals that believe the work that Concrete supplies is vital to the healthy development of Edmonton's communities. Concrete Theatre has received funding from: Alberta Children and Youth Services Community Incentive Fund, The Alberta Creative Development Initiative, The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, The Alberta Performing Arts Stabilization Fund, The Canada Council for the Arts, Canadian Heritage, the Edmonton Arts Council and the City of Edmonton, The Clifford E. Lee Charitable Foundation, The Community Initiatives Program, DuMaurier Arts Foundation, Eco-City, The Edmonton Arts Council, The Edmonton Community Foundation, The Edmonton Community Lottery Board, the Stollery Foundation, the Telus Community Foundation, Edmonton Rotary Clubs, The Lee Fund, The Kristie Foundation, The National Association of Japanese Canadians, The Province of Alberta – Early Intervention Program, SSHRC, Stand Firm Capacity Building Program and The Wildrose Foundation.