

Pre-Season Insights - Speaker Bios

Toronto Reference Library

789 Yonge St., Toronto, ON M4W 2G8

March 3, *Much Ado About Nothing*

Dr. Philippa Sheppard

Philippa Sheppard received her BA from the University of Toronto, her MA from the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-on-Avon and her D.Phil in English Renaissance Drama from the University of Oxford, where she was a Commonwealth Scholar. She has taught both Renaissance drama and Modern Drama at Memorial University, at University College Dublin and, currently, at the University of Toronto. Her book *Devouring Time: Nostalgia in Contemporary Shakespearean Screen Adaptations*, was published by McGill Queen's University Press in May 2017. Since 2007, she has given talks and written program notes for the Stratford Festival – always a highlight of her year.

March 10, *Richard III*

Dr. Jane Freeman

Director of the School of Graduate Studies' Graduate Centre for Academic Communication, Jane Freeman is a Senior Fellow of Massey College in Toronto. Her areas of specialty are Oral/Written Communication, Classical Rhetoric and Shakespeare in Performance. A regular speaker at the Stratford Festival, she is a member of the Festival's Senate, past Chair of its Education and Archives Committee, and the founder of the Shakespeare Lecture Series at the Toronto Reference Library. She is proud to be hosting the series for the 11th time this year.

March 17, *All's Well That Ends Well*

Alexander Leggatt

Professor Emeritus of English at University College, University of Toronto, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, Alexander Leggatt has published 13 books on English drama, particularly on the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. These include *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love*, *Shakespeare's Political Drama* and *English Drama: Shakespeare to the Restoration, 1590-1660*. A hugely popular teacher and speaker, he has been a regular contributor of program notes and Table Talks at the Stratford Festival for many years.

March 24, *Hamlet*

Peter Cockett

Assistant professor in the Theatre and Film Studies program at McMaster University's School of the Arts, Peter Cockett regularly directs plays both at McMaster and for Pocoli Ludique Societas, the University of Toronto's medieval and Renaissance players. In 2006, he directed *Macbeth's Kitchen*, his own adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, for the Toronto Fringe Festival, and recently he was the stage director for the "Shakespeare and the Queen's Men" project, directing *King Lear*, *Famous Victories of Henry V* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. He is also a professional actor, whose recent credits include *The Memory of Water* (Tarragon Theatre/Elgin Winter Garden), episodes of *The Border* and *Murdoch Mysteries* (CBC), *Write and Wrong* (Lifetime), *Recipe for a Perfect Christmas* (Lifetime), *Riding the Bus with My Sister* (Hallmark) and *Head in the Clouds*. While he is a regular speaker at Stratford, this is first lecture for the Toronto Reference Library series.

Guelph Public Library

100 Norfolk Street, Guelph, ON N1H 4J6

March 5, *Chicago*

Dr. Ann Wilson

Director of the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph, Ann Wilson has published on modern and contemporary drama written in English, with a particular focus on the drama of Britain, Canada and the United States.

March 12, *Richard III*

Dr. Mark Fortier

Professor of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph, Mark Fortier has published on adaptations of Shakespeare and is under contract for a book on Shakespeare's law.

March 19, *Spamalat*

David Prosser

As the Stratford Festival's Literary and Editorial Director, David Prosser edits and writes for the Festival's many publications. He worked on its 50th- and 60th-season commemorative books and on former Artistic Director Richard Monette's 2007 memoir *This Rough Magic*. He also hosts the Meighen Forum's popular Rarely Played series of readings and presents free Lobby Talks before selected Festival performances.

March 26, *Hamlet-911*

Nitasha Rajoo

Currently Interim Director of Education at the Stratford Festival, Nitasha Rajoo has over 20 years of experience in the performing arts as an actor, director and educator. Her love for the creative arts, education, travel and adventure has allowed her to work all over the globe leading workshops, adjudicating, teaching, directing and programming – including such countries as South Africa, India, Jamaica, the U.K. (where she lived for over 10 years) and now back home in Canada. Nitasha holds a Master of Arts degree in the Advanced Teachings of Shakespeare from the University of Warwick and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Kitchener Public Library

85 Queen St. N., Kitchener, ON N2H 2H1

April 2, *Chicago*

Lois Kivesto

Researcher and consultant Lois Kivesto holds a PhD in theatre from New York University. A frequent lecturer for the Stratford Festival, the McMaster Stratford Seminar Series and the McMaster Alumni Association, she is also a long-serving program essayist for the Shaw Festival. Her essay "Comedy Tonight!" is published in *Stephen Sondheim: A Casebook*, part of the Garland Reference Library of the Humanities. In 2020, she teaches a course in musical-theatre history for McMaster University's recently launched "Learning for 55+" program.

April 16, *Here's What It Takes*

Lauren Acton

Musicologist, cultural theorist and performer Lauren Acton is Coordinator and faculty member of the Performing Arts Fundamentals program at Centennial College in Toronto and a faculty member of the college's Music Industry Arts and Performance program. Her research and teaching interests embrace musicology, popular music studies, theatre studies, performance studies, cultural theory and aesthetic philosophy. Her publications have addressed violence in Canadian musicals, analyzed the stage and screen versions of *Show Boat*, explored the repertoire of musicals written for children in school and community settings, and examined the intersection between tourism and musicals at the Stratford Festival.

April 23, *Spamalot*

Dr. David Seljak

Professor of Religious Studies at St. Jerome's University in Waterloo, Ontario, David Seljak is also Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Waterloo. With Paul Bramada, he co-edited *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* (2005) and *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (2008). His areas of expertise are religion and identity in Canada, religion and public life, and Catholic social ethics. He has authored research reports on religion and multiculturalism for the Department of Canadian Heritage and consulted with the Ontario Human Rights Commission on its policy on freedom of religion. He has served as the editor of *Critical Theology*, published by Novalis.

April 30, *Hamlet-911*

Dr. Neil Brooks

Associate professor of English and Cultural Studies at Huron University College, Neil Brooks specializes in American Literature, African American Literature, and contemporary fiction and drama. He has taught courses and presented papers on the contemporary coming-of-age story. He is co-editor of the forthcoming *Literature, Film, and the Politics of Health*.

Dr. Scott Schofield

Scott Schofield is an assistant professor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at Huron University College, where he teaches a variety of courses, including offerings in Shakespeare. His recent publications include articles on Shakespeare and biblical allusion and the history of Renaissance reading practices. In 2016 he was Lead Curator for the Shakespeare 400 exhibition at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

Hamilton Public Library – Dundas Branch

18 Ogilvie St., Dundas, ON L9H 2S2

April 7, *Much Ado About Nothing*

Dr. Mary Silcox

Professor of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, Mary Silcox focuses her interests on 16th- and 17th-century non-dramatic literature, particularly emblem books and poetry. One of the leading scholars in English emblem studies, she also enjoys working on issues of subjectivity, women writers and the construction of women characters in Renaissance poetry. Both of her graduate courses, "Self and Other in Elizabethan Poetry" and "Self and Society in 17th-Century Devotional Writings," are based on the writing of selves within early modern culture. Another field of interest, in which she has

directed several theses, is utopian literature, from More's *Utopia* to contemporary feminist critical utopias.

April 14, *Spamalot*

Stephen Low

Stephen Low's scholarly interests include 20th-century theatre and performance, musicals, queer theory, sex and sexuality, gender, critical race studies and gay culture. His books include *Hail Mary: Gay Culture in the Age of Homonormativity* and the forthcoming *Upbeat Horizons: Hope, Awe, and Queer Potentiality in the Broadway Musical*, in which he theorizes that marginalized communities and disenfranchised individuals have a particular affinity for the musical because it is *the* dramatic form that most consistently elicits feelings of hope. His essays have been published in *Modern Drama*, *Theatre Research in Canada*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, *Queer Theatre in Canada*, the *Critical Perspectives in Canadian Theatre in English* series and *Opera Canada*.

April 21, *Hamlet*

Peter Cockett

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April 28, *The Rez Sisters*

Stephanie Johns

Education Associate (Teaching Focus) at the Stratford Festival, Stephanie Johns holds an Honours BA in History from Huron University College, an MA in Public History from Western University and a Bachelor of Education degree in Intermediate/Senior History and English from Althouse at Western. She completed her Public History internship under the guidance of Jean-Pierre Morin, Resident Historian in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (now Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada). Stephanie is a teacher, a Girl Guides of Canada leader and a reader.

London Public Library

251 Dundas St., London, ON N6H 6A9

May 6, *Wendy & Peter Pan*

Dr. Michelle Hartley

An assistant professor in the Department of English, French, and Writing at King's University College, Michelle Hartley has had the privilege of teaching Children's Literature at Western and its affiliates for the past 15 years. In 2013, she received an Arts and Humanities award for Teaching Excellence. She is thrilled to be working with Stratford again to take her interest in children's fantasy and female heroes to a wider community audience.

May 13, *The Rez Sisters*

Ro'nikonkatste (Standing Strong Spirit) is a Mohawk from Six Nations. Since 1982, he has worked in mental health at Parkwood Institute Mental Health as a nurse, social worker and educator, all with a specific focus on an Indigenous worldview. In 2011 he directed *The Rez Sisters* in a joint project with Claire Porter-Martin, Saunders Secondary School and his theatre company, Theatre Red & White. The production, attended on opening night by playwright Tomson Highway, went on to win the 2011 Brickenden Award for Outstanding Youth Drama. Currently, Ro'nikonkatste is the Project Lead for Biigajiiskaan: Indigenous Pathways to Mental Wellness at Parkwood Hospital, in partnership with Atlohsa Family Healing Services. This Indigenous-led program is geared toward creating sacred space within a hospital where Indigenous identity and cultural practices can be included as a form of care and treatment.

May 20, *Wolf Hall*

Dr. Kel Pero

Kel Pero holds a PhD in English literature and has taught in the disciplines of English literature and theatre at the university level. A founding member of Ottawa's Plosive Productions, she is a proud member of Equity and ACTRA. She lives in Stratford, where she runs KMP and Associates Creative and Communication Services.

May 27, *Hamlet-911*

Lauren Acton

Musicologist, cultural theorist and performer Lauren Acton is Coordinator and faculty member of the Performing Arts Fundamentals program at Centennial College in Toronto and a faculty member of the college's Music Industry Arts and Performance program. Her research and teaching interests embrace musicology, popular music studies, theatre studies, performance studies, cultural theory and aesthetic philosophy. Her publications have addressed violence in Canadian musicals, analyzed the stage and screen versions of *Show Boat*, explored the repertoire of musicals written for children in school and community settings, and examined the intersection between tourism and musicals at the Stratford Festival.