

## A PLACE FOR LIVE THEATRE IN CANADA

In May, leaders from Canada's professional theatre companies gathered in Fredericton, New Brunswick, to explore and reflect on the place of live theatres in towns and cities across the country. It's an important question, at a time when so many of us carry virtually unlimited entertainment options literally at our fingertips.

Our tablets, our smart phones and our computers connect us to a vast virtual network, but often at the cost of human connection. How many times do we see a group of people texting, reading, or playing on their handheld devices, instead of enjoying a personal conversation?

In its recent study, *2010 Vital Signs*, the Vancouver Foundation discovered that the number one issue for Vancouver residents is the degree to which we feel connected to one another. "A strong sense of belonging — really feeling that there is a place for us in our community — and a bond of trust with our neighbours have the greatest influence on how we rate the quality of life in our community."

And that is the place for live theatre in our community. Theatre is a place of human connection, where people gather for a shared experience. The interplay between artists and audiences is what distinguishes live theatre from static forms of entertainment. Each performance is unique and immediate, provoking discussion, thought, and emotional connections.

Whether it's work like *Kim's Convenience* playing at the Arts Club Theatre, Boca del Lupo's *The Voyage*, or Ruby Slippers Theatre's French-Canadian plays in English translation, theatre plays an increasingly important role in celebrating Canada's cultural and ethnic diversity, while fostering increased understanding among us. More than 90% of Canadians believe that arts experiences are a valuable way of bringing together people from different languages and cultural traditions.

A recent study by Nanos Research shows that eight out of ten Canadians believe live theatre is important to making Canadian communities vibrant and more attractive to visitors. Furthermore, at a time when Canada looking to grow its economy, 67% of Canadians believe that live theatre plays important role in attracting business to communities.

In Vancouver, it's now the start of festival season, a time when residents and visitors gather in the thousands to celebrate and enjoy music, theatre, cultural exchanges and our glorious surroundings. The tents are up at Bard on the Beach, the rEvolver theatre festival is presenting adventurous, high energy, and sophisticated new work by emerging companies and artists, and the Vancouver International Children's Festival takes over Granville Island at the end of May.

The nominations for the annual Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards for Metro Vancouver are announced the day after Victoria Day, a reminder of the extraordinary depth and talent of our theatre community and of the wonderful plays and musicals we enjoy year-round from companies of all sizes. Vancouver truly is a vibrant city, and one made immeasurably richer by the contributions of live theatre.

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Endorsed by the Board of Directors, Ruby Slippers Theatre*