

TOUCHSTONE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

50th Anniversary

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T|S

24/25



ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S REPORT

YOUR STORIES | OUR STORIES



THIS IS TOUCHSTONE'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY AND THE FOUNDATION THAT WAS BUILT 50 YEARS AGO CONTINUES TO BUOY UP THIS NEW LEADERSHIP TEAM.

We seek new ways to amplify Canadian/Turtle Island playwrights, to celebrate writing that is thoughtful, urgent and brilliant - to produce work that pushes form and content, while always remaining current and necessary; to nurture and support diverse voices that reflect who we are, where we are, where we have been and where we are going on this northern part of Turtle Island. The new leadership team of 2025/2025 includes myself (**Lois Anderson**) and **Libby Willoughby**. We both came onboard Fall 2024 to join Flying Start director **Daniela Atencia** and Communications and Business Manager **Kat Krampol**.

QWALENA: THE WILD WOMAN WHO STEALS CHILDREN

With storyteller
DALLAS YELLOWFLY

As the new AD it was important to consider what a land acknowledgement might look like for Touchstone at this moment in time. Story-teller **Dallas Yellowfly** helped us to create an evening-long event in the Fall of 2024 to call attention to the land on which we are situated, and the history of colonization on this land, as reflected through his story *Qwalena: The Wild Woman Who Steals Children*.



We partnered with **Zee Zee Theatre** for this event, and with Indigenous Community Engagement Manager **Alysha Collie** who curated an Indigenous marketplace, talk-back, donations and sweet treats to end the sold-out evening. Donations collected went to: **Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center, Aboriginal Mother Center Society, Urban Native Youth Association, Greater Vancouver Native Cultural Society 2-Spirit Organization** and **Kílala Ielum Urban Indigenous Health and Healing Cooperative**.

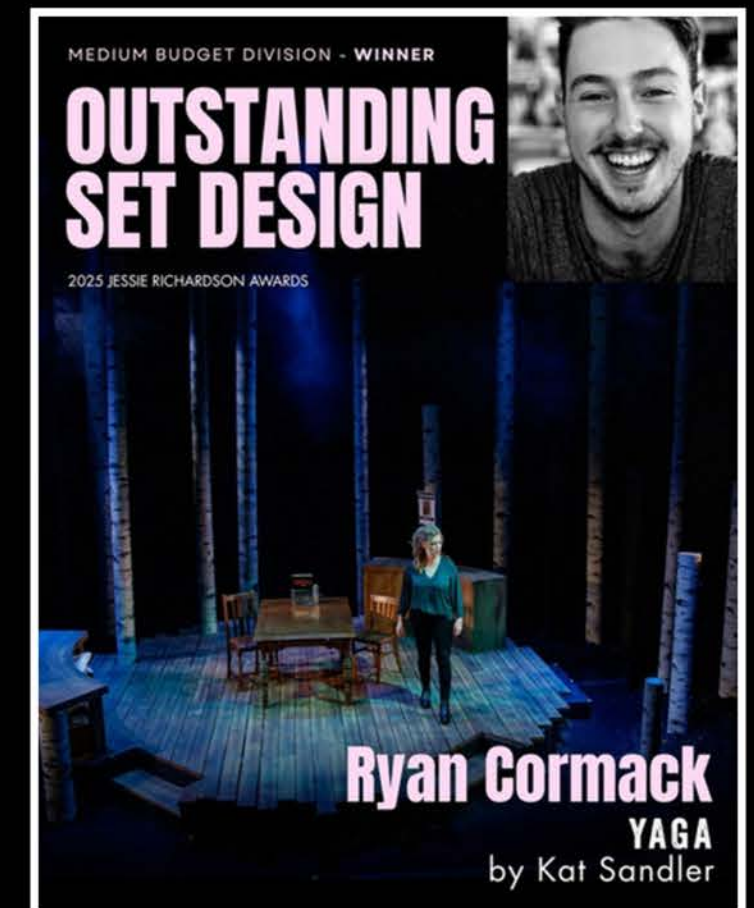
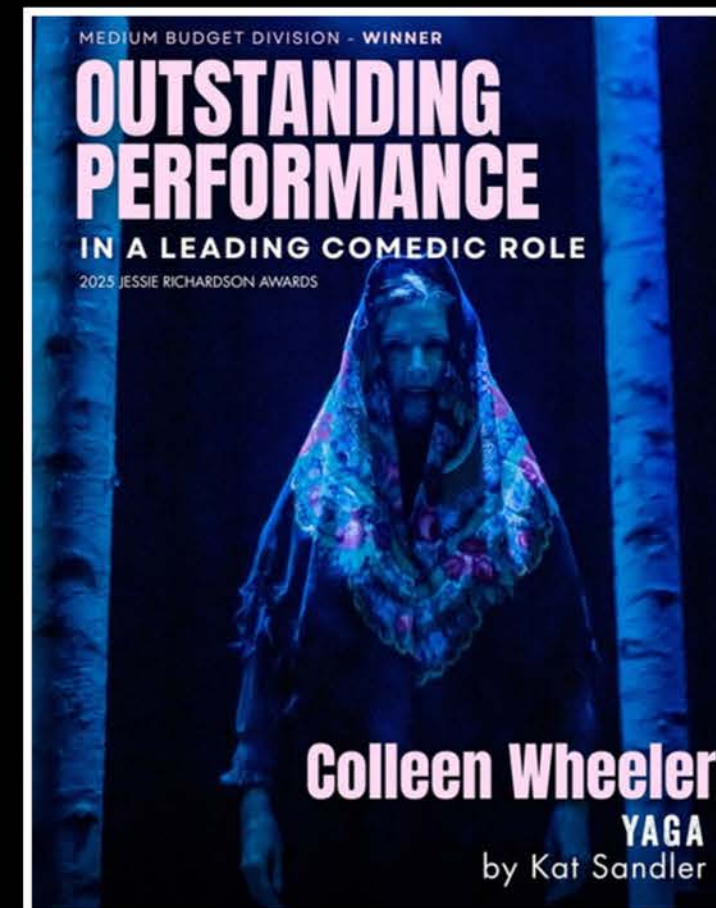
We acknowledge that Canada is not a safe construct for all - the word itself contains the history of colonization on these lands. As a result we have changed our language from a company that produces Canadian plays to a company that produces playwrights from **Canada/Turtle Island**. We have made a commitment to annual Indigenous programming. To this end our leadership team have entered into a long-form conversation with **Michelle Olson** of Raven Spirit and **Yvette Nolan** to discuss Indigenous work at Touchstone and the importance of professional development opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to work together. We created two playwright-in-residence opportunities for Metis playwright **Tai Amy Grauman** and Squamish playwright **Justin Neal**. It has been so exciting for me to work as a dramaturg for Tai on her new play *Romeo and Juliet: a Metis Love Story*, and to meet regularly with Justin to discuss his new play projects.





YAGA by Kat Sandler

Our 2024 fall production, *Yaga*, was a Touchstone re-mount presented by **The Gateway Theatre**, programmed by outgoing Touchstone leadership team **Roy Surette** and **Susan Shank**. Part fairy-tale, part murder mystery, playwright **Kat Sandler** considered 'witch' mythology as it pertains to women and aging. *Yaga* received 8 Jessie Richardson nominations, picking up 2 awards for **Outstanding performance** by **Colleen Wheeler** and **Outstanding Set Design** by **Ryan Cormack**. It was a thrilling rapid-fire piece, and was well received by audiences.



BEHIND THE MOON

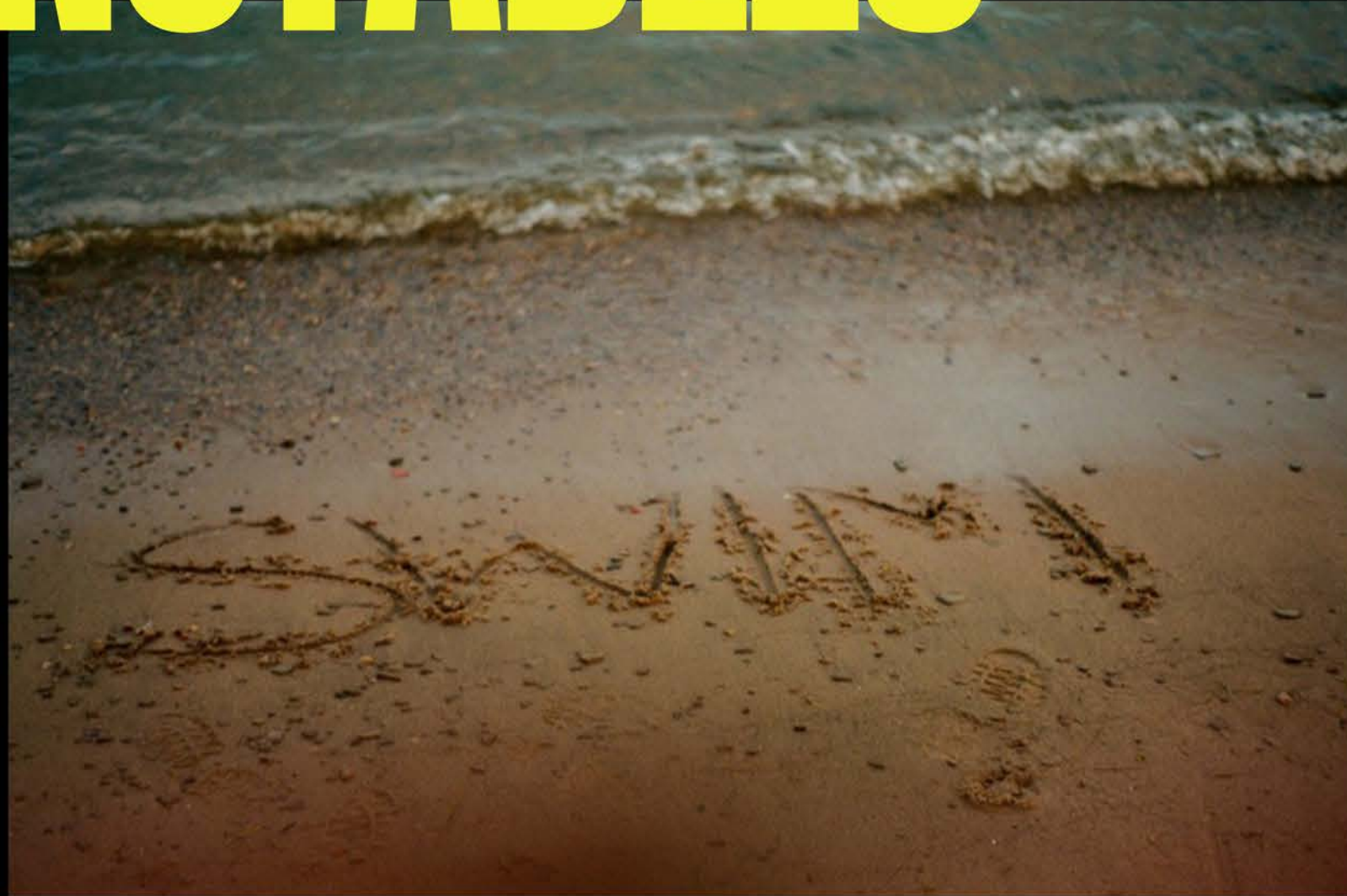
by Anosh Irani

Our 2025 spring production *Behind The Moon* by **Anosh Irani** sold out very soon after it opened. It was nominated for 8 Jessie Richardson Awards which included nominations for all performers and designers, picking up **Outstanding Direction**, **Outstanding Performance** by both **Praneet Akilla** and **Zahf Paroo**, **Outstanding Lighting Design** (**Jonathan Kim**) and **Best Production**. *Behind The Moon* charts the story of Ayub, the cook in a Toronto Mughlai restaurant, Jalal, a cab driver who walks in one night, and the restaurant owner Qadir Bhai. Our team of three outstanding actors, Praneet Akilla, Zahf Paroo and Dhirendra flawlessly crafted the tale of these three men, a tale of migration, loss, faith and brotherhood.

We were delighted to partner with **VPL Community Events Specialist Candie Tanaka** to host meet-the-playwright with Anosh Irani. The evening was a lively discussion about Anosh's plays and novels with many great questions from guests who knew Anosh's writing or were writers themselves.



NOTABLES



SWIM

We are proud to share that the following awards: **Outstanding Innovation in the use of Technology** to create an immersive theatrical experience, and Outstanding Original Composition by **David Mesiha** were received for the Touchstone/PuSh Festival co-presentation of *SWIM* produced by **Theatre Conspiracy and Pandemic Theatre**.



BEAUTY & THE BEAST: MY LIFE

We are also delighted that *Beauty and the Beast: My Life* by **Niall McNeil** won a Jessie award for **Significant Artistic Innovation in Theatrical Form**. Touchstone offered sponsorship support to Niall McNeil Productions through a city CASC grant and through a directing mentorship with myself, during the development period.

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT



In Spring 2024, we offered our first Touchstone professional development workshop as a new leadership team - puppetry workshop with **Shizuka Kai**. For this workshop we partnered with Washi+ paper-making collective. This workshop was sold out and was an extraordinary opportunity to explore object puppetry and the medium of Japanese paper. We hope to offer a professional development workshop annually. A sneak peek into our 2026 offering is a Clown Workshop with Cirque du Soleil director **Manon Beaudoin** in March. These workshops create connectivity with the larger theatre community and allow for professional development opportunities.



Our **EARLY CAREER PLAYWRIGHTS COHORT** gathered together **10 writers** for artists talks with **Anosh Irani**, **Gavan Cheema**, and a Masterclass in writing with **Marcus Youssef**. Our cohort also received free tickets to our season, dramaturgical opportunities with **Daniela Atencia** and participated in our first Open Mic Night. For Open Mic night we invited experienced playwrights to come listen to the work of the cohort. Libby baked amazing brownies, Daniela hosted, and the evening evolved into stories shared from the audience of early writing ventures.

FUNDRAISING | THE LAWYER SHOW

Our Lawyer's Show fundraiser returned to BMO this year. *The Addams Family Musical* was a big hit and the volunteering cast of lawyers expressed that it was one of the most fun experiences they had ever had in the theatre.

We discovered that the BMO venue and lobby is ideal for sponsors, audience and Touchstone staff to mingle. This year we set up a welcome table in the lobby, hosted by our leadership team with information about Touchstone Theatre - to encourage guests to come see one of our shows or buy a season's pass.



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

With the goal of making Touchstone accessible to playwrights, we launched a call for play submissions in the the fall of 2024 and assembled a curatorial team to read submissions which consisted of **Renelta Arluk**, **Marcus Youssef** and myself. The goal was to have a diverse team receive submissions from a diverse group of playwrights. We received 125 plays and short-listed 3 possible plays for future Touchstone productions.



COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

At Christmas, we partnered with **Zee Zee Theatre** and **Great Northern Way Scene Shop** to hold a community Christmas dinner for theatre administrators. This was a delightful long-table, bring-a-dish event that brought together the theatre companies in Vancouver to eat, chat and celebrate the work we are all doing. The event was opened with a welcome by Alysha Collie.



FLYING START



Finally **Daniela Atencia**, director of our Flying Start program continued a dramaturgical process with playwright **Jordyn Wood** on their new play *Vascular Necrosis*, a thrilling narrative that subverts typical zombie tropes to explore identity, chronic illness, and belonging.



**SNEAK
PEAK
25/26**

WOMEN OF THE FUR TRADE

For *Women of the Fur Trade* by **Frances Koncan** we reached out to **Western Canada Theatre** company in Kamloops to partner with us as producers and to **UBC Department of Theatre and Film** to partner with us as presenters. We were able to host both a V'ni Dansi jiggging workshop and an Indigenous Marketplace at UBC with the help of our Indigenous Community Engagement Manager **Alysha Collie**. VPL hosted a meet-the-playwright with Frances Koncan and myself. We were able to provide 49 comps to Indigenous audience members and we received 77 new email subscribers and gained 135 new instagram followers during this window.



GERTRUDE & ALICE | 2021 | DANCEBOY

Gertrude and Alice produced with **Western Gold Theatre** is currently pulling in audiences - it has been described as one of the best plays of the last couple of years and a personal favourite of city critics. We look forward to our PuSh co-pro, 2021, a live performance where story, video games, and AI collide to create space for a daughter's questions about her father's life and legacy. Co-produced by **Guilty by Association** and **Elbow Theatre**. Also coming up, *Danceboy*, **Munish Sharma's** solo show which comedically confronts toxic masculinity, cultural stereotypes, and Bollywood's heteronormative myths of love.



THANK YOU

My gratitude to our Touchstone Training instructor **Kerry Sandomirsky**. And I want to thank **our board** for their support and engagement. I want to thank my Touchstone partner **Libby Willoughby** for rolling out visions with me and **Kat Krampol** for re-invigorating the visual story-telling of our website and socials and for creatively finding dynamic ways to amplify our productions and programs.

- **Lois Anderson** | Artistic Director



MANAGING PRODUCER'S REPORT

Our 2024/25 season, which happened to be mine and Lois' first season with the company, was a delightful one. In addition to the artistic successes that have already been mentioned, it was also a year of **great organizational growth with our new leadership team setting priorities for the future, expanding our definition and understanding of what "Canadian Theatre" means, building relationships with artists and new partners, and expanding our offerings in the realm of professional development, particularly for playwrights.** Our season of shows was remarkably well attended, with "Behind the Moon" selling out its entire run 2-week by the night we opened. Through our programming and ancillary events, we were able to connect new audiences to Touchstone's work.

The 2024/25 season also brought with it some financial challenges. These challenges are not unique to Touchstone, but are being faced by our sector as a whole. For example, individual giving has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels, nor are we able to count on subscription sales as a significant revenue source any longer. Our sector is also facing government austerity, cutbacks, and stagnation in funding. These factors combined with rapidly rising costs in every area of our work present a real challenge when it comes to organizational and sector stability. That being said, we have been at a stable and consistent level of funding with each of our major government funders, and that funding is fully expected to continue.

Touchstone Theatre is currently running an accumulated deficit. While our current financial position is not ideal, it is also not unexpected. We are in the midst of **enacting our recovery plan**, which broadly involves: cutting down on operational costs by eliminating extraneous expenditures as well as subleasing half of our office space to another local company; embracing co-productions this season and next in order to maintain our level of artistic activity while reducing cost and financial risk, as well as optimizing proceeds from our annual Lawyer Show fundraiser by cutting down costs and re-vamping our sponsorship model. We are currently on track to eliminate our deficit by the end of the current fiscal year.

Our longer-term financial goal is to get the society back into a position of having a small accumulated surplus which would cover at least 3 months of operating expenses, as well as building up an "Artist Care" reserve fund, and a fund for commissioning new work.



Libby Willoughby
Managing Producer

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This year has been transformative for Touchstone Theatre. We welcomed our new Artistic Director, **Lois Anderson**, and Managing Producer, **Libby Willoughby**, both of whom have made significant contributions to our organization. Their leadership has resulted in outstanding, award-winning theatre and strengthened our team.

Lois has brought exceptional creativity, energy, and vision, pursuing new partnerships and innovative formats. Libby has quickly become an essential part of Touchstone, and together with our Business and Communications Manager, Kat Krampol, they form a dynamic leadership team poised to make a lasting impact on Touchstone and the Vancouver theatre community.

As I conclude my tenure on the Touchstone Board after ten years, including five as president, I am proud of our achievements and grateful for the opportunity to support the arts alongside dedicated colleagues. I look forward to seeing the continued success of the team.

A highlight for me during my time on the board has been the *Lawyer Show*, our annual fundraising event, which fosters connections within the legal profession and celebrates community engagement. Our 2025 production of *The Addams Family* was a resounding success, raising record funds, thanks to the commitment of our staff, volunteers, and supporters. I extend a special thank you to the legal professionals who volunteer over 3000 lawyer-hours rehearsing each year. I am very excited to be performing in my 13th Lawyer Show in May 2026, and hope you will all join us as we all (ironically) work "9 to 5".

I extend my sincere appreciation to the board members, staff, artists, and volunteers for their dedication and passion. Your creativity and hard work are the foundation of our productions and community spirit. Thank you to all of our audiences and donors for your continued support.



Linda Sum
Board President



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