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THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF BERNICE TRIMBLE

By Beth Graham

Featuring: Jason Chinn, Clarice Eckford, Patricia Zentilli with Susan Gilmour

Directed by Bradley Moss
Set & Costume Design: Cory Sincennes
Lighting Design: Scott Peters
Composer/Sound Design: Darrin Hagen
Stage Manager: Tracey Byrne

Head Carpenter: Andre-Michel Lavoie
Carpenter: Tyler Herman
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Audio Head: Tyler Herman
Lighting Head: Scott Peters
Backstage Crew: Tyler Ferguson
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Working on Beth Graham’s play has conjured memories of my Dad’s mother, my grandmother Daisy Moss. She was the hub of our family; gatherings always occurred at my grandparent’s house, the good times and the sad times were both celebrated with lots of great food by Daisy. She was a quiet or shy type but she sure liked to giggle and she had a wonderful serenity about her.

When she was in her mid eighties she had Alzheimer’s and was in a home. One evening after dinner, when she was visiting my Dad’s house, we were playing dominos and Daisy kept asking who had played—as her short-term memory was now a real struggle. Then in the middle of the game she started to tell a story about when she was 21 and in a stage show in 1942. She was able to describe the show and so many details around it; how she got time off work to perform, how her part was small, how she remembered standing backstage for many hours, how it had helped her with her shyness, and how it led to meeting my grandfather. When she told us this story I knew in my heart it was her DNA that had been passed on to me and had helped me towards leading a life in the theatre.

Everything shifted in our family even before Daisy passed away because we lost her as the hub of our family, and now my Dad’s two brothers and two sisters are still trying to figure out how to gather and where to gather with eight grand kids and 12 great grand kids. When the hub of a family is lost it is like everyone is flung into outer space. It is the hub that keeps everyone attached, grounded and connected, or as Beth Graham describes Bernice Trimble in her play, these special folks have a gravitational pull to them. They seem to easily attract family around them, but it is because they call and write and reach out with news of family members and they help keep us all revolving around each other.

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How did you get into play writing?
I’ve always liked to write. I did the whole ‘dark poetry’ thing, as a teenager. Then, I wrote a few short stories. I studied acting in University and that is how I, eventually, found my way into playwriting.

What was the first play you wrote? Why did you write it?
I began writing collaboratively with Daniela Vlaskalic and Charlie Tomlinson. We wrote a play for the Edmonton Fringe in 1999 called ‘The Drowning Girls’. Daniela, Charlie and I all met at the University of Alberta. Daniela and I were in the same acting class. After graduating, we wanted to continue working together. We were reading plays and looking for one to do. For whatever reason, we couldn’t find a play that we all agreed on. Then, with much bravado and a bit of naivety, we thought, “hey, let’s write one ourselves.”

You are also an accomplished actor. How do the skills of an actor feed into play writing and vice versa?
I definitely approach playwriting from an actor’s perspective. For me, it’s all about living through the imagination, finding the character’s voice, their intention. When I write, I often act it out, talk out loud. My dog thinks I’m insane.

What inspired you to write The Gravitational Pull of Bernice Trimble?
A whole bunch of things inspired the play. It’s hard to put my finger on one incident or inspiration. I had been thinking about my parents getting older and imagining how I would handle that, how I would cope. My biggest fear, apart from death, is losing my mind. Our memories are who we are, so when we lose those, we lose ourselves. When we witness someone else losing their memory, we lose them. They become strangers. It’s terrifying. I wanted to explore that fear. I wanted to imagine how I might react if I was in the same situation, as Iris, as Bernice, as Sarah and as Peter.

When did you write the first draft of Bernice? What was the history of its development from there?
I wrote the first draft in the Citadel Playwright’s Forum in the fall of 2010. There were re-writes and workshops (Colleen Murphy and Brian Dooley gave me a great deal of valuable feedback during the play’s development). Then, I went to the Banff Playwrights Colony with the play in 2012. Philip Akin, the artistic director of Obsidian Theatre, had been on the reading committee for Banff. While I was in Banff, he called me up and asked me if Obsidian Theatre could produce it at Factory Theatre. I said, “Hell, yeah!”

Has the play changed at all since the production from Factory Theatre? Or are you the type that likes to be done with it?
The play has changed very slightly from its production at Factory Theatre. I’m not the type to be done with a play. I love to tinker! I have to be careful because sometimes I tinker too much.
Why focus on the character of Iris rather than the title character Bernice Trimble?

Iris’ voice was the one that told me the story. My heart went out to her. That’s the only way I can explain it. It’s just how the play emerged. The play isn’t about the disease or about the decision that Bernice makes. It’s about family. In a way, it’s a love letter to all the mothers out there.

Was there a particular dynamic of “family” that you wanted to explore?

I was really interested in exploring the mother daughter relationship. For me, it is a wonderfully rich and complicated dynamic. I began with that relationship and then the rest of the family emerged. I ended up seeing the family from the middle child’s perspective. Sarah, the oldest wears her heart on her sleeve and has no problem sounding off. Peter, the youngest, is very private and withdrawn. Iris, the middle child, lies somewhere in between. She identifies with both of her siblings and is also wildly frustrated with them at times. I like contradictions and extremes. The three children reflect that. Even though we have known people all of our lives they still have the ability to surprise us. Every family is different but I hope everyone will see elements of their own family dynamics reflected on stage.

Does anyone in your family have a gravitational pull of their own?

Oh yeah. Family pulls me. Both of my parents pull. That’s why I pick up the phone. I just start wondering how they’re doing or I see something that reminds me of them and I get pulled in. They are a force in my life.

Do you have any advice for aspiring playwrights?

Write, write, write.

Finally, what non-theatre (or art) related activities do you enjoy in your down time?

Walk my dog, yoga, read, shovel snow, the usual.
Tracey Byrne – Stage Manager
Recent Stage Management credits include; THE TAMING OF THE SHREW for the Freewill Shakespeare Festival and Assistant Stage Manager for ROMEO AND JULIET for the Citadel Theatre. Special thanks to Bradley Moss and everyone at Theatre Network for their guidance and support! It has been a blast working with such a wonderful and talented ensemble! Tracey sends her love to John, Liam, Grace and Emma.

Jason Chinn – Peter
Jason is an Edmonton based actor and playwright. Recent credits include PERVERT and VICTORIA MARTIN: MATH TEAM QUEEN (Northern Light Theatre), THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN (Studio Theatre), MR. MARMALADE (Summerworks/Outside the March), and THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST (Capitol Theatre). As playwright: MURDERERS CONFESSION AT CHRISTMASTIME (Summerworks, Theatre Network Performance Series), I LOVE YOUR HAIR AND OTHER CONVERSATIONS, commissioned by Workshop West Theatre for Theatre Yes! (The National Elevator Project, Skirts a Fire Festival), Chekhov’s THE SEAGULL, commissioned by the Canadian Centre for Theatre Creation (University of Alberta, MacEwan University), INTIMACY for Surreal Soreal’s Sartre’s Shorts, and LADIES WHO LYNCH (Azimuth Theatre, Canoe Festival). Jason is a Sterling and Dora nominee. He is developing his next play AEGISTHES AND ZEPHYRINUS at the Citadel Theatre Playwrights’ Forum.

Clarice Eckford – Iris
Clarice Eckford was last seen at the 2014 Edmonton Fringe Festival in Whizzgigging Productions’ HER MARK – a play based on the poetry of Michael Crummey. Other credits include DOUBT at the Citadel Theatre; 448 PSYCHOSIS as part of the Indy Five Theatre Festival; THE LONESOME WEST with the Atlas Theatre Co-op; LOVE/HATE/KILL and POPTART at the Edmonton and Winnipeg Fringe Festivals; KINGFISHER DAYS with Covenant Theatre; and, THE LOVE COURSE with SPIRIT Theatre. Clarice received Sterling nominations for her work in KINGFISHER DAYS, THE LOVE COURSE and THE LONESOME WEST. She is a graduate of the BFA Acting Program, and she is a co-founder of Pony Productions, an award-winning independent company, known for its anthology plays.

Susan Gilmour – Bernice
Susan is an artist of international standing, having starred in Toronto, Stratford, on Broadway, in Los Angeles, across the US and Canada, and around the world. Her many credits include LES MISERABLES, INTO THE WOODS, EVITA, CATS, JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT, ANYTHING GOES, MAN OF LA MANCHA, OLIVER!, THE THREE PENNY OPERA, and the World Premier of PELAGIE, for which she received a Dora Mavor Moore Nomination. Since her recent move back to her hometown of Edmonton, Susan’s credits include the title role of THE DROWSY CHAPERONE, Marmee in LITTLE WOMEN, The Baroness in SOUND OF MUSIC, Lady of The Lake in SPAMALOT (all for The Citadel Theatre), and in this year’s Citadel/ Theatre Calgary production of MARY POPPINS, where she won the Calgary Theatre Critics Award for her portrayal of The Bird Woman, and “The Holy Terror” Miss Andrew. Susan is thrilled and honoured to be making her debut here at Theatre Network, in Beth Graham’s beautiful play, and with this wonderful company!
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Beth Graham – Playwright
Beth is an Edmonton-based playwright, actor and guardian to a pomeranian cross named Oscar. Beth wrote THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF BERNICE TRIMBLE as part of the 2010 playwright’s forum at the Citadel Theatre. The play premiered at Factory Theatre (co-produced with Obsidian Theatre) last fall and will be published by Playwrights Canada Press in the Spring of 2015. Beth is also one of the co-creators of THE DROWNING GIRLS, which premiered at the Edmonton Fringe Festival, was re-written for the 2008 Alberta Theatre Projects PlayRites Festival and went on to tour nationally. Other co-creations include: MULES, COMRADES, and VICTOR AND VICTORIA’S TERRIFYING TALE OF TERRIBLE THINGS. She is a graduate of the University of Alberta’s BFA acting program.

Darrin Hagen – Composer/Sound Design
Darrin Hagen is an award-winning playwright, composer and drag artiste. He is the author of The Edmonton Queen, which won a Sterling Award and was published in book form by Brindle & Glass Publishing. Darrin is the Artistic Director of Guys In Disguise, which recently celebrated a quarter-century of creating drag comedies that have toured across North America. He has received 7 Sterling awards for his work in the Edmonton theatre scene. Other plays by Darrin include BUDDY (nominated for Outstanding New Play); WITH BELLS ON (nominated for Outstanding New Play); BITCHSLAP!, THE NEO-NANCIES: HITLER’S KICKLINE; TORNADO MAGNET: A SALUTE TO TRAILER COURT WOMEN (published by Brindle & Glass); PSYCHOBABBLE, DRAGULA and FLORA & FAUNA’S FIELD TRIP (co-written with Trevor Schmidt); PILEDRIVER! (co-written with Wes Borg); MENS ARE STOOPID, WOMENS ARE CRA-AZY (co-written with Chris Craddock). Darrin has also directed and curated the legendary Loud & Queer Cabaret, which recently had its 20th anniversary, and is the editor of Queering the Way: The Loud & Queer Anthology, a collection of many of the writers that had been mentored by this unique event. In 2005, Hagen was named one of 100 Edmontonians of the Century. To the best of his knowledge, he’s the only Drag Queen on that list. Last year he was inducted into the Q Hall of Fame Canada for his lifelong contribution to the quality of life for Canada’s LGBTQ community.

Bradley Moss – Director
Bradley is thrilled to be directing Beth Graham’s THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF BERNICE TRIMBLE and to be working with such a talented team. Bradley is a MFA graduate in directing from the University Alberta. He joined Theatre Network in 1996 to create the multidisciplinary emerging artist festival – Nextfest. Recent productions: last season’s Sterling Award Winning LITTLE ONE, DRIVING MISS DAISY, PIG GIRL, the Sterling Award Winning LET THE LIGHT OF DAY THROUGH, WHERE THE BLOOD MIXES, IN ON IT, MOVING ALONG, MICHEL & TI-JEAN, TWELFTH NIGHT, PUBLIC SPEAKING, DOG, HARD CORE LOGO: LIVE, POSTER BOYS, THUNDERSTICK, BUDDY, WITHOUT YOU, ALIAS GODOT, MISERY, A BEAUTIFUL VIEW, CLOSER AND CLOSER APART, the Sterling Award Winning play SUMMER OF MY AMAZING LUCK, TRUE WEST, GIRL IN THE GOLDFISH BOWL, THE LEISURE SOCIETY, HOSANNA, MARION BRIDGE, A SKULL IN CONNEMARA, the Sterling Award Winning glam rock musical HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH, and HIGH LIFE.
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Scott Peters – Lighting Design
Scott is thrilled to be back for Theatre Network’s 40th season. In 1974 Scott was 11 years old and living with his family in Shearwater, Nova Scotia. He had just seen a touring production of Theatre New Brunswick’s FRANKENSTEIN, and a Dalhousie University production of HEDDA GABLER. His sister was dating a stage carpenter who took him to see The Phantom of the Paradise (a brand new movie), and he was compulsively listening to JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR on the record player. Scott’s mother Iris was a stage performer in England growing up, and encouraged all the artistic pursuits of her children. Scott has been a theatre technician, writer, producer, designer, educator, Production Manager, and Technical Director for 25 years in Edmonton and beyond. He is also a musician who co-founded the local band Captain Tractor. Enjoy.

Cory Sincennes – Set/Costume Design
Cory is a award winning designer currently residing in Edmonton, AB. His set, costume, lighting and video designs have been seen throughout Canada, as well as in Germany, Austria, England, Belgium and Russia. He has received both national and international recognition for his design work and is fast becoming one of Canada’s most sought after talents. Cory earned a degree in Architectural Studies from Carleton University before studying at Ryerson Theatre School in Toronto. He also holds a MFA in Theatre Design from the University of Alberta. Recent Designs: MARY POPPINS, NEXT TO NORMAL, Theatre Calgary/Citadel Theatre, SPAMALOT, THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW, Citadel Theatre, CHICAGO, BOEING BOEING, Mayfield Dinner Theatre, MICHEL AND TI-JEAN, LET THE LIGHT OF DAY THROUGH, Theatre Network, MUMP AND SMOOT: CRACKED, ATP, LES MISERABLES, WCT; LIBERATION DAYS, Theatre Calgary. www.corysincennes.com

Patricia Zentilli – Sarah
Patricia Zentilli has performed across Canada in Theatre, Film, Television and Cabaret. She is very happy to be making her Theatre Network debut. Theatre credits include Mabel in MACK AND MABEL (Plain Jane Theatre), Izzy in RABBIT HOLE (Neptune Theatre), Audrey in LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS (Canadian Stage-Dora nomination), Olive in THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE (Sterling nomination- Western Canada Theatre and Mayfield Theatre) and Cathy in THE LAST 5 YEARS (Manitoba Theatre Centre). She has performed her solo cabarets at the Toronto International Jazz Festival, Toronto Centre for The Arts, Toronto Cabaret Festival, as well as The Club at the Citadel Theatre here in Edmonton. Film and TV credits include 2 seasons as Susan on THE JANE SHOW (Global), RICK MERCER REPORT, DAN FOR MAYOR, THIS IS WONDERLAND (CBC), and most recently DELMER AND MARTA for (APTN) and TINY PLASTIC MEN (Superchannel). She has also recorded an album of cabaret/theatre songs with pianist Patti Loach called Pull Me Through which is available on iTunes. Patricia lives in Edmonton with her husband Farren Timoteo and their 4-year-old son Leonardo.
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Join the cast, crew and playwright of The Gravitational Pull of Bernice Trimble as they are joined by members of Dying With Dignity for an in-depth discussion about the themes and ideas presented in the play. How does a family cope with the declining health of a loved-one? Do people have a gravitational pull of their own? Bring your own stories, reflections and be part of the conversation.

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