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# MÉTIS MUTT Written & Performed by Sheldon Elter

#### Original Production co-written with Kenneth Brown

# Featuring: Sheldon Elter\*

#### Directed by Ron Jenkins

Stage Manager, Set & Lighting Design: **Tessa Stamp** Sound Design: **Aaron Macri** Projection Design: **T. Erin Gruber** House Technician: **Tyler Ferguson** 

Original Production co-written with Kenneth Brown

\*Appears courtesy of the Canadian Actors Equity Association

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# **A NOTE FROM SHELTON ELTER**

#### PLAYWRIGHT & PERFORMER

I have always hoped that people will walk away from this show questioning their use of racial stereotypes in everyday conversation, in jokes, stories, etc. In this day and age, anyone can film us, record us, and take our words out of context and twist our meaning. We must all educate ourselves on language and context so that we can truly take responsibility of our own words. In truth, it is getting harder for me to continue the use of the word, "Indian", in my everyday language. In the context of the show it may work, but in my daily conversations it will have to change. Being bullied for being an "Indian", or being bullied for not being "Indian" enough, has always made me feel that I have earned the right to use that word, despite its social and political inaccuracies. I have literally fought people about this word. Times have changed. We are finding clearer language to use in the proper context. I will have to change too.

The main thing I hope people will understand is that through my own unique, Indigenous experience - despite the harsh realities of history and oppression, loss of culture and identity, dysfunctional family life as a result of intergenerational trauma, and the present day society's inherent need to define me through colonial measurements - at the very least I can take responsibility for my own actions and create positive change for myself one day at time to overcome all odds. Hopefully, so can everyone else, whatever their story is.

I have been very lucky to have had time to develop this piece over some time now. It has given me the confidence to push forward, despite the fact that some audience members may even walk away completely missing my point. If my play can at least create discussion, then hopefully through active, fractious disagreement can we all hold each other accountable, including those we choose to lead us.



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# THE HISTORY OF MÉTIS MUTT

#### AS TOLD BY SHELDON ELTER

MÉTIS MUTT began as a 7min monologue for a vocal masque project while I was attending Grant MacEwan College's Theatre Arts program in 2001. I performed it at the Roxy in summer of 2001 at Nextfest. My drama instructor and mentor, Kenneth Brown, asked me if I would be willing to turn it into a full length one man show. After graduating from the Theatre Arts Program in 2002, Ken and I spent the summer writing the show together and presented it at Nextfest. It went really well and launched us into a sold out Edmonton Fringe run that same summer, winning 2 Sterling Awards for Best New Fringe Work, and Best Fringe Performance by an Actor. The show toured Ottawa for the Magnetic North Theatre Festival's inaugural launch. It then went on to tour New Zealand, and all over Canada. It was later adapted for a high school tour with Azimuth Theatre that toured rural Alberta. The play then went on to become more of a motivational speaking tool. It toured to many reserves, and settlements in its simplest form with only me, a chair, and a guitar, followed by a drama, self-empowerment workshop, helping students build confidence through telling their own stories.

In 2003, Theatre Network presented MÉTIS MUTT at the Roxy. It was the first time some of my immediate family had seen it.

In 2017, former Artistic Director, Ryan Cunningham of Native Earth Performing Arts, asked if I would be interested in doing the show again, but in Toronto at their theatre. I told him that I had never done it in Toronto, and that if I was going to do it again, I would want to make some changes and breathe some new life into it. He agreed. With the help of the amazing Stage Manager and designer, Tessa Stamp, Media Designer, Erin T. Gruber, Sound Designer, Aaron Macri, and under the new direction of Ron Jenkins, the play came back to life. I knew that with this amazing team, the piece would become a theatre play again and embrace some more of its technical elements while keeping the integrity of the original work.



#### Metis Mutt <sub>by</sub> Sheldon Elter



Directed by Kenneth Brown Stage Manager - Jeremy Baumung VENUE #10 YARDBIRD SUITE



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MÉTIS MUTT

# THEATRE NETWORK BIOS



#### Sheldon Elter – Playwright/Performer

Sheldon is a Métis actor, writer, stand-up comic, musician and director originally from Northern Alberta. As a stand-up comic, he has emceed and been host at both Breaker's, and Dave's Comedy Saloon, and has toured western Canada twice as the opening comedy act for Hypnotist, Marc Savard. Sheldon was also a Top 14 finalist on Canadian Idol in 2006. TV credits include: HANK WILLIAMS' FIRST NATION, CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN NUTS (Gemini, and Canadian Comedy nominated writer) and DELMER AND MARTA (APTN, writer, co-star, and Co-Executive Producer), HELL ON WHEELS, (AMC). He is also a core-member of the ukulele rock band sensation, The Be Arthurs. His theatre credits include: CRAZY FOR YOU (Citadel Theatre), HAIR THE MUSICAL (Mayfield Dinner Theatre), ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, EVANGELINE, ONE MAN TWO GUVNORS (Citadel Theatre), BEARS (Pyretic Productions), TARTUFFE, SOUND OF MUSIC, ENRON (National Arts Centre), IT'S A BIRD! IT'S A PLANE! IT'S SUPERMAN! - THE MUSICAL, FIORELLO, ANKLES AWIEIGH (Plane Jane Theatre), MARVELOUS PILGRIMS (Teatro La Quindicina) THE CRACKWALKER (Kill Your Television Theatre), THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE, SHEAR MADNESS, THE BUDDY HOLLY STORY and THE FULL MONTY (Mayfield Dinner Theatre), BEOWULF (Workshop West Theatre), L'HOMME DE LA MANCHA (L'Unithéâtre), HROSES: AN AFFRONT TO REASON (Maggie Tree Theatre), NEVERMORE (Catalyst Theatre).



#### T. Erin Gruber – Projection Design

T. Erin Gruber is an independent theatre designer with experience in set, lighting, costume and projected media design. She is a graduate with distinction of the BFA Theatre Design program at the University of Alberta and works across the country in theatres of all shapes and sizes. What excites her most about working in theatre is collaboration and conversation with generous, passionate minds. She has worked on the development and production of two independent collective-theatre creations working with and leading teams of interdisciplinary artists to create something brand new. She is also a founding member of the ShowStages video collective, a group that strives to guestion and expand the boundaries of projected media's role in theatre. Her most recent projects include: THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT TIME (Set, Lighting and Costume Design, Citadel Theatre and RMTC), WITCH HUNT AT THE STRAND (Set, Lighting and Projection Design, Workshop West Playwright's Theatre), MACBETH and A CHORUS LINE and AS YOU LIKE IT (Assistant Set Designer, Stratford Festival), CATEGORY E (Production Design, Sterling Awards for Lighting and Projected Media Design, Maggie Tree Collective), BEARS (Environment Designer, Pyretic Productions), A BOMB IN THE HEART (Production Designer, Downstage Theatre, Betty Mitchell Nomination), MONSTROSITIES (Video and Lighting Designer, Maggie Tree Collective, Sterling Nomination). For more information visit her online: eringruber.com, showstages.com

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# THEATRE NETWORK BIOS



#### Ron Jenkins – Director

Ron Jenkins is an Edmonton based freelance director and playwright. Ron is thrilled to be working on Metis Mutt here at Theatre Network. Selected Credit include: THE 39 STEPS, JULIUS CAESAR (TSC) RICHARD III (TSC), SUCKER (HAT) TURN OF THE SCREW (Vertigo) ROMEO AND JULIET (TSC) CHASING CHAMPIONS (Ship's), PLAYING WITH FIRE (Citadel/PTE) OTHELLO (TSC) HIGH LIFE (GZT) ENRON (NAC) THE MOTHERF#\$#ER WITH THE HAT (ATP) GOOD NIGHT DESDEMONA, GOOD MORNING JULIET (Belfry Theatre) 1984 (Saint John Theatre Company) NEXT TO NORMAL (Theatre Calgary/Citadel) PLAYING WITH FIRE: THE THEO FLEURY STORY (ATP), CHICAGO (Mayfield Dinner Theatre) THE FORBIDDEN PHOENIX (Citadel Theatre), EXTINCTION SONG (Citadel Theatre) THE TRESPASSERS (Belfry/Vancouver Playhouse) BASH'D (Off Broadway), MARY'S WEDDING (Workshop West), MESA (Workshop West), and RESPCTABLE, CONFESSIONS OF A PAPER BOY (Ghost River Theatre), THE BLACK RIDER (November Theatre Co.), THE RED PREIST (Eight Ways to Say Goodbye) and THE BLUE LIGHT (Alberta Theatre Projects), STEEL KISS, EUREKA, and THE HORROR, THE HORROR (Skid). Ron has won ten Sterling Awards as a director and playwright and two Betty Mitchell Awards for Direction for THE BLACK RIDER and PLAYING WITH FIRE. In 2013 he was honored with a CCA Award in Ottawa for his direction of ENRON. Ron is also the winner of the 2004 Syncrude Award for Artistic Innovation and a Critter Award Winner for Playing With Fire. Ron was shortlisted for the 2007 and 2010 Siminovitch Prize in theatre for Direction.



#### Aaron Macri – Sound Design

Aaron Macri is an award-winning composer, sound designer, sound recordist, mixer, live technician, and multi-instrumentalist. Aaron composed songs and music for the Dora Award-winning Musical Comedy BOYGROOVE and won a GLAAD media award for BASH'D! A GAY RAP OPERA in 2007. He was nominated for an AMPIA award for music for seasons one and three of the sketch TV show CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN NUTS, broadcast nationally on APTN. He has also received AMPIA nominations for his music on the feature length film TRUCK STOP BLOODSUCKERS on Bite TV, the first season of the series TINY PLASTIC MEN on Super Channel & both the pilot of & first season of DELMER & MARTA on APTN.



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# THEATRE NETWORK BIOS



#### Tessa Stamp – Stage Manager, Set & Lighting Design

Tessa Stamp is an Edmonton born theatre professional, entrepreneur, and found object artist. A dancer first, Tessa has made her career in technical theatre. She travelled the world as a pirate for 5 years, ran away with the circus in 2007 and eventually landed back in Edmonton in 2009. Tessa enjoys set, lighting and costume design and has been building a lot of theatrical pieces for unlikely clients. Recent credits include – BOUTIQUE HOTEL ROOM at MacEwan University Residences, CONSTELLATIONS (Set and Lighting Design - Shadow Theatre), Alberta's NDP Caucus 2016 and 2017 Parade Season (Float design), THE SUPINE COBBLER (Set and Costume Design, Maggie Tree). Tessa is delighted to be Stage Managing MÉTIS MUTT, a show that has been a part of her life periodically for over 16 years. It has laid down roots in her heart in that place where true friendship and forgiveness live and the stories of our journey are never lost.



#### TALK-BACK NIGHT With Sheldon Elter

Friday February 23 Following the performance 9:30pm FREE OF CHARGE

Join Theatre Network's Artistic & Executive Director Bradley Moss as he leads an intimate discussion with *Métis Mutt* creator Sheldon Elter and the team behind the production. Even if you've seen the show, you are welcome to attend this talk-back.

# A CONVERSATION WITH SHELDON ELTER





#### Thanks for taking the time to chat with me, Sheldon. I'd like to start at the beginning. What is the origin of the play's title, MÉTIS MUTT?

While I was in college at Grant MacEwan and my instructor, mentor, and co-creator of MÉTIS MUTT, Kenneth Brown, was doing a lesson on vocal masque. We were asked to think of a theme that would represent ourselves. Being a young procrastinator, and a pothead, I forgot and hadn't put any thought into it. We were in class when he asked us to share our titles. I was sweating bullets and thinking hard, but had nothing. After hearing some of my classmate's titles, I started formulating something. It was my turn, and I just blurted out, "MÉTIS MUTT!" Everyone laughed. I secretly was relieved, and now had to figure out what that title meant.

#### And a great title it is. Do you identify yourself as an indigenous artist?

I do identify as an Indigenous artist. I think I was always defined as one whether I wanted to be or not. I think that it has opened many doors and provided me opportunities that many of my other theatre colleagues would never have.

#### While it opened up doors and opportunities, do you feel that title limits you or has emboldened you?

I used to worry as a young, emerging artist that it would hinder me, or pigeonhole me, and that I would only ever play Native roles. I am not sure why I thought that might be a bad thing, but I wanted to be able to have the opportunity to play all kinds of parts. My friend, Shaun Johnston, a wonderful artist and all around great guy, said he worried that he would always be type cast to play bad guys because that was all he ever seemed to be cast as. He said he got his first big break in film working with Gordon Pinsent, and asked him some advice about being type cast. He said Mr. Pinsent laughed for an uncomfortable amount of time before gathering himself to say, "Young man, you don't have to worry about being type cast. You have to worry about being cast!" Beautiful advice for any budding actor.

## HOSTED BY LEWIS CARDINAL

#### This story seems like it would be difficult for you to share. Why do you keep revisiting it and sharing it?

It is very difficult to share this story and every time I do it I ask myself this very question. It always takes me until my first performance in front of the audience to be reminded of why this piece of work still has value and should be told. After the show, people of all genders and ethnicities speak as if I was telling their story. Each time I am reminded that if I can be brave enough to tell my truth as best I can, that the story becomes more human and relatable.

#### At the same time, Truth can be difficult, painful, and yet so necessary to move forward and gain the necessary knowledge to grow. You look at a lot of negative stereotypes through off-colour "jokes" in the play. Why do you think you were encouraged to tell those jokes when starting your comedy career?

Simply, because they got laughs. Great laughs, in fact. Sometimes, 1500 people laughing at my stuff. I was rewarded with laughter, but I was too young to fully comprehend the impact of what I was saying. This began at an early age as a class clown. I grew up in a small town where I experienced a lot of racism. I learned quickly that if I made negative, stereotypical jokes about Natives, I could win over those who would likely make fun of me first. I will always carry the shame of unknowingly perpetuating these negative stereotypes of my own people.

# Shame can be such a teacher and a catalyst for change. Do you encounter feelings of "responsibility" to the indigenous community to share this story?

I often feel immense, overwhelming responsibility to the Indigenous community. I have often been called a "leader," a "role model," and many other titles that scared the crap out of me. Here I am sharing all my dark secrets about myself onstage, and I am still being called these things? I often feel that people expect I am not only speaking on behalf of the Metis, but on behalf of all Indigenous people. I can't do that. I have for too much to learn. It puts a lot of pressure on me to feel that I should have all the answers. I don't.

## What are the main messages you hope the community can resonate with or learn from?

I am constantly learning who I am, and slowly learning to take responsibility for my own actions. I hope my audiences know that they don't have to have all the answers right now either. I hope they are inspired to create positive change for themselves.

continues on page 20



Lewis Cardinal is a board member with Theatre Network and has spent most of his professional life in public service. His long track record of public service includes his involvement with many Human Rights and Social Advocacy Boards.

## A CONVERSATION WITH SHELDON ELTER

#### HOSTED BY LEWIS CARDINAL

continued from page 19

#### Often times storytelling is used as a way in which to make and inspire positive change. Can you talk a bit about the importance of storytelling you had in your life and how that lead into a passion for the arts?

I had some understanding of my own cultural importance of storytelling growing up. It was how we passed down knowledge. Stories carry powerful medicine through teachings. But I think at the heart of it, I just wanted to truly be remembered. I seemed to have a knack for telling stories, and it seemed the more I told them, the better the stories got, and the more people remembered them. (because they had heard it a thousand times)

# It's easy to see this as your story, but there is a lot in it about your mother. How did that evolve as you developed the piece over the years?

I am very lucky I have my mother's blessing to tell these stories. The play in the past mainly focused on the relationship with my father. It still does, but as the play has grown and changed over the years, I started thinking about the great lengths my mother had gone through to protect me. It was my mother's bravery to finally leave my father for good, breaking a cycle of family violence. I wanted to make that clearer in the piece. She is my hero.

#### I guess, in a way, storytelling can be an act of heroism and healing. Pieces like Metis Mutt can bring up a lot of feelings and emotions in audiences. Why is that an important part of healing?

I think when we see and hear others sharing their stories, it can sometimes give us the confidence to share our own. I have gotten a lot of disclosures over the years doing this play. I think it helps audience members feel brave enough to begin their own healing by first voicing what is troubling them.

# If the mature Sheldon of today could talk and advise the growing teen artist Sheldon, what would you give – what would you say? Or, would you say anything?

Wow. Umm...Let's see. "Stay away from cocaine, crack, and meth. Every time you think you are giving anything your all, if you dig deeper, you'll find more. And don't just be an actor. Write more, sing more, paint, draw, dance, whatever. Just keep creating. If you are just an actor, you will always be waiting for someone to give you a job." I don't know if that would inspire my younger self, or if I would look at me and say, "Who is this chubby, jaded old fart? And what does he know?"

#### Do you see yourself still doing this show in 10 years?

Maybe. But it will be a different show, because I will be different. If it continues, it needs to grow and change as me, the artist does as well.



# **PRODUCTION ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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#### January 30, 2018

We would like to extend a warm thank you to all of our volunteers that have helped us in the past. Also, to those who continue to volunteer with us we appreciate your dedication and commitment to the success of Theatre Network. Bravo!

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JABBERWOCKY Created by The Old Trout Puppet Workshop World Premiere November 9, 2017 Photos by Brad Gibbons dephotographicsca









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