



2013/2014 Season

Unity (1918)

March 13 – 22, 2014

As WWI ends and a mysterious flu pandemic nears, the inhabitants of a small Saskatchewan town deal with the trials of life and death.

2002 Governor General's Award

Written & Directed by Kevin Kerr
(Assoc. Professor, Writing Dept.)
Set & Lighting Designer: Allan Stichbury
Costume Designer: Halley Fulford
Composer and Music Director: Francis Melling
Sound Designer: Colette Habel
Stage Manager: Kristen Iversen

Pre-Show Lecture: March 14 at 7pm
Writer Kevin Kerr speaks about revisiting the play as a director for the first time, a decade and a half after the work that launched him onto the national stage.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
February 20, 2014



University
of Victoria

HAVE YOU GOT YOUR FLU SHOT YET?

On the brink of new epidemics, Kevin Kerr directs his play of the Spanish Flu for the first time

With many pharmacies across BC running out of flu shots this year, the retelling of the 1918 Spanish Flu's impact during a half-forgotten chapter in Canadian history is more relevant now than ever.

The University of Victoria's Phoenix Theatre presents Kevin Kerr's Governor General's Award-winning play **Unity (1918)** from March 13-22, 2014. While chronicling the global pandemic of the Spanish Flu that advanced its way across Canada on the heels of the First World War, the play is a touching and intensely human portrayal of the citizens of the isolated town of Unity, Saskatchewan. Accounts of fear and death are intertwined with moments of joy and desire, as told through the pages of one young woman's diary.

"Unity is about risk," says Kerr. "When we come in contact with one another, we're risking contamination of disease – but also of ideas, fear, and the exposure of the dark parts of yourself." Outbreaks of SARS, the H1N1 flu – and now the H1N7 strain – have since evoked similar reactions to the spread of disease and fear of human interaction. In 1918, spitting in public was banned and masks were mandatory. Our day-to-day preventative measures now include the pervasive use of hand sanitizer and the demise of the handshake, but this distancing has not reduced our intrinsic need for human connection. *"We see ourselves through contact with each other,"* says Kerr. *"Fear is part of the backdrop in Unity, but in the foreground is desire: desire for love, intimacy, for understanding and for home."*

A decade and a half after writing **Unity (1918)**, Kerr is revisiting his play from a director's perspective for the very first time. Born and raised in BC, he spent his childhood summers with his family in his mother's hometown in Saskatchewan. *"My time there reminded me of the power of community, of the strength in having those close connections found in the smaller towns."* Kerr is the founding member of Vancouver's Electric Company Theatre where he has been working as a playwright, director, actor and producer since 1996. In 2012, he joined the faculty of UVic's Department of Writing. His plays include *You Are Very Star*, *Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla*, and *Studies in Motion*, which toured nationally and was adapted into a feature film. He co-wrote the film/theatre hybrid *Tear the Curtain!* which premiered at Vancouver's Arts Club Theatre and toured to Canadian Stage Company in Toronto.

While the story explores a historical event, Kerr's vision of the production examines the past through a contemporary lens. Allan Stichbury's set and lighting design offer a minimalist and flexible space for various locations, from a country homestead, to a telegraph and telephone office, to an undertaker's mortuary. The 360-degree, wraparound set surrounds the actors and audience like a vast prairie landscape. While referencing the rural clothing of the era, Halley Fulford's costumes capture the transformation of each character as their stories progress. Composer and music director (as well as actor) Francis Melling and sound designer Colette Habel have crafted a musical landscape inspired by farm machinery, alt-rock and traditional Ukrainian music, while Kristen Iversen stage manages the play.

Studied in most Canadian university theatre programs, *Unity (1918)* is *"one of those quiet sensations of Canadian theatre"* (Montreal Gazette) and *"... a work of powerful and moving familiarity that celebrates love, sex, death, and the sorrowful mysteries of war and plague. It's also painfully funny."* (Globe & Mail) *"Unity (1918) is written with assuredness that easily mixes profundity with hearty laughs... Kerr shows a gift for creating genuinely ordinary people who can expand on great thoughts even as they trip over their own flaws."* (Vancouver Sun)

Join us **Friday, March 14 at 7pm** for a FREE preshow lecture with director Kevin Kerr who will talk about revisiting this play as a director for the first time, a decade and a half after writing the work that launched him onto the national stage. The performances for **Unity (1918)** are as follows:

Public Preview Performances 8pm: March 11 & 12

Evening Performances 8pm: March 13 (Opening), 14 (Lecture), 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22

Matinee Performances 2pm: Saturday, March 22

Single Tickets: \$14 Student / \$20 Senior / \$22 Adult / \$24 Weekends @ 8pm (Previews \$7, available after 5pm)

Phoenix Box Office Opens: March 4 in person or by calling: **(250) 721-8000**.

Phoenix Theatre Media Contact:

Adrienne Holierhoek, Marketing & Communications
Department of Theatre
email: aholierh@uvic.ca | 250-721-7992
www.phoenixtheatres.ca | Box Office: 250-721-8000