



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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University
of Victoria

LOVE & COMEDY IN THE TIME OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Poignant comedy imagines our foreseeable future

Phoenix Theatre
2019/20 Season

3 **Comic Potential**

February 13– 22, 2020

By Alan Ayckbourn

A wickedly funny sci-fi satire offers a cautionary tale about society's romance with technology.

Directed by Conrad Alexandrowicz
Set Designer Leah Anthony
Costume Designer Misty Buxton
Lighting Designer Harry Zhe Lin
Sound Designer Glen Shafer
Stage Manager Devon Vecchio

4 **The Children's Hour**

March 12 – 21, 2020

By Lillian Hellman

Directed by Peter McGuire

Two courageous school headmistresses risk everything to fight for the truth to be heard.

Department of Theatre &
Phoenix Theatre Media Contact:
Adrienne Holierhoek, Communications
Manager, Department of Theatre
aholierh@uvic.ca | (250) 721-7992

www.phoenixtheatres.ca
Box Office: (250) 721-8000

In 2018, reports of Amazon's virtual assistant Alexa randomly bursting into hysterical laughter raised questions about the humanity of artificial intelligence. Is it possible for a robot to have a sense of humour? Could we form meaningful relationships or even fall in love with robots? Although written in 1998, Alan Ayckbourn's futuristic satire **Comic Potential** foresees these questions and asks a few of its own. Phoenix Theatre presents this romantic sci-fi comedy at UVic, running February 13-22, 2020.

One of the most inventive plays by Britain's grand master of comedy, **Comic Potential** is set in the not-too-distant future, where actors are replaced with convincingly lifelike robots known as "actoids." When an aspiring young writer visits a TV studio, he discovers the charming android Jacie Tripplethree (serial number JCF 31333) and realizes that the programming glitch that makes her laugh hysterically also makes her more human. Will Adam lose his heart to a robot? This wickedly funny satire looks at the rise of artificial intelligence, asking the question: what makes us human?

"It's a comedy with a sting in its tail," says director Conrad Alexandrowicz. "In the age of today's online assistants, it's becoming more and more important to figure out how we proceed in a rapidly shifting technological landscape."

A frequent director and long-time professor of movement for actors at UVic's Department of Theatre, Alexandrowicz's background in physical theatre lends itself well to this script, which not only explores technology in our lives, but also what makes for great comedy: good timing, the idea that less is more, the element of surprise... and maybe a custard pie!

While the audience will be laughing, Alexandrowicz also hopes **Comic Potential** will spark conversation. *"What does it mean to be human? Are we nothing more than the sum of our memories? What is our responsibility regarding 'personhood'?"* Alexandrowicz asks. *"I chose this play because it's a very funny piece of writing, yes, but also because it looks at what we're facing as we head into the next decade."*

This glimpse into the future is highlighted by a dedicated team of student designers. Fourth-year student Leah Anthony's set evokes the forced perspective grid of a TV sci-fi holodeck. Third-year student and costume designer Misty Buxton's colourful outfits imagine a futuristic aesthetic that is rooted in the trends of today. MFA design candidate Henry Zhe Lin and fourth-year student Glen Shafer design the lighting and sound respectively. Third-year student and stage manager Devon Vecchio ensures all these elements come together smoothly.

The public is also invited to a free **Preshow Lecture, Friday, February 14 at 7pm** with UVic Postdoctoral Research Fellow Edwin Hodge who will discuss the importance of sci-fi and other speculative fiction in exploring the human condition.

Performances for **Comic Potential** are as follows:

Public Previews @8pm: Tuesday & Wednesday, February 11 & 12 (Previews: \$8.00 after 5pm on day)

Opening Night @8pm: Thursday, February 13

Evenings @8pm: Tuesdays through Saturdays

Matinees @2pm: Saturdays, February 15* (with sign language interpretation) and February 22

Preshow Lecture @7pm: Friday, February 14

Sign Language Interpretation*: Saturday, February 15 at 2pm with Deaf interpreter Nigel Howard, and hearing interpreters Jen Ferris and Keith Brougham

Tickets: \$15 to \$28 (depending on day), Student Rush: \$16 (30 minutes at the door)

Phoenix Box Office: open February 4 - 22, Monday through Saturday from 12:00 to 8:30pm.

In person or charge by phone at **(250) 721-8000**.

Advisory: *Comic Potential* has some coarse language. Ages 14 +