

MEDIA RELEASE

Soulpepper presents Sharon Pollock's *Doc*

Toronto, ON – July 21, 2010 – **Albert Schultz**, Founding Artistic Director of Soulpepper Theatre Company, today announced that the company's production of **Sharon Pollock's** *Doc* will run August 19 – September 18, 2010, at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts.

Winner of both the Chalmers Canadian Play Award and the Governor General's Award for drama, *Doc* is a powerful and very personal play by one Canada's most celebrated playwrights, **Sharon Pollock**. With generosity and forgiveness, Pollock examines the scars and redemption of a daughter's relationship with her parents and her younger self. *Doc* premiered in 1984 at Theatre Calgary to critical acclaim.

Diana Leblanc directs **Derek Boyes**, **Carmen Grant**, **Jane Spidell** and **R H Thomson** as well as **Hannah Gross** in her Soulpepper and professional theatre debut.

Doc previews August 19, 2010, opens August 26, and runs until September 18, 2010 at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, located at 55 Mill Street, Building 49, in the Distillery Historic District. Tickets range from \$31.20 – \$75.33 (including 13% HST) and are available by calling the Young Centre box office at 416.866.8666 or by visiting soulpepper.ca. \$22 tickets are available for 21-30 year-olds at stageplay.ca. StagePlay is sponsored by TD Bank Financial Group.

Doc is generously supported by Fiona Garland and Andrew Bentley + Kevin and Roger Garland.

2010 Soulpepper Lead Sponsors are: Sun Life Financial, Scotiabank Group and TELUS. Soulpepper gratefully acknowledges annual operating support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council.

Soulpepper Theatre Company is an artist-founded, classical repertory theatre company with a three-tiered mandate: to present the world's greatest stories in vital Canadian interpretations; to train a new generation of theatre artists; and to inspire and enrich youth through mentorship and access programs.

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Soulpepper's Production images for *Doc* are available to download @:

http://www.soulpepper.ca/media/media_gallery.aspx

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BACKGROUND NOTES

A synopsis of this play doesn't do it justice: grown daughter returns to the family home having unfinished business with her domineering father. Both are haunted by events from their shared past. Both disagree on the reasons for those events. It may seem like familiar kitchen sink realism but what this bare bones description fails to mention is the play's brilliant structure, daring theatricality and the way the struggles of its passionately questioning characters touch our hearts.

At a talkback last year for Glengarry Glen Ross, a man in the audience said, "These characters speak to me of my experience, where I've been and what I've done." The same could also be said of the characters in Doc. At the play's heart are three meaty roles for women: Katie, the lonely young girl with big dreams, Catherine, the returning writer determined not to repeat her parents' mistakes, and Bob, their loving but tormented mother. And let's not forget Ev, the eponymous Doc, a charismatic, complex patriarch. All of them have big hearts and big flaws and they're not afraid to take a stand. Here, for example, is Katie on the Almighty: "If there is a God then I don't like him."

Doc is autobiographical, as Pollock freely admits in her introduction to the play. She too had a father who was a beloved doctor in the community and a difficult, often absent presence at home. All of the story's characters deal with the spectre of suicide, as their creator did. But if there are commonalities between the play and the playwright's own life, she is clear about the divisions as well. "If it was just my story, I would have put it in a letter and sent it to my family," she once said. "My father is Ev but Ev [the character] is not my father... [These characters] aren't really the people I know any more. They started out that way but now have grown past them."

The characters grew beyond autobiography (as well as kitchen sink realism) through the strength of Pollock's craft. What makes this play compelling after all these years is its structure, the way the writer chooses to tell the story. Rather than go from beginning to end in chronological order, she lets it rip with the force and unpredictability of memory. Though the scenes range back and forth in time, we are never confused. Pollock is in complete control of her material. Every word resonates with feeling, but it is all contained within a disciplined, fully imagined and rigorously detailed theatrical world.

Perhaps her most exciting choice involves Katie and Catherine. They are in fact the same character at two different times in her life. Many plays have used this device but few playwrights have dared to have two such characters speak directly to each other across time. It's a coup de théâtre and one that gets us by the heart. We can't help but wonder what we would say to our younger self, if we could speak to her and share our experiences with her. What have we forgotten of her point of view? What would meeting her again change in us?

BACKGROUND NOTES CONTINUED ...

Sharon Pollock describes herself as someone “engaged in an internal and eternal questioning of what is, what isn't and why.” She knows that definitive answers are impossible but, as with her characters, that doesn't stop her from continuing to search. In the confrontation between Catherine and the world she grew up in, some things are revealed and some remain forever a mystery. Father and daughter find their way to something both can live with. In this tender, unsparing portrait of one family, Pollock has given us five unforgettable characters and through them, a portrait of our society not so long ago, a portrait that speaks to us of our experience, of what we've done and where we've been.

Tidbits

- Perhaps fittingly, Sharon Pollock's youngest daughter, Amanda, created the role of Katie in the premiere production.
- Perhaps equally as fittingly, Hannah Gross, daughter of founding member Martha Burns, appears with us in this production. It is her first professional engagement.
- Sharon Pollock's father was well known in New Brunswick. George Everett Chalmers pioneered polio treatment in the Maritimes, was a member of the provincial legislature and, like the fictional Ev in the play, had a hospital named after him in Fredericton in 1974.

PLAYWRIGHT BIO

1936 – On April 19 in Fredericton, New Brunswick, a daughter, Mary Sharon, is born to doctor George Everett Chalmers and his wife – and former nurse – Eloise.

1937 – On October 19 the Chalmers family welcomes a son, Peter.

1940's – Sharon develops a passion for history and nurses a desire to become a writer. Meanwhile, her mother finds it increasingly difficult to live with her charismatic, but compulsively philandering father, and she sinks progressively into depression and alcoholism.

1954 – Eloise Chalmers commits suicide. Sharon, barely 18 years old, leaves the University of New Brunswick to marry Ross Pollock, a forestry student. They move to Toronto where he becomes an insurance broker.

1956 – 63 – The couple have five children in these years but their relationship is frankly troubled.

1964 – Sharon finds the strength to leave Ross, taking her children to Fredericton to live with her now re-married father and his new family, an apparently difficult situation. While working as front of house manager for the recently opened Playhouse Theatre, she meets and falls in love with actor Michael Ball.

1966 – Sharon, Ball and her children move to Calgary, hoping for a fresh start in the west.

1967 – They tour with the Prairie Players (Sharon is also an actress), finding it difficult to make ends meet. She gives birth to her sixth child.

1968 – Frustrated by the feeling that as an actress her own voice is never heard, Sharon returns to her childhood desire and begins to write.

1970 – Her first radio play, *Split Seconds in the Death Of*, premieres on CBC Radio.

1971 – Her first full-length play, *A Compulsory Option*, a dark comedy about paranoia, wins the Alberta Playwrighting Competition and is the inaugural production at Vancouver's New Play Centre.

1973 – Sharon's love of history inspires her next play, *Walsh*. Theatre Calgary premieres this examination of the injustices committed against the Sioux Nation between 1877 and 1881. The following year the play is produced at the Stratford Festival's Third Stage. It is the first time a play by a Canadian woman is staged there.

PLAYWRIGHT BIO CONTINUED...

1976 – Pollock plays the role of Lizzie in *My Name is Lisbeth* at Douglas College in Surrey, B.C. In a few years, she will substantially re-write this work, transforming it into the much-produced, much-awarded *Blood Relations*.

1977 – She is named head of the Banff Playwrights Colony, a post she will hold until 1980. She is also named a Fellow of the The Royal Society of Canada.

1978 – 1981 – She continues to structure her plays around actual historical events with *The Komagata Maru Incident* and *One Tiger to a Hill*.

1982 – Sharon Pollock wins the Governor General's Award for *Blood Relations*, her compassionate consideration of Lizzie Borden, the infamous woman accused (and ultimately acquitted) of murdering her parents. Pollock plays Lizzie once again in a Theatre Calgary production.

1984 – Her new play *Doc*, loosely based on her own family, premieres. It is immediately embraced and is frequently produced across the country in the coming years. She's named Artistic Director of Theatre Calgary.

1986 – Pollock receives her second Governor General's Award for *Doc*.

1988 – She is awarded the Canada-Australia Literary Prize and named Artistic Director of Theatre New Brunswick (where she formerly ran front of house).

1992-3 – She founds the Garry Theatre in Calgary, which produces two of her plays: *Saucy Jack*, a feminist meditation on Jack the Ripper, and *Death in the Family*, which is later made into a film for television.

1993 – Her play *Fair Liberty's Call*, about the United Empire Loyalists, premieres at the Stratford Festival.

1999-2001 – She works closely with Theatre Junction in Calgary. They produce three of her plays in this period: *Moving Pictures*, *End Dream* and *Angel's Trumpet*.

2003 – She is given an honorary doctorate by the University of Calgary.

PLAYWRIGHT BIO CONTINUED...

2005 – She receives a second honorary degree from the University of Alberta. Their theatre department produces her *Moving Pictures* with Pollock taking the leading role as pioneering film-maker Nell Shipman.

2006 – She is named as company dramaturge and artistic consultant at the Atlantic Ballet Company, a position she will hold for three seasons.

2007 – Her play *Man Out of Joint*, a look at how the events of September 11 have affected Canadian rights and freedoms, premieres at Downstage Theatre in Calgary.

2009 – She continues to review Calgary theatre for CBC's Radio One's "Homestretch" in a segment called "Pollock on Plays."

2010 – Sharon Pollock still writes, directs, teaches, encourages new writers and, in her own words, "shoot(s) my mouth off." In short, she remains committed to a life in the theatre.

Notes by

Soulpepper Associate Artist Paula Wing