



Theatre for audiences
both old and young

Description

Geordie Theatre's Virginia Wolf and New York Bedlam Theater's Anna Karenina

By **Byron Toben**

"Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder" wrote Greek philosopher Plato around 360 BCE. To me, appreciation of theatre also lies in the eyes (also ears and memories) of audiences. This occurred to me in catching two plays ending this weekend, *Virginia Wolf* and *Anna Karenina*.

The first, loosely based on a story about British Author Virginia Woolf having a sister was streamed by Montreal's **Geordie Theatre** and the latter by New York's **Bedlam Theater** adapted from the famous novel by Leo Tolstoy.



Virginia Wolf – Image: courtesy of Geordie Theatre

Virginia Wolf

Although Geordie had its origin in 1980, created by **Elsa Bolam** as a children's theatre and is still active as such, particularly with its touring productions, it has had some impressive shows for the general public, such as *Around The World in 80 Days* and *It's A Wonderful Life*.

While some production aspects can be appreciated by senior theatre goers, *Virginia Wolf* is primarily for kids ages 6 and up. Virginia (**Jennifer Roberts**) has initiated a housebound regime (nothing to do with COVID-19) and taken to staying in bed and growling or howling, with heavy curtains blocking the windows, a device not seen since Miss Havesham doing same in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*.

Lots of physical theatre, grimacing and movement which entrance kiddie audiences.

Her older sister, Vanessa (**Alexandria Laferrière**) enters often to try to cure her by music therapy (violin) and art therapy (painting) to little avail. Lots of physical theatre, grimacing and movement which entrance kiddie audiences.

The play was written by **Cole Lewis** based on a Governor General's award written story by **Kyo Maclear** and directed by **Mike Payette**.

Virginia Wolf ends its streamed run at 4 pm on **May 16** but should do well on future tours.

geordie.ca



Anna Karenina cast – Image: courtesy of Bedlam Theater

Anna Karenina

This benefit for the **Loveland Foundation** was an adaptation of Russian author **Leo Tolstoy**'s 1848 novel, being a two-volume compilation of instalments he had issued over 5 years (1843-1847) in magazine form. Tolstoy considered this his best novel, but I disagree in favour of his *War and Peace*.

In any event, *Anna* has great staying power, having been adapted to stage, film, opera, TV and radio over these many years. Futurist though he was in some sense, hard to imagine him conceiving of its being “streamed” on an “Internet”.

The printed volume averages 800 pages. The interwoven plots have 12 main characters. The love story at the center is an occasion to discuss the societal changes of the day as **Czar Alexander II** introduced some liberalization into the country.

‘My brief overview sounds like a progenitor of *Desperate Housewives*. However, with Tolstoy’s insights and Bedlam’s skills on streaming, it is more than that.’

The excellent job by Bedlam Theater, broadcast from apartments in the New York City area, captured the feel even without the many train scenes the novel is famous for. This event consisted of five episodes involving the main characters. The Russian names are so long that I here primarily refer to their first names.

Anna is married to Karenin, twenty years her elder. They have a son Sergei, 8. Her brother, Stepan, 34, is a womanizing man about town. His wife Dolly, 33, is thus Anna’s sister-in-law. Levin is a rich landowner, 32, a friend of Stepan, who eventually marries Dolly’s younger sister Kitty, 18.

Vronsky is a dashing cavalry officer, with whom Anna is in love. As Anna and Vronsky’s affair become notorious, they flee to Italy for a respite. My brief overview sounds like a progenitor of *Desperate Housewives*. However, with Tolstoy’s insights and Bedlam’s skills on streaming, it is more than that.

I look forward to their next benefit, ***Still Waiting***, based on a Dorothy Parker story, on May 21.

bedlam.org/do-more

Feature image: *Virginia Wolf*, courtesy of Geordie Theatre

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Byron Toben, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.



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