



Segal Centre presents a take
on political polarization

Description

The Assembly expands Porte Parole's role in documentary theatre

By **Byron Toben**

In one of G. Bernard Shaw's 50-plus plays, I forget which, there is a scene where a couple is about to welcome some dinner guests. "Now dear", reminds the wife, "be on your best behaviour – don't discuss religion, politics or sex." "But my dear", responds the husband, "they are the only subjects worth discussing."

That recall flitted through my mind as I viewed **Porte Parole's** latest essay in its specialty, documentary theatre, ***The Assembly***.

This show, which has toured Quebec, mostly in French, has a short run in English at the **Segal Centre** from February 16 to 20, preparatory to its venture into the United States.

Earlier creations by Porte Parole, such as *Seeds* and *The Watershed* were based on actual verbatim from conferences, government hearings and the like, as organized by playwright **Annabel Soutar**.

Here, she is joined by two actor/playwrights, **Alex Ivanovici** and **Brett Watson**, in scripting this show based upon some conversations amongst some (unsuspecting?) dinner guests.



The topics change depending upon the country or city or venue visited. To me, it seemed like an artistic version of a marketing “focus group” although the subjects raised and responses thereto ranged from immigration to white supremacy to sexual orientation to anarchy. And of course, capitalism vs. socialism.

Imaginatively directed by award-winning **Chris Abraham**, the four participants each entered the sounding room with stutter-like moves. Guiding their conversations were moderators **Marcel Jeanin** (fresh from his role as God in the Centaur’s *Paradise Lost*) and co-playwright Mr. Ivanovici.

To me, it seemed like an artistic version of a marketing “focus group” although the subjects raised and responses thereto ranged from immigration to white supremacy to sexual orientation to anarchy. And of course, capitalism vs. socialism.

The excellent actors included the versatile **Jimmy Blais** as a gay Jewish man with leftist leanings, **Tanja Jacobs** as a loud-mouth lady more prone to rightist attitudes, **Akosua Amo-Adem**, a shy girl of colour not sure what to make of it all and **Sean Colby**, a young man seeking to be politically correct.

A new innovation was the company inviting four random audience members to come on stage and continue the conversation for 20 minutes. I was amazed at how readily volunteers grabbed the opportunity – usually audiences need a bit of coaxing.

I am sure *Porte Parole*’s entering the USA will draw a lot of attention at this time with so many fireworks going on with government actions and the Democratic party debates. Lots of competition out there with opinions swirling on Fox News, NBC, CNN, ABC, The Young Turks.



Still nothing like live theatre to really involve viewers. Speaking of which, viewers so inclined may wish to also scan my earlier review of Porte Parole's [Watershed](#) at the Centaur in 2018.

The Assembly plays at the Segal Centre **until February 20**.

segalcentre.org

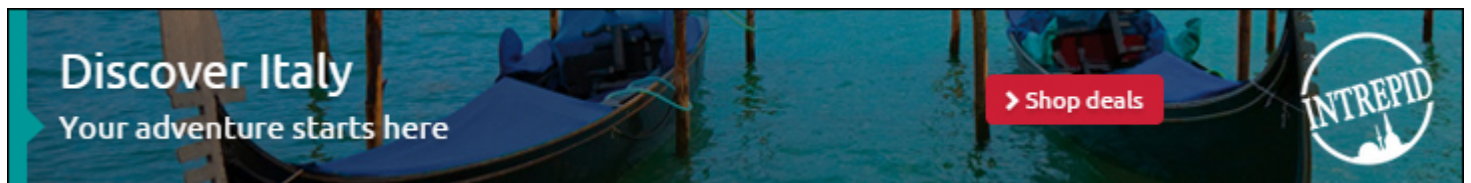
Images: Maxime Côté

Sign-up to our newsletter
and get email notification
of our most recent articles

Sign up

Read [more articles from Byron Toben](#)

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.



Category

1. Review
2. Theatre

Tags

1. Akosua Amo-Adem
2. Alex Ivanovici
3. Annabel Soutar
4. Brett Watson
5. Byron Toben
6. Chris Abraham
7. Jimmy Blais
8. Marcel Jeanin
9. Porte Parole
10. Sean Colby
11. Segal Centre
12. Tanja Jacobs



13. The Assembly

Date Created
February 2020