



Safdie's *Gratitude* explores adolescent coming of age

Description

A tale of how an innocent crush snowballs into a life-changing moment...

By **Byron Toben**

Oren Safdie is at it again. The Montreal born playwright, author of some 13 plays, is back from warmer points south to present his latest, *Gratitude*.

Viewers may recall two of his earlier works, both staged by Infnitheatre, which examined sexual abuse in the clothing industry (*Unseemly*) and terrorism in Israel (*Mr. Goldberg Goes to Tel Aviv*).

Gratitude involves teenage students at a tony private High School. This is a time when hormones oft play a major role in behaviour and such is the case here.



Fifteen-year old-Dariya (**Michaela Di Cesare**) seems to be acting the opposite of Me Too-ers in aggressively enticing three male co-students. They are jock stud Drew (**Patrick Keeler**), rich kid comic Josh (**Laurent Pitre**) and Ben (**Patrick Emmanuel Abellard**). All four of these young actors have excellent local success.

Thus the cast is experienced beyond what you might ordinarily find in the intimate **Mainline Theatre** studio space (35 seats).

As in the 1907 theatre classic *Spring Awakening*, adolescent coming of age is featured. As in *La Ronde* (1897), relationships shift from one character to another. Add to these eternal themes a soupçon of Lewinsky lore. And we have a play that in lesser hands might have devolved into a parody or farce.



However, gratuities invoked for favours rendered become demands as the plot thickens and near soft porn escalates into tragedy.

Well co-directed by Mr Safdie and Mainline chief **Amy Blackmore**, who also choreographed movements.

Gratitude continues at the Mainline Theatre until December 2.

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Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.



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Date Created

November 2018