



Feminist rebel(le)
with a cause

Description

Rebel Daughter, a fitting finale to Dawson theatre program's winter season

By **Byron Toben**

As worthwhile as Montreal's major theatre houses are – the Segal Centre, the Centaur Theatre and the touring Broadway hits at the Place Des Arts – attending them regularly can really add up in costs. Luckily, Montreal has some professional theatre programs at venues with talented actors and backstage technicians of the future. Their tickets range from free to \$10 or so.

The National Theatre School tops the list with students drawn from across the country. At universities, Concordia always features imaginative shows. While McGill does not have a theatre degree program as such, it churns out full-scale shows from the English department, augmented by student-originated efforts at the Players Theatre and the tiny Tuesday Night Cafe.

CEGEPS pitch in with related degrees. Sir John Abbott is often worth a ride along the river road to its West Island campus with its well-equipped theatre space. Closer to Montreal residents and especially Westmounters, are the superior offerings at Dawson.

Each term, it supplies a varied selection of plays by its first year, second year and graduating students. Which brings us to the subject of this review, the closing selection of the 2016-17 term, **Rebel Daughter**.

Ms. Anderson... became a feisty feminist years before the American author Betty Friedan... shook things up with her landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*.

This show was inspired by the autobiography of the indomitable **Doris Anderson**. This Canadian feminist icon's book has inspired a few earlier stage treatments, but this one at Dawson was largely a creative collection involving

21 actors who researched Ms. Anderson's life beyond the book to fashion the aptly called *Rebel Daughter: An Exploration on Feminist Themes Inspired by the Autobiography of Doris Anderson*.



Under the fine direction of Dawson prof **Jude Beny**, the 21 performed 27 named roles plus filling in as extras in crowd scenes.

Ms. Anderson, born in Medicine Hat in 1921 and raised in Calgary, became a feisty feminist years before the American author Betty Friedan, also born in 1921, shook things up with her landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*. Ms. Anderson struggled to become editor of Chatelaine magazine and introduced topics like rape, abortion, e recipe and home decor articles.

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She married at 35 to liberal organizer David Anderson to have children, which she did – three boys. After the marriage ended in divorce after fifteen years, she increasingly remained active in many groups improving the status of women, before passing on in 2007 at 85.

'... be it noted that the role of Doris was played by three excellent actors at different stages of her life – Stephanie Montagni, Nicola Hanchet and Dominique Foucault.'

This Dawson production also involved imaginary post death scenes where she meets famous women of history (shades of Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls!*). Famous women invoked included **Jeanne Mance, Viola Desmond, Amelia Earhart, George Sand, Mary Two-Axe Earley, Maya Angelou** and **Therese Casgrain**.

Difficult to squeeze in all 21 performers here, but be it noted that the role of Doris was played by three excellent



actors at different stages of her life – **Stephanie Montagni, Nicola Hanchet** and **Dominique Foucault**.

Husband David was enacted by **Zachary Manocchi**, and sons Mitchell, Stephen and Peter by **Samuel Partous, Martin Simard** and **Myles Stuart**.

Other characters included five male editors, (mostly unsupportive) and two female friends.

Gabriel Maharian added another dimension as a staff photographer ordered to accompany Doris on her interviews to keep her in line, only to be won over by her logic and zeal.

The whole show was punctuated by period musical excerpts. I enjoyed *Working from Nine to Five* from the 1980 film with “uppity women” Dolly Parton, Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda.

Rebel Daughter closed on April 29 after nine performances.

Images: courtesy Dawson College Theatre

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

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2. Dawson College Theatre
3. Doris Anderson
4. feminist
5. play
6. Rebel Daughter

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