



Terrribly Theatrical is terribly funny

## Description

# Science on Stage Series presents readings of two Colleen Curran plays

By **Byron Toben**

**Colleen Curran** keeps churning them out. Our prolific local playwright has penned about two-dozen plays, many of which have been mounted in the rest of Canada, the USA, even Australia, but not many here.

Finally, in 2011, the Centaur (then under artistic director Roy Surette) mounted her *True Nature*, which, like all her plays, had plenty of laughs and lots of topical references. That play told the true story of Mary Anning, an amateur palaeontologist in the south of England, whose discoveries predated Darwin.

Appropriately, it had had a staged reading earlier at **McGill's Redpath Museum**, which displays many prehistoric artefacts.



Colleen Curran

The museum has hosted several such readings for Ms Curran, as part of its **Science on Stage Series**. It even included *Picturesque: Paintings from Beaver Hall* about accomplished but less famous Montreal women painters to match a related exhibit at the Musee des Beaux Arts. [Read the Westmount Magazine review.](#)

In a recent reading last Sunday, **Beneficent Tornado** was a short curtain raiser about **Dr Maude Abbott** (1868-1940), one of the first women medical doctors in Canada, a specialist in congenital heart disease. She was nicknamed the “Beneficent Tornado” by colleagues due to her indomitable spirit. She even survived being hit by two streetcars.

She was also instrumental in setting up McGill’s Medical Museum, which, after some recent years of neglect, is now being rejuvenated by the Redpath Museum and being transferred to larger housing in the Anatomy building.

In setting up the museum, Dr Abbot sent out a call to medical museums and hospitals in Canada and the US for specimens to catalogue and display. Among the more unusual receipts was a collection of preserved body parts from the US 1863 battle of Gettysburg.

Ms Curran read the role of the doctor and **Sylvia Cymbalista**, that of her assistant.

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**Terribly Theatrical**, shades of the famous 1996 mocumentary *Waiting For Guffman*, dealt with an amateur community theatre dealing with authorship, directorial and casting problems.



In preparing for a community theatre contest with a new script climaxing with the 1865 assassination of Abraham Lincoln by actor John Wilkes Booth at the Ford Theatre in Washington, DC, every cliché in the book is cleverly woven in. Especially riotous for a theatrical audience, it was equally enjoyable for the ordinary viewers, many members of “Curran Nation” which includes sister Peggy, who had a brief cameo as Madame Curie. Toronto may have its Ford Nation, but our Curran Nation is much more audience friendly.

Singer/actor **Mary Burns** was solid as the reluctant director in whipping the collection of error-prone actors into shape, all leading to the most unexpected ending since Mack the Knife was pardoned by royal decree at the moment of his hanging.

The group, all reading multiple roles, also included **Debra Hale, Charles Roburn, Chad Tyler** and **Patsy Tyler**.

Look for a staged reading of Curran’s **Godot at Coconut Grove** within the **2018 Bloomsday Festival**. It is slated for **June 13** at Loyola Chapel.

More information at 514 438-3300 or [bloomsdaymontreal@gmail.com](mailto:bloomsdaymontreal@gmail.com)

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*Feature image: courtesy of Peggy Curran*

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

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## Date Created

March 2018