

Growing Culture

Incubator Project mixes talent new and old

The Incubator Project. Sounds like a scientific experiment involving the growing of bacterial cultures in a temperature-controlled environment, doesn't it? Actually, it's one of the Belfry Theatre's highly successful youth programs and is behind the upcoming production of *Lion In The Streets*.

Incubator was started by artistic director Roy Surette to provide opportunities for young actors in Victoria. The idea was to offer emerging artists not only financial assistance but also professional mentoring in creating an original new work—as well as all box office revenues generated by the premiere of their play during the Belfry's annual Festival season.

But after four successful years, the Belfry decided to change the Incubator format slightly, by having WAVE Theatre present a production of Judith Thompson's *Lion In The Streets*. In an attempt to integrate professional actors into the project and open Incubator up to a wider community, Surette approached WAVE Theatre and asked if they would produce this year's show. "[Roy] knows our work and he supports the mandate of WAVE, which is to generate actor-driven work. So he felt this was a good fit," says WAVE Theatre founder Monica Prendergast.

Prendergast's goal with WAVE is to "provide new and unique opportunities" for local actors and to work "in a collective and actor-driven way." After a little cajoling from the Belfry WAVE



agreed to produce *Lion In The Streets* this year, which Prendergast describes as being very dark and hard edged. "It really pushes people's comfort zones, both as actors and as audience members," she says. "People are going to be challenged by it."

The play follows Isobel, the ghost of a murdered child, as she takes us through her neighborhood and into the lives of characters facing betrayals, fears and memories. Prendergast, along with fellow WAVers Kate Rubin and Gina McIntosh (the team behind last year's *The Attic*, *The Pearls* and *Three Fine Girls*) and 10 emerging artists, put aside the typical four-week rehearsal period and instead have been workshopping *Lion* since last October.

While guest artists have come in to coach, *Lion* has been mostly built on the collaboration between the mentors and emerging actors. "It's been really challenging . . . to step more into a director mode with an outside eye, and then back in as an actor," Prendergast admits. "It's been a real negotiation."

Lion offers audiences a great opportunity to see a variety of local talent at different stages in their careers. With a short run of just five shows in four days, here's hoping their five-month rehearsal period is rewarded with large audiences.

—Sarah Gignac

Lion in the Streets
March 10-13
The Belfry,
1291 Gladstone
Tickets \$12
385-6815