



100<sup>TH</sup>  
*Season*  
*Exhibits*

# Growing our Talent

## Exhibit Preamble

*While it was in 2009  
that the education program  
Learning@OLT was established,  
the history of learning at  
Ottawa Little Theatre  
is a long and proud one.  
This exhibit, the fourth of ten  
to be on display during the  
100th Anniversary Season,  
shines a light on  
the many and myriad ways  
Ottawa Little Theatre's  
volunteers have been  
offered opportunities to  
acquire and/or enhance their  
experience and skills in the  
arts of theatre.*



# Opportunities for Learning Can Be Unexpected

In his autobiography, *In Search of Greatness: Reflections of Yousuf Karsh*, Karsh, one of the world's most famous photographers, acknowledges the significant influence that observing productions at the Ottawa Drama League (as Ottawa Little Theatre was then called) had on his development as a photographer:



Karsh photo  
from *Escape*, 1935

“Solange (Karsh’s wife) brought me into association with the Little Theatre movement in Ottawa, and it was largely through this connection that I started on my present career..... As instructions about lighting effects were given by the directors, a new world opened to me. This experience of photographing actors on the stage, with stage lighting was electrifying. (Photographer John H.) Garo had taught me to work with daylight, where one had to wait for the lighting to be right. In this new situation the director could command the lighting to do what he wished. The unlimited possibilities of artificial lighting overwhelmed me. Mood effects could be created, selected, modified, intensified. I was thrilled by the realization of this new method of interpreting life, this new means of expression.”

*In Search of Greatness:*  
*Reflections of Yousuf Karsh*  
University of Toronto Press,  
1962 p. 42

# Acquiring an “Education In The Arts Of The Theatre” from the Memoirs of Michael Meiklejohn

## Learning the Theory

*“...In 1935-36 I was chosen to play the lead in the Little Theatre’s production of Escape by John Galsworthy...It was in this production that I first met Eric Stangroom who was the biggest influence in my life as a theatre person...He had a very full theatre library and he started me reading many of the basic texts of backstage and directorial theory. It was in this period I first read Appia, Gordon Craig and Stanislavsky. My rapidly forming intellectual approach to theatre was particularly coloured by two companion volumes, The Art of Acting and The Art of Play Direction.... The latter formed the basis for my own approach to the job of director and to my teaching in the 1940’s and 50’s.”*

## Learning the Practice

*“(Stangroom, Jim Dudley, chief architect for National Parks) and I were all involved in the design and building of the set (for On The Spot, 1934-35 Season). We had been talking for some time about the texture of painted surfaces in the theatre.... I remember that we discussed the possibility of employing the principle of pointillage to the painting of plain surfaces in a set. I can remember working on the set and sprinkling small dots of colour over the total painted area. It was a terribly tiresome method of achieving a desirable effect, but as far as I was concerned it was an important stage in my education in the arts of the theatre*

*Excerpts from: Theatre in Ottawa in the 1930’s:  
A Memoir J.M.C. Meiklejohn, edited by Denis W. Johnston,  
Theatre Research in Canada*

**M**ichael Meiklejohn (1906 – 1989) joined the Ottawa Drama League on his arrival in Canada in 1930 and became one of the League’s most prominent members in the ensuing thirty-five years. In his memoir, Meiklejohn talked about how he received his “education in the arts of the theatre”

Michael Meiklejohn became greatly invested in ensuring that others would also have the opportunity to be educated in the theatre arts at Ottawa Little Theatre. He was one of the founders of The Workshop; was instrumental in establishing an annual Canadian playwriting competition, (now known as the Ottawa Little Theatre National Playwriting Competition); and with Julia Murphy and Marion Taylor began OLT’s Children’s Theatre and its off-shoot Drama Classes for Children.

In 1950, Mr. Meiklejohn was named recipient of the Canadian Drama Award recognizing outstanding contributions to Canadian Theatre.

## Apprenticing under Bill Adkins

Bill Adkins was the permanent stage manager of the Ottawa Little Theatre for almost 60 years. Over those years, Adkins was responsible for training countless volunteers in the skills required for working backstage. In his memoir, Michael Meiklejohn comments on his association with Bill Adkins:

*"...I was ...serving an apprenticeship (under Bill Adkins) in some of the crafts of the theatre. I became acceptable to the stage crew as a working member. I learnt to run and lash a flat, and to handle the stage rigging. I was made welcome into the little group that met after performance in "Bill's Room"... Regular admission to this room was a very real privilege which denoted one's acceptance as a backstage person. On the last night of any show...a special session was conducted in Bill's Room....The "Bull" session which went on was lively and conducive to expanding one's creative approach to backstage problems."*

Bill Adkins first became involved with the Drama League when he was recruited by Dr. Duncan Campbell Scott to help backstage when the League was putting on plays in the National Museum. At the same time Dr. Campbell recruited Bert Bristow. Mr. Meiklejohn recounts:

*"Both of these men had learnt the fundamentals of the craft of stage manager from an old professional George Haythorne, who had come to Ottawa with a touring company from the U.K. and had stayed on. Here was a core of professional craftsmanship which ensured that every show that was produced on the Ottawa Little Theatre stage was mounted in a professional way."*

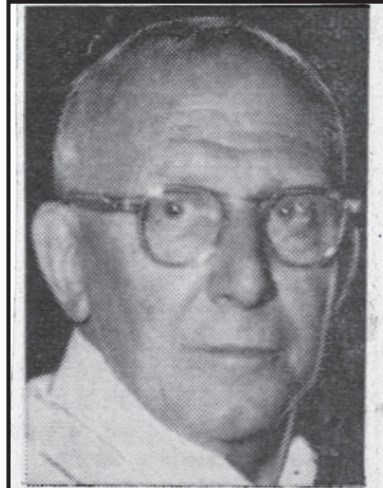
Bill Adkins was twice honoured for his commitment to theatre, in 1960 he received the Canadian Drama Award, and in 1972 he was inducted as a member of the Order of Canada.



One of the infamous  
"Bull" sessions in "Bill's Room"



Bill Adkins receiving the  
Order of Canada.



**BILL ADKINS**

Dec. 3/60

### **Bill Adkins Honored**

Bill Adkins, who has served as stage manager at the Ottawa Little Theatre for many years, is to receive one of the 1960 Canadian Drama Awards. These awards are given annually in recognition of outstanding contributions to Canadian theatre.

Mr. Adkins has been doing backstage work at the Little Theatre for nearly 40 years and has been stage manager since the early 'thirties. He worked in this capacity in the early days of the Dominion Drama Festival, when the finals were held in Ottawa.

## Early Learning Opportunities

### The Workshop



WINNERS IN LOCAL FESTIVAL — Ottawa Drama League Workshop players won first place in the two-day city drama festival with their presentation of the Noel Coward play "Still Life," and Kay Cranston added to their glory by winning the award for best actress. First row: Miss Bobbie Adye, who assisted by Hugh Parker, directed the play; Alleen Van Dine. Second row: Winifred Tibbey, Christina Drever, Kay Cranston. Third row: Howard Collins, Edward Nunn.

Workshop production winners.

It was not unusual for plays produced by The Workshop to be in competition with OLT's main-stage productions at the Eastern Ontario Drama League Festival and at the Dominion Drama Festival. The Workshop's productions garnered many awards during its existence.

Organized in 1936 by Julia Murphy, Michael Meiklejohn and Eric Stangroom, the main objective of The Workshop was to encourage inexperienced actors and directors, training them in all branches of dramatic art, aided by the Theatre's more experienced members.

The members of The Workshop presented original and experimental plays (many culled from the winning submissions to the annual Ottawa Little Theatre One-Act Playwriting Competition) and operated within the Theatre's regular season up until the early 1960's.

### The Radio Class

For a short time, in the 1940's, the League ran a Radio Class in conjunction with The Workshop. The new facilities of the Ottawa studios of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio station, located in the Chateau Laurier Hotel, had been completed. With the new facility, it was now possible to produce radio drama in Ottawa. CBC producer Bob Edmunds was determined to develop local actors:

*"...the establishment of radio classes (was) a necessity. The logical place to look for persons interested in these classes was the Ottawa Drama League... Upon these classes depend whether Ottawa will make its name in radio dramatic circles... It is to be hoped these classes will be the beginning of another successful page in Ottawa's amateur acting history and equal to her past triumph's"*

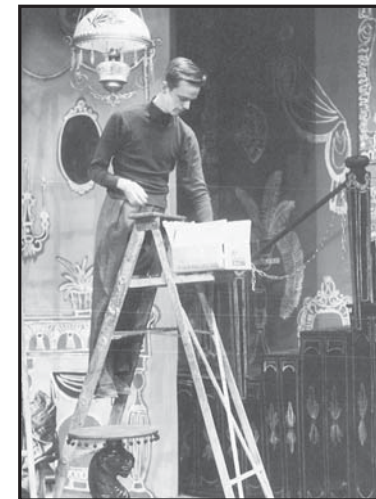
Ottawa's Radio Classes by William Freeman, The Curtain Call, Vol. 12 No. 6, March 1941. p. 2.

### Theatre Under The Stairs

By 1963, the League's season was so fully evolved that there was no longer room for the experimental productions of The Workshop to be accommodated on the main stage. Theatre Under the Stairs, a very intimate theatre space, designed by architect-set designer Stan White, was developed in the theatre's basement to offer a replacement venue for The Workshop productions.

*"Formerly a rehearsal room, with limited facilities, (now) a charming and very piquant miniature theatre. Seating 71 people, it has a semi-circular stage.... Four rows of chairs surround it to accommodate the audience. It is very like the ancient Greek theatre on a small scale.... Experimental plays will be performed here..."*

Feature by Barbara Crook, Ottawa Citizen, Oct 24, 1987



Stan White, architect-set designer.

## Developing Talent

### Starting Them Young

#### Junior League and the Saturday Players

As early as 1915, there is reference to the existence of a Junior League in operation at the Ottawa Drama League. "At Christmas time that year (1914 or 1915) our Junior League, trained by Mrs. Macbeth, put on *While the Chimes Rang*, on two evenings" (Ottawa Drama League – Early History by E. Arma Smillie, M.A. in Canadian Bookman, Vol. 5, 1923, p. 151). In later years, the Junior League becomes known as **The Saturday Players** and is recognized as an organization established primarily to promote opportunities for young talent to work with established actors.



The Saturday Players production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, May 1952

#### Children's Theatre and Classes for Children

The most recent exhibit, *Follow the Yellow Brick Road*, established the history of Children's Theatre and The School of Theatre, which offered drama classes for children at Ottawa Little Theatre, beginning in the 1950's and lasting for forty years until the 1990's. In more recent years, Ottawa Little Theatre has, on a regular basis, offered Drama Camps and Youth Theatre Training opportunities primarily during the summer and March Break.



### Drama Classes for Adults

Not to be forgotten, Adult drama classes started in 1976, with the objective: "to introduce the basic discipline and techniques of an actor's craft" and give more experienced actors greater "focus on characterization and script analysis."

These formal classes were offered for over two decades and they met with great success.

### The Actor's Gym

In the past year, John Muggleton, on staff with the Ottawa Little Theatre, has conducted what he calls an Actor's Gym. John Muggleton describes the Actor's Gym as:

"A weekly "drop-in" style workshop, the Actor's Gym allows actors of all levels of experience, an opportunity to get up on stage and flex those acting muscles. What began with 8 participants in the first 9 week session, has now grown to as many as 25 actors all working together to present as many as 10 scenes presented at the end of each Saturday afternoon class. Although fundamentally a scene study workshop, participants also have the opportunity to work on audition techniques, improvisation, focus and movement exercises. Many directors from the Ottawa theatre community volunteer their time to the Actors Gym to nurture new talent and offer feedback."



Participants in the Actor's Gym receiving feedback after presenting their scene.

# The Tradition of Training Becomes a Mandate

## Ottawa Little Theatre Bursary

For a number of years OLT has offered subsidies to its volunteers to assist them in attending workshops, of a variety of types, held elsewhere in the country. It is a mutually beneficial arrangement, as the volunteers inevitably return to the OLT community with expanded skills which they share with their fellow volunteers.

## ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION GRANT Learning@OLT today

In September 2009, The Ottawa Little Theatre announced that it had applied for, and was successful in receiving, a \$46,100 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, an agency of the Government of Ontario which supports the growth and vitality of communities across the province. It continues to strengthen the capacity of the volunteer sector through investments in community-based initiatives.

Excerpt from a media release, September 8, 2009:

*“The one year grant will allow the Ottawa Little Theatre to research, develop and test a three-year plan to expand the Learning@OLT program. An Education Director and guest instructors will be hired to design and pilot a well-integrated, experiential learning program which will offer opportunities to volunteers of all ages to explore their own creativity by actively practicing theatre arts and crafts through programs such as regular classes, master classes, workshops, panel discussions, readings (and) speaker programs... The program will also provide opportunities for audience members to learn more about theatre, building their interests, loyalty and commitment to the art form.”*

THE ONTARIO  
TRILLIUM  
FOUNDATION



LA FONDATION  
TRILLIUM  
DE L'ONTARIO

The three-year plan which was developed through the Ontario Trillium Foundation grant was successfully implemented and many of the activities which are exposed on the following panels are the direct result of the plan. An Education Committee now ensures the continuity of planning through annually generated three-year plans.



## Learning@OLT

The following workshops are representative of what is being offered to volunteers through Learning @OLT, this does not represent an exhaustive list.

### Training Provided by Staff

- WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) in the Theatre. *Instructor – Tom Pidgeon*
- Lighting System at OLT, More than just a Go button! *Instructor – Mark Ryder*
- Sound System at OLT, Could you turn that down yet make it louder and sound different? *Instructor – Mark Ryder*
- The Actor's Gym, training new actors. *Instructor – John Muggleton*

### Training Provided to Volunteers or Audience Members by Experienced Volunteers

- Introduction to Acting. *Instructors – Geoff Gruson* (volunteer) teaching Scene Study; *Johni Keyworth* (volunteer) teaching Audition Techniques and *John Muggleton* (Staff member) teaching Improv;
- Playwrights' Circle, lead by *Lynn McGuigan* (staff) and *Adam Meisner* (volunteer)
- Acting Shakespeare. *Instructor – Jim McNabb*
- Acting for the Mature Theatre Goer. *Instructor – Jim McNabb*

### Training Provided to Volunteers by Experienced OLT Designers

- Set Design. *Instructor – Robin Riddihough*
- Lighting Design. *Instructor – Dave Magladry*
- Sound Design. *Instructor – Andrew Hamlin*

### Training Provided by Professional Artists

#### Show Specific Training

- Accent workshop, Northern Irish accents for *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. *Instructor – Julia Lenardon*
- Stage Fight workshops for *Dr. Cook's Garden* and *Deathtrap*. *Instructors – Chris McLeod* and *John Brogan* from National Stage Combat Training Partners
- Stage Fencing workshop, for *Dangerous Liaisons* and *I Hate Hamlet*. *Instructor – Chris McLeod*
- Costume Altering/Adapting Workshop, for period plays being presented during the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season. *Instructor – Sarah Waghorn*

#### The Actor's Tool Kit

- Farcing Around: A Farce Skills Workshop. *Instructor – Todd Duckworth*
- Developing Character Through Neutral Mask Workshop. *Instructor – Alix Sideris*
- Movement Workshop. *Instructor – Peter Ryan*
- Voice Production Workshops. *Instructor – Julia Lenardon*

#### Craft and Special Skills Training

- Make-up Workshop. *Instructor – Annie Lefebvre*
- The Art of Illusion: Blood and Special Effects Workshop. *Instructor – Zach Council*
- Costume Design. *Instructor – Julia Tribe*

# Training Directors

**W**hen the Drama League first began, professionals were traditionally hired to undertake the task of directing the productions. However, early in the existence of the League, it became apparent that it would be in their own best interest to train in-house directors.

*“In 1930 the decision was made to develop and train directors, and many who had formerly acted now took on the burden of directing and producing. Rupert Caplan came weekends from Montreal to train the group.”*

Excerpt from: *Ottawa’s Heritage of Theatre 1837 – 1955*, Mrs. Roy McGregor Watt.

Learning@OLT has continued the tradition of providing training for Directors, recently bringing in such luminaries as:

This season, two renowned directors will be sharing their skills with OLT participants:



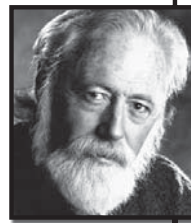
**Marti Maraden**  
*Director and former Artistic Director of the Stratford Festival and the National Arts Centre English Theatre (Directing Master Class)*



**Micheline Chevrier**  
*Director and former Artistic Director of The Great Canadian Theatre Company (Directing Master Class)*



**Jackie Maxwell**  
*Director and Artistic Director of the Shaw Festival (Directing Master Class)*



**Paul Thompson**  
*Director and founder of the Theatre Passe Muraille (Directing Master Class)*



**Joel Beddows**  
*Director and former Artistic Director of Théâtre la Catapulte (Round Table discussion between Directors and Designers)*

100<sup>TH</sup>  
*Season*