

BLUEBIRDS

BY VERN THIESSEN

tnb theatre
NEW BRUNSWICK

A white graphic element consisting of a horizontal bar with a pointed arrow shape extending to the right, positioned below the 'tnb theatre' text.

Bluebirds by Vern Thiessen

Directed by Natasha MacLellan
Featuring Kirsten Alter, Mélanie LeBlanc and Sharisse LeBrun
Costume Designer | Sherry Kinnear
Projection Designer | Christian Ludwig Hansen
Sound Designer | Stewart Legere
Lighting Designer | Chris Saad
Set Designer | Andrea Evans
Choreographer | Sarah Power
Stage Manager | Teagan Keith

Theatre New Brunswick is an active member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT).

We engage under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional artists who are members of the Canadian Actor's Equity Association.

This world premiere production is supported in part by Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture's Touring Program.

Please Respect the Performance. The taking of photographs and video is strictly prohibited. Please turn off your cell phones and data devices before the show begins. Thank you.

Content Warning: Please be advised this production contains: Strobe lighting effects. Sudden loud noises.

Special thanks to: Sydney Hallett, Dianne Kelly, Lee Sochasky, Cat Candow, Rebecca Wiegers and the staff of the Andrew & Laura McCain Library.

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A boy asked me to write his mother. I told her he was not alone when he died, nor when he was buried. And that the graves were kept nice. So that his mother might imagine being here herself.

Bluebirds

by Vern Thiessen

Bluebirds is set in Étaples, France, 1918. Nurses Christy, Maggie, and Bab have crossed oceans to care for wounded Canadian soldiers in the Great War. Despite the terrible injuries they must deal with, they manage to stay hopeful as the dangers of the front draw closer to their hospital. Through it all, the three women find friendship, independence, power, and influence in a place where men, once again, are trying to destroy the world.

A Theatre New Brunswick world premiere production.

Welcome to Theatre New Brunswick

Theatre New Brunswick acknowledges that it carries out its work on the traditional unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq and Peskotomuhkati peoples. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which these nations first signed with the British Crown in 1726. The treaties did not deal with the surrender of lands and resources, but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

We, the staff and members of the board, pay respect to the elders, past and present, and descendants of this land. We honour the knowledge keepers and seek their guidance as we strive to develop closer relationships with the Indigenous people of New Brunswick.

A Message from our Artistic & Executive Director

I'm so excited to launch our season with Bluebirds! I've been waiting two years to produce this play, and we're finally doing it!

We workshoped Bluebirds during our first Fall Festival of New Plays back in October of 2020 when no one knew what the future held for live theatre. It was a weird time, as you all remember. I'm forever grateful to Vern for allowing us to include a workshop reading of this play in our festival. It certainly helped me feel a little more grounded in theatre than I otherwise would have. For that reason – and the fact that it's just a beautiful story – I feel truly honoured be able to share its world premiere with you all as the first show in our first full season of theatre in too long. And being able to take it around the province, that's the icing on the cake for me.

It has been a challenging few years, but I like to think we made the most of the time we had. We asked ourselves a lot of important questions. We found a few answers and uncovered even more questions worth answering. We learned a lot, and I hope we keep learning. As we begin a new season of theatre, it is my sincere hope that you join us on this journey and that we may foster a more appreciative, more caring and more inclusive community in our wake.

It feels good to be back.

Natasha MacLellan
Artistic & Executive Director
Theatre New Brunswick



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A Message from our Chair

History is littered with attempts to glean glory from the unspeakable horrors of war. This is how we cope. This is how we heal. And sadly, this is how we forget. This is also what makes Bluebirds unique among war stories. This play is not about brave soldiers, cunning generals, or ignorant politicians. It's a story about how our mothers, our grandmothers, and our great grandmothers were able to find community and share comfort with the injured, the sick, the dying and each other.

Vern Thiessen is a master of his craft. Using one of the greatest tragedies in world history as inspiration, he has found light where little exists; humour in the face of unspeakable horror; and in crafting three distinct characters, he offers us both a new perspective and a truly original take on the war stories we have grown accustomed to hearing. Bluebirds is a story about love and tragedy and caring and loss and hope. I believe each of us here in the theatre tonight will find a connection in our own lives to these characters and this story. My hope is that you leave the theatre richer than when you arrived.

Deborah Burns
Chair
Theatre New Brunswick
Board of Governors





Canadian nurses were nicknamed “Bluebirds” because of their blue dresses, accented by white aprons and sheer veils. Real-life bluebirds can be found across Canada today in emergency rooms, ambulances, and as soldiers of our military.



Some years ago, I visited the Vimy Ridge memorial in France. I had been there twice before, but this time my wife Susie was along for the journey. We were led by my friend and colleague, Simon Godly, an expert in WWI battlefields. Simon had assisted me with research on both Vimy and Einstein's Gift, both dealing with the horrors of the First World War. Susie asked him a question he is rarely asked: "Where are all the women?" Simon took us to Boulogne-sur-Mer. There at the Wimereux Communal Cemetery, at least ten women were buried. Simon confirmed that Boulogne-sur-Mer and nearby Étaples were hospital sites, often called "Hospital City" at the time.

Simon also showed us the Étaples graveyard, a magnificent, overwhelming thing to behold, where the three women in this play lay buried. On May 19, 1918, No. 1 Canadian General Hospital near Étaples was attacked by air. Katherine Macdonald, Margaret Lowe, and Gladys Wake lost their lives. I began to piece together, in my imagination and also based on research, something of a life for each of these women. This is one of my callings as a dramatist: to create characters, to resurrect lives forgotten, to make them live again for a short time, in front of an audience in the present. As I did in writing Vimy, I wanted to connect each character with their sense of home and geography. Even today, the bombing of hospitals and other civilian sites is not uncommon. These horrors are brought to us continually via both traditional and social media. Sadly, the lives of these women, who we now call "front-line workers" or "first responders" are an even more important reminder of the universal and timeless tragedy and ruthlessness of war.

Canadian nurses were nicknamed "Bluebirds" because of their blue dresses, accented by white aprons and sheer veils. Real-life bluebirds can be found across Canada today in emergency rooms, ambulances, and as soldiers of our military. Bless these women for their daring, sense of adventure, sacrifice, and love for their fellow humans. If you are ever in France, pay them a visit, won't you?

I am deeply indebted to the following individuals and organizations: Natasha MacLellan, Artistic Director of tnb for believing in this play from the start. Thanks to all the actors who did workshops of this play, virtual productions during the pandemic, and those who performed in a short version of this play previously published. Thanks to Louise Casemore, who dramaturged this play, and Susie Moloney who read every draft. Thanks to Theatre Alberta, and to the Artstrek program for commissioning the idea in the first place. The Canada Council and Alberta Foundation for the Arts assisted in the writing of the play. Rebecca, Don, and Amy, thanks for keeping the flame going. A special thanks to Cynthia Toman. Her landmark work *Sister Soldiers* is the definitive record of these women. I could not have written the play without her research, guidance, and generosity.

-Vern Thiessen Winnipeg 2022



Vern Thiessen **Playwright**

Vern Thiessen is one of Canada's most produced playwrights. His plays have been translated into five languages and have been seen around the world. Vern is the recipient of the Dora Mavor Moore and Elizabeth Sterling Haynes awards for Outstanding New Play, the Carol Bolt Award, the Gwen Pharis Ringwood Award, and the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama, Canada's

highest honour for a playwright. He has served as president of both the Playwrights Guild of Canada and the Writers Guild of Alberta and was artistic director of Workshop West Playwrights' Theatre for six seasons. He is married to acclaimed screenwriter and novelist Susie Moloney.



Natasha MacLellan **Director**

Natasha MacLellan's love of new scripts was fostered through Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre where she mentored with Jenny Munday. From there she started Forerunner Playwrights Theatre, which produced new works in Halifax for a decade followed by six seasons as the Artistic Producer of Ship's Company Theatre. Before she became a full time producer, Natasha worked as

an actor, director, teacher and dramaturge. And, she still does those things, when she can.



Kirsten Alter **Maggie**

Kirsten couldn't be happier to be headed back to the stage, back to the Maritimes, and back to TNB! She was last spotted on the TNB stage in the Christmas production of *It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*. Over the past couple of years she has kept herself busy on Zoom, with a number of new play workshops (TNB, HEIST, PARC, and The Assembly Theatre), several voice over

radio spots, as well as two Norm Foster plays, *The Ladies Foursome* (staged outside on a golf course), and the world premiere of *Wildly Romantic* (filmed version), both for The Foster Festival.



Mélanie LeBlanc Bab

Mélanie is happy to be returning to TNB after COVID-19 brought an unfortunate end to Heroine the day before it was supposed to open! Mélanie has played The Wicked Witch of the West in the Capitol Theatre's production of Wizard of Oz and has played many well-loved characters over the years, such as Marry Poppins, Anne of Green Gables, and Patsy Cline. She has toured her

one-woman show *Hommage aux femmes de la guerre* (Women in Wartime) across Canada and in France, and was a featured soloist in high-end venues across Asia for years. Mélanie is grateful to all who have made this adventure possible and who have stood by her through thick and thin.



Sharisse LeBrun Christy

Sharisse LeBrun is a theatre educator, director and actor. Having grown up in New Brunswick, she has long been involved with the local theatre community with companies including Theatre St. Thomas, Theatre UNB, Bard in the Barracks, Theatre New Brunswick, Notable Acts, and Solo Chicken. After completing her MA in drama, theatre, and performance studies at the

University of Toronto, she returned home to take on the role of Director of the Theatre School, and now Director of the Young Company, for Theatre New Brunswick where she gets to spend her days sharing her love of theatre with young people. She couldn't be more thrilled or grateful to be part of this wonderful team.

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COFFEE ROASTERS



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tea**

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Christian Ludwig Hansen **Projection Designer**

Christian (He/Him) is a theatre creator and performer with special focus in collaboration, puppetry, stage combat, and projection design. He is from Northern Friesland by the German-Danish border and now lives in Kijipuktuk/Halifax. He is a recent graduate from the Acting program at Dalhousie.

Design Credits: #IAmTheCheese (HTYP & EFT), The Proletariat (HAT), Glass Menagerie (ARC), Digidamara (B&B), Fat Juliet (EFT & SBTS), At this Hour (Zuppa).



Andrea Evans **Set Designer**

Andrea Evans proudly holds a BFA with Honours from York University where she studied Theatre Production and Design. With nearly 20 years' experience, she has worked as a set designer, scenic painter, and props builder for numerous theatres throughout Ontario and the Atlantic provinces. Andrea has worked for theatre companies such as the National Ballet of Canada, Saint John

Theatre Company, the Chester Playhouse, Tarragon Theatre, and many others. For two seasons, Andrea worked as an assistant designer at the Stratford Festival. She has also been a guest artist / instructor at numerous high schools teaching stagecraft and design. Andrea has been nominated two times for Toronto's Dora Awards and the proud recipient of a Dora Award for Outstanding Set Design.

COMING IN DECEMBER:





Sherry Kinnear
Costume Designer

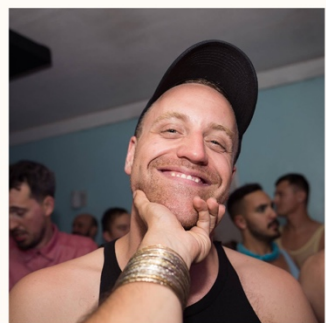
Sherry is the costume designer at Theatre New Brunswick and serves as Head of Wardrobe for all branches of the company. Sherry most recently designed costumes for *Heroine*, *A Brief History of the Maritimes* and *Everywhere Else*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Fortune of Wolves*, *The Boat*, *The Snow Queen*, *A Sunday Affair*, *Marion Bridge*, *Vigil* and *The Eighth Fire*, as well as *The Wizard of*

Oz, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Mary Poppins*, and many other TNB productions over the past several years.



Chris Saad
Lighting Designer

Chris is happy to be working for Theatre New Brunswick. Chris is the resident lighting designer and technical director for Black Box Productions at Saint Thomas University in Fredericton. He has many lighting design credits for Theatre New Brunswick's main stage as well as providing technical support and design for TNB's theatre school. Break A Leg Everyone!



Stewart Legere
Sound Designer

Stewart Legere is a multidisciplinary artist situated between Kijipuktuk/Halifax and Tkaronto/Toronto. He is the Co-Artistic Director of Live Art company The Accidental Mechanics Group and Associate Artistic Director of ZUPPA. His performances have been presented at theatres and festivals across Canada and the internationally. He is a vocalist with orchestral pop outfit The Heavy

Blinkers, and a solo singer/songwriter ("*Quiet the Station*" - 2017, "*To the Bone*" - 2020). He composes music and sound for theatre and film. An avid and passionate collaborator, his work is fascinated with vulnerability, intimacy, the destruction of persona and the celebration of performance. He is currently an artist-in-residence at The Theatre Centre in Toronto.



Sarah Power Choreographer

Originally from Saint John, Sarah has been working as a professional independent dance artist and teacher since graduating from Toronto Metropolitan University in 2001. She is a founding member and current Artistic Director of Connection Dance Works.

Her career has included collaborations with musicians, dancers, filmmakers and visual artists. She has received grants for Professional Development, Residencies and Creation projects through the Canada Council for the Arts and artsnb.

Sarah continues to learn and develop work through her practice of Authentic Movement, a way of discovering movement inherent in the body instead of inventing it.

"I'm interested in intuition itself and how it can unfold. For me, it is a process of witnessing and waiting for something to happen. I see it as sitting in the middle of the creative experience, paying attention."



Teagan Keith Stage Manager

Teagan (she/her) is delighted to be working with TNB for the first time! After graduating from Humber College's Theatre Production program, she returned home to Saint John to pursue a career in stage management; she's still in awe that she gets to travel around the Maritimes creating theatre and call it work. Some favourite past credits include Dear Rita (Savoy Theatre), No Man Is An Island (Atlantic Repertory Company), and Little Shop of Horrors (Saint John Theatre Company).

Save the Date



*Join us for a fundraising brunch at the
Delta Fredericton on February 26, 2023.*

Full details coming in December.



VISIT IN PERSON OR ON-LINE **GALLERY78.COM**

"Self Portrait Looking Up" by Stephanie Weirathmueller

**TNB Company
2022-2023**

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Artistic and Executive Director

Joanna Bryson
General Manager

Matt Carter
Development and Communications

Sharisee LeBrun
Theatre School and TNB Young Company Director

Nikki Vigneault
Production Manager and Technical Director

Naomi Costain
Theatre School and Admin Assistant

Sherry Kinnear
Head of Wardrobe

Jamie Atkinson
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Season Performances

Bluebirds

October 26-30 | Open Space Theatre | Fredericton, NB
November 1 | Theatre Restigouche | Campbellton, NB
November 2 | Empress Theatre | Moncton, NB
November 3 | Imperial Theatre | Saint John, NB
November 4 | W.C. O'Neill Arena Theatre | St. Andrews, NB
November 5 | Carleton North High School | Florenceville-Bristol, NB
November 6 | Motyer-Fancy Theatre | Sackville, NB

The Wickhams: Christmas at Pemberley

December 8-10 | Fredericton Playhouse | Fredericton, NB
December 11 | Imperial Theatre | Saint John, NB
December 12 | Student Matinee | Imperial Theatre | Saint John, NB
December 14 | TBA
December 15 | TBA
December 16 | Riverview Arts Centre | Riverview, NB

Resident Aliens

March 22-26 | Open Space Theatre | Fredericton, NB
March 28 | Theatre Restigouche | Campbellton, NB
March 29 | Empress Theatre | Moncton, NB
March 30 | TBA
March 31 | W.C. O'Neill Arena Theatre | St. Andrews, NB
April 1 | Carleton North High School | Florenceville-Bristol, NB
April 2 | Motyer-Fancy Theatre | Sackville, NB

Tickets

Tickets for all season performances can be purchased through the **Playbill and Tickets** section of our website **tnb.nb.ca**

