

2019-20

OCTOBER 15 - NOVEMBER 2, 2019



# ICELAND

BY **NICOLAS BILLON**

*theatre:*  
**CALGARY**  
STAFFORD ARIMA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

WELCOME TO THEATRE CALGARY.

WE WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THIS PERFORMANCE IS TAKING PLACE ON TREATY 7, SIGNED AT BLACKFOOT CROSSING IN 1877. WE ARE ON THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES OF THE PEOPLES OF TREATY 7 INCLUDING THE THREE BLACKFOOT NATIONS: CONSISTING OF THE SIKSIKA, PIKANI, KAINAI NATIONS; THE STONEY NAKODA NATIONS: CONSISTING OF THE BEARSPAW, WESLEY AND CHINIKI NATIONS; AND THE TSUU T'INA NATION. THE CITY OF CALGARY IS ALSO HOME TO MÉTIS NATION OF ALBERTA, REGION III.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT IN THIS TERRITORY.

# GENERAL INFORMATION

CAMERAS AND AUDIO/VISUAL RECORDING DEVICES ARE NOT PERMITTED IN THE THEATRE.

VIDEO AND AUDIO RECORDING OF THIS PRODUCTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED.

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BABIES ARE NOT PERMITTED IN THE THEATRE.

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ASSISTED LISTENING DEVICES FOR THE HARD OF HEARING ARE AVAILABLE AT THE COAT CHECK.

FOR FIRST AID ASSISTANCE, SEE THE HOUSE MANAGER, OR NEAREST USHER.

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# WELCOME TO THEATRE CALGARY



STAFFORD ARIMA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR &  
JON JACKSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When it comes down to it, theatre is all about storytelling. Taking an audience on a journey to places they might never venture – like Afghanistan in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, our 2017 adaptation; and

introducing an audience to situations that they might only have a whisper of knowledge about – like the backstage antics of a group of actors in this season's opener *Noises Off*; but stories need their tellers. The characters that populate the dramas, the comedies, the musicals, etc., the colourful and fascinating people whose lives, histories, and personal circumstances are brand new to you – the audience. Nicolas Billon's Governor General Award-winning play, *Iceland*, is delivered mostly through monologue. This means the characters speak in direct-address to the audience. They not only live this gripping plot, but each puts their own particular lens to it. In *Kassandra*, *Halim*, and *Anna*, *Iceland* delivers three of the most the compelling and complex original characters in recent memory.

Rich characters draw an audience in and reflect back the depths of the human condition. This is why *Iceland* is so profound. Not only has the playwright written an engaging story about three disparate characters who actually have more in common than one might think; Billon has given us three unconventional characters who, on the surface, might appear dubious, but once you understand their story you will hopefully come to see their humanity. That is what theatre has the capacity to do, to awaken an audience to people, their histories, their psychology, and their humanness. We might not want to invite these characters back to our homes, or share a beer and wings with them, but we can, for a brief moment in a darkened room, watch their lives unfold in front of our eyes, in the safety of a theatre, and live their story.

## **Stafford Arima**

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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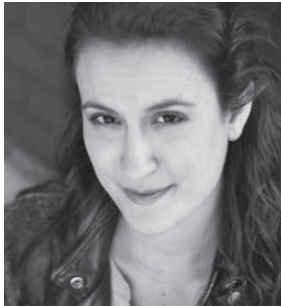


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## DIRECTOR'S NOTES



With skyscrapers, condo towers, and office buildings looming overhead, it can be easy to feel small in a big city. When I find myself in a cluster of strangers, on the C-Train during rush-hour, eating lunch on Olympic Plaza, or in the theatre on any given night, I can't help but be amazed by the unknown of all those around me. While I may love to make up story upon story about that woman in the red hat or this gentleman and his sad ice-cream cone, it is impossible to truly know

someone simply by seeing them. We all walk this earth with so much history, and we may wear it well or we may seem worse for the wear. It is all too easy to pass judgement before someone has even opened their mouth.

With a population of almost 3 million people, Toronto is Canada's largest city. In Nicolas Billon's *Iceland* (which is actually set in Toronto's Liberty Village – not Bjork's homeland), we meet just three of its inhabitants. We get to peer into their lives, as though spying from the safety of our own balcony to theirs. I encourage you to try to see them for who they really are; you just may be surprised by what you find.

Fair warning: the intimacy of *Iceland* places audience as voyeur and that can feel a little criminal, but if you lean in – it can also be very satisfying.

### Jenna Turk

DIRECTOR

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THEATRE CALGARY GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE CITY OF CALGARY THROUGH CALGARY ARTS DEVELOPMENT, THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA THROUGH THE ALBERTA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS, THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA THROUGH THE CANADA COUNCIL, CANADIAN HERITAGE, AND ALL CORPORATE AND PRIVATE CONTRIBUTORS.



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NOV 28 - DEC 28, 2019

# A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BY **CHARLES DICKENS**

ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY **GEOFFREY SIMON BROWN**

DIRECTED BY **STAFFORD ARIMA**

*theatre:*  
**CALGARY**  
STAFFORD ARIMA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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ARTS COMMONS MAX BELL THEATRE  
OCTOBER 15 - NOVEMBER 2, 2019

*theatre:*  
**CALGARY**

*presents*

**ICELAND**

BY **NICOLAS BILLON**

DIRECTOR	<b>JENNA TURK</b>
SET & COSTUME DESIGN	<b>HANNE LOOSEN</b>
LIGHTING DESIGN	<b>CIMMERON MEYER</b>
SOUND DESIGN	<b>ANDREW BLIZZARD</b>
VOICE & DIALECT COACH	<b>JANE MACFARLANE</b>

TC MENTORS PROGRAM

DIRECTING	<b>QUINN LAZENBY</b>
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# ENHANCE YOUR THEATRE EXPERIENCE AT ICELAND

## OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>OCT 13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b> 7:30 P.M. ♦	<b>16</b> 7:30 P.M. ♦	<b>17</b> 7:30 P.M. ♦♻️	<b>18</b> 8:00 P.M. ●	<b>19</b> 2:00 P.M. ▲ 8:00 P.M.
<b>20</b> 7:00 P.M.	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> 7:30 P.M. ♦♻️	<b>23</b> 12:00 P.M. 7:30 P.M. ☉	<b>24</b> 7:30 P.M.	<b>25</b> 8:00 P.M.	<b>26</b> 2:00 P.M. 8:00 P.M.
<b>27</b> 2:00 P.M.	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b> 7:30 P.M.	<b>30</b> 7:30 P.M. ○	<b>31</b> 7:30 P.M.	<b>NOV 1</b> 8:00 P.M.	<b>2</b> 2:00 P.M. ■ 8:00 P.M.

♦ PREVIEW ● OPENING NIGHT ♦ TALKBACK TUESDAY ♻️ TALK THEATRE THURSDAY ▲ PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN MATINEE  
☉ WINE WEDNESDAY ♻️ TASTY TUESDAY ■ SENIOR SATURDAY ○ ASL PERFORMANCE ★ RELAXED PERFORMANCE

### TALK THEATRE THURSDAY OCTOBER 17

SPECIAL GUEST:

**SET & COSTUME DESIGNER, HANNE LOOSEN**

MAX BELL THEATRE UPPER LOBBY

Get an insider's perspective on the process of making theatre. Meet an artist from the production's creative team before the show, in conversation with a member of Theatre Calgary's artistic staff.

### TALKBACK TUESDAY

**OCTOBER 22**

Join us for a lively post-show discussion with members of the cast.

### SENIOR SATURDAY NOVEMBER 2

SPECIAL GUEST:

**DIRECTOR, JENNA TURK**

MAX BELL THEATRE UPPER LOBBY

Before the show begins, Senior Saturday patrons are invited to enjoy some snacks followed by an engaging chat with a theatre professional providing insight into the performance.

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# THE CAST

HALIM	<b>PRANEET AKILLA</b>
KASSANDRA	<b>ARIELLE ROMBOUGH</b>
ANNA	<b>LARA SCHMITZ</b>

## SETTING:

**Toronto's Liberty Village, post-2008 financial crisis.**

STAGE MANAGER	<b>JUSTIN BORN</b>
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	<b>MEREDITH JOHNSON</b>
HEAD OF LIGHTING	<b>CATHARINE CRUMB</b>
ASSISTANT HEAD OF LIGHTING	<b>MIKE BOOTH</b>
HEADS OF SOUND	<b>BRONWYN BOWLBY</b>
	<b>CHRIS JACKO</b>
HEAD STAGE CARPENTER	<b>SCOTT MORRIS</b>
HEAD DRESSER	<b>RACHEL MICHELLE SHERIDAN</b>

*Iceland* is performed without an intermission.

*Iceland* is staged by arrangement with  
Ian Arnold, Catalyst TCM Inc. [www.catalysttcm.com](http://www.catalysttcm.com)  
Commissioning Theatre Why Not Theatre, ON  
Premiered at Summerworks Festival 2012 - Why Not Theatre  
Subsequent Production - Factory Theatre, Toronto, ON - 2013



## PRANEET AKILLA HALIM

FOR THEATRE CALGARY: *A Christmas Carol* (2017), *As You Like It* (Shakespeare by the Bow). SELECTED CREDITS INCLUDE: *Coriolanus* (Bard on the Beach); *The Orchard* (Arts Club); *The Penelopiad* (Grand Theatre); *Wet* (ItsAZoo Productions); *King Lear* and *Macbeth* (The Shakespeare Company). FILM AND TV CREDITS: *October Faction* (Netflix); *Arrow* (CW); *Lux-Me* (Telus Storyhive Web-Series). UPCOMING: *Mahabharata* (Shaw Festival). Follow Praneet on Instagram & Twitter @p\_akilla



## ARIELLE ROMBOUGH KASSANDRA

FOR THEATRE CALGARY: *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. Arielle is an actor, burlesque and drag performer, and now writer, based in Calgary. Growing up behind the scenes at the Shaw Festival and the Citadel Theatre lead to a professional career in the arts. Arielle appeared in the first season of the hit CTV show *JANN*, Netflix's *Black Summer*, FX's *Fargo*, and the indie horror thriller *Red Letter Day*. Having played on stages at Theatre Calgary, Lunchbox Theatre, The Citadel Theatre, Manitoba Theatre Centre, Vertigo Theatre, and The Orleans stage in Las Vegas, Arielle continues to pursue the arts in film, on stage, and most recently putting pen to paper. All my love to C & N.



## LARA SCHMITZ ANNA

FOR THEATRE CALGARY: *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare in the Park). Lara is a local actor, educator, and budding playwright. Her acting credits include: *Sextet* (Verb); *The Lonely Diner*, *The Hollow* (Vertigo); *Vanya, Sonia, Masha and Spike* (ATP); *It's A Wonderful Life* (Theatre NorthWest); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Thou Art Here); *Twelfth Night* (The Shakespeare Company); *Time Present* (Lunchbox); *We Are All Treaty People*, *The General* (Quest); and *Bashir Lazhar* (Downstage). Later this season Lara will be workshoping a script commissioned by Verb Theatre with co-writer Matt McKinney then heading to the Belfry Theatre for *The Ministry of Grace*. Lara is a co-producer and ensemble member of Dirty Laundry, Calgary's completely live improvised soap opera. Much love to her family and KP.

## FEEL LIKE YOU'RE PART OF THE CRIME, WITH ONSTAGE SEATING FOR \$35

WE ARE OFFERING AUDIENCES THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCE TO ENJOY ICELAND WITH ONSTAGE SEATING. SEE THE PLAY AS A FLY ON THE WALL, PEERING THROUGH WINDOWS WATCHING THE STORIES OF THE THREE CHARACTERS UNFOLD ON STAGE.

VISIT [THEATRECALGARY.COM](http://THEATRECALGARY.COM) TO GET YOUR TICKETS





## NICOLAS BILLON PLAYWRIGHT

THEATRE CALGARY DEBUT. Nic writes for theatre, television, and film. His work has been produced around the world and has garnered over a dozen awards, including a Governor-General's Award for Drama, a Canadian Screen Award, and a Writers Guild of Canada Screenwriting Award. [nicolasbillon.com](http://nicolasbillon.com)



## JENNA TURK DIRECTOR

FOR THEATRE CALGARY: Dramaturg – *Honour Beat*; Adaptation – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *As You Like It* (Shakespeare by the Bow). Jenna has been with Theatre Calgary for the past three years as Artistic Associate. She came to Alberta after eight years in independent theatre in Toronto (living in Parkdale, which is adjacent to Liberty Village). Jenna self-produces under The Deep End Collective, an artist-run feminist theatre cooperative that creates work inspired by real people, places, or events. She has a BFA in Acting from the University of Windsor and a MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Guelph. Most recently, Jenna's play *Remnants* premiered in St. John's, NL, with White Rooster Theatre and she directed *Return to Treasure Island* for Calgary's StoryBook Theatre. Next up, Jenna is the dramaturg on Theatre Calgary's new adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*. Many thanks to Stafford and Lesley.



## HANNE LOOSEN SET & COSTUME DESIGN

FOR THEATRE CALGARY: *Skylight*, *The Shoplifters* (Costume design). SELECTED CREDITS INCLUDE: Costume design for *The Glass Menagerie* (Shaw Festival); *Deathtrap*, *The Lonely Diner* (Vertigo); *Zorro: Family Code*, *Constellations*, *To The Light* (ATP); *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (The Shakespeare Company and Hit & Myth); *Attila* (Mariinsky Theatre); set and costume design for *Hamlet*, *A Ghost Story*, *Macbeth*, *The Three Musketeers* (The Shakespeare Company); *Huckleberry Finn*, *Hana's Suitcase*, *Lord of the Flies* (Storybook Theatre); *Children's Corner*, *La Cenerentola* (State Opera Berlin). Upcoming projects include *The Lion*, *The Witch and The Wardrobe* at ATP, and the design for *Flush*, a new work based on the novella by Virginia Woolf staged at the Shaw Festival.



## CIMMERON MEYER LIGHTING DESIGN

FOR THEATRE CALGARY: *Twelfth Night*. ELSEWHERE: *Bakkahi* (Stratford Festival); *Twelfth Night* (NAC); *Famous Puppet Death Scenes*, *The Erotic Anguish of Don Juan*, *Ignorance*, *The Tooth Fairy* (The Old Trout Puppet Workshop); *Dream Machine*, *Featherland*, *A History of Wild Theatre* (One Yellow Rabbit Performance Theatre); *Sailor Boy*, *The Alan Parkinson's Project*, *Confessions of a Paper Boy* (Ghost River); *Closer*, *Reasons to be Pretty*, *Urinetown: The Musical*, *Writer's Block* and *The Full Monty* (Ground Zero Theatre); *Travels with My Aunt*, *Snake in the Grass*, *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, *Shear Madness* (Vertigo); *Macbeth*, *Richard III* and *The Queens* (The Shakespeare Company). Cimmeron is alumna of the National Theatre School of Canada and a recipient of a Sterling Award and two Betty Mitchell Awards for outstanding lighting design.



## ANDREW BLIZZARD SOUND DESIGN

FOR THEATRE CALGARY: *Blow Wind High Water*, *Hamlet* (Shakespeare by the Bow). SELECTED CREDITS INCLUDE: *Dracula: The Bloody Truth*, *Sherlock Holmes and the American Problem*, *Nine Dragons*, *Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Jersey Lily*, *The Haunting*, *The Game's Afoot*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Travels with my Aunt*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Woman in Black*, *Noirville* (Vertigo); *Macbeth* (The Shakespeare Company/Hit & Myth/Vertigo); *In On It*, *The Surrogate* (Lunchbox); *The After, aWay* (ANCHOR|RED Theatre); *Shakespeare's Dog* (ATP); *Lieutenant of Inishmore* (GZT/Hit & Myth); *Blood: A Scientific Romance* (Sage); *Le Gros Spectacle* (The Wind-up Dames/ATP); *PARANOiA* (The Wind-up Dames/GZT). He has received three Betty Mitchell awards and was a nominee for an AMPiA award for the short film *The Money Tree*. Andrew wishes to thank his darling wife Brianna, his boys Sebastian and Rowan, and little Ruby for their enduring love and support.



## JANE MACFARLANE VOICE & DIALECT COACH

FOR THEATRE CALGARY: More than 60 productions since 2000 including *Noises Off*, *Billy Elliot the Musical*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Mary and Max – A New Musical*, *Honour Beat*, *The Secret Garden*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Audience*, *Skylight*, *The Crucible*, *Liberation Days* (WCT co-pro), *One Man, Two Guvnors*, *The Mountaintop*, *Enron*, 8 seasons of Shakespeare by the Bow and 15 years of *A Christmas Carol*. Jane has also worked for ATP, is the Voice & Dialect Consultant for Vertigo Theatre and the Voice & Text Coach for The Shakespeare Company. She has taught at such institutions as York University, Harvard University, Southern Methodist University, MRU, UofA, and is currently teaching in the Drama Division in the School of Creative & Performing Arts at the UofC.



## JUSTIN BORN STAGE MANAGER

FOR THEATRE CALGARY: Stage Manager – *Skylight*. Assistant Stage Manager – *The Scarlet Letter*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *The Crucible*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *The Great Gatsby*. Selected credits include: *Dracula: The Bloody Truth*, *The Lonely Diner*, *The Hollow*, *Calamity Town*, *The Game's Afoot*, *The Huron Bride* (Vertigo); *Mickey & Judy*, *Epiphany*, *The Santaland Diaries* (Lunchbox); *To The Light*, *Venus in Fur* (ATP); *Jeremy de Bergerac*, *Maria Rasputin Presents* (Forte); *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Tuesday's with Morrie*, *Queen Millie of Galt*, *Mary's Wedding* (Rosebud Theatre); *The Canadian Badlands Passion Play* (2010 – 2014); Assistant Production Manager of the Calgary Stampede Grandstand Show (2015 – 2019). Love to Ariel, Mom, Dad, and Lucy.



## MEREDITH JOHNSON ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

THEATRE CALGARY DEBUT. Meredith is a Calgary based theatre artist who has worked in stage management for numerous companies in the city including: Alberta Theatre Projects, Bad Knaps Theatre, Black Radish Theatre, Calgary Young People's Theatre, Lunchbox Theatre, Major Matt Mason Collective, Quest Theatre, The Shakespeare Company, Spontaneous Theatre, Verb Theatre & Vertigo Mystery Theatre.



## QUINN LAZENBY TC MENTEE - DIRECTING

THEATRE CALGARY DEBUT. Quinn is thrilled to be part of Theatre Calgary's *Iceland*. Prior to studying Musical Theatre at Otterbein University, he performed as a soloist with the Calgary Opera, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and trained professionally at Alberta Ballet. Quinn's previous theatre credits include: *West Side Story* (Rainbow Stage), *The Addams Family* (Front Row Centre), as well as *Sweet Charity*, *Into the Woods* and *Anything Goes*. Quinn is passionate about using political theatre as a spark for social change, and hopes Iceland will ignite a lively debate. He would like to thank his first directing mentor and university professor, Lenny Leibowitz, for introducing the art of storytelling as an effective form of activism.

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# ICELAND IS A BEAUTIFUL SCRIPT; FIERCELY FUNNY, AND WHIP-SMART.”

**ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE JENNA TURK TALKS ICELAND AND MAKING HER THEATRE CALGARY DIRECTORIAL DEBUT.**

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“What I learned in Toronto as an emerging artist is that you have to dive in. It’s a hustle trying to make a living as an artist there.”

Jenna Turk, an Ontario native, earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting at the University of Windsor, but moved to Toronto to realize her dreams as an artist, seizing any opportunity she could to learn and grow as a theatremaker. While taking a directing workshop with Tarragon Theatre’s Artistic Director Richard Rose, she accepted a role as script coordinator for a new play there called, *A Brimful of Asha*. Little did she know, its creator was someone who would become important in her career: Ravi Jain. Observing him in the theatre, Jenna says it became clear why he was so successful at such a young age.

“He’s smart and kind. He showed genuine interest in the people he worked with. There was no façade.”

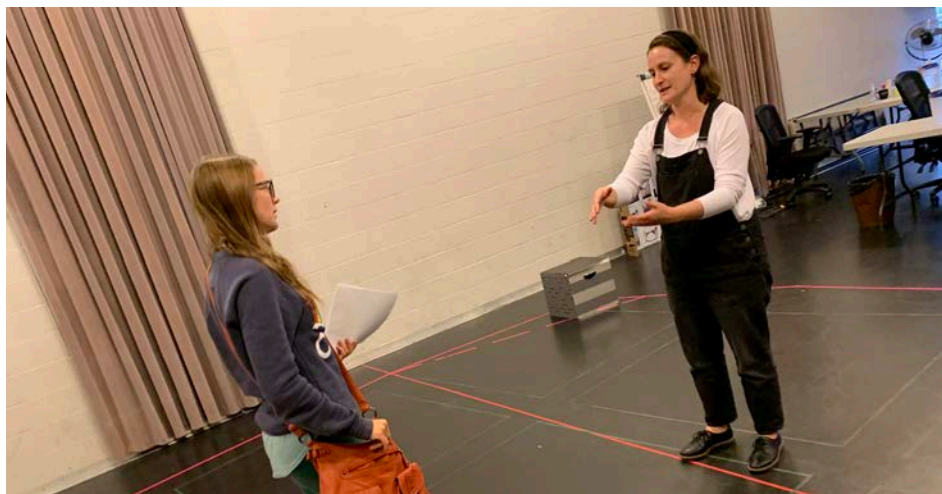
It was during this time that Ravi saw Jenna’s talent and drive, and asked her to be the Assistant Director on a new work by playwright Nicolas Billon at Toronto’s 2012 SummerWorks Performance Festival. That play was *Iceland*. For Jenna, this was a real introduction to Canadian theatre and what it means to make new plays in Canada.

“It was so inspiring working with Ravi. His energy is extraordinary. He is a real force,” said Jenna. “It was also really eye-opening working with Nic. He was incredibly generous in his writing process, everyone had a voice and he welcomed our ideas.”

It was after the experience of working with Ravi and Nicolas that Jenna wanted to focus on creating her own work, and she decided to further expand her knowledge and pursue a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Guelph. After completing her Masters and having lived in Toronto for eight years, she decided it was time for a change, so she moved out west for her position as the Artistic Associate at Theatre Calgary.

Calgary’s artistic community was a refreshing change for Jenna. Her experience living in Toronto was that everyone was labelled – be it an actor, director or playwright – but it was rare to make a living as more than one thing. “In Calgary, quite often an actor is also a designer/director/etc. And not just as a side hustle. But they are seen as a respected artist in both fields. Like, Mark Bellamy who directed *Noises Off* for TC and who will be onstage next in the new *A Christmas Carol* adaptation.”

After working with Theatre Calgary’s Artistic Director, Stafford Arima, and being embraced by the team, Jenna’s



JENNA TURK DIRECTS LARA SCHMITZ DURING REHEARSALS FOR "ICELAND."

contract became permanent. And an opportunity presented itself that she never thought would come about. "I had put directing out of my mind as a possibility within my role at Theatre Calgary. So, when Stafford and the artistic team here offered me the chance to direct *Iceland*, it was a surprise. But a really wonderful one. It felt like Stafford trusted and believed in me. It was exciting."

Jenna hopes *Iceland* will appeal to a Calgary audience. "*Iceland* is a beautiful script; fiercely funny, and whip-smart. And, this is a business-minded city with a big heart, but it can be difficult to balance the two. Capitalism is a huge part of our lives, navigating booms and busts; I think people will be able to relate to this story."

As Jenna reflects on her journey of getting to this point and making her Theatre Calgary directorial debut, she is thankful for the people who have supported her and cheered her on along the way. Mentorship is important to Jenna who as Artistic Associate facilitates Theatre Calgary's mentorship program,

TC Mentors. "It's not always easy to find mentors though. It takes a lot of work and patience to be one! I have actually started considering people around my age, colleagues and friends in theatre, as my mentors. In Calgary, there are some powerful women I admire and who make me excited about the future. Like, Jamie Dunsdon and Jenna Rodgers. Tara Beagan, Clare Preuss, Pam Tzeng. There are many! And that is thrilling."

"I'm so grateful to Stafford for giving me this opportunity and entrusting me to bring this show to our stage. In a way, it's really walking the walk, not just supporting emerging artist through programs like TC Mentors, but taking a risk on me and allowing me to continue to grow as well. I am very lucky to be where I am." ●

**BY HEATHER OLIVER**



# HOW DO WE EVOLVE PAST HUMAN GREED?

ACTOR PRANEET AKILLA SHARES HIS ACTING JOURNEY AND BECOMING HALIM

---

**P**raneet Akilla calls himself and his fellow acting community empathy machines. His greatest reward in his career is impacting lives with stories, putting smiles on faces, tears in eyes and laughter in bellies. He says he wants to evoke feelings from the audience. And within the play *Iceland*, he's sure to evoke a mixed bag of emotions playing Halim.

Praneet was born in Mumbai, and after living in Kuwait, his family immigrated to Canada to seek better education, opportunities and lives for him and his sister. This is what put Praneet on the path to entering the world of oil and gas, and pursuing a career as a chemical engineer.

Praneet attended McGill University in Montreal, but did not just focus on his engineering pursuits. Praneet had developed a passion for the arts and acting during his grade school years, and while in university, he would feed his desire by acting in a musical theatre group.

"Every summer I'd come back to Calgary and intern with oil and gas companies and see old friends, and everyone would be surprised to hear the career I had chosen. All my friends thought because of my love of the arts, that's where I'd be."

Over 2013-2014, Praneet began to feel like he was in 'auto-pilot', questioning his life path and where his passions and ambitions lied. To continue to feed his burning interest in acting and film, he decided to work on a project called *Jewel*

*Fools*. Praneet shares he would go to school all day, and film all night to make the film, burning the candle at both ends. After the film premiered at the Calgary International Film Festival, he had a wakeup call, and realized he wanted to fully immerse himself as an actor.

"I had started working with Suncor as a chemical engineer at this time, but people started to be laid off. I knew my path there would only lead to a certain point. So I followed my heart, and fully pursued my acting career."

In 2016, Praneet landed his first general audition with Theatre Calgary. "I had no idea what I was doing, but they gave me a chance," said Praneet. "It was a risky thing to do, but it was tried and tested for me, I had accumulated the data, I knew I could do this and had seen the reception to it. That's the engineer in me. And I knew if I failed, I had a backup plan."

Praneet continued to build up his acting career in Calgary, and joined Front Row Centre Theatre doing community theatre for about one year. He finally got an opportunity to work at Theatre Calgary though, playing the role of Orlando in the 2017 Shakespeare by the Bow production of *As You Like It*. While honing his skills as an actor, Praneet shares the greatest challenge that he still faces is the insecurity of the business.

"We actors in some ways are anxious narcissists. With the volatility and competitiveness of the industry we're in,





PRANEET AKILLA DURING REHEARSALS FOR "ICELAND"

especially when there is no job security, we constantly second guess our abilities and look for external validation. I'm sure as I continue down my career path, this will become less of a challenge, but it's there for me now."

But Praneet's hard work and dedication to his craft is paying off and he is now a full-time actor. He plays one of the main characters in the soon-to-be released and highly anticipated Netflix series, *October Faction*, and in *Iceland*, takes his first major role and second appearance on the Theatre Calgary main stage.

Praneet shares he is excited for his return to Theatre Calgary, calling it his home theatre because it is where he got his first professional opportunity when playing Dick Wilkins in the 2017 production of *A Christmas Carol*.

"I wanted this role to work with Stafford Arima (Artistic Director) and Jenna Turk (Director, *Iceland*). They are both visionary artists, and it will be my first time working with Jenna as a director which I'm really looking forward to."

"The script is what really drew me to this opportunity. Billon won the Governor General award for this play and it is an incredibly timely and riveting piece of art that speaks to the problems we have today."

Praneet will also be flexing his acting muscles, performing his first-ever monologue playing what is a divisive character. He shares he will be drawing upon his personal experiences working

as an engineer and tapping into his capitalistic frame of mind that once drove him in his former career.

"I used to be Halim in some ways. I was money-hungry and I thought success equated to money. I also know many people like him more than I want to know," said Praneet. "My character is a very meaty character. It's very easy to make him the villain of the piece because he says what most people won't say out loud. But I can't judge my character, I have to see where he's coming from."

Praneet shares he loves studying and researching human behaviour, and through his own experiences he can come up with a version of Halim based on this and the people he's met in his life. But he's going deeper into the character he's building.

"I could have easily become a Halim, and the irony of that is not lost on me. It's easy to play the idea of Halim, the real estate investor, the person all about success and money. But to really prepare, I am trying to find my own voice through Halim."

Praneet knows that this play will provoke many feelings and emotions, but it's not a feeling he wants the audience to feel so much as it is a question he wants to pose.

"How do we evolve past human greed? Greed is instinctual, so how do we move past that? We keep telling the same stories but we never learn." ●

**BY HEATHER OLIVER**



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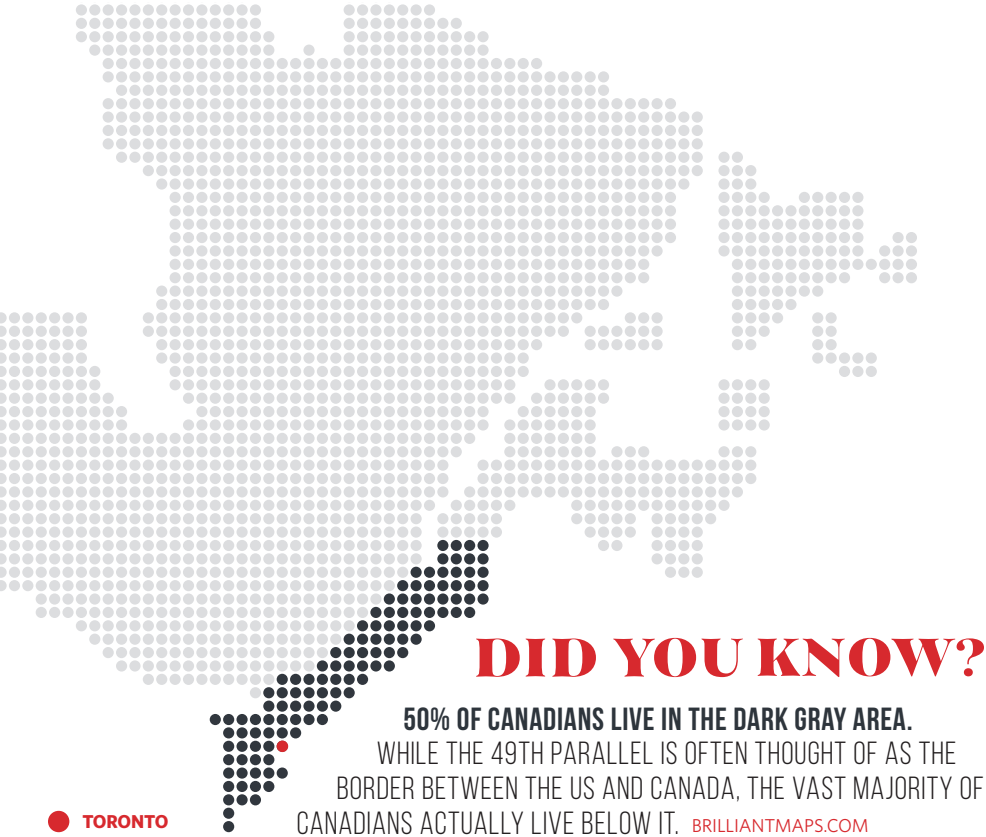
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