

TARRAGON THEATRE

32nd SEASON 2002-2003

“Tarragon Theatre has skimmed the cream of Canadian playwrights for its 2001-2002 season.” **Robert Crew, *Toronto Star*, 2001**

“What a miracle the Tarragon is, really.”
David MacFarlane, *Globe & Mail*, 2000

“Tarragon [has] the key position at the centre of Canada’s theatrical stew.”
Mira Friedlander, *Globe & Mail*, 1997

About Tarragon Theatre

Tarragon Theatre was founded in 1970, Bill Glassco was Artistic Director until 1981; Urjo Karede was Artistic Director until his death in December, 2001; Richard Rose became Artistic Director at the beginning of the 2002-2003 season.

Tarragon Achievements

Over 175 Canadian premieres by such celebrated and award-winning playwrights such as David French, James Reaney, George F. Walker, Judith Thompson, John Murrell, John Krizanc, Don Hannah, Joan MacLeod, Wendy Lill, Morris Panych, Jason Sherman, Guillermo Verdecchia, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Daniel Brooks, Diane Flacks, Richard Greenblatt, Ted Dykstra, Ken Garnhum, Michael Healey, Jonathan Wilson, Morwyn Brebner, Mavis Gallant, Kristen Thomson and a host of others.

Tarragon is the foremost producer, in English Canada, of translated plays from Québec, most notably the work of Carole Fréchette and Michel Tremblay.

Plays developed and produced at Tarragon have on many occasions, toured nationally and internationally; they have also been widely published, broadcast and filmed.

Tarragon has received more than 200 Dora Award nominations, many nominations (and winners) for the Chalmers Canadian Play Award and many nominations for the Governor General’s Award for Drama (winners include Judith Thompson, Joan MacLeod, Guillermo Verdecchia, John Krizanc, Jason Sherman and Morris Panych, all for Tarragon plays). Tarragon has received the Lieutenant Governor’s Award 4 times in the past 6 years.

Over the past 6 years, the number of people subscribing to the Tarragon has grown to a record 4,100 subscribers by an average 15% in the 2002/2003 season. Tarragon is deficit-free.

The Urjo Karede Playwrights Endowment Fund, named to honour Urjo’s commitment to Canadian theatre, stands at just over \$1 million. Income from the fund is used to assist playwrights while they are writing their plays.

Tarragon Programs

Seven or eight major productions in two theatres each season. In the 2001-2002 season, there were eight productions (339 performances) with 49,854 paid attendance.

Playwrights Unit (since 1982). As many as 7 playwrights, with works-in-progress work individually and collectively with the artistic director and the associate artistic director over the course of a year. These plays are given a public reading during Play Reading Week, held in mid-December.

5 playwrights-in-residence.

Young Playwrights in Schools Program – co-op credit program provided in conjunction with Toronto District School Board.

Tarragon Theatre/George Brown College New Play Development Project – a Tarragon playwright will write a play to be workshopped by second year acting students at George Brown College in order to give the students a sense of the development process and their role as actors within it.

Spring Arts Fair (since 1985): an extraordinary free celebration of the performing arts, presented in spaces throughout the interior and exterior of Tarragon Theatre.

OutReach programs aimed at youth including Spring Training Project, Young Playwrights Unit, *Under 20 for Under 20's* playwriting contest, high school and post-secondary co-op placements.

OutReach programs aimed at educators including Teacher Nights and educator workshops.

Apprentice programs in arts administration and stage management.

Tarragon Special Services

Over 500 scripts professionally read and assessed annually without charge. Student and senior matinees. Teachers provided with a complimentary study guide.

Pay-What-You-Can performances every Sunday afternoon. Costume and prop rentals for professional and community companies. Wheelchair accessibility throughout facility.

Complimentary tickets donated to community and social service groups for fundraising events.

TARRAGON THEATRE

study guide

Russell Hill by Chris Earle



Starring: Chris Earle, Same Earle, Shari Hollett, Frank Moore, Mary Francis Moore, Robert Smith

Directed by Chris Abraham

Set and costumes designed by John Thompson

Sound and music composed by Richard Feren

Lighting design by Andrea Lundy & Michelle Ramsay

Stage Manager: Monica Esteves

April 15 – May 25, 2003

About the *Russell Hill* study guide:

This study guide has been created so that your theatre experience at Tarragon is a fulfilling and engaging one. We hope that it will help create discussions, generate ideas and prompt many questions.

The ***Russell Hill*** study guide was coordinated by Mary B. Wood and compiled by:

Kim Thomas (BA, B.Ed.) was a 2003 education intern at Tarragon Theatre as part of her program work in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University.

Kristen Van Alphen (BA Honours) has been working in professional theatre since 1995 and with OutReach at Tarragon Theatre since 1999.

Mary B. Wood (BA Honours, B.Ed.) first came to Tarragon in 2000 as a Tarragon Theatre/ OISE intern. She teaches dramatic arts part time and continues to work in OutReach.

Special thanks and acknowledgements to Mary Francis Moore, Catherine Matzig and Andy McKim for their invaluable contributions.

The ***Russell Hill*** study guide is divided into several sections.

1. **Themes** and **vocabulary** in ***Russell Hill***.
2. **Pre show lesson plan** for your class grounded in the Dramatic Arts curriculum.

We encourage you to contact us should you have any questions or comments at 416.536.5018 x243.

Russell Hill

But disaster is a funny thing. It's like a river. You can dam it up in one spot, but...

Russell Hill is a new work by Chris Earle. The play uses the 1995 Toronto subway crash both as a backdrop to the story and as a symbolic representation of the tenuousness of life. **Russell Hill** plays out a series of dramatic scenes that reveal the risks and consequences of missed warning signals.

Chris Earle wrote the first draft of **Russell Hill** in 2000, as a member of Tarragon's Playwright's Unit, and continued to develop the play at Tarragon as a writer-in-residence. His previous plays include *The Proceedings*, the twin comedies *Expectation* and *Big Head Goes to Bed* (both co-written with Shari Hollett), and the Chalmers and Dora award-winning *Radio: 30*. Earle and Hollett's company, the night kitchen, produced all of the above works. Selected acting credits include *Miracle Mother* and *Faust* at Tarragon, *Mayhem and the Naked Writer*, *The Knee Plays 2* and *Doubt* for Theatre Columbus and *Possible Worlds* at Theatre Passe Muraille. Chris' work as a director includes *Howie The Rookie* (Naked in the Wings/SummerWorks), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Equity Showcase/George Brown College), *Hello...Hello* (Pochsy Productions), and three shows at The Second City including last year's hit *Psychedelicatessen*.

From the playwright

The Accident:

On Friday August 11, 1995 at 6:02 PM, a southbound Toronto subway train packed with rush hour passengers collided with a stopped train in the tunnel just north of Dupont station. It was the worst accident in TTC history, leaving three passengers dead and over a hundred injured.

Those seeking further information should refer to the transcripts of the Coroner's Inquest and the extensive newspaper coverage, particularly the excellent work of Bruce Champion-Smith and Nicolaas van Rijn for the Toronto Star.

About the Play

Setting

Russell Hill takes place primarily in Toronto, Ontario in August 1995. The action of the play is set in a Toronto subway station called Russell Hill. The scenes are staged on the far end of a subway platform, where the mouth of the subway tunnel is visible. A variety of lights and sounds indicate other locations throughout the play.

Structure

Russell Hill does not follow a strict narrative pattern. Rather, it portrays a succession of scenes, each which has an element of missed warning signals and/or the resulting disaster. **Russell Hill** follows a number of stories that share a theme rather than one story with a number of themes. Therefore, it is more significant to draw connections between the situations of the characters than to connect the characters themselves.

"Like ghostly faces seen in the windows of a passing train, we catch a glimpse of Torontonians at the intersection of life and disaster – all of them sharing a journey, a city, a moment in time."

Characters

In the program, the cast is listed as an ensemble. This choice indicates that circumstance rather than the history of the characters is most noteworthy. To assist you, we have incorporated a quick reference of the characters here.

Russell Hill has twenty-one characters who appear throughout the play, although some characters appear in more than one scene.

- Host:** He acts as a guide for the audience throughout the show. He pops up in both the middle and the ending of scenes. He also acts out other roles such as the Crown Counsel and young man on the subway platform. He is the comic relief throughout the play but also brings a serious message to the audience.
- Father:** A middle-aged man who is traveling with his young son. During these scenes, he makes countless, failing attempts to communicate with his child.
- Son:** A young boy traveling with his father. He is quiet, withdrawn and outwardly disobedient to his father.
- Crown:** This character is played by the Host. He questions the subway operator.
- Driver:** The subway operator who was driving the train when it collided with a second train. This character is played by different actors in each scene. However, it is meant to be the same driver.
- Beggar:** A man who stands on a downtown street corner and begs for money. He has worked on the same corner for many years.
- Gill:** A wealthy businessman who is both greedy and self indulgent. He only seems to help others if it directly benefits him.
- Joe:** A middle aged man who suffers from back pain.
- Rachel:** An abstract thinker who specializes in the practice of therapeutic touch.
- Carolyn:** A women who five years after a break up is still not able to let go. She puts on the façade that she has moved on.
- Mark:** Carolyn's former boyfriend. He, like her, has not been able to move on fully with his life after the break up. He harbors extreme guilt for falling in love with another woman and desperately searches for Carolyn's forgiveness.
- Singer:** A character that appears briefly to sing Carolyn a "Sinatra – style ballad".
- Katherine:** A young wife and mother living a comfortable and secure life. She is kind and tries to be a good person by sponsoring a foster child.
- Paul:** A young production assistant working on the set of a film called "Acceptable Risk." The movie details the Toronto subway crash of 1995. He is both pleasant and polite, yet somewhat naive.

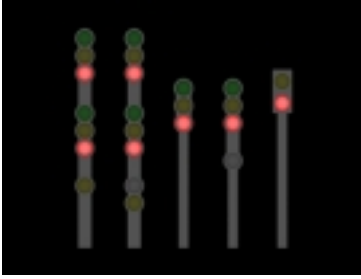
- John :** A resident in the area where the movie "Acceptable Risk" is being shot. He is a friendly man but he has a difficult time staying focused on a single conversation and tends to change the topic frequently.
- Meg:** A young woman vacationing in Mexico with her husband and children. During her vacation she has an affair with Ann, another guest at the resort.
- Ann:** An outspoken, loud and vivacious woman vacationing in Mexico. She has a crush on Meg who is also staying at the resort.
- Man #1 and Man #2:** Both are Mexican men who work at the resort where Meg and Ann are staying.
- Coroner:** Appears briefly in the last scene in which the driver is being questioned by the Crown for the last time.
- Young Man:** Played by the Host. He does not have any lines; he is only seen waiting quietly for the subway on the platform in beginning of the play and the final scene.
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Russell Hill Vocabulary

- Tripping:** To stop a subway train as rapidly as possible.
- Trip arm:** Movable metal bar installed beside the tracks near most signals. When raised by the signaling system, a trip arm will physically hit corresponding emergency brake trigger (tripcock) on any passing train thus forcing the train to stop. Trip arms are generally held upright by a spring but are driven down by air pressure (or a small electric motor) when the signal is not presenting an indication of *stop and stay*. As the raising action of the trip arm is caused by a spring, the trip arm will rise if power to the signals is lost.
- Marker Signals :** Are the subway equivalent of, "do not enter." They unconditionally deny access, almost always in the reverse direction to usual traffic. They never change their red aspect and they often have trip arms.

There are five types of signals used on the TTC subway system that can give six different indications (instructions) to train operators. (The following are mentioned in *Russell Hill*)

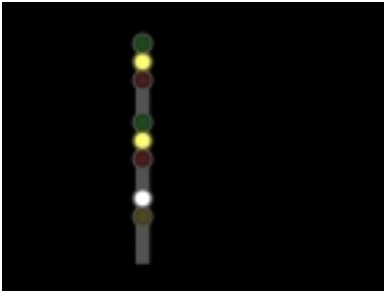
- Stop and Stay:** All signals can present a red light to convey the instruction of *stop and stay*. Upon reaching a red signal, the train operator must wait until the signal clears (changes colour) or until they are given permission to key-by (drive through) the signal at greatly reduced speed *with the expectation of finding a broken rail or stopped train*. If a driver attempts to drive his/her train at normal speed through a signal that presents an indication of *stop and stay*, the train's brakes will be automatically triggered by the signal's trip arm.



← Stop and stay light formation

Yellow over lunar (white):

designates that the next signal is a time signal and that the time signal (beyond the next switch) is presenting an instruction of *stop and stay* with timer. A train which passes a signal with an aspect of yellow over lunar white *will not* be stopped by the trip arm, but the train must slow down before it crosses the second time signal or it *will* be forced to stop.



← Yellow over lunar light formation

Themes

The risks in being self-absorbed

- All the characters in ***Russell Hill*** find themselves absorbed by the reality of their daily lives.

Gill is an example of an egocentric man who only cares about himself. He shows this by admitting that the only reason he helps the beggar is because it benefits him.

Many people are unaware that they are wrapped up in their own lives and as a result they have become blind to the “bigger picture”. It is not until we are able to look back that we realize all that has been missed.

Unfortunately, it sometimes takes an astonishing or tragic event to wake people up and open their eyes. In ***Russell Hill***, it is the Toronto subway crash of 1995 that sheds light on what is really important in life.

They escaped through an emergency access tunnel at Russell Hill, and found themselves standing on the slope of a wooded ravine. It was a beautiful, summer evening. Up on the hillside, people were walking their dogs, and pushing kids in strollers. And I imagine that as they stood there, blinking in the soft twilight air, they looked up in wonder and thought, “So this is it...this is the world.”

Taking responsibility for your actions

- In *Russell Hill*, the subway operator acknowledges the possibility of mistakes he made. "...it has come to my attention since that day that it is likely I made a mistake on that day. And I would like to say to the court today how regretful I am about that mistake and how sorry I am that the families of the victims and the injured had to go through such a tragedy."

How else is the importance of taking responsibility for your actions explored in *Russell Hill*?

The Dangers of Pre-judgement

- Throughout *Russell Hill* we are introduced to characters that are not always what they seem. For example, when Gill sees the beggar on the street he automatically assumes that the beggar is beneath him.
- Gill establishes his power by talking "at" him instead of with him.

What do take away from this scene? What do we learn about those characters?
What other scenes explore the concept of pre-judging?

Lesson Plans

The pre-show lesson plans are meant to introduce themes and ideas in the play, and get your students thinking before coming out to see the show.

These lessons plans are grounded in the Ontario Curriculum documents, which can be found at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/curricul.html>

The study of dramatic arts provides students with an opportunity to take on roles, to create and enter into imagined worlds, and to learn in a unique way about themselves, the art of drama and the world around them.

The expectations for dramatic arts courses are organized in three distinct but related strands with are **Theory, Creation and Analysis**. The following lesson plan covers all three areas.

Pre-Show Lesson Plan

This lesson is based on the theme of self-absorption. In *Russell Hill* we experience how easy it is to become consumed by issues in our lives, so much so, that we become unaware of what is happening around us.

Often we lose sight of what is truly important in life and it is not until we look back at the damage, that we see the many missed "warning signals".

When disaster strikes, it often has the power to open our eyes and shed light on the important things we were not able to see before.

Objectives (from the Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum)

- Analyze the connections between the theatre, themselves, and society
- Create the inner and outer life of a character, using a variety of strategies (e.g., improvisation, research, textual analysis)
- Develop the background of a character using appropriate techniques (e.g., writing in role; analysing a character's motivation and influences)
- Analyze, through journal writing, discussion, and questioning, the significance of what they have gained from their artistic experiences
- Explain how the portrayal of roles and characters in drama is connected to their personal experiences, to universal truths, and to specific aspects of the human experience

Warm-up Activities:

1. Breathing Your Body Away

- Students lay on the floor (on their back) in their own space
- They close their eyes and follow the instructions that the teacher gives them.

Instructions:

- Gently focus your attention on your feet and legs.
- Be aware of all the sensations from your feet and legs.
- Now, inhale a long, slow breath, and as you do, breathe in all the sensations from your feet and legs.
- In your mind's eye, imagine that you are erasing this part of your body. Now, as you exhale, breathe out all those sensations. Once again, breathe in your feet and legs, and exhale it from your body, so that, in your mind, you can see only from your hips up.
- Now, with another long breath, slowly breathe in all the parts of your body to your neck, and, as you exhale, breathe it away.
- Now, beginning with your fingers, breathe in your fingers, hands, wrists and arms, and exhale them away. Now, your neck and head. As you breathe in, imagine your neck and head being erased, and now breathe them away.
- Let's go back over the whole body in one breath, beginning with the feet. A long slow breath in, and as you do, erase any little parts that still remain.
- Now, take a long slow breath in, as you exhale erase any of the remaining parts. Now, just sit quietly for a minute and enjoy feeling yourself relax deeper and deeper.

- Next, the students will focus on a word. They must pick a word that has, for them, "good" vibrations associated with it. It should be a word that you associate to relaxation, comfort, or peace (e.g. "serenity", "cool," "peaceful," "joy," "free," etc.)
- Now, just let that word hold the centre of your thoughts. As your mind wanders to more stressful thoughts, gently bring it back to that word. After awhile, perhaps your mind will drift to other gentling, restful thoughts. If so, just let it wander. When it does drift to

stressful thoughts, always go back to your original word. Hold this feeling for a few minutes and then follow up this exercise with a gentle arousal.

2. **Walking breath**

- Students find an private space in the room
- The teacher gives the following directions:

Instructions

- Breathe out all the air in your lungs.
- Now take a breath.
- As you breathe out, start walking in any direction, watching out for other people and changing direction if you have to.
- Keep walking until you reach the end of the breath.
- Now stop and take another breath before you continue walking in a new direction. The breath should be gentle and easy.
- Stay focused on everything around you while you walk; the other people, the shape of the space, the objects within the space, the air surrounding your space as you walk, the temperature, the noise (if any) etc.
- Continue walking and now look out to the horizon and imagine the walls aren't there.

Follow this exercise with a brief discussion asking the students what they noticed when they were walking and breathing. How did that change when they imagined the walls had disappeared, etc.

3. **Three Changes**

- Students get into pairs.
- Partners stand facing together and have one minute to look and study each other. They try to take in every detail of their partner's appearance.
- Partners stand back to back and change three details of their appearance (i.e., the way they wear their hair, how their blouse is buttoned etc.)
- They turn back around trying to guess the three minor things that have been altered on their partner.
- The more times this activity is done, the more aware you become of small details.

Main Activity:

*Image Theatre*₁ has been used extensively by Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal. It enables students to explore work with tableau while becoming aware of the thoughts and feelings others in a variety of situations.

Image Theatre

- Students imagine what the subway crash in 1995 in Toronto would have looked like.
- Two volunteers are invited to create a frozen picture that represents the subway crash.
- They each hold the frozen positions in relation to one another- for example one could be a policeman/woman and the other a photographer.
- Other members of the class are asked if they can think of additional images to add into the picture - for example bystanders, passers-by, those who escaped from the train, train operators, etc.
- A tableau is established.

- The teacher then taps one student on the shoulder and asks them to speak one or more of their thoughts aloud in the character they have become in the tableau.
- Each person in the group is invited one by one to speak their thoughts or feelings aloud. Lights can be added to the finished works, in order to add emphasis on different emotions.

This exercise can be developed further by having members of the group move to a position illustrating where their character would have been one minute prior.

Then they are asked to move to another frozen position showing where their character is a moment after the original incident. Each time they speak a thought aloud. Each student should have a chance to take part and become a character.

Journal/response writing

- Students write in the role of the character they played during the tableau exercise.
- They first brain storm what their characters' life was like a month prior to the incident; what kind person were they? (kind, depressed, egocentric, etc.) What were their relationships like? What were they most concerned about at that time? etc. They must then go on to write a journal/diary entry talking about how their lives changed as a result of the Toronto subway crash. What did it make them realize about themselves, about others around them, their loved ones, what they now believed to be important, etc.
- They can read their journal to the rest of the class.