

# spotlight

## Holly Lewis

Actor **Holly Lewis** learned a lot about her profession when she went back to school. Not theatre school, mind you. It was the U of T's Trudeau Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies.

"Ironically, it was theatre work that made me apply for the program," says Lewis, who's currently in **Ubuntu (The Cape Town Project)**.

"When I worked on Theatrefront's last show, *Return* (The Sarajevo Project), I met theatre people who had come of age during a time of war in their homeland. When we worked with them in Europe, I discovered viscerally what war was about: signs for land mines, bullet holes in buildings.

"I realized that in order to explore a work like *Return* artistically, I also had to understand it politically and socially."

Like *Return*, *Ubuntu* – a word that refers to the interconnectedness of all humanity – is the culmination of several workshops involving Canadian and South African performers. The final version blends the stories of *Jabba*, a Xhosa man who seeks his father in Canada, and *Libby* (Lewis), a Canadian woman who discovers secrets about her deceased mother.

"My character has changed over the course of four years of workshoping," smiles the actor. "At one point, because I was pregnant myself, she was a woman concerned about her unborn child. Now the focus looks back a generation, with *Libby* trying to understand her mother."

*Ubuntu* was collectively written, which means that everyone involved had a hand in shaping the work. Still, at some point, director **Daryl Cloran** had to step in and decide which elements would finally be used.

"The process is about trust on sev-

eral levels," admits Lewis. "Theatrefront is an ensemble, but we often bring in people from other countries to create with us.

"We all just have to dive in and do those embarrassing things that are part of collective development, trying things out in front of people whose possible reactions make you a little nervous."

See Opening, page 55.

JON KAPLAN

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