

# arts alumni

WINTER 2010

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE ALUMNI OF THE COLLEGE OF ARTS

## Grad edits new release by L.M. Montgomery



Benjamin Lefebvre

It has been said that the power of the written word is a great force that can play a strong role in shaping perception, culture and lives. For Benjamin Lefebvre, MA '02, the work of acclaimed Canadian author Lucy Maud Montgomery has influenced his career path. "It's no exaggeration to say that L.M. Montgomery changed my life," says Lefebvre, a U of G English literature grad who is now a visiting scholar at both the University of Worcester near London, England, and the L.M. Montgomery Institute at the University of

Prince Edward Island. "She has certainly had a radical effect on my career."

A rare find in the University of Guelph library archives more than a decade ago shone a spotlight on his dedication to advancing the late author's work.

Lefebvre has edited Montgomery's latest book, *The Blythes Are Quoted*, and takes pride in knowing he is sharing a story that almost went untold. The book was released in October after sitting dormant in the U of G archives. A previous version of the manuscript was released as *The Road to Yesterday* in 1974, but Lefebvre's research revealed that the essence of the material had been edited so dramatically that it was almost unrecognizable.

"When I discovered that the original typescript contained more material than I had imagined, and that there were two earlier typescript versions, I knew this was a project that had to be done," he says.

In this book, Montgomery weaves in stories about adultery, illegitimacy, hatred, revenge and murder, he says. "These elements aren't wholly absent in her earlier work, but they are usually pushed to the margins. In this book, they take centre stage."

Lefebvre admits it took a long time to find a publisher for the book. He says several editors were intrigued by the manuscript when

they read it, but perceived Montgomery to be a children's writer and didn't believe the book would appeal to children. In Lefebvre's view, calling Montgomery a children's writer is too narrow a label. While some of her best-known books, including *Anne of Green Gables* and *Emily of New Moon*, are about child characters, most of her books are about older adolescents and adults. "What sets Montgomery apart from other writers," Lefebvre says, "is the fact that her popularity has endured with readers of all ages, genders and locations. Her readers have always included both adults and children."

"Montgomery got a lot of flack toward the end of her career for refusing to keep up with literary trends and shifting notions of realism. Now, the writers and critics who disparaged her are forgotten for the most part, and she remains a writer whose work has endured and will continue to endure as new generations of readers discover her."

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## Student makes Giller list



Shani Mootoo

**S**HANI MOOTOO, a master's student in the School of English and Theatre Studies, is continuing to make a name for herself after her novel *Valmiki's Daughter* made the long list for the 2009 Scotiabank Giller Prize. Her book was one of 12 in the running for the prestigious award.

Mootoo is a filmmaker, visual artist and writer. Her first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, published in 1996, was also a finalist for the Giller Prize, among other awards, and was published worldwide.

*Valmiki's Daughter* is about a well-to-do Trinidadian family. Valmiki, a renowned doctor, is a central character, along with his daughter, Viveka, who is lively, intelligent and intent on escaping from her family's confines.

Mootoo was born in Ireland and grew up in Trinidad. She has lived in Canada since the early 1980s. She is also the author of *He Drown She in the Sea*, which was on the long list for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

## Kudos for historian's book

**A**STUDY OF COMPLEX economic and social relationships in 19th-century rural Ontario has earned three prestigious awards for a University of Guelph historian.

Prof. Catharine Wilson, BA '82, recently receive the Floyd S. Chalmers Award in Ontario History from the Champlain Society for her book *Tenants in Time: Family Strategies, Land, and Liberalism in Upper Canada, 1799-1871*. Earlier this year, *Tenants in Time* also received the Canadian Historical Association's Clio

Award and the Ontario Historical Society's J.J. Talman Award.

"This is a wonderful honour," said Wilson. "I'm delighted at the response the book is getting as it challenges our understanding of early settlement in what we now call Ontario."

In *Tenants in Time*, Wilson mines data from the 1842 census of Cramahe Township, Northumberland County, near Colborne, and examines some of our basic assumptions about life in Upper Canada.

## Grads lead RBC competition

**T**WO U OF G FINE ART GRADS beat out some 600 applicants at the 2009 RBC Painting Competition. Sarah Cale, MFA '05, and Martin Golland, MFA '06, were named runners-up in the competition. Each was awarded \$15,000. Sasha Pierce, BA '97, was also among the contest's 15 semi-finalists. The annual event recognizes leading young Canadian artists who have been showing their work professionally for five years or less.



Martin Golland

## Drama prof wins international prize

**U**NIVERSITY OF GUELPH theatre studies professor and playwright Judith Thompson won the 2009 Amnesty International Freedom of Expression Award for her play *Palace of the End*.

The prestigious award is presented to an outstanding Fringe play that builds understanding and engagement of human rights. *Palace of the End* was chosen by a panel of judges from a record 63 entries.

The play consists of three storylines that capture the global effects of the Iraq War. The first fictional monologue is based on Lynnidie England, the young female U.S. soldier who was convicted for

torturing detainees. The second monologue features British microbiologist David Kelly, who told the BBC that the dossier justifying the invasion of Iraq was grossly exaggerated. The third tells the story of Narjis al Saffarh, a leading Communist in the 1960s and Iraqi mother of four, who was brutally tortured by the Baathists and finally killed by American bombs.

This is the latest honour Thompson has received for *Palace of the End*. The play was a finalist for the 2008 Governor General's Literary Awards. In March 2008, she became the first Canadian to win the prestigious Susan Smith Blackburn Prize.

## Exhibit celebrates Canadian theatre

**U**OF G THEATRE STUDIES professor Pat Flood is co-curator of an exhibit that celebrates the career of a renowned stage designer and the evolution of Canadian theatre using works from Guelph's archive collection.

"Risking the Void: The Scenography of Cameron Porteous," which runs Jan. 20 to April 4 at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, is a comprehensive retrospective of Porteous's 40-year career and his contributions to Canadian theatre.

Flood worked on the project with Sean Breaugh using artwork from private collections and work donated by Porteous to U of G's L.W. Conolly Theatre Archives.

The exhibit offers a glimpse into the creative process of making theatre today and provides a historical perspective on how professional theatre in Canada has evolved in the past four decades. It's a collaboration of U of G, Theatre Museum Canada and the Shaw Festival.



Prof. Pat Flood

## Warm up with the arts

**T**he *Café Philosophique* series hosted by the College of Arts in collaboration with the Bookshelf in downtown Guelph continues with three new instalments this winter. On Feb. 9, history professor Matthew Hayday discusses "Olympic Gold! International Achievement and Canada's Changing Identity." On March 9, the topic is "Can Rodeo Sports Survive the 21st Century?" with Prof. Susan Nance, also of the Department of History. Prof. Stephanie Nutting, Languages and Literatures, presents "Sleuthing for the Truth: The Detective Genre and Quebec Identity" April 13. The lectures are free and begin at 7 p.m. at the eBar.



Prof. Matthew Hayday

## Mark your calendar



The College of Arts is hosting a number of free public events this winter, including lectures, readings, theatre performances and concerts. To be added to the arts events listserv, send email to [khanneso@uoguelph.ca](mailto:khanneso@uoguelph.ca).

## Shenkman lecturer announced

**I**WONA BLAZWICK, director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, England, will deliver the 2010 Shenkman Lecture March 10 at 5 p.m. at War Memorial Hall. Blazwick was formerly head of exhibitions and displays at Tate Modern.

The annual Schenkman Lecture was established in 2007 through an endowment provided by Dasha Shenkman, a Canadian art collector who lives in the United Kingdom. Past Shenkman lectures have been given by American artist Roni Horn, philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto and conceptual artist Michael Craig-Martin.

## arts alumni

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# alumni profile

## Cancer can't dance like this



Daniel Stolfi

**B**ATTLING CANCER is no laughing matter, but Toronto comedian and actor Daniel Stolfi, BA '05, is using his personal experience and a little humour to educate people about the realities of the disease.

Stolfi, who is originally from Guelph and who earned a theatre studies degree from U of G, returned to campus last fall to perform an edgy one-person show he wrote called *Cancer Can't Dance Like This*. The play was directed

by Andrew Ferguson, BA '06, who was working with Stolfi on a show for the 2008 Toronto Fringe Festival when Stolfi fell ill. Jennifer DeLucia, BA '06, co-produced the show with Ferguson and served as its publicist.

Almost two years ago, Stolfi started feeling symptoms of what he thought was possibly the flu. An initial trip to a walk-in clinic resulted in a diagnosis of a sinus infection, but when antibiotics didn't solve the problem, he returned for a second opinion.

This time, he insisted on an X-ray because he'd been experiencing chest pain. The results alerted him and his doctor to something much more serious — fluid in his left lung and a grapefruit-sized tumour next to his heart. He was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

"It didn't fully hit me until I was doing treatment," says Stolfi, who began intensive chemotherapy sessions within days of receiving the news. "I'd never experienced cancer through anyone else, and I was naive. All I knew was that some people die and some people live. I knew I might lose weight and some hair, but I didn't realize the magnitude of it."

Despite his uphill battle,

he chose to use his experience — and a journal he kept while in hospital — to educate and inspire others.

"People would often ask how I was feeling, and I could never quite verbalize it," he says, adding that he still has trouble with that question. "The only way I could get it across in my own way was to do a show because it's all I really know. I'm a performer, and this is my way of expressing it. What I've learned is that, although everyone's story is unique, we all share common experiences, and this connects with a lot of people."

The play, which has also been performed at the Second City in Toronto and at the River Run Centre in Guelph to positive reviews, addresses everything from hair loss and weight loss to lack of sex drive and energy through comedic monologues, musical numbers and character portrayals.

"I tried to find the humour in some of those dark moments," says Stolfi, who is now in remission and cancer-free but still undergoes weekly chemotherapy treatments as a precaution. "Writing this show helped me get through the whole thing. It was like an 'in your face' to cancer."