

# **\$100,000 Siminovitch Prize in Theatre Awarded to Designer Ronnie Burkett**

*Burkett chooses Clea Minaker to receive \$25,000 as Protégé*

**TORONTO, November 2, 2009**



*In photo (from left): Maureen Labonté, Siminovitch Jury Chair; Ronnie Burkett, 2009 Siminovitch Award Winner; Dr. Lou Siminovitch, Founder; Clea Minaker, Siminovitch Protégé Award Recipient; Eric Tripp, President, BMO Capital Markets.*

BMO Financial Group announced that Calgary-born, Toronto-based designer Ronnie Burkett has been selected as the recipient of the 2009 Elinore & Lou Siminovitch Prize in Theatre, the largest theatre award in the country. Burkett was chosen from a short list of six finalists including Jean Bard (Montreal, QB), Bretta Gerecke (Edmonton, AB), Anick Labissonnière (Montreal, QB), Richard Lacroix, Montreal, QB; and Ken MacDonald (Vancouver, BC and Toronto, ON). The short-listed candidates were selected from a list of XX nominated designers.

"The selection of Ronnie Burkett as winner of the 2009 Siminovitch Prize goes to recognize his unique contribution to theatre design. Design has remained at the very centre of everything he has created. His work challenges audiences and extends the way we see theatre," said Maureen Labonté, Jury Chair. "As a designer, he takes risks and experiments while remaining profoundly human in the theatre he creates. He continues to inspire younger, emerging artists whom he has mentored and taught."

Recognized as one of Canada's foremost theatre artists, Burkett has been credited with creating some of the world's most elaborate and provocative puppetry. His work has stimulated an unprecedented adult audience for puppet theatre, continuously playing to great critical and public acclaim on Canada's major stages and at international theatre festivals. His current production *Billy Twinkle, Requiem For a Golden Boy* follows the now-retired *10 Days on Earth*, *Provenance* and the "Memory Dress Trilogy" of *Tinka's New Dress*, *Street of Blood* and *Happy*.

"My chief mentor in puppetry, Martin Stevens, said that 'art is the personal contribution to the ever-continuing conversation about life. Here in the middle of my career, the Siminovitch Prize will allow me to continue that discussion in a significant way," said Burkett.

Burkett has been captivated by puppetry since the age of seven when he opened the World Book Encyclopedia to the entry for “puppets”. He began touring his puppet shows around his home province of Alberta when he was 14 and has been on the road ever since.

“From all of us at BMO Financial Group, I would like to congratulate Ronnie on his outstanding achievements in the world of Canadian theatre,” said Gilles Ouellette, President and CEO, Private Client Group, BMO Financial Group. “The Siminovitch Prize represents an excellence that Ronnie has demonstrated continuously throughout his career. His work is an example of the creativity we can foster in Canada through encouragement, mentorship and support for the arts.” Burkett received a cheque for \$75,000 at the ceremony on Monday, November 2nd and selected Clea Minaker as his protégé who received \$25,000 of the prize. The Siminovitch Prize is set up in this way to put an emphasis on the role of mentorship in Canadian theatre.

### **Clea Minaker, Protégé , protégés**

Clea Minaker grew up on Vancouver Island and has been based out of Montreal for the past twelve years. From 2002-2005 Clea studied at France’s National Puppetry School (E.S.N.A.M) located at the International Institute of Puppetry Arts, in Charleville-Mézières, France. Upon returning to Canada she has been employed as a: puppeteer, actress, puppet builder, designer, director, and teacher. She has worked in theatre companies, on solo performances, in short films, music videos, and concerts. In 2007/2008 she toured internationally with Canadian singer Feist, designing and performing live shadow puppetry and video projections in close to one hundred concert venues. For 2010, Clea has been commissioned to create and direct a touring performance for young audiences at Youtheatre in Montreal. She will also be in residence at Tas de Sable in Amiens France, beginning the creation of her first, full-length, solo performance.

Clea holds a D.M.A (professional arts diploma) in puppetry from E.S.N.A.M, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from McGill University.

### **About the 2009 Siminovitch Prize Jury**

This year’s jury was chaired by newcomer Maureen Labonte, a Montreal-based translator and dramaturge. Other members of the jury included:

- Mérédith Caron – Montreal, Quebec, one of Quebec’s foremost costume designers and a teacher at Montreal’s National Theatre School;
- Rachel Ditor – Vancouver, British Columbia, a dramaturge who has freelanced around Canada and currently Literary Manager at the Arts Club Theatre in Vancouver as well as adjunct professor in dramaturgy at the University of British Columbia;
- Sue LePage – Toronto, Ontario, celebrated set and costume designer for more than 25 years; and
- Mieko Ouchi – Edmonton, Alberta, playwright, actor, stage and film director as well as co-founder and Artistic co-director of the Concrete Theatre in Edmonton.

### **About the Siminovitch Prize**

The Siminovitch Prize in Theatre was introduced in 2001 and dedicated to renowned scientist Lou Siminovitch and his late wife Elinore, a playwright. Sponsored by BMO Financial Group, Canada’s largest annual theatre arts award recognizes direction, playwriting and design in three-year cycles. Previous recipients include:

- Toronto director Daniel Brooks in 2001;
- Montreal playwright Carole Fréchette in 2002;
- Montreal designer Louise Campeau in 2003;
- St. John’s director Jillian Keiley in 2004;
- Toronto playwright John Mighton in 2005;
- Toronto set and costume designer Dany Lyne in 2006; and
- Montréal director Brigitte Haentjens in 2007.

- Toronto playwright, Daniel Maclvor in 2008.

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