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Award-winning play by Glendon grad premieres in Hong Kong

York alumna Melissa Major (BA Hons.'04, BEd '07) first learned about absurdist drama in the Approaches to Theatre class taught by Glendon instructor Aleksandar Lukac (MFA '95). Last week, with the staging of Major's own absurdist tragicomedy, *Unicorn Horns*, in Asia, Lukac's role in the young playwright's career has now shifted from one of coach to collaborator.

Directed by Lukac and performed by Major, *Unicorn Horns* was part of the lineup of **IDEA 2007**, an international festival that took place in Hong Kong July 16-22. Presented by the World Congress for International Drama/Theatre and Education Association, IDEA2007 featured workshops, lectures and 30 performances.

“ Right: Melissa Major

“Having the play staged at this festival was important for both of us,” says Lukac. “It was a great opportunity to show our work in a renowned international venue. It made it all the more challenging that it was part of the world theatre congress as participants were both theatre artists and teachers,” he says.



“I was a bit surprised that they invited this bizarre, physical absurdist show with sexuality to be part of this giant international festival,” says Major. She submitted *Unicorn Horns* for consideration to the festival's organizers because it travels well, as it is a one-person show and does not have a large set. The Hong Kong audience gave it standing ovations and bravos this past weekend.

Unicorn Horns, which won the 2006 York University President's Prize for Playwriting, has a lonely androgynous actor called Quiche as its central character. Quiche has just unsuccessfully completed 714 auditions, marries Alexander Alexandrovich, the perfect man, but is broken when, upon waking up in the morning, discovers that Alexander Alexandrovich is flat. (As in *flat*, flat).



Left: Poster for Hong Kong production of *Unicorn Horns*

Through the surreal plot, Major is exploring weighty themes. “Sometimes things can happen that are completely inexplicable, but they generate the same emotions as ordinary events,” says Major. Quiche's experiences of rejection reflect the reality of an actor's life, she says. “Isn't there a point where that gets to you in a dramatically painful way?”

The play grew out of a monologue Major wrote when she was auditioning for a part in a 2002

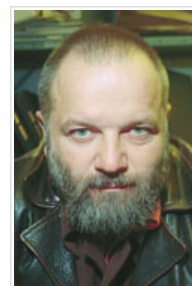
Glendon production of *Elizabeth Bam* by Daniil Kharmis, the founder of the Russian avant-garde literary movement Oberiu, which Lukac was directing. “I had read all kinds of odd, absurdist, wonderful things that really inspired me, so I wrote a monologue myself,” she says.

Major got the part and began writing plays in earnest. Two of her other works also won a York University President's Prize for Playwriting: *Kicking and Smiling* (2007) and *Art is a Cupboard* (2004). “Lukac was a mentor to me for the script of *Art is a Cupboard*,” says Major. He also directed a production of her play, *One Butterfly*, in 2004.

A long-established theatre professional, Lukac, who holds an MFA in directing from York's Faculty of Fine Arts, has directed over 80 productions in the former Yugoslavia, Holland and Canada. His own performance piece, *Newcomer*, was staged earlier this month in Serbia at Open Arc Theatre, a conference for site-specific theatre that brought together theatre artists from the Balkans, Europe and Canada.

“ Right: Aleksandar Lukac

“Working with Lukac is always a wonderful experience. He always has a plethora of incredible and creative ideas,” says Major, who has a bachelor of arts in drama studies and psychology and a bachelor of education from York.



The admiration is mutual as Lukac says he is impressed by the innovative nature of Major's work. “Melissa's plays are very uncommon in the

Canadian context. They are very far from the usual realistic theatre that is dominant on Toronto's stages," says Lukac.

"Melissa was initially informed about this theatre style [Russian absurdism] in my course," says Lukac. "Inspired, she proceeded to create her own work, which has maintained the quirkiness and absurdity of the original literature -- but she is adapting it to the Canadian context."

By Olena Wawryshyn, York communications officer

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