

A Glimpse of Alumna Melissa Major's Award-Winning Unicorn Horns at Glendon



The hall is hushed and dark, there is not a vacant seat in Theatre Glendon, as a slim figure in neutral black and white comes to sit on the bar stool that is almost the only prop on stage. Glendon grad **Melissa Major (right)** has come back to her college to introduce her award-winning absurdist one-act play and talk about her theatre experiences. Her former drama professor, mentor, and director of the current production, Aleksandar (Sasha) Lukac is also on stage with her to add his comments and praise for this work. A brief pause ensues, while Melissa puts on her "costume", and then the shaggy, androgynous Quiche emerges from backstage to offer a short excerpt from her play, *Unicorn Horns* which opened at Toronto's [Theatre Passe Muraille](#) on Thursday, November 8th.

Written and performed by Major, the one-act *Unicorn Horns* is hard to categorize. It is both comic and tragic; there are moments of reality – mostly grotesque, but what dominates is absurdism, clowning, theatre that, according to the author is "not for the faint of heart, and probably not for the average person."

Perhaps not, but her themes are universal and she may be one of the few who are surprised at the success and recognition this piece has garnered. *Unicorn Horns* started out as a short monologue, an assignment in Sasha Lukac's class, "Approaches to Theatre". They were studying the Russian absurdist of the 1920s, who chose this medium because it was the perfect mirror to the absurdity of their lives in an environment of constant fear and political terror. Major was blown away by these works, especially *Elizabeth Bam* by Daniil Kharmis, the founder of the Russian avant-garde literary movement Oberiu. When Major got a part in the play's student production, she immersed herself in this medium and began to write for the theatre in earnest.

Unicorn Horns received its first public showing as a one-nighter at Toronto's 2006 Nuit Blanche Festival, after winning the 2006 York University President's Prize for Playwriting. It was next performed at IDEA 2007, last July's international theatre festival in Hong Kong to great acclaim. The [July 25, 2007 issue of Y File](#) has detailed the play's trajectory of success, along with Melissa Major's other awards and successful plays.

How does the main character of a play acquire the moniker 'Quiche'? "Names are one way a writer can play with language," says Major, "and making the character a food might mean that they are meant for consumption. The audience consumes Quiche." This playfulness with food is also reflected in one of the scenes where Quiche gorges her(him?)self on various types of cheese. The eating and edible person...



ABOUT GLENDON

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

ADMISSIONS

VIRTUAL TOUR

Glendon Campus
York University
2275 Bayview Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M4N 3M6

- Directions
- Tours
- Contact Us

Web site comments?



Sasha Lukac and Melissa Major

Unicorn Horns is not a linear play. Its structure and narrative are circular, as we lurch back and forth between characters and events. As we descend to lower and lower 'circles' of experience, the story becomes gradually more and more tragic. Quiche's love for the totally flat Alexander Alexandrovich would be ludicrous in the realistic world, but then Quiche's whole world is flat, and in that microcosm nothing needs to be reasonable.

Major plays a lot on the grotesque, with scenes insinuating sex in a funny and at the same time repulsive way. Ultimately, everything is up for grabs: is Quiche a man or a woman (her upper lip sports a pencil-drawn moustache), is s/he crazy or is the world surrounding her/him crazy? But as it progresses, the play eventually reveals who the protagonist really is.



Quiche doing her monologue

Lukac comments on parallels with Chekhov and other Russian playwrights. "Tragedy is the important constant in Chekhov's plays", he states, "and this is also true of *Unicorn Horns*. Without tragedy, the play would just descend into nonsense". Lukac and Major have become a creative team and they both affirm their positive and inventive working relationship. Although Lukac is a seasoned director with a Master's degree from York in the theatre arts (MFA '95) and many successful productions in Europe and Canada, he affirms Major's independence in creating her own voice. What was once a teacher – student relationship has grown into an equal partnership. "The fact that Sasha would work on these crazy projects of mine - we have now collaborated several times - is very lucky for me", says Major. "He has a highly developed directorial instinct which helps to shape the production. And he gets these ridiculous and hilarious ideas that somehow always make it into the show. He trusts in the fact that what we find

funny, other people will too."

Major brought this preview of *Unicorn Horns* to Glendon for several reasons. She wanted to share her insights and technique with current students, and to encourage them that it is possible to work in the theatre world with the training they are receiving at Glendon. She also wanted to entice her audience to come and see the full show at Theatre Passe Muraille, where she has made special arrangements for a reduced ticket price for Glendon students.

"I ended up at Glendon almost by mistake, the best 'mistake' I ever made", quips Major. "Instead of the theatre schools I was looking into, my parents were pushing me towards something more 'realistic'." She studied psychology and drama at Glendon, completed an Honours BA in 2004 and went on to do a Bachelor of Education in 2007. During this process, she also became fluent in French. "And on the theatre side, I couldn't have been more fortunate... I must have worked on over 20 productions during my time here, 6 of which I wrote and produced myself. Glendon gave me the opportunity to play, to try things out on stage. It was certainly a case of learning by doing, which is a rare experience for school."



Melissa wears the unicorn horn

As for making a living in the theatre, Major's story is that of so many other playwrights and actors. She works at many other aspects of theatre, such as stage-managing the Bathurst Street Theatre's upcoming December production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Major's Glendon sample of *Unicorn Horns* was meant to entice that audience to come and see the whole show. In her experience, absurdist theatre is more difficult to market than some other forms. "Yet it's impossible to separate the art from the business, because you are always creating art so that people will see it. And if you are failing on the second part, you've failed on the first", says Major.

Melissa Major's performance and talk was sponsored by the Playwrights' Guild of Canada and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Unicorn Horns, written by and featuring Melissa Major and directed by Aleksandar Lukac, is on at Theatre Passe Muraille, 16 Ryerson Ave, from November 8 to 18. It plays as a double feature with *Joe: The Perfect Man*, written by and featuring Rachelle Elie and directed by Adam Lazarus. (PWYC-\$25 at 416-504-7529). **Glendon students should identify themselves for a reduced ticket price.** For information, visit www.cheshireunicorn.com; for tickets: www.artsboxoffice.ca.

This article was submitted by Glendon communications officer Marika Kemeny

Published on November 9, 2007



GLEDON

