



Victoria play about HIV criminalization gets world premiere

Assaulted by a violent boyfriend, why does Billi feel like she is the one under investigation? An officer is asked to investigate a domestic assault and must face his own prejudice. Guy attempts to reconcile a terrible decision that may have killed the woman he loved.

Meet the three main characters of *Secret/e*, a new play that explores ideas around HIV criminalization, intimate partner violence, love, consent, and the role that justice and the law can play in all these realms. *Secret/e* will make its world premiere at Victoria's Intrepid Theatre Club, 1609 Blanshard Street, opening November 27 and closing on December 1, World AIDS Day.

For Victoria-based playwright Rick Waines, *Secret/e* is the natural culmination of his work as an activist and theatre practitioner. Earning a Jesse Richardson Award for Outstanding Performance during his time with Vancouver's Green Thumb Theatre, Rick now works as a VocalEye describer, providing live descriptions of plays, concerts and other events for people with vision loss. He also spent many years working with the BC Persons with AIDS Society, having contracted HIV after receiving a tainted blood transfusion as a teenager. *Secret/e* is based on Rick's own struggles with HIV disclosure.

"As a young 21 year old virgin with HIV in 1987, navigating disclosure was terrifying. And I didn't get it right the first time I had intercourse. I got it as wrong as you can get it. This failure was mine, but I would also say was also a failure of a culture of shame and guilt that surrounded HIV at the time. This play, many years in the making, is my attempt to understand what happened that night. It is also an attempt to examine how our criminal justice system works against our goals of limiting the spread of infectious disease."

Secret/e boasts a talented roster for its world premiere production. The strong-willed, vivacious Billi will be played by Jessica Lowry, a Tofino native who is as familiar with the stage at the famed Shaw Festival as she is here on Vancouver Island; Theatre SKAM artistic producer and actor extraordinaire Matthew Payne plays a police officer faced with a conundrum; and Kett Turton, a West Coast actor you may have caught on television shows like *iZombie*, *The Flash*, or *The Magicians*, is cast as the enigmatic character Guy.

At the director's helm is Winnipeg-based actor, playwright and director Sharon Bajer, who was a participant in the inaugural Michael Langham Director's program at the Stratford Festival and has directed across the country. She is an apprentice Intimacy Co-ordinator with Intimacy Directors International and will be sharing some of her insights into Intimacy work for the stage with the cast of *Secret/e* in collaboration with Pacific Opera in Victoria on November 4. Given *Secret/e*'s intimate and intense content, it was important for Rick to have a director with professional experience in how to navigate intimacy on stage.

"Intimate scenes onstage can be breathtaking, touching, beautiful and complex; the ability to capture a look, a touch, a kiss, or an explicit depiction of sex or sexual violence onstage must be handled in a way that ensures the actors are working in a safe consensual environment," says Sharon. "The practice of intimacy direction creates that safe space for performers and audience members to engage in the story being told."



While the play has its fair share of heaviness, *Secret/e* also promises moments of levity, and facilitators will be on hand after every show to help promote post-performance discussions for those who choose to participate. There will also be some interpreted or described performances (including Rick doing a Vocal Eye description of one of the performances himself).

“The theatre has always been a place where I have been able to consider more thoroughly whatever the playwright has asked me to,” Rick says. “In particular, I have learned so much about living with HIV from playwrights Tony Kushner and Larry Kramer who have taken it on in their work. It is also super important to me that the theatre is accessible, and providing live description and ASL performances is very important to me.”

Performance details:

Secret/e

November 27-December 1

Intrepid Theatre Club, 2-1609 Blanshard Street

Tickets \$10-\$20

bit.ly/SecreteTix

Content warning: this play deals with mature themes and content and is not suitable for children.

[A press kit with creative team bios and high-res images is available here.](#)

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