

Shakespeare's Sonnets And Comic Half Masks: The Voices Of Montreal.
October 21st and 22nd, 2017

Under the guidance of Mask Master Brian Smith, Infinithéâtre will hold a workshop to explore selected Sonnets using comic half masks. Under the 'trance' of the mask actors will find contemporary characters and situations to render the obscure Elizabethan language and word-play understandable to a contemporary audience. Our exploration, working with a set, a costume and a sound designer, would allow the distinct voices of Montréal, discovered by the magic of the comic half-mask, to distil the words of Shakespeare into stories and emotions so contemporary they will sound as if spoken on the streets and subways of Montréal today. Through action, through distinct character choices which the mask work forces an actor to make, the myriad of potential meanings of Shakespeare's Elizabethan poetry are distilled into limpid clarity for our contemporary audience.

This workshop is an initial step in an exploration for a compilation of the Sonnets into a full-length evening of theatre that Infinithéâtre hopes will be part of Season 2018-2019.

Participation in the workshop is by invitation. If you wish to be considered for the workshop please send in a resume and photo to info@Infinithetre.com. We are hoping for a broad diversity of ages, genders and background to reflect the richness of contemporary Montréal. There is a modest workshop fee of \$100.

BRIAN SMITH

Brian Smith has been leading classes, workshops and experiments in mask for over thirty-five years, following a period of training with Richard Pochinko and Pierre Lefevre, pioneers in mask work for the training of Canadian actors.

Drawing on a stunning collection of half-masks in the Copeau/St. Denis tradition, his work ignites the primal connection between the imagination and the body.

In an atmosphere charged with both discipline and freedom, actors reconnect with the deep sources of their personal creativity. Embodying a variety of masks in both improvised scenarios and set texts, they are emboldened by the power of masks to draw out untapped physical, vocal and emotional resources for acting. Led by the mask to exhilarating new shores of experience and invention, actors reimagine and enact in depth the creation of character.

Brian has worked with theatre companies and schools across Canada and abroad, offering masks as a creative tool for actors and directors as they investigate plays for performance. With Guy Sprung he has collaborated on projects at the Stratford Festival, Manitoba Theatre Centre, Toronto Free Theatre and Infinithéâtre, including productions of Middleton & Rowley's *The Changeling* and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard III*. In 2014 at the Stratford Festival he served as Mask Master for Guy Sprung's theatrical reimagining of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, which played to enthusiastic audiences in the Studio Theatre.

For many years, Brian was Professor of Acting and Directing at the University of Calgary where in 2016 he was honoured with the university's highest award for Excellence in Teaching. As an

actor in Calgary, he played key roles in a range of productions including *King Lear* (U of C); *Macbeth* (The Shakespeare Company); *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare in the Park); *The Philanthropist* and *Henry IV Part I* (Theatre Junction); *Slavs!* (Sage Theatre). As both actor and mask coach, he has been involved in the development and creation of new works for theatre, and theatre for social change has been an abiding interest. In collaboration with Ghost River Theatre, he co-created and performed the role of Parky Parkinson in Doug Curtis's award-winning play, *The Alan Parkinson's Project*, a theatrical reflection on one man's experience with Parkinson's Disease. In 2014 he collaborated on the theatrical adaptation of Clem and Olivier Martini's *Bitter Medicine*, a family memoir about the devastating impact of schizophrenia, and later performed the piece solo in Calgary and at Toronto's Summerworks Festival.

Brian has directed numerous plays from the modern and classical repertoire, often including mask as a creative resource in rehearsal or visual element in performance. Notable productions include Chekhov's *The Seagull* and *Cherry Orchard*; Gogol's *The Inspector General*; Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*; Lesage's *Turcaret* (with Val Campbell); Rose Scollard's *Caves of Fancy* and Howard Brenton's *Bloody Poetry*.

The investigation and practice of masks as powerful creative resources for actors and directors remains central to his work.