NightwoodTheatre

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026



A FESTIVAL OF NEW PLAY READINGS

NOVEMBER 9 - 16 & DECEMBER 15, 2026

THE 2025-26 WRITE FROM THE HIP PLAYWRIGHTS:
Sal Currie, Nicci Pryce, Vanessa Spence, Rais Clarke-Mendes & **Alison Adams**

Program Director **Intisar Awisse**
Program Associate **Mya Wong**

Nancy & Ed Jackman Performance Centre - ABC Residents Rehearsal Studio at 877 Yonge St.

http://www.nightwoodtheatre.net



ABOUT WRITE FROM THE HIP

Write from the Hip is a year-long script development program designed to support new writers through mentorship, one-on-one dramaturgy, developmental workshops and readings, all working towards the completion of a full-length play.

The program supports women and gender-expansive playwrights who are emerging in craft. Nightwood has gone on to produce a number of the plays developed in this program, including “Lo (or, Dear Mr. Wells)” by **Rose Napoli**, “Every Day She Rose” by **Andrea Scott** and **Nick Green**, “Grace” by **Jane Doe** and “A Poem For Rabia” by **Nikki Shaffeeullah**, which went to production in 2023 by Tarragon Theatre in association with Nightwood Theatre and Undercurrent Creations.

ABOUT NIGHTWOOD THEATRE

As Canada’s preeminent feminist theatre, Nightwood cultivates, creates, and produces extraordinary theatre by women and gender-expansive artists, liberating futures, one room at a time. Founded in 1979, Nightwood Theatre has created and produced award-winning plays, which have won Dora Mavor Moore, Chalmers, Trillium, and Governor General’s awards.

To learn more about Nightwood Theatre, please visit **nightwoodtheatre.net**

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026

WRITE FROM THE HIP READING SERIES



Andrea Donaldson

Welcome to Nightwood Theatre's
Groundswell Festival of New Works!

For 41 years, Nightwood has held Groundswell to celebrate the incredible women and gender-expansive artists in this city and their brand new plays. Each year we gather for playwrights to experience an audience's first reaction to their work after workshopping all day with a guest director and actors. The festival has been a pivotal moment for hundreds of artists along their creative pathways, and the birthplace of some of Nightwood's favourite productions throughout the company's existence.

This year's festival includes five works from our beloved Write from the Hip program helmed by Program Director Intisar Awisse and Program Associate Mya Wong. These playwrights - Alison Adams, Rais Clarke-Mendes, Sal Currie, Nicci Pryce, Vanessa Spence - have spent ten months writing on their own and alongside each other. This is a very special moment in the trajectory of these plays and these artists. We also have six brief opening acts from promising writers and their budding pieces.

Groundswell uplifts works and artists that deserve to be heard. Thank you for showing up and supporting another year of feminist culture!

— **Andrea Donaldson**
Artistic Director

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026

WRITE FROM THE HIP READING SERIES



Intisar Awisse



Mya Wong

Welcome to **Groundswell Festival 2026**!

There is something extraordinary about watching a new play come into being. It begins sometimes with a question, or an image, or simply an instinct that an idea is rich enough to open up a new creative world. And then comes the work: the writing, the re-writing, the moments of uncertainty, and the discoveries that move the piece closer to what it wants to be.

Over the past ten months, Mya Wong, our wonderful Program Associate, and I have had the pleasure of working alongside this year's remarkable group of emerging playwrights as they explored ideas, challenged assumptions, took creative risks, and discovered new possibilities within their work.

Being a dramaturg means being part sounding board, part provocateur, and part curious companion. For me it means asking questions without necessarily knowing where they will lead, making space for possibilities, and trusting that sometimes the most interesting discoveries happen when I let go of what I thought I knew and simply become attuned to the artist and the work. **Alison Adams, Nicci Pryce, Sal Currie, Rais Clarke Mendes,** and **Vanessa Spence** embraced this spirit of exploration with generosity and artistic courage. It's been a real honour to be part of their journey.

Thank you for joining us in celebrating these playwrights and the possibilities of new work. Enjoy the festival!

— **Intisar Awisse**
WFTH Program Director

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2026

EAGLET

BY SAL CURRIE



Sal Currie is a playwright and actor based out of Toronto. Currie's work operates in shades of contrast. Their passion lies in dragging complicated subjects to the surface, whether that be abortion (It's Not a Boy! Blue Canoe Productions, 2016), addiction (I Got My Life Back, NTS, 2021), or rape culture (Charlotte Louise, Queen's Students on Broadway, 2017). They are a proud graduate of both Queen's University (2018) & The National Theatre School of Canada (2021).

CAST

Curtain Raisers:
Zoe Magirias
Alyana Ameadeo

Eaglet TEAM
Playwright: **Sal Curri**
Director: **Alisha Grech**
Stage Direction Reader: **Dylan Carter**
Ensemble & Louise:
Raylene Harewood
Ensemble & Cordelia: **Juliana Monk**
Ensemble & Phantom:
Nabil Traboulsi
Ensemble & Isadora, Guerard:
Louise Lambert
Ensemble & Hugo, Nicholas, Announcer, Gentleman Audience Member, Driver, Messenger:
Breton Lalama
Bernhardt: **Jobina Sitoh 司徒加恩**
Eaglet: **Hilary Wheeler**

SYNOPSIS

Sarah Bernhardt, budding Parisian actress at the turn of the 20th century, has found herself in an unlikely tryst with a Belgian Prince, and must navigate his wiles as she attempts to grow her career.

Meanwhile, late 2010s finds Eaglet, a playwright in Montreal, navigating her own recent romance, left stripped of an identity in the wake of its failure.

Eaglet follows both as they attempt to reclaim purpose within the art they create.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2026 AT 7:00PM

NANCY & ED JACKMAN PERFORMANCE CENTRE - ABC RESIDENTS REHEARSAL STUDIO AT 877 YONGE ST.

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2026

MEDUSA AND THE MANEATERS

BY NICCI PRYCE



Nicci Pryce (they/them) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work is rooted in passion, vulnerability, and social justice. With a BA in Media Production from TMU, they contributed to creating a wide array of projects ranging from mixtapes, theatrical productions, and short films each with a definitive focus on amplifying underrepresented narratives. Their artistic journey has been shaped by collaboration with companies such as Theatre Gargantua, Bad Hats, Crane Creations, Soulpepper, and New Harlem Productions.

CAST

Curtain Raisers:
Renée Wong
Ashley Elliott

Medusa and the Maneaters TEAM
Playwright: **Nicci Pryce**
Director: **Makambe K. Simamba**
Stage Direction Reader: **Tsholo Khalema**
Euryale: **Trinity Lloyd**
Medusa: **isi bhakhomen**
Stheno: **Gloria Mampuya**
Athena: **Ilona Gal**

SYNOPSIS

After a disastrous Olympian party, the once gorgeous Medusa is unjustly cursed and transformed. Meanwhile her sisters, Stheno and Euryale, must deal with the humiliating destruction of their family's legendary garden of stone.

As Medusa comes to terms with their new identity, they must aid their family in refilling the Gorgon's Grove with "worthy" victims. A story of gender, identity, perception, and justice.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2026 AT 7:00PM

NANCY & ED JACKMAN PERFORMANCE CENTRE - ABC RESIDENTS REHEARSAL STUDIO AT 877 YONGE ST.

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2026

CATCHIN' TAIL

BY VANESSA SPENCE



Vanessa Spence is a classically trained actor, producer, emerging playwright & director, and professional human being. She is the founder & artistic director of Virtu Arts Theatre, serving the Black diaspora of artists based outside of Toronto. Her artistic practice is rooted in amplifying the intricate stories of Afro-Caribbean femme bodies and minds while advancing the conversation of what it means to be a Black artist based in regions where they are not adequately represented.

CAST

Curtain Raisers:
Makambe K. Simamba
Gabrielle Milner

Playwright: **Vanessa Spence**
Director: **Sedina Fiati**
Stage Direction Reader: **Tsholo Khalema**
FIRST: **Arlene Duncan**
SECOND: **Rhoma Spencer**
THIRD: **Marcia Johnson**
FOURTH: **Joella Crichton**

SYNOPSIS

Catchin' Tail is a poignant play that explores the lives of four Trinidadian sisters living in Canada, navigating the complexities of their twilight years.

Through humor and heartfelt moments, **Catchin' Tail** addresses themes of loss, resilience, and the pursuit of fulfillment, ultimately showcasing the enduring bonds that tie them together as they seek to redefine their identities in the last chapter of their lives.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2026 AT 7:00PM

NANCY & ED JACKMAN PERFORMANCE CENTRE - ABC RESIDENTS REHEARSAL STUDIO AT 877 YONGE ST.

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2026

CARNIVAL QUEEN

BY RAIS CLARKE-MENDES



Rais Clarke-Mendes is a Trinidadian-Barbadian actor, director, and emerging playwright. A graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada, she has honed her craft performing heightened text at The Shaw Festival. A dedicated advocate for Black and Caribbean communities, Rais channels this commitment through her work as a director. She is also engaged in arts education with the Nia Centre for the Arts and shares her love of literature as a book reviewer on Instagram (@rayrayreviewed).

CAST

Carnival Queen TEAM
Playwright: **Rais Clarke-Mendes**
Director: **Sabryn Rock**
Stage Direction Reader: **Abigail Whitney**
Mom & Queen: **Joella Critchton**
Anya: **Virgilia Griffith**
Crystal: **Vandana Maharaj**
Nikolai: **Tony Ofori**
Janelle: **Shauna Thompson**

SYNOPSIS

Carnival Queen* follows Anya, on Carnival Tuesday in Trinidad and Tobago, preparing to play mas with her two best friends.

Since childhood, Anya has nurtured a lifelong dream of being a Carnival Queen. However, as the morning unfolds, her costume lies untouched.

Amidst the festival's radiant swirl, Anya meets Queen, her fairy godmother, who guides Anya on a surreal journey where traditional Carnival characters help her discover her agency and sense of self.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2026

*THIS IS A CLOSED WORKSHOP WITH NO PUBLIC SHARING

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2026

HOOKS

BY ALISON ADAMS



Alison Adams is a graduate from the University of Windsor's Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting program. Recently, she presented two of her plays at Half Blind Owl's The Slate Festival: "stupid dumb idiot" in 2024 and "Perfect, Perfect Girls" in 2025. She is currently developing a new work, "One Million Love Songs," with The Vault Creation Lab. Alison is very excited to delve into the esteemed Write From The Hip program with her newest work, "Hooks."

CAST

TO BE ANNOUNCED

SYNOPSIS

Hooks is meant to be a bold and brutal piece. It follows a young Mixed Martial Arts fighter, Tony, and his journey to greatness. These dreams are put to the test while he deals with an extreme weight cut, head injuries, and his teammates who are vying for that same glory.

It's all about the competitive human spirit, pressures of modern masculinity, and the performance of power versus the true endowment of power. Essentially, the heart of the play grapples with the idea of what it truly means to be a predator.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2026 AT 4:00 PM

NANCY & ED JACKMAN PERFORMANCE CENTRE - ABC RESIDENTS REHEARSAL STUDIO AT 877 YONGE ST.

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2026

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS



ANDREA DONALDSON



COURTNEY CH'NG LANCASTER

Building Creative Connections

Join Nightwood Artistic Director **Andrea Donaldson** and Artistic Associate **Courtney Ch'ng Lancaster** for an intimate opportunity to introduce yourself to the organization and to other emerging professional artists.

This session is intended for theatre professionals who are women and gender expansive producers, directors, stage managers, production managers and designers. All levels of professional experience are welcome and encouraged. Each session will be limited to 14 participants, and will include facilitated group introductions and time for more intimate, one-on-one chats.

📍 Nancy & Ed Jackman Performance Centre - ABCRA Studio at 877 Yonge St.
🕐 1pm - 3pm OR 3:30pm - 5:30pm
🎟️ $20* Limited Capacity

*Admission fee includes 1 discounted ticket to attend one of the performance dates of Groundswell Festival (Nov. 10 - 12, 2026)

GROUNDSWELL FESTIVAL 2026

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2026

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS



INTISAR AWISSE

The Art of Generative Self-Critique

Join WFTH Program Director, **Intisar Awisse**, for an online dramaturgy workshop designed to help emerging playwrights refine their work and cultivate a productive practice of self-critique. Through guided exercises, feedback, and strategies for reflection, participants will develop dramaturgical tools for self-critique and revision, allowing them to assess their work with both critical distance and clarity.

Participants should have a complete first draft and be ready to dive into revisions to benefit from this workshop.

This event is suited for emerging playwrights with a full draft of a play.

📍 Zoom (link will be shared with confirmed participants)
🕐 10:00 am – 3:00 pm
🎟️ $30

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Donations received October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026. If your name has been misspelled or omitted, please accept our sincere apologies, and don't hesitate to reach out to Gabrielle Milner at gabrielle@nightwoodtheatre.net

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UP NEXT AT Nightwood Theatre



FALL ON YOUR KNEES PT 1 + 2

Co-created & Written by **Hannah Moscovitch**
Co-created & Directed by **Alisa Palmer**
Based on the Novel by **Ann-Marie MacDonald**

A Crow's Theatre & Vita Brevis Arts Co-production in association with Nightwood Theatre

February 9 – March 21, 2027
Guloien Theatre, Crow's Theatre



JAJA'S AFRICAN HAIR BRAIDING

Written by **Jocelyn Bioh**
Directed by **Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu**

A Nightwood Theatre, Obsidian Theatre and Soulpepper Theatre co-production
In Community Partnership with Luminato

May 13 – June 6, 2027
Young Centre for the Performing Arts

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