

The Story of **REASONABLE DOUBT**, The Play

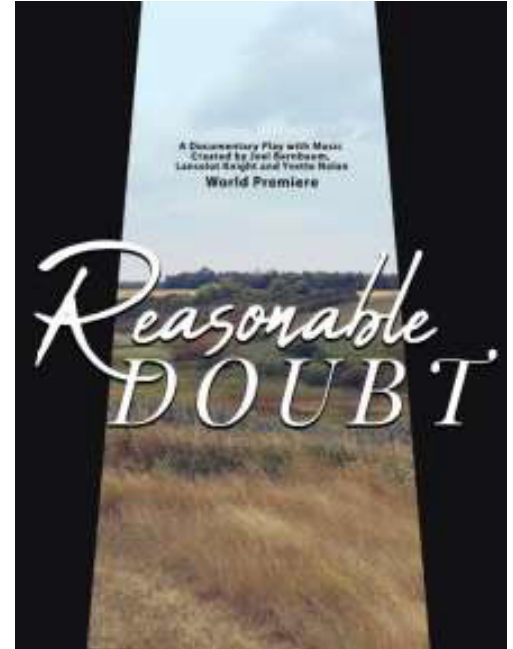
In February, 2020, Saskatoon's Persephone Theatre produced the premiere production of *Reasonable Doubt*, a documentary play with music created by Joel Bernbaum, Lancelot Knight, and Yvette Nolan. The events upon which *Reasonable Doubt* was based – the shooting death of Colten Boushie, a young Cree man, and the acquittal of white farmer Gerald Stanley – had already riven the province, and the creative team wanted to engender understanding and empathy, not further drive a wedge between communities.

The project began in 2015. Joel Bernbaum had a great experience making *Home is a Beautiful Word* – a documentary play about homelessness – at the Belfry Theatre in Victoria B.C. That play showed him the true power of community engagement; he wanted to return home and make a documentary play about Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Arts Board funded the first 50 interviews. The conversations were interesting, but very polite. It was important to keep talking to people about this topic, and Joel was thankful that Persephone Theatre saw the value of continuing the conversations and decided to commission a full play. Joel kept doing the interviews.

Then, on August 9, 2016 Colten Boushie was shot and killed on the Stanley farm in west-central Saskatchewan. The tragic event rocked our whole province. Joel kept doing interviews, but they were different now. People were talking with a new kind of raw honesty. People wanted to talk. People needed to talk. People stopped talking from their head and started talking from their heart. We began to not only see and hear but also feel the relationship and the hopes for relationship and the fears of relationship of every person that we interviewed. At that point, when those interviews started coming in, then, we knew we had a play.

Interviews were transcribed and Yvette Nolan began pouring over thousands of pages of transcripts. Joel and Lancelot Knight would sift through transcripts and see how they became songs. They worked together with the hopes of capturing a kaleidoscope of views about this incident, this province, and our people. . . .





The run of the show completely sold out. Over a hundred people stayed each night to share their reactions and experiences. Lisa Bayliss, Persephone Theatre's marketing director, worked with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission to coordinate two different Courageous Conversation panels before two different performances. These events were both standing room only.

When we closed this show, we did not know it would be the last play we did in a long time. We did not yet know the severity of Covid-19. We did not yet know the name George Floyd. Now we are uncertain of when we will be able to do this play again. We are certain that this play is even more relevant than ever. In a time where we reevaluate what it means to be together/apart there is no more important task than building relationships with each other.

It is our hope that this play [will create] a bigger conversation: an opportunity for us to talk to each other, and with each other, and to talk about what has happened on this land and how we can live together in a good way. It [will] be uncomfortable at times, but we feel it is worth it.

Excerpted from **“Writing a New Song: Creating Conversations through Theatre”**
by Joel Bernbaum and Yvette Nolan (2020)