

Festival is about novelty, innovation

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Opening play promises to be true to mandate of exciting festival

PREVIEW

What: Belfry Theatre Festival 08

When: Tuesday through April 5

Where: Belfry Theatre

Tickets: \$18 to \$21; Tel 385-6815

ADRIAN CHAMBERLAIN

Times Colonist

The real-life case of a sleepwalking Canadian who killed his mother-in-law inspired the opening play of the Belfry Theatre's Festival 08.

The annual festival showcases new and innovative plays. And *Any Night*, launching the festival on Tuesday, promises to live up to the Belfry's mandate.

The 70-minute play was inspired by the infamous case of Ken Parks, a Toronto man who in 1987 drove to his in-laws' home and stabbed his mother-in-law to death. He also wounded his father-in-law. Parks then turned himself in. His defence — that he was sleepwalking and unaware of his actions — proved success-

ful, with Parks being found not guilty of murder.

Vancouver's Daniel Arnold and Medina Hahn, who both wrote and act in *Any Night*, say their play is loosely inspired by the Parks case. The drama, receiving its premiere at the Belfry, concerns a woman who moves into a basement suite and forms a relationship with the man living above. Their romance is rattled by the woman's night terrors — a sleep disorder in which the sufferer is stricken with extreme fright and unable to regain full consciousness immediately.

The underlying theme, Arnold says, is that while we live with the knowledge calamity can strike us at any time, we ought not to live in fear. "We became fascinated with the whole night terror thing," adds Hahn, a University of Victoria theatre graduate. "We started to do as much research as we could."

Also on the Festival 08 menu are *Léo*, Rosa Laborde's

tale of political intrigue and sexual identity; *The Shoes*, a fairy-tale like fantasy by Victoria's Lee Cookson; *The Josephine Knot*, Meg Braem's play about sifting through a late relative's possessions; and *Belfry 101 Live*, a collaborative creation for high school students. (Full details at www.belfry.bc.ca)

With their new play, Arnold and Hahn hope they hit the sweet spot once again. After all, their last major collaboration, *Tuesdays & Sundays*, was a big hit. They performed that two-hander in New York, New Mexico, Edinburgh and Prague. The *New York Sun* even deemed the award-winning drama one of the best plays of 2006.

Like *Any Night*, *Tuesdays & Sundays* takes its cue from historical fact. Years ago, Arnold came across the 1887 story of a man whose girlfriend became pregnant. After she was found floating dead in a river, he was blamed for the death and hanged. Performed

at the Victoria Fringe Theatre Festival in 2001, *Tuesdays & Sundays* proved itself an accomplished and highly original play delivered in ecstatic outbursts and dreamy reveries.

"We got lucky with that one," says Hahn, who notes the pair performed *Tuesdays & Sundays* more than 100 times.

Partners only in theatre ("We just banter like we're married," Hahn says) these two writer-performers met while attending theatre classes at the University of Alberta. They were part of a university committee struck to read and select plays for the department. Their writing collaboration began after they learned there were few plays suitable for young actors.

Their ability to be "brutally honest" with one another is the foundation of their partnership, Hahn says. "Because we can fight. We can argue. We can disagree. And it's not personal. It's about the work."



Daniel Arnold and Medina Hahn open the Belfry drama festival with *Any Night*, a play inspired by a real slaying by a sleepwalker.

SHARON STONE, TIMES COLONIST