

Edmonton duo wins \$25,000 arts award Part of the Siminovitch Prize won by playwright Daniel MacIvor

Liz Nicholls and Vanessa Farquharson

EDMONTON - Toronto playwright Daniel MacIvor is \$75,000 richer after winning the Siminovitch Prize today, the largest theatre award in the country.

"Everyone I know who works full time in the arts is carrying a considerable amount of debt," MacIvor said, "so of course, both my mother and my loans officer are very thankful for this."

The prize includes \$25,000 to be awarded to a protege or proteges chosen by the winner - in this case, the playwright/actor team of Daniel Arnold and Medina Hahn, both from Edmonton and both acting grads of the University Alberta theatre school.

The pair, now Vancouver-based, came to prominence with a much-travelled two-hander period romance Tuesdays and Sundays, which premiered in 2000 at Edmonton's Nextfest and has since played theatres here, in New York and abroad. Three years later they received an "emerging artist scholarship" from Calgary's Alberta Theatre Projects that enabled their mentorship with MacIvor.

"This (Siminovitch) award not only recognizes him (MacIvor) for the amazing career he's had, but helps him into the next phase of it," Arnold said in a phone interview. "It's great timing for this honour."

Arnold and Hahn are thrilled by their prize, not least because of a nod of approval it represents from their mentor. "He's such a great example of taking chances, trying things," said Hahn. "That's his example, to have no fear of trying and maybe failing."



CREDIT: Greg Southam/Edmonton Journal

Daniel Arnold and Medina Hahn when they starred in Workshop West's production of Mary's Wedding in 2005.

They plan to use the money to "fix our website ... and expand." Their most recent collaboration, a thriller called Any Night, was presented in workshops in San Francisco and New York and has been produced in Victoria and Toronto. And they're currently working on an early draft of a musical for a cast of six, "a sort of economic satire" a la Urinetown.

MacIvor, born in Cape Breton, N.S., is one of the most recognizable names in Canadian theatre, having written nearly 20 plays and won several prizes, including the 2006 Governor General's award for drama.

Arguably the country's most skilful exponent of the solo show, MacIvor is a name well-known to Edmonton audiences, both as a playwright and an actor. He's appeared here personally in House, Here Lies Henry, Cul-de-Sac and others. Among his best-known works are Never Swim Alone, Marion Bridge and You Are Here.

He is also an acclaimed screenwriter and filmmaker.

In his acceptance speech today, he said that the Siminovitch prize - first introduced in 2001 and dedicated to renowned scientist Lou Siminovitch and his late wife Elinore, a playwright, - reminded him of the ability of theatre to affect people on a level that other forms of entertainment can't always reach.

"It has the power," he said, "to transform the lives of audiences, who come into dark rooms with their minds and their hearts open, who are filled with questions, and who find a moment of peace in the presence of something innately familiar."

Recognizing direction, playwriting and design in three-year cycles, the award was decided by a jury chaired by Leonard McHardy, co-owner of TheatreBooks in Toronto.

Other finalists on the shortlist included Morwyn Brebner, Daniel Danis, Colleen Murphy and Larry Tremblay, chosen from a total of 26 nominees.