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MacIvor wins \$100,000 Siminovitch

BY JAMES BRADSHAW

Nova Scotia-born playwright Daniel MacIvor was awarded the \$100,000 Siminovitch Prize in Theatre last night, and he says it couldn't have come at a better moment.

Now Toronto-based after relocating several times, and having expanded his repertoire to include acting, directing and writing screenplays, MacIvor is working on an entirely freelance basis "for the first time since 1990," saddling him with greater financial uncertainty.

Last year, the curtain came down for the final time on da da kamera, a theatre company he started in 1986 when fresh out of George Brown College.

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Prize moving to mid-career honour, MacIvor says

» Though he recently received a \$25,000 commission from the Banff Centre to write a new play, he says it needs costly research in Tokyo, making him ever more grateful for the Siminovitch.

"The honour of being a part of this amazing company of artists is a nice encouragement, and on the other side, financially, I'm [now] in a position where I don't have to take a job I don't want. That's really great. In the theatre, one sometimes feels drawn into other places in order to supplement [one's income]," he said from home yesterday before a ceremony at First Canadian Place in Toronto.

MacIvor is the eighth recipient of the prize, edging out 25 other nominees. Also shortlisted were Morwyn Brebner of Toronto; Daniel Danis of St-David de Falardeau, Que.; Colleen Murphy of Toronto; and Larry Tremblay from Montreal.

The award was dedicated to scientist Lou Siminovitch and his late wife Elinore, a playwright, in 2001. Founded by 12 individuals and six organizations and currently sponsored by BMO Financial Group, it is

Canada's richest annual theatre prize.

As such, MacIvor is asked to share the wealth, naming protégés to split \$25,000 of the prize money. He chose Vancouver-based actors and writers Daniel Arnold and Medina Hahn, whose plays have won multiple awards and appeared on the CBC and BBC. In 2002, Arnold and Hahn were chosen to apprentice with da da kamera and MacIvor, helping to develop the play *A Beautiful View*.

"That's really the best part, the idea that I can do this, that I can give money and none of it is earmarked for anything. I give them this \$25,000 and it just buys them some time, some wiggle room. It gives them some time to think," MacIvor said.

Combined with his "enormous" contributions to the development of a Canadian theatrical identity, the mentorship aspect of the prize made MacIvor an ideal candidate, according to Leonard McHardy, jury chair and co-founder of Toronto's TheatreBooks.

"He has probably done more, without any sense that he was doing it, to attract young peo-

ple to the theatre," McHardy said. "His mentoring has always been there. I don't know of another artist who is just so willing to respond to requests from people for support. He does a lot of work in schools and with individuals."

MacIvor's selection raised a few eyebrows, following on the heels of Siminovitch victories by two of his close collaborators, Daniel Brooks in 2001 and John Mighton in 2005. His win has prompted whispers from some that the jury - which also included actor Patricia Hamilton, dramaturge Paul Lefebvre, director John Van Burek and dramaturge Vicki Stroich - could have cast its search farther afield. But MacIvor thinks the three playwrights created "a different vibe" through their respective companies, and that the next generation of Canadian theatre has at last begun to emerge on their heels.

"I think that it represents a wave of people coming into midlife who were doing something that wasn't being done 20 years ago," he said.

He also thinks the Siminovitch Prize has shifted from targeting artists in need of greater

exposure to supporting those "in mid-career."

McHardy said the triumvirate's history together did not come up during the selection process, but called it "an interesting notion."

"While it's not really a cabal, it's a happy coincidence. Really what we do look for is a person who is at the height of their potential, who has achieved some excellence in that work, and we can see that the potential needs the push to go in another direction," McHardy said.

MacIvor said his victory came as a total surprise, admitting he "was putting my money on Morwyn Brebner," and showed empathy for his fellow nominees.

"Being shortlisted is painful. When I was asked if I would go up for nomination again, I thought, okay, one more time. You can't help think about what [the money] would make possible, and you develop expectations. And I think we all understand that that's going to lead you nowhere but misery," he said.

"After they told me, I think I spent the first three days being relieved I didn't lose."