

# Play takes on life of its own



KENSINGTON LINE

## Mike England

Play about century-old murder case on P.E.I. wins praise as it is performed on stages around world.

Daniel Arnold could not believe his luck.

Arnold, a playwright and recent graduate in acting from the University of Alberta, had just finished reading a story in a True Canadian Crime book. It was just what he and fellow playwright/graduate Medina Hahn were looking for — a story of star-crossed lovers.

The setting for the story was Margate, P.E.I. The events took place in 1887.

Two teenagers, William Millman and Mary Tuplin, met at a New Year's dance. They went back to her home late that evening and were intimate.

Mary became pregnant. In late June, Mary disappeared. The next day her body was found in the South West River. William was tried for her death and hanged early the following year.

The discovery of the story had a timely significance, says Hahn.

"The thing that struck us first was just simply how sad the story was. We came across it just after the Columbine shootings took place in the U.S., and all the news was focused on the youth violence today ... and we came across this story and realized that it has always been happening ... and we wanted to explore why ... and

how?"

They were also struck by the many unanswered questions surrounding the story and the fact that Millman was hung for the crime largely on the basis of circumstantial evidence. It was clear that, had he been tried today, he would likely have walked free.

Arnold and Hahn chose not to write a play with characters re-enacting events. Instead, Millman and Tuplin appear as spirit characters, who have just arrived in a state of limbo and are trying to figure out what has happened to them and why they are there.

That approach, says Hahn, arose from financial need.

"We wanted a story we could perform without props and a big set. As a result, the style became that of storytelling, and we gravitated towards spirits telling the story. We struggled a lot with the 'real story' and the fact that all

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MEDINA HAHN, CO-CREATOR OF PLAY ABOUT P.E.I. MURDER CASE

will never be known about it, and so the spirits were a way to separate the 'truth' from the fiction we have created."

A standing ovation followed the first performance of Tuesdays and Sundays in Edmon-

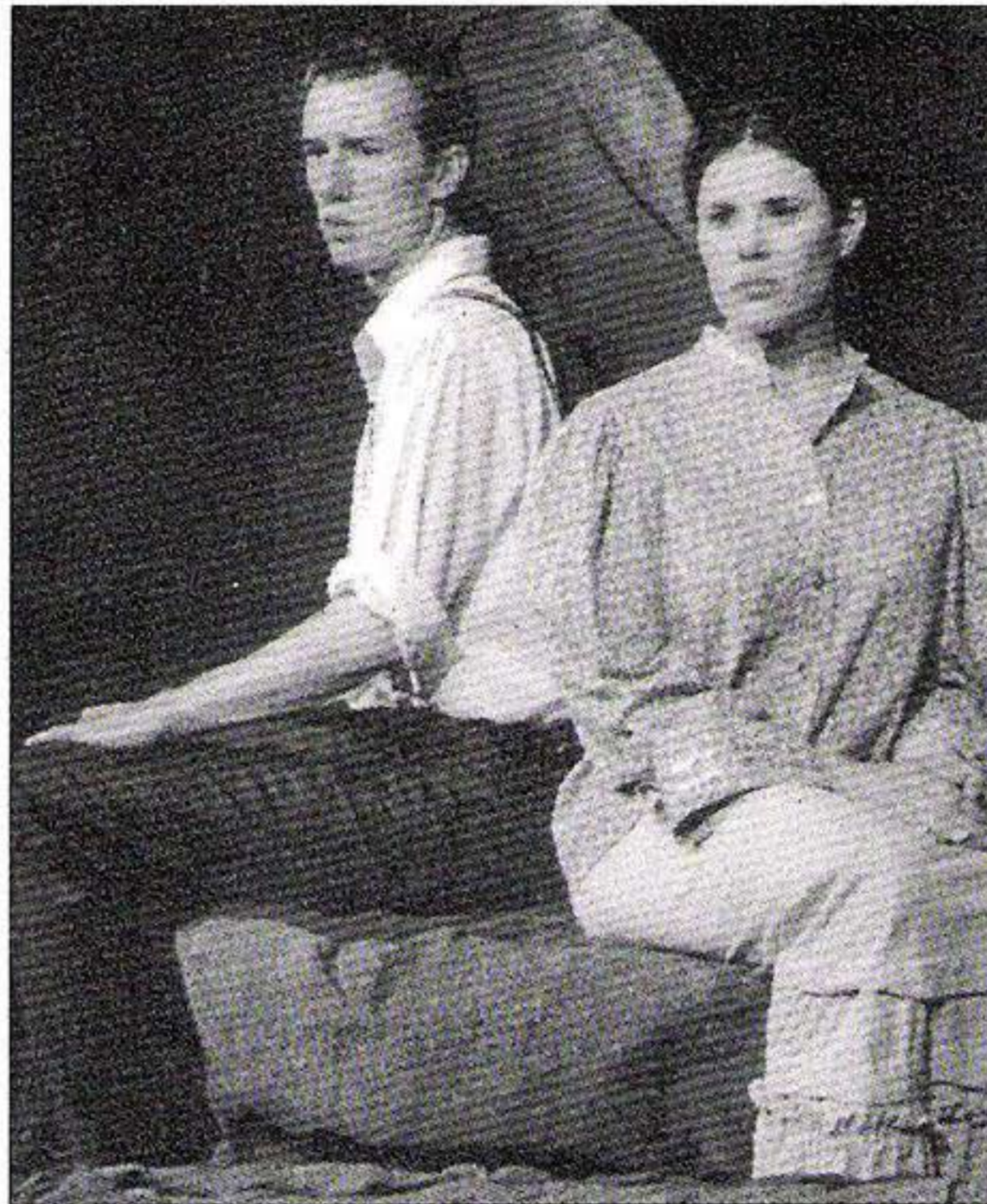


PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

A play inspired by a Margate murder case has been taking audiences by storm in Europe and North America. Daniel Arnold and Medina Hahn created a tragic play about P.E.I. teenagers who lived over a century ago.

ton in 2000. At the Edmonton Fringe Festival that summer the show received three of the five awards that were handed out — Outstanding Fringe Actor, Outstanding Fringe Actress and Outstanding Fringe New Work.

Since then Arnold and Hahn have performed the play over 100 times in Europe and North America, accumulating numerous awards and accolades. They have also adapted the play for CBC and BBC radio and are now working on a version for a U.K. film company. Work is also in progress on an operatic version, which will be performed by the Canadian Opera Company.

Last summer, between performances of the play at Antigonish, they paid their first visit to P.E.I. It was a

moving experience, says Hahn.

"What hit home was how the land was much more peaceful, picturesque and tranquil than we had imagined. To envision the horrible murder happening was quite striking."

With the aid of old maps they retraced the steps of Millman and Tuplin. It was, says Hahn, a strange experience.

"We saw what would have been the Mud Road ... the County/Line Road ... stood on the riverbank where it would have happened ... where Mary's body was found ... where they lived ... at moments I definitely felt an energy — something there. It was kind of eerie."

They talked to local people.

Two of them knew about the story and talked quite openly, many others said they had never heard of the story.

While doing their research they had come across an account by a writer who, after doing interviews in Margate, implied that people there were still uneasy about the events of the story. Hahn found that surprising since it all happened over a century ago.

During their visit, Arnold and Hahn were able to locate a version of the story written by a member of the Tuplin family.

It led to some interesting speculation, says Hahn.

"We have created these characters from the information we found (in Island newspapers of the time), but also from our own hearts and minds. They are a creation, based on some fact, but also a lot of fiction. It is interesting to see how family, duty and religion can affect children as they grow up ... and how much fear can take over.

"In our play they were a young couple, who fell in love quickly and innocently, but who didn't have the maturity to handle everything that came with that. In the version we read while in P.E.I. it was suggested that Mary and William's intimacy wasn't consensual ... but in our play it was."

Next summer Arnold and Hahn will be on the road with the show again. They will be playing in Calgary, Halifax, Prague and Connecticut. The success of the play has surpassed any expectation they had at the beginning, says Hahn.

"It has taken on a life of its own. It inspired us from the start, but we had no idea it would touch people all over the world as it has."

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