



# acts of imagination

## Biography

Michael Springate was the founding Artistic Director of the Painted Bird Ensemble in Montreal, active during the 1970's. The company, composed of actors, dancers, musicians and visual artists, investigated new ways of creating theatrical narrative within formal musical structures. The company was widely praised for such works as *Scat*, *Twelve Tones*, *Improvisation in Sonata Form #1 and #2*, and *Fugue*.

He was invited to join the theatre faculty at Concordia University, first teaching performance within the dance department under Elizabeth Langley, but later teaching acting at all levels within the theatre department, as well as offering a special studio course in the work of the Polish writer, Witkiewicz.

In 1984 he became the Artistic Director of Playwrights Workshop Montreal, where he initiated the program *New Music New Text*, as well as Playwrights' Retrospective, an annual series of readings and conversations investigating the work of an individual Canadian playwright. It was during his tenure that such now well-known writers as Thomson Highway, Connie Gault, Kent Stetson and Don Druick developed their early work in Montreal.

He became the Assistant Head of the Theatre Section at the Canada Council prior to becoming the Artistic Director of Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg. While there he initiated the first Canadian visits by the Traverse Theatre of Scotland and The Odessa Music and Drama Theatre of Ukraine. He also developed new works by Margaret Sweatman, Carol Shields, Patrick Friesen, Ian Ross and Bill Harrar, among others. His production of "The Stone Angel" broke attendance records at the theatre and was invited to a sold out run at The National Arts Centre in Ottawa. He started a Second Stage series called Theatre With Bite, and opened the theatre to the work of younger artists and groups.

As a director he continued to work closely with composers, collaborating with Glenn Buhr, Michael Matthews, Daniel Koulack and Greg Lowe. He was invited to be part of the New Music Festival of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, collaborating with jazz pianist Marilyn Lerner and bass clarinet Lori Freedman on a presentation of his cycle of *Geese Sonnets*. He also performed the piece "Coming Together" by Frederic Rzewski with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Glenn Buhr. His piece, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, a re-interpretation of the work of that name by Boethius (480-520 CE), was presented as an oratorio at the Toronto New Music Gallery in a composition by Helen Hall.

He then became Artistic Director of Factory Theatre in Toronto, and in his first and only season there, presented new works by Andrew Moodie and Tom Walmsley, both of which were nominated for best new Canadian play.

After working briefly in a publicly traded company in film production and distribution, he produced with director Carolyn Combs a number of socially conscious documentaries, including *The Art and Ability Series* and *Protest and Prayer*. He also wrote the screenplay for and produced *Acts of Imagination*, starring Stephanie Hayes and Billy Marchenski, which had its Canadian premiere in 2006 at the Toronto International Film Festival, and its Asian premiere at the Pusan International Film Festival.

As a playwright, Michael continues his work on a series of "history plays": *Historical Bliss*, *Dog and Crow*, *Kareena*, *Freeport Texas* and, most recently, *Kut*.

In October 2006 he was invited to present a paper entitled "Symptoms of a Crises in English Culture" at the PEN International Writer's Conference in Seoul, South Korea.

He studied visual arts at The Montreal Museum School of Fine Arts, and has an MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts from the School for Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University, where he has recently taught directing, acting, and playmaking.