THIS IS WHY WE LIVE

By Open Heart Surgery Theatre
Directed by Coleen Shirin MacPherson
Team

Directed by Coleen Shirin MacPherson
Performed and Devised by Alaine Hutton and Elodie Monteau
Music performed by Dr. Dobrochna Zubek
Original Music created by Tatiana Judycka and Dr. Dobrochna Zubek
Set and Costume Design by Helen Yung
Costume Design Assistant: Judie Plaza
Set Design Assistant: Kevin Yung
Lighting Design by Rebecca Picherak
Lighting Associate: Nic Vincent
Projection Design by Wesley McKenzie
Stage Management by A.J. Morra
Dramaturgy and Translation Support by Viktor Lukawski
Poetry by Wisława Szymborska
French Translation by Piotr Kamiński
English Translation by Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańczak
Artistic Support by Yearime Castel Barragan and Sallie Lyons
Photos by Michael Cooper

After the performance on Sunday September 22nd, we will having a special talk-back with the cast with a discussion on Szymborska led by Columbia professor Anna Frajlich

This production has financially supported by The Canada Council for the Arts and The Polish Institute in New York City.
“Whatever we might think of this measureless theater to which we’ve got reserved tickets, but tickets whose life span is laughably short, bounded as it is by two arbitrary dates; whatever else we might think of this world – it is astonishing.”

(Szymborska, from her Nobel Prize in Literature speech, 1996)

This Is Why We Live is a journey through 21 poems by Polish poet Wisława Szymborska and an intimate offering to a chaotic world; for in a time where so much around us feels untenable, I truly feel it is the poetic sensibility that is one of the most transformative. As Szymborska said in her Nobel Prize winning speech, the poetic state “is born from a continuous I don't know.” The privileging of uncertainty in her work, of imbuing the everyday with layered meaning is her quiet and unique power. Her poems notice the things that we fail to have time for: a Conversation with a Stone, Statistics, First Love, an Onion ...

What interested us in bringing her work to the stage was the way in which her poems moved, the conversational quality that existed within her work; her wit, her humour. To perform her work is at times both a revelation and a wink; at other times filled with a sense of wonder and amazement. This work has been developed in Canada, France and toured to Poland. Every time we perform this work, it changes with us. Wisława Szymborska lived through Nazism, Stalinism and Communism, having witnessed firsthand the tragic failures and fragility of human life – from the atrocities of genocide of World War II and the disillusionment in its aftermath, she still managed to look at life with irony and lightness without denying its harsh reality. In a time where we have global uncertainty and environmental collapse, where reality and fiction have switched places, it feels all the more pertinent that we stop and slow down and listen to past writers like Szymborska. I feel her wisdom rings true in a line she wrote in a letter to her friend and fellow writer, Anna Frajlich:“sometimes I think the absurd is the most essential ingredient in reality.”

We come from Canada, France and Poland, and as we experimented in three languages with her work, we embodied the poems through movement and music; through improvisation we developed a structure that linked the poems and stayed true to the intimacy within her work-- what you see tonight is the culmination of a journey between the artists of Open Heart Surgery Theatre, a journey that we ask you to take part in, inspired by a great poet.

Our research has been developed in Canada and in France at Théâtre de L’Enfumeraie and at a residency at Old Vic New Voices and toured to Toronto (The Theatre Centre), Paris (Plateau 31), Krakow (Nowy Teatr / Miłosz Festival), and Katowice (Silesian Library). Please note: We have decided to project the English translations of the poem by Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańczak, in this way we have layered her poems in translation rather than re-translated her French translations or original Polish poems.

We are immensely thankful for all the individuals who lit paths for us in moments of darkness, you are each integral in creating this unique play and to La MaMa for bringing us into the family and allowing Szymborska's words to find a home in New York City.

We are delighted to be bringing this show to La MaMa and to New York audiences for the first time!

Coleen MacPherson & Open Heart Surgery Theatre
The Poems by Wisława Szymborska
(in order of appearance)

French translations by Piotr Kaminski, English translations by Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańcyk

Nothing Twice / Nic Dwa Razy
Life-While- You-Wait *
In Praise of Dreams
Conversation with a Stone / Conversation avec la Pierre
The Silence of Plants
The Onion
Classifieds
Plotting with the Dead / Konszachty z Umarłymi
Starvation Camp Near Jaslo
In Praise of Birds
Notes From a Non-Existent Himalayan Expedition / Z Nieodbytej Wyprawy w Himalaje
Funeral II
First Love
Advertisement
Statistics
Photograph of September 11th
Hatred/ Decline of the Century / Schyłek Wieku
Under One Small Star / Pod Jedną Gwiazdką
Astonishment

* The collages used were created by Wisława Szymborska for her friends and were generously given to us to use from the Szymborska Foundation in Poland.

Special thanks for the guidance of Tamara Trojanowska, Sallie Lyons and The University of Toronto, Yearime Castel Barragan and Viktor Lukawski and to all those that believed in our work.

Thank you to Théâtre de L’Enfumeraie, Old Vic New Voices and the Polish Consulate in Toronto who helped fund the initial creation phase.

Thank you to our generous donors for our New York City debut:

A special thank you to Mia Yoo and La MaMa for bringing us into their fold and giving us the space to share our work and to The Szymborska Foundation and Michal Rusinek for their support.
Wisława Szymborska was born on July 2, 1923, in Bnin, a small town in Western Poland. Her family moved to Krakow in 1931 where she lived most of her life. Szymborska studied Polish literature and sociology at Jagiellonian University from 1945 until 1948. While attending the university, she became involved in Krakow’s literary scene and first met and was influenced by Czesław Milosz. She began work at the literary review magazine Życie Literackie (Literary Life) in 1953, a job she held for nearly thirty years.

During her lifetime, Szymborska authored more than fifteen books of poetry. Her collections available in English include Monologue of a Dog. Her collections available in English include:

- Monologue of a Dog (Harcourt, 2005);
- Miracle Fair: Selected Poems of Wisława Szymborska (Norton, 2001);
- Poems, New and Collected, 1957-1997 (Harcourt, 1998);
- View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems (Harcourt, 1995);
- People on a Bridge (Forest, 1990);

While the Polish history from World War II through Stalinism clearly informs her poetry, Szymborska was also a deeply personal poet who explored the large truths that exist in ordinary, everyday things. “Of course, life crosses politics,” Szymborska once said “but my poems are strictly not political. They are more about people and life.”

In the introduction to Miracle Fair, Czeslaw Milosz wrote: “Hers is a very grim poetry...a comparison with the despairing vision of Samuel Beckett and Philip Larkin suggests itself. Yet, in contrast to them Szymborska offers a world where one can breathe.”

Writing in the New York Review of Books, Stanisław Barańczak said: “Wit, wisdom and warmth are equally important ingredients in the mixture of qualities that makes her so unusual and every poem of hers so unforgettable.”

In 1996, Szymborska won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her other awards include the Polish Pen Club prize, an Honorary Doctorate from Adam Mickiewicz University, the Herder Prize and The Goethe Prize.

Wisława Szymborska died on February 1, 2012, at the age of eighty-eight.

Link to this information: https://poets.org/poet/wislawa-szymborska
Open Heart Surgery Theatre was founded in 2014 and is an all-female international theatre ensemble based in Toronto. We are a Lecoq-based theatre company whose aim is to create intercultural work and often experimenting with multiple languages on stage and form.

We take an interdisciplinary approach to theatre making: merging live music, media and dance to create original theatre that opens the heart and speaks about relevant material that reflects who we are today.

Led by Coleen Shirin MacPherson, we create work that stretches across borders and boundaries, creating cross-cultural collaborations. We like to dangle across the hyphenated space in our work, through experimentation with language and form.

Recently the company performed *In Silence From Dawn ‘Till Dusk*, a 12-hour silent protest at 2nd Floor Rear in Chicago (Mana Contemporary) in reaction to Donald Trump’s EO Travel Ban when their Iranian-Canadian musicians couldn’t make it over the border. OHS has developed work in France, Spain, USA, UK, Poland and Canada.

In 2014 the company produced MacPherson’s play, *First Draft* to sold out audiences at Camden People’s Theatre and was later programmed at The Mimetic Festival in London (The Vaults, London, UK). This show then was re-imagined and co-produced with StudioZAT at Falaki Theater in Cairo, Egypt. Open Heart Surgery Theatre held residencies at Théâtre de L’Enfumeraie in Le Mans, France; Plateau 31 in Paris, France and Old Vic New Voices in the UK for the development of *This Is Why We Live*. The play held a short run at The Theatre Centre in the Fall of 2016 and will soon be touring to Krakow at Nowy Theatre with the support of the Miłosz Festival and the Szymborksa Foundation. Our U.S. premiere of the work will be at La MaMa in NYC as part of their 58th season.

Upcoming: *Like a Messenger to the Deep*, based on the life, writings and paintings of Leonora Carrington written by Coleen MacPherson and Martha Ross and performed by a company of five women.

For more information on the company:
www.openheartssurgerytheatre.com

Follow us Instagram: @OHsurgerytheatre. Twitter: @OHsurgery

More on our process check out La MaMa Blogs: http://lamamablogs.blogspot.com/2019/09/coleen-macpherson-on-this-is-why-we-live.html
Coleen Shirin MacPherson (Director) is an international theatre artist based in Toronto with training in movement and mask from École Jacques Lecoq. She founded Open Heart Surgery Theatre in 2014 and works as a playwright, director, actor and voice artist. Coleen has worked with many companies in Canada and has toured work to: China, Egypt, Poland, Spain, France, UK and U.S.A.

Internationally she has worked with Wet Picnic (UK), TinderBox (Northern Ireland) and had residencies at Théâtre de L’Enfumeraie (Alonnes, France) and Old Vic New Voices (London, UK). She mentored with Canadian theatre director, Daniel Brooks on Divisadero (Michael Ondaatje) and has directed The Editor (Brain Box Productions). Her play, First Draft was performed in London UK at Camden People’s Theatre and The Mimetic Festival, and later was re-imagined in Arabic and English with Studio Zat at Falaki Theater (dir. Sarah Warren). Coleen adapted The Hearing Trumpet by Leonora Carrington for Dark Matters Theatre (Brighton Fringe, UK) and co-translated Pylade by Pier Paolo Pasolini with Adam Paolozza, which held its world premiere in New York and was performed by the Great Jones Repertory Company at La MaMa in 2015 (dir. By Ivica Buljan). Coleen teaches Devised Theatre at Randolph Academy for the Performing Arts in Toronto and created Writing in Movement, a workshop series that engages writers in the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq.

www.coleenmacpherson.com

Alaine Hutton (Performer/Deviser) is a performer, creator and has been a company member of Open Heart Surgery Theatre since 2014. She is also co-Artistic Director of the Toronto based company Lester Trips (Theatre). Lester Trips devises theatre with a bouffonesque approach to character deliberately maddening dramaturgy, and a physical foundation stemming from training in butoh-based embodiment. Through playful creations that teeter on the edge of grotesque, Lester investigates moral conundrums that surround our collective relationship to desire, consumption, and...doubt? She has received training at the University of Toronto’s drama program, and École International de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris, France. While at Lecoq, she studied design and mise en scène in the Laboratoire d’Etude de Mouvement (LEM). Alaine continues to study Fides Krucker’s approach to extended range voice, as well as butoh-based embodiment with

Elodie Monteau (Performer/Deviser) After graduating in Psychology at the University of Nantes (2006-2009), she studied theatre in the professional course of Le Conservatoire d’Art Dramatique de Rennes in France, while she was also doing an other degree on Art du Spectacle at the University of Rennes (2009-2012). She then went to finish her training at Ecole International de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris (2012-2014) where she studied movement, mime, mask, clown and theatre creation. She is passionate about improvisation and has done it for ten years in different leagues in Nantes, Rennes and Paris. She is currently working with different international companies as a performer/deviser. Recents credits: This is Why We Live, with Open Heart Surgery Theatre (Canada and European tour), Miraculi with Théâtre Senza (French and European tour), Cassandre with Les Compagnons Butnieurs (French and Central America tour), Sans Issues Dessous with Petit Huit (French tour), Dragons with Théâtre Senza (Tunisia, France, Scotland), Om Inclusive with Ça se fait pas (Mexican and European tour).

Dobrochna Zubek (Cellist) In an evolving, multi-faceted career Dr. Dobrochna Zubek has worked as a soloist, chamber musician, recitalist, orchestra cellist and interdisciplinary artist in Europe, USA, Canada and Mexico. (Orquesta Sinfónica del Estado de México 2008-2012) Highlighting Ms. Zubek’s numerous competition awards are: first place award of the Peggy Friedman Gordon Music Competition (2002), the Sidney Liebermann Music Competition (2004), the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra Competition (2007) and the YoYo-Ma Fellowship. Recently, received Doctoral Degree in Cello Performance at University of Toronto and joined Sudbury Symphony Orchestra as the Principal Cello and Artist in Residence. Cello and Artist in Residence. Currently, is also a member of the
Canadian New Music Ensemble; The Thin Edge Music Collective. In 2016 Dobrochna has recorded her first solo CD entitled: “Mexico-Voyage,” and Centre discs Juno nominated recording Hymns of Heavens and Earth-music by Peter- Anthony Togni. Also in 2016, she started collaborating with Open Heart Surgery Theatre in *This is Why We Live* performed in Toronto, Paris, Kraków and currently in New York. http://dobrochnazubek.com

**Helen Yung (Set Designer / Costume Designer)** is an inter/transdisciplinary artist and designer. She makes installations, interactions and interventions. She curates and designs environments, exhibitions, and performances (theatre, dance, digital, live art). Helen has been invited to share and create work around the world, including New York, Graz, Montreal, Syros, Buenos Aires, Banff, Charleville-Mezières, Marnay-Sur-Seine, Sydney, and the bush of New South Wales. Design credits include *LULU v. 2 to 7* directed by ted witzel (v.4 directed by Susanna Fournier), the youth elders project directed by Evalyn Parry, taken by night co-directed by Andrea Nann and helen yung, *This Is Why We Live* directed by Coleen MacPherson, *ps: we are all here* 2014 (festival) produced by the toronto love-in, workshop productions of *Gertrude and Alice* directed by Karin Randoja, and *Purgatory in Ingleton* (scenic design) directed by Birgit Schreyer Duarte. Helen has received three Toronto Dora Theatre Award Nominations (scenic design, lighting, and best production).

**Rebecca Picherak (Lighting Designer)** is a Canadian lighting designer. She has toured shows all over the world. In New York, *Goodness* at PS 122. Recent works include a new ballet of *Anne of Green Gables* and upcoming the Canadian premiere of *Cost of Living* at the Arts Club in Vancouver. Rebecca is very happy to be a part of *This Is Why We Live* at La MaMa.

**Nic Vincent (Lighting Associate)** is a New York based lighting designer originally from Toronto, Canada. Recent design credits include *Ni Mi Madre* (Rave Festival), *El Huracán* (Yale Repertory Theatre, World Premiere), *Henry VI part 3, Passion, Pentecost* (Yale School of Drama); *NOVIOS: part one, Agreste* (Drylands), *The Ugly One, The Red Tent*, and *This American Wife* (Yale Cabaret). Upcoming work includes *Big Love, Cabaret* (Columbia University).
Wesley McKenzie (Projection Design) is a lighting, sound and video designer based in Toronto. He serves as the Production Manager and Lighting Designer in residence for the Classic Theatre Festival in Perth, Ontario. Credits include: Mr. Truth; Intangible Trappings; The Misunderstanding; (Lester Trips); The Scavenger’s Daughter (Paradigm Productions); Who Killed Adrianna?; Orpheus in the Underworld; (UofT Opera); The Tender Land; Tales of Hoffmann (Opera Laurier); The Italian Girl in Algiers; The Rape of Lucretia (MYOpera); lulu v.7; the marquise of O—(the red light district).

A.J. Morra (Stage Manager) Based in Toronto, A.J. is a graduate of the Technical Theatre Program at Ryerson University, has enjoyed an active career as a Technical Director, Production Manager, and Stage Manager for contemporary dance, circus, and theatre. Selected credits include work with Toronto Dance Theatre, Groundling Theatre Company, Dreamwalker Dance, Zata Omm Dance Projects, Signal Theatre, and ProArteDanza. This is her first project with Open Heart Surgery Theatre.
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