

BON MOTS PRODUCTIONS

# PIRAIRIE ODYSSEY

FEATURING  
**Sondra Learn,  
Alison Chisolm &  
Musical Direction  
Charly Chiarelli**

LIVE STREAMED



WRITTEN & DIRECTED  
BY VALERI KAY

#### Playwright's & Director's Notes:

I have always heard “never direct your own plays”, but as one who tends to color outside the lines, I saw this as more of a challenge than an edict. And how could I miss with such a stellar cast? I was more than right. Sondra, Alison and Charly bring the characters, which kept knocking on my mind at 3:00 am clamoring to be heard, to exquisite life. Prairie Odyssey is a family story based on actual events. It explores the choices families make when confronted with tragedy. How they live with those choices, adapt to their circumstances and eventually take a new path grounded in growth and love, is the core of Prairie Odyssey. As well, the universal themes of loss, love and redemption are told to the wonderful strains of Charly Chiarelli’s harmonica. I always seem to dedicate my plays to someone dear who has been lost. With my last play, **Der Zug**, it was my dear sister. **Prairie Odyssey** is dedicated to my late partner Glenn Hardcastle. This is to you and Peggy, Glenn, with love.

#### Notes from the Music Director

When it struck me that being a music director for Val's touching play (set in the depression era) would allow me to arrange and perform the first songs I had learned on the harmonica, I latched on to this privilege. To allow one single old-time harmonica to accompany the sweet and tragic images of Val's work seemed right. It's a representation of the broad musical attributes of this small humble instrument - and a challenge for me to play it joyfully and plaintively - even if it's "Turkey in the Straw" or "Ode to Joy".

## Cast

Becky	Sondra Learn
Jane, Mama, Harry, Doug,	Alison Chisholm
Papa, Musician	Charly Chiarelli

## Production

Playwright, Director, Producer	Valeri Kay
Assoc. Producer	Rob Sutton
Music Director	Charly Chiarelli
Videographer/Lighting	Reverend Douglas Moore
Graphic Design	Gregory Neely
Dramaturgy	Judith Sandiford & Ronald Weihs

**Sondra Learn** Sondra has been involved with theatre since her first high school Theatre Arts class taught by David Fox. Since, she has worn many hats: stage manager, props, set design, set décor, workshop leader, producer, director, sound designer, actor, and playwright. She has premiered three of her own full-length plays and raised over \$ 8,000 for charity. She has won community theatre awards for acting, director, stage management, set décor as well as playwriting awards. Her plays have been produced in Canada and the USA. Sondra has been involved with the Hamilton Fringe Festival in the past as a director and playwright. **Prairie Odyssey** will be her Fringe acting debut. When not active with theatre, Sondra is busy with her family which consists of her husband Chuck and their three sons. She is always working on new theatre projects.

**Alison Chisholm** Alison is excited to be working with Valeri Kay and Bon Mots Productions in her first performing role in the Fringe. In the last few years, Alison has renewed her interest as a theatre practitioner, play write, director and reviewer. A graduate of Niagara College Theatre Program, McMaster University, and M.Div., from Emmanuel College, Acting credits include; "The Importance of Being Ernest," (Funeral Pyre), "Cakewalk," "She Stoops to Conquer," "Children's Hour," (Dundas Little Theatre), "Charley's Aunt" "Top Girls" (Hamilton Player's Guild), "The Lesson," "The Bear," "The Maids," (McMaster University). "Six Characters ...," "A Taste of Honey," "The Hollow Crown," "The Bacchae," "Murder in the Cathedral," "Mary Stuart," (Niagara College) Lighting for (The San Quentin Drama Workshop), "The Wall is Mama," "The Cage," Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Directing; "The Rivals," (DLT) "The House of Bernarda Alba," (McMaster.) Alison directed Valeri Kay's first play, **Der Zug**, a Gallery performance in the 2015 Hamilton Fringe. Her first original play, "A Certain Slant of Light" premiered at the Pearl, and her one-woman monologue, "Love, Loss and the Shit in Between, premiered at Mind Play at The Staircase. Alison is grateful for the support life-long friends like Val, especially in the time of Covid, and her children and grandchildren.

**Charly Chiarelli** Charly cut his performance teeth as a 9 year-old, selling the Hamilton Spectator in downtown streets. As a compliment to graduate studies and working as a psychology professor, he wrote and performed in 3 highly successful one-person plays, featured on BRAVO TV for 12 years. He is also a celebrated storyteller and virtuoso harmonica player. Charly has been published as a writer, including poetry and children's stories. Recently, he became an international, award-winning screen star and screenplay writer. To view Charly's movie, Google: **Road to the Lemon Grove.**

**Valeri Kay** Valeri is well known performer in the Hamilton area. Her experience in theatre and film spans a career of over 25 years. **Prairie Odyssey** is her second playwriting venture and she is very excited to see her work come to life as part of The Hamilton Fringe Festival's What The Fest Stream Out Loud. Her first play, **Der Zug**, had a successful run at the 2015 Hamilton Fringe Festival's Gallery Mini-Series. This is her first directing venture in many years. She is thrilled to be directing such a talented and committed cast, consummate professionals all.

**Robert Sutton**

This is Rob's first producing gig. He has minor previous experience set building for H.T.I. He's sung Baritone, Broadway style with the Harlequin Singers of Hamilton since '98. As well, he has some previous photography and art experience. He's happy to help with mounting "Odyssey" – a real slice of Canadiana!

**Greg Neely** A graduate of York University's visual communication design program in 1995, Greg has been working in branding and communication design for over 25 years, including being a partner in a firm for the last 15 years. His work has encompassed a wide range of areas from independent to cultural and entertainment, specifically in the music industry, to large scale corporate and institutional projects here and across North America over the years. Greg has designed for Hamilton Fringe shows in past including **Der Zug** and **Sunshine Steps**.

**Reverend Douglas Moore** Rev. Doug Moore has been the minister at Laidlaw Church on Ottawa Street in Hamilton for sixteen years. He finds it a real pleasure to work with Bon Mots Productions to bring Prairie Odyssey to an audience through live streaming. A progressive congregation; the people of Laidlaw Church have enthusiastically embraced the remodelling of the beautiful acoustic worship space to share with our community for music, drama, recitals and music festivals. The generosity of film crews renting our space has made possible the installation of sound and video for live streaming, which was originally directed to shut in members of the congregation, but with the advent of COVID-19 has proven a godsend for music and drama groups seeking to reach their audiences when other venues are closed. Rev. Doug, along with his son, Ben, have received a crash course in video and sound, approaching professional results. We are so happy to share what grace we have been given to support the vibrant music and are scene in our beloved Hamilton, and beyond!

## *Thank you to*

Ronald Weihs & Judith Sandiford  
Reverend Douglas Moore & Laidlaw United Church

Ray Rivers

Brian Morton

Gary Hardcastle

Linda Friend

Alison Chisholm

David Victor

Hamilton Fringe Festival Personnel:

Chris

Franny

Heather

And of course, Wilson

And anyone I've forgotten to mention on this Long and Winding Road.