

PETER HINTON-DAVIS

ORDER OF CANADA

STAGE DIRECTOR | PLAYWRIGHT | EDUCATOR



Hinton-Davis, Peter (b. Ontario, 23 July 1962). Canadian theatre and opera director, playwright and educator. Through his commitment to new play development, Indigenous theatre and revisionist productions of canonical works, Peter Hinton-Davis has significantly impacted the evolution of contemporary Canadian theatre. His exhaustively researched stagings are at once visually stunning and firmly rooted in the social, cultural and political context in which they are created.

A graduate of X University, he began his career as an actor but quickly found his passion in directing. He gained attention early in his career for an unflinching production of *Michi's Blood*, (Crow's Theatre, 1986). This was followed by successive positions in new play development at Theatre Passe Muraille, Canadian Stage and Vancouver's Playwright's Theatre Centre. He then served as the dramaturg in residence at Playwrights' Workshop Montreal and as an artistic associate at the Stratford Festival. This period saw him develop and direct a number of now canonical Canadian plays, including John Mighton's *Possible Worlds* and Métis/Dene playwright Marie Clements's *Burning Vision*. Hinton has also penned five original plays, including *The Swanne* trilogy, and written librettos for two operas by Peter Hannan.

In 2005, Hinton-Davis took over as the artistic director of English theatre at Ottawa's National Arts Centre, shaping how Canada conceptualizes its national theatre. Among his innovations were reinstating the English-language acting company in 2009 and programming the company's first season of all Canadian plays (2006-7). The former brought together a diverse group of artists from across Canada; the latter represented a bold move towards emancipating Canadian theatre from its enduring colonial ties to English and American drama and created space for Indigenous programming. This commitment to Indigenous theatre was evident in Hinton-Davis' selection of (among others) Marie Clements (Métis/Dene), Kevin Loring (Nlaka'pamux), Daniel David Moses (Six Nations) and Yvette Nolan (Algonquin) as playwrights in residence. In 2008, he partnered on the first ever collaboration between a Canadian company and Britain's the Royal Shakespeare Company, a stage adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*. Other contributions during his tenure at the NAC include instructing and mentoring students at the National Theatre School and founding The Ark; a three-week laboratory in which a diverse group of actors and actors-in-training come together to focus on a playwright's oeuvre.

Peter's departure from the NAC in 2012 was born of a desire for further artistic growth through freelance directing. He gained significant praise for his visually compelling staging of *Lady Windermere's Fan* at the Shaw Festival (2013). The production drew heavily on impressionist painting and contemporary music to venture beyond the superficial preoccupations of Victorian England and, ultimately, offered an engaged and feminist celebration of the heroine's resilience. His subsequent productions included a modern day setting *Pygmalion* (2015), the Canadian premiere of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' ground-breaking play *An Octoroon*, and in 2018 to re-envision Joan Littlewood's iconic *Oh What a Lovely War*, moving the setting to Niagara on the Lake during the Great War. This shift emphasized the racially-driven struggles faced by Indigenous peoples and Black Canadians during the period. In 2019, Peter directed the Canadian premiere of Mae West's 1926 comedy *SEX*. Again, the work was acknowledged for innovative design, and gender diverse casting, making it in some ways, as controversial for audiences at the Shaw in 2019, as the original was on Broadway 93 years before.

Important opera staging's include *Riel*, a 1967 opera with music by Harry Somers and libretto by Mavor Moore. Hinton-Davis' direction of *Riel* (Canadian Opera Company, 2017) sought to free the piece from its colonial bearings, chiefly a preoccupation with the conflict between Canada's English and French colonizers; instead, Hinton-Davis' *Riel* focused on the theft of Indigenous land and other injustices inflicted on First Peoples by settlers. In 2017, Hinton-Davis brought his signature visuals to *Missing*, a chamber opera by Brian Current (music) and Marie Clements (libretto) dedicated to British Columbia's missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. In 2018 he directed the word premiere of Rufus Wainwright's and Daniel MacIvor's opera *Hadrian*, at the Canadian Opera Company, marking the company's first work with explicit gay content and history.

Also, a leading educator Peter has been an instructor at Toronto Metropolitan University, the National Theatre School of Canada, York University and the University of Alberta. In 2012, he was awarded the Gascon Thomas Award for outstanding contribution to Canadian theatre and in 2009 he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada for his national contribution to the arts.