

# ARTS & LIFE

Now that's surely gotta hurt!

Acrobats get twisted all out of shape in the Mirror Tent at the Tulip Festival, F6



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THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, SECTION F

## Igniting artistic passions

### Recipients of the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards recall their turning points

**What:** Governor General's Performing Arts Awards Gala, hosted by Christopher Plummer.  
**When and where:** Today, 8 p.m., NAC Southam Hall.  
**Tickets:** Starting at \$60, at the NAC or through TicketMaster outlets (613-755-1111).

BY STEVEN MAZEY

**T**hey've dedicated their lives to the arts, but what sparked that passion when they were young?

That's the question we asked this year's recipients of the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards for lifetime artistic achievement: theatre and film director Robert Lepage, dancer and choreographer Peggy Baker, playwright George F. Walker, composer R. Murray Schafer, actress and singer Clémence Desrochers and Acadian singer-songwriter Edith Butler.

Chosen by a panel and nominated by their peers, the recipients were to be at a ceremony at Rideau Hall Friday to receive their awards, which include prizes of \$25,000 each from the Canada Council for the Arts.

At the National Arts Centre tonight, actor Christopher Plummer will host the gala, in which fellow artists pay tribute to the recipients. Among those who will perform or speak are dancer Karen Kain, soprano Measha Brueggergosman, pianists Angela Hewitt and Oliver Jones and actor Gordon Pinsent.

In addition to the six recipients, two other award recipients are honoured.

The Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Voluntarism in the Performing Arts goes to James D. Fleck. The veteran Toronto philanthropist was a longtime board member of the National Ballet, chaired the Art Gallery of Ontario's recent makeover and has supported the careers of visual artists and performers.

Actor, writer and director Paul Gross receives the National Arts Centre Award for exceptional achievement over the past year. Gross's Genie Award-winning feature film *Passchendaele*, about Canadian soldiers in the First World War, was released last fall. Gross also receives \$25,000.

We asked the recipients to share memories of a youthful experience or a mentor who made a difference. Their responses follow, edited for space. For their full remarks, visit [ottawacitizen.com/entertainment](http://ottawacitizen.com/entertainment).

#### ROBERT LEPAGE

**Born:** Quebec City, 1957. Stage and film director, writer, actor, whose productions have been presented and acclaimed internationally.

My sister attended a girls' high school. When I was 12 or 13, they did a Michel Tremblay play, *En Pièces détachées*. I hadn't seen any Tremblay. This school show was quite incredible. I was attracted by the whole theatricality of it... the way it was directed, the way it was acted, the fact that only girls played in it, so that meant the men's parts were played by girls, the whole makeup and costume aspect, the sets and lighting.

Robert Lepage combined cutting-edge technology and ingenious props in *Le Projet Andersen*.

## ARTS &amp; LIFE

## Awards Gala: 'I felt that I had found myself'



JEAN LEVAC, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean presents Peggy Baker, left, with the 2009 Governor General's Performing Arts Award for lifetime artistic achievement in dance and choreography. Baker is a founding member of Toronto dance company Dancemakers.

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I remember going back to see it two or three times. I was so seduced by the whole idea of theatre. After that, whatever artistic discipline I studied or classes I went to, it was all connected to that ... I understood that theatre was the meeting point of all these other disciplines, whether it was architecture, fine arts, writing, acting, lighting or music.

There were a lot of people who were inspiring, but one who stands out was my main teacher at the conservatory, Marc Doré. Marc was a strange object in Quebec in the mid-1970s, when everyone was doing a lot of psychological, hyper-realistic theatre. He had studied at Lecoq (theatre school) in Paris and came back from France with techniques that were very poetic, a very different way of telling stories. It was liberating to work with Marc. I discovered that I could tell stories using nothing — my body, my hands, miming, using masks, shapes, objects. It was a big influence on my work.

#### EDITH BUTLER

**Born:** Paquetville, N.B., 1942. Acadian singer-songwriter who has performed internationally and produced more than 27 albums.

I never dreamed about doing this. It just happened. My mother is very musical. She plays piano and has a beautiful voice. As early as I can remember, we used to make music at our house. I learned piano, guitar, fiddle, mandolin, banjo, by ear. I played in hoedowns. The guitarist would go out for a beer and I would jump in and take the guitar, when I was maybe 10 years old.

We sang Acadian songs every day at school. I was excited about music, not about show business. I didn't know that show business existed. But music was with me. My mother is 87 now, a tiny little woman, but very strong, and she is coming from Moncton to Ottawa for the awards. I owe her thanks, because she gave me music.

#### GEORGE F. WALKER

**Born:** Toronto, 1947. Walker's more than 20 plays, including *Suburban Motel*, *Zastrozzi* and *The Art of War*, have been produced internationally. He has written for television series that include *Due South* and *The Newsroom*.

I'm from a working-class family, not from an artistic background. The second play I ever saw in my life was mine. I guess you could say I took it all from the world around me and found that I enjoyed it. I don't know if I even enjoyed it. It was something I had to do, to get it out rather than keep it in. I still feel like that, that I'm cleaning out the garbage bin.

I did have an English teacher, Dennis Boulton, who was supportive. It was not so much what he said to me. It was really how he felt about writing. He was passionate about it, and for the first time, I saw someone actually excited about something that wasn't mundane.

#### CLÉMENCE DESROCHERS

**Born:** Sherbrooke, Quebec, 1933. Actress, singer, writer, broadcaster. Desrochers wrote lyrics for several revues, including *Les Girls* (1969), wrote and performed acclaimed monologues and hosted popular TV

shows such as *Le monde de Clémence*.

When I was about seven, I was in school in Sherbrooke. I was not having great success, apart from writing and recess. I studied with nuns and was very unhappy with them. One day, we did a play at school, and I had a small part. Maybe I was funny already. I was so surprised by the reaction and the laughs. I thought, "That's wonderful. You can create another world where you don't have to do what the adults and the nuns tell you to do." From that moment on, I wanted to become an actress. That's the moment where it started. I did everything to be on the stage.

#### R. MURRAY SCHAFFER

**Born:** Sarnia, 1933. One of Canada's best-known composers, whose pieces have been performed around the world, including orchestral and chamber music and pieces for outdoor performance. A new NAC-commissioned piece, *Dream-E-Scape*, will be performed by the NACO May 20 and 21.

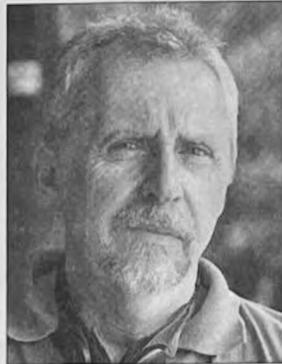
I can remember composing an homage to Mozart at the age of six or seven, so I was interested in composing. But what turned me in the direction of wanting to be a composer was when I went to study with John Weinzwieg, because John considered himself a composer, rather than a musician who also composes, and that was quite significant in Canada at the time.

I went to him when I was about 15. I respected John a great deal, for making it possible for us to survive as composers in Canada.

He was very different from other



Edith Butler



George F. Walker



Clémence Desrochers



R. Murray Schaffer



Paul Gross



James D. Fleck

people who were teaching composition, most of whom considered themselves musicians who also composed. They played in an orchestra or jazz group and composed on the side. That was a different

thing from saying "I'm a composer, even if I don't play the piano very well and don't know anything else. I do know how to write music and put it on paper." John gave me that idea.

#### PEGGY BAKER

**Born:** Edmonton, 1952. Dancer, choreographer, teacher. A founding member of Toronto company Dancemakers, she also toured with Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project.

As a teenager, I dreamed of becoming an actress. In 1969, I won an acting prize at an Edmonton high school drama festival and I used the bursary to attend a theatre seminar in Drumheller. Our movement class was taught by Patricia Beatty, a dancer and choreographer who was a founding co-director of Toronto Dance Theatre. Trish led us in a thorough and rigorous modern dance class based in the technique of Martha Graham.

I later wrote of this pivotal experience:

"I was deeply affected, not only by the aesthetic and physicality of the movement material, but also by the eloquence and articulation of Trish's body and by the language that she used to describe the experience of dance. She spoke like a poet, her riveting, thunderstruck images exquisitely nuanced. The class sustained an undercurrent of ritual: stillness, deeply considered and deeply felt movement, silence, a kind of ecstasy. It was a revelation ... I felt utterly connected, fluent and inspired. I felt that I had found myself."

Indeed, from that point on, I knew with absolute certainty that I was a dancer.

#### NAC AWARD: PAUL GROSS

**Born:** Calgary, 1959. Actor, writer, director.

When I was 11, my mother took

me to Stratford to see Bill Hutt in *King Lear*, and it was like someone had tossed a hand grenade into my imagination. I can recall thinking: I would very much like to be part of that world. At one point during the battle, the head of a soldier's spear fell off in the aisle. I raced down and scooped it up and still have it to this day — a kind of talisman.

#### Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Voluntarism in the Performing Arts:

#### JAMES D. FLECK

Toronto resident Fleck, 77, developed his passion for the arts as an adult, thanks partly to his dance-loving wife, Margaret, who persuaded him to join the board of the National Ballet of Canada in the 1960s. He has since supported theatre, music and visual arts organizations and individual artists.

I didn't have one particular galvanizing performance. There were artists who excited me, including Veronica Tennant and Karen Kain. Their performances were very moving, and I became enamoured of ballet.

At the ballet company, I saw Celia Franca make something out of nothing. Her view was always to spend the money and then somehow find it, even if that made her treasurer nervous.

I realized how little artists are paid. I realized the arts generally in Canada are thought of as something that is subsidized rather than something that you invest in. I feel strongly that having a cultural infrastructure is essential to quality of life. Having a strong arts scene is also essential to attracting the minds that we know are necessary in the knowledge-type economy that we aspire to. Since I'm not an artist myself, I can help others realize their potential. I've enjoyed my involvement in the arts very much.



Peggy Baker