

Just (1999)

by Trevor Schmidt

Following the production of a number of successful new plays in the early 1980s, Walterdale's attention to new play production waned during the latter part of the decade and into the early 1990s. In some years the April or May slot was given over to known full-length plays such as Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (May 1987), in other years to productions of known one-acts (Ayckbourn's *Drinking Companion*, Gosforth's *Fete*, and *A Talk in the Park* in May 1992, for example). By the mid-1990s the company turned in earnest to new one-act productions in the late-spring slot. Since then it has produced, and in most cases offered dramaturgical development to, nearly forty new one-act plays by local writers, including CKUA radio personality and former Walterdale board member Chris Allen, playwright Heather Morrow, choreographer (and musical theatre aficionado) Barbara Mah, playwright and screenwriter Matthew Kowalchuk, actor Dale Wilson, and former Walterdale artistic director David Owen. Counted in this list is multi-award-winning playwright, director, and designer Trevor Schmidt.

Schmidt was born in Saskatoon. He graduated with a BFA in drama from the University of Calgary in 1991 and has since written dozens of plays. In 1994 he moved to Edmonton and in the following year he formed the Unconscious Collective. The group had the wide but pressing mandate to produce new works for the theatre written by Albertans. Schmidt himself wrote most of the group's plays. His writing, directing, design, and acting work have garnered him Elizabeth Sterling Haynes nominations in eight categories, as well as a Syncrude Award for Innovative Artistic Direction and an Enbridge Emerging Artist Award for his playwriting.

When *Just* made its theatre company debut at Walterdale in 1999, having had recent success at the Alberta Provincial One-Act Festival, Schmidt's playwriting star was on the rise. To offer a sense of his output, consider that in the 2000/01 Edmonton theatre season alone, he earned three of the four Elizabeth Sterling Haynes nominations for Outstanding New Play for *Only Girls* (Sound & Fury Theatre/The Unconscious

Collective), *Treatment* (Theatre Yes/The Unconscious Collective), and *The Watermelon Girls* (The Unconscious Collective), which won the award. He was also nominated that year for his costume design for *The Oedipus Project* (Northern Light Theatre). In the summer of 2002 he contributed six of his own plays to the Edmonton Fringe Festival; notably, Schmidt himself produced none of them. For the 2003/04 season, along with ten other writers who included Mark Stubbings and former Walterdale artistic director David Owen, Schmidt won the award for Outstanding Fringe New Work for his contribution to *Change Room*. Since then he has barely slowed down despite becoming artistic director of Northern Light Theatre, where he continues to write, direct, design, and act. His second play produced at Walterdale, *Mockingbird Close*, received enthusiastic responses at the 2008 one-acts.

Just, one of the few one-person shows that Walterdale has produced, is a tense yet delicate story told by a woman who comes to a home for young, pregnant girls to adopt a baby. By way of sensitive dramatic monologue we gradually learn why she has been troubled for so long as she waits for her husband to meet her.

Just ran May 31–June 5, 1999, at Walterdale Playhouse (firehall) with the following cast and creative team:

WOMAN Michele Vance Hehir
DIRECTOR Trevor Schmidt
STAGE MANAGER Brad Smith

Just was presented at the 1999 Edmonton Regional One-Act Festival, where Michele Vance Hehir won the Best Actress Award as The Woman, before going on to the Provincial One-Act Festival. *Just* became, as Schmidt describes it, the “cornerstone” monologue for his award-winning play *The Watermelon Girls*, performed at Edmonton’s Arts Barns the following year.

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The Woman (Michele Vance Hehir) considers her options in Trevor Schmidt's Just, May-June 1999. Photo: C.W. Hill Photography for Walterdale Theatre Associates.

A woman sits alone.

WOMAN My husband should be here. Any minute.
I don't have any idea what's keeping him.
We made an appointment, he always does this, we make
an appointment and he ... sorry.
Something must have come up, some sort of emergency.

Just wait, I suppose.

This is a lovely home. I thought that as I was pulling up.
It's a lovely colour. And so big. Why, there must be ... seven
rooms? Maybe eight! It's so nice that it can be used for such
a ... good cause. I think it's wonderful, the work that's being done here.

I saw some of them. The girls. Outside. When I drove up. They were
having some kind of picnic or something, on the bench just off the porch.
They were laughing and happy, each one looking like she'd swallowed a
medicine ball.

They all looked very happy.

I don't suppose I could ... smoke a cigarette? Or is that not done here?
I'll ... wait, I'll just wait. It's a filthy habit. I'll just wait.
I don't know where he is.

I was ashamed. Earlier. In the car, out front. They all saw me, the girls, they saw me drive up, they were all laughing. I pulled up the drive, stopped in front of the house, and just ... sat there. I didn't want to get out and walk to the door. Not with all of them watching.

That was silly, wasn't it? I mean ... they must have known, they must have all known, I mean, no one comes out here unless ... it was silly of me. Stupid. To sit there in my car while they stood not twenty yards away, just sat there waiting for ... I don't know what I was waiting for.

I don't have any idea how long I would have sat there if one of the girls hadn't detached herself from the group and started coming toward me, her huge belly ... well, that was enough to practically shoot me out of that automobile, tell you. Direct contact! I couldn't face that.

She called something out to me, friendly? Concerned. I waved her away and practically ran up the walk, trying to keep my face away from them, hoping my hat would cover. Trying to keep my face away! Can you see any point in that? With my car sitting right out front, with license plates clear as day. What was I thinking!

I was ashamed. Does that make any sense? I mean ... what do I have to be ashamed of? It's not as though I'm one of those ... I haven't done anything wrong.

I suppose I shouldn't have told you that story. It didn't represent me in the most positive light. I just ... I guess it was on my mind. My conscience. And it slipped out. I thought it would be better to acknowledge the whole incident than just ... ignore it.

I should probably just sit here until my husband arrives, and not say another word. Just sit and wait quietly.

Yes, it's a very lovely colour, this house. A lovely shade. And those trees out front. Well they're quite...

They weren't laughing at me. When I drove up. I know that. They were just happy, and that's all. Though how one could be happy in that condition, knowing that in a few weeks, or months, you were going to...

Well, everyone's different. And what the good Lord takes from one, He gives to ... though in this case, He doesn't really take, as much as they give it away, all of them...

I suppose there's always someone willing—happy—to get what one of those girls has cast off.

He should be along any minute. He surely hasn't forgotten. He might be late, but he won't have forgotten. He knows how important this is to me.

I didn't mean anything about those girls. Nothing bad. I don't judge. Sometimes you just find yourself in situations ... that you're not sure how to get out of. And if you're young, and have no one to help you ... I can understand.

My sister-in-law, Betty, says that I'm chasing a dream. She's always catching me looking out the window, or staring at the wall. She doesn't understand. She says she'd love to have the time to stand around, day-dreaming, but she's got four kids to run around after. She says that's just the way it is. Some get, some don't.

Betty says we're lucky.

She came across me the other day, just crying my eyes out. Sitting in the door to the backyard, the screen door between me and her kids. She asked me why I was crying.

What could I say? That her kids made me weepy? I was bawling because her kids were happy?

Now Betty just thinks I'm crazy.

I told her I wasn't feeling well. I had an ache in my stomach, that's what I said.

Look at me. I'm smoking. Now, how did that happen? I could put it out. Should I put it out? I could. If it's against the rules— I don't want to break any rules here. I want...

I really wanted this to go well, but everything seems to be conspiring against me. First my husband...

He knew how important this was to me.

I have tried and tried ... and tried.

I understand those girls. The ones outside, having a picnic. I think ... if I'm afraid of them, ashamed, it's because I understand them.

Bert wasn't my first. No, that distinction goes to a young man who lived down from us, a boy with curly hair. His name was Cameron.

I didn't know the first thing about ... the first thing. If I'd known then ... if my mother had told me ... well, I can't help but think things would have been so different.

It didn't take long
it hurt
and the earth didn't move
he didn't talk to me the next day
I thought I'd left with only some grass down my dress
down there
but I found I had
something else
left there, too.

I don't even remember what I felt

My mother was horrified
My father could never know
She took some money from a jar
and more from a secret drawer
and drove me to a little house
smaller than this one
an ugly little house
and an ugly little man
did something
down there.

Then she took me home
and told my father
I was ill
a fever
and she brought me food in bed
and changed my dressings
and sang to me
like she hadn't done since I was
a baby

Bert says Betty means well. But I think she's purposely mean. She doesn't realize. With just the slightest amount of tact, she might notice that I'm ... pained. She might think twice about bringing her brood over.

We have a nice home. Not as nice a colour as this one but ... We have a large home, with lots of room. But there is an empty space. I have died a hundred deaths waiting for something to fill that space. That room.

You have no idea what that's like
When you wait
and each month
a drop of blood
kills you.
A tiny drop of blood
like a teardrop
my body cries

I want to meet the girl
the girl in question
I'd like to meet her
I'd like for her to see me
to see that I'm the right sort
I want to tell her
show her
how badly
I want this.

And my husband
my husband as well
he'll tell you himself
it's very important
it's what we need
what we've needed for some time now
just what we need to
remind us
why we ended
together in the first place
It seems a hundred years ago now.

Bert and I
tried very hard
we used to try
every night
but
I guess he got tired of trying
and gave up.

I can't really blame him
it's not as though
I was ever very good at it
if it had been my choice
I wouldn't do it at all
except that
The Ends Justify The Means.

I try not to think about it too much
but I think it's my fault
you know
my fault that all our trying was for
nothing
I did something wrong
at the wrong time
and now I can't do it again
even though
now
it's the right time
the perfect time
even though it may soon be
too late.

I don't know how much longer I should wait. He should have been here long before now. I don't know what kind of excuse he'll have for me. What kind of excuse I can give you for him.

He works very hard. He's tired.

The other night, when I told him about coming here today, that I'd made an appointment, he shook his head and said "I'm tired.

I'm tired..."

I made him promise to come, and that tired man went to bed.

He lay beside me and we pretended to sleep, neither one of us touching. Too tired to try.

Bert and Betty don't know, of course, I never told them. I can't imagine why I've even told you about it today.

I suppose I just wanted you to know that ... if there had been a house like this, if I had known about it, if I knew then what I know now, well ...

I would have gone to “visit an aunt.” That’s the proper phrase, isn’t it? They still say that, don’t they? “Gone to visit an aunt.”

Everything would be so different.

I dread the rest of the lonely evenings of my life stretching out before me. I don’t want to spend my time with the company of a man who is tired. I want to have love, even if it is the love that someone else has given away, the love they have cast out. It only seems fair. The love has done nothing wrong. It should be held close, cherished. I can do that. We can do that.

I don’t mean Bert and I, although he will make a fine father. He’ll leave the real work of it to me.

No, when I say “we,” I mean yourself and I. We can do it. You and I can do it together. This deal, this contract, it can be between us. It can be our secret.

Not that it is anything to be ashamed of. No. I didn’t mean that, by any means. It’s not a secret. But I don’t want to call it a deal, I mean, that sounds so...

I’d best wait for my husband. I’ll just wait.

My mother kept my secret. Our secret. She’ll go to her grave with it, I have no doubt. That’s mothers and daughters.

I want that.

I want that, does that make any sense to you at all?

I’m going to wait.

I’m very patient.

I’ll wait to get what I want

I’ll wait forever if I have to.

I’ll sit here and wait.

Don’t rush to any decisions.

Take your time.

I’ll wait.

The Woman smokes and sits and waits as the lights fade.