


BWW Interview: Renaissance Man/Playwright Daniel MacIvor NEVER. DREAMS. ALONE. At Open Fist

 broadwayworld.com/los-angeles/article/BWW-Interview-Renaissance-ManPlaywright-Daniel-MacIvor-NEVER-DREAMS-ALONE-At-Open-Fist-20211011

by Gil Kaan

October 11, 2021

Open Fist returns w/live performances at Atwater Village Theatre w/a concurrent run of 2 plays by Canadian playwright Daniel MacIvor - SOLDIER DREAMS & NEVER SWIM ALONE

Open Fist Theatre Company returns to live, in-person performances at Atwater Village Theatre with a concurrent run of two plays by Canadian playwright **Daniel MacIvor** - the west coast premiere of *THE SOLDIER DREAMS* and the shorter *NEVER SWIM ALONE*. *THE SOLDIER DREAMS* opens October 23rd, with *NEVER SWIM ALONE* running concurrently October 30th through November 21st. Had the chance to pick Daniel's brain, a true Renaissance man who's an actor, playwright, theatre director and film director.

Thank you for taking the time for this interview, Daniel!

My pleasure.

You wrote *THE SOLDIER DREAMS* in 1997 and *NEVER SWIM ALONE* in 1991. What would your three-line pitch for each piece be?

THE SOLDIER DREAMS is a naturalistic dream play about the journey of a virus, its beginning in a love affair and its end in a family.

NEVER SWIM ALONE is a highly theatrical competition, where two businessmen engage twelve rounds of one-upmanship fueled by guilt and memory.

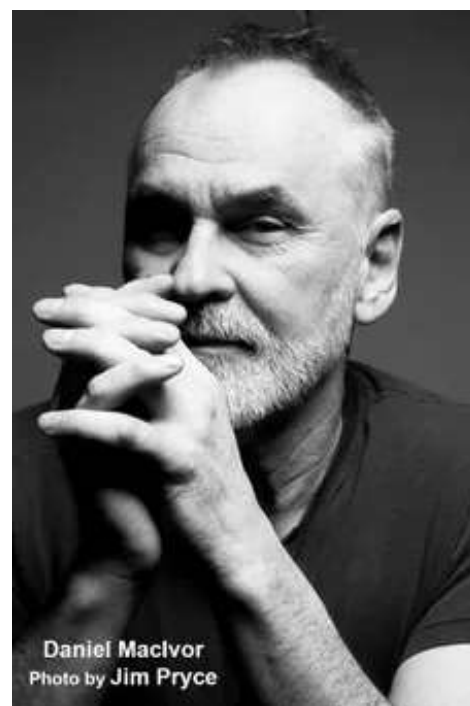
Whose idea was it to combine the two plays into one evening?

Open Fist.

What cosmic forces finally brought you together with Open Fist to west coast premiere *THE SOLDIER DREAMS* you wrote twenty-four years ago?

Wow, I don't really know. Instagram?

How hands on are you in the preproduction of your premieres?



In premieres I am usually in or direct the plays. I was in *NEVER SWIM ALONE* (I played Bill) and for *THE SOLDIER DREAMS* I was in it (I played David) and co-directed with director Daniel Brooks. In terms of regional premieres, I am as hands on as the producers want me to be. For the New York City premiere of *NEVER SWIM ALONE* the actor playing Bill broke his foot so I rewrote the play to accommodate his cast. Sometimes my involvement is as simple as responding to some interview questions.



Will you be coming from Canada for this premiere?

Sadly, no.

Your list of plays you're written is quite extensive. How do you keep up with all your countless premieres being produced all over the world?

Mostly my agent, but I also have a Google alert on my name. It's amazing what comes up!

Your work has been translated into French, Portuguese, Spanish, Czech, German, and Japanese. How do you stay on top of the correctness of the various translations of your plays?

Yes, well, that's a tall order since I only speak English. Often, I will have someone I know and trust who is outside the process but knows the play, and who speaks, say German, read the translation and alert me to any wild variances of intention or meaning. But of course, it's not just language, much room must be made for cultural shifts as well.

When does your script become set in stone? After first workshop reading? Following dress rehearsal? Post opening night curtain?

Hmmm. Never? I am always open to a conversation about rewriting. To me performance is the center of theatre, not text. Text supports, inspires, ignites performance. Theatre must be alive, especially the relational kind of theatre that I make. Of course, having said that there are some lines that must remain as written. In the perfect world I would always be present for all rehearsals so that adjustments can be made.

What moved you to write *THE SOLDIER DREAMS*, the story of David and his lover Richard?



I am 59. I spent my 30's moving through the trenches of AIDS. Gathered at bedsides. Trying to decipher last words. I loved the American plays that addressed that war, **AS IS** and **THE NORMAL HEART** and of course the gold standard **ANGELS**. But I wanted to look at smaller, private moments. The innocent, loving moment of transmission. The final days and the tectonic/infinitesimal effects on those gathered to witness.

What motivated you capture the one-upmanship of Frank and Bill in *NEVER SWIM ALONE*?

The director of the original was Ken McDougall an important Canadian theatre director whom we lost to AIDS. He and I had a very competitive relationship. In the published version I dedicated the play to him with the epigraph "To Ken, a formidable foe and friend indeed." In some ways it was a message to Ken - maybe a warning? We remained friends but stopped working together shortly after the premiere. Competition is another kind of virus.

Do your friends and family ever recognize themselves in your plays?

Yes. But they are often wrong.

What factors influenced your creating your theatre company da da kamera with Michele Jelley in 1986?

*[Just to note: Michelle and I formed the company waaaaay back at the beginning but Michele stepped away from making work when she went to work at the national television broadcaster. My long-time partner in da da kamera (who came on board at **NEVER SWIM ALONE**) was Sherrie Johnson.]*



We wanted to be able to work outside the system. Things have changed somewhat now, but because Canadian theatre has always been mostly funded by the government there was a process of development in place that was considered "tried and true" and could narrow one's view of what was possible or allowable. I had approached the artistic director of a prominent Toronto theatre with the script of **NEVER SWIM ALONE** - before deciding to self-produce - and he dismissed it as "not a play." Thirty years of productions later I am grateful that we did it ourselves.

What did you initially want to be when you grew up - actor, writer, director?

My plan was to be a journalist. My parents gave me an electric typewriter for my 13th birthday. Then I fell into writing poetry. It seems that perhaps that's the mix that makes a playwright: part poet, part journalist.

If you had to pick only one profession, which one would you choose to continue to pursue?

I think like a writer, but I feel most at home on the stage. I need to do both. My head and my heart. If I had to choose one profession, I'd probably have to forgo both. Design maybe, I love chairs and rooms.

Was it a challenge to write your first libretto *HADRIAN* after writing in 'standard' play format?

There were challenges to be sure. But the writing came quite fluidly. I was able to fully embrace the poet part of myself. Rufus (Wainwright) and I had the typically fiery composer/librettist relationship. Not quite foes, but indeed formidable.

What's in the near future for Daniel MacIvor? A couple new scripts? An acting role? A new project to direct?

The pandemic came along just as I was beginning two tours, a four-character play called *NEW MAGIC VALLEY FUN TOWN* and a solo work called *LET'S RUN AWAY* (I was performing in both). Hopefully I will get back to those. During the pandemic I have been editing a feature length documentary called *The Work*, about my solo work in the theatre and my partnership with director Daniel Brooks. We are deep in post-production now. Watch for it at arty film festivals!

Thank you again, Daniel! I look forward to experiencing your *David & Richard*, and *Frank & Bill* at the Open Fist.

Once again, my pleasure Gil. I appreciate your research and curiosity.

How To Get Tickets

For tickets for the live performances of *THE SOLDIER DREAMS* through December 12, 2021 (with *NEVER SWIM ALONE* running as a companion piece October 30th through November 21st; log onto www.openfist.org

