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CANADIAN PLAYWRIGHTS PROMOTE CANADIAN PLAYS IN BRITAIN

The Department of External Affairs announced today that under its auspices five Canadian playwrights will tour arts centres and theatres in England and Scotland from May 15 to 25. This ten-day tour is part of a pilot project of the Department's Cultural Affairs Division to promote Canadian playwrighting abroad and is organized by the Guild of Canadian Playwrights with assistance from Canada House in London.

The playwrights Michael Cook, David Fennario, Ken Gass, Ken Mitchell and Rick Salutin will illustrate the diversity of the work being done in English-speaking Canada through general discussions and selected readings representing major themes in Canadian playwrighting today. The work of these five playwrights which reflects different regional perspectives and stylistic approaches, has been central to the surge in Canadian theatre over the past ten years.

Readings and discussions on tour will be given at the University of Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, the Institute of Contemporary Arts and the Theatre Writers' Union in London, the Bristol Arts Centre, the Third Eye Arts Centre in Glasgow, the Centre of Canadian Studies at the University of Edinburgh and the Theatre Workshop in Edinburgh.

Background notes on each playwright are attached.

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MICHAEL COOK has been developing dramatic literature combining his heritage of the great poetic tradition of Irish drama with the bleak and barren Newfoundland landscape and the struggles of the people to survive, since he emigrated from England in 1965 to Random Island on the coast of Newfoundland. His most widely produced works are Head Guts and Soundbone Dance, a compassionate portrait of a fishing culture, and Jacob's Wake, chronicling the collapse of a culture confronting the 20th Century.

DAVID FENNARIO comes from the English-speaking Montreal working class and was drawn to the street culture of the '60's. A journal he wrote recording this period in his life was published and it was read by a regional theatre artistic director in Montreal who asked Fennario to write a play: On the Job was premiered in January 1975 and since then Fennario has produced five plays mostly reflecting the experience of working class life for the English speaking Canadians in Quebec.

KEN GASS was the founding and first artistic director of the Factory Lab Theatre in Toronto, the first theatre created to produce only Canadian plays. Also a playwright, Gass' work includes Hurray for Johnny Canuk, about the World War II comic book character that presented the image of Canada to the world, The Boy Bishop, a sprawling majestic piece about coping with the expectations and frustrations of nationalism in Canadian culture, and Winter Offensive, a comically stylized treatment of the decline of Nazi Germany which shattered the sensibilities of local critics. Gass toured Britain with Factory Lab two years ago.

KEN MITCHELL is a prolific and versatile prairie writer, story-teller and poet whose work reflects his farming roots and the historical struggles of that community. Recipient of the Canada-Scotland Writers-in-Residence Exchange Fellowship, Mitchell will take up residence at a Scottish university for the period from October 1, 1979 to June 30, 1980. He has published a novel, numerous short stories, plays, poems, articles and radio and TV scripts. His most recent production Cruel Tears, a country and western musical based loosely on Othello and set in a Saskatchewan farming town, toured every major community in Canada last season.

RICK SALUTIN is a playwright, journalist and trade union organizer who has been a major force in the development of the movement in Canadian cultural and economic independence. His 1837-The Farmers' Revolt is currently being toured in Scotland by Theatre Passe Muraille, a Toronto theatre company. His version of Fanshen was his first major theatrical work, and most recently, Les Canadiens a historical treatment of French-English relations as seen through the metaphor of Canadian hockey, has been produced throughout Canada over the last two years.