



Despite “More Or Less” being his most tender album, Dan Mangan still has some ‘piss and vinegar’ left in him

OPINIONS



Deaf Crows play // Deaf Crows Collective

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Deaf Theatre Festival makes noise



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SOUND OFF: DEAF THEATRE FESTIVAL

Feb 13 – Feb 17

ATB FINANCIAL ARTS BARN

Tickets

Imagine a theatre performance accessible to all audiences, no matter your spoken, or signed, language.

Audiences looking for a more inclusive theatre experience will welcome *SOUND OFF: A Deaf Theatre Festival*—Canada’s national festival dedicated to the Deaf performing arts—showcasing the talents and stories of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities, and the beauty of American Sign Language on the mainstage. *SOUND OFF* is dedicated to making theatre accessible to both deaf and hearing audiences.

Now in its third year, *SOUND OFF* will see Deaf performing artists from across Canada converge on Edmonton for its biggest iteration yet.

“Back in 2016 when I was planning for the first festival, there were not a lot of people actively engaged in Deaf performance and shows by Deaf performers or shows incorporating them were fairly rare,” says artistic director Chris Dodd.

Featuring five mainstage productions, staged readings, salon panel discussions, workshops, talkbacks and an improv collaboration with Rapid Fire Theatre, *SOUND OFF* celebrates and offers a glimpse into Deaf culture.

“I feel the festival has helped give greater awareness to those who are Deaf performing artists and a new appreciation by audiences of their talents and the stories they have to tell. *SOUND OFF* exists for this cultural exchange, as well as to provide opportunities for

Deaf performers to showcase their work and to connect with one another and strengthen their community,” Dodd says. “The time is right for everyone to have a voice and for their stories to be heard, and I feel that the support and encouragement for *SOUND OFF* is excellent barometer for that.”

An increased focus on accessibility and inclusion among Edmonton’s theatre community can be attributed, at least in part, to *SOUND OFF*, which is presented by Workshop West Playwrights’ Theatre in collaboration with Edmonton’s Chinook Series Festival.

“We partner with a wide range of professional theatre companies within Edmonton, including the Citadel Theatre, which is doing a staging of *The Tempest* this spring with Hearing and Deaf actors,” Dodd says. “I feel there is an increased focus on accessibility within Edmonton’s theatre community and the festival has helped play a part in that.”

While all performances in the festival are ASL/English accessible, one show, *Apple Time*, is accessible regardless of language spoken.

“*Apple Time* is a bridge to all realms: a magical, liminal ‘third’ space, in which Deaf, Hard of Hearing, locals, newcomers, oral and signing come together to create entire new worlds. Blending puppetry and ASL poetry with traditional Deaf storytelling and ensemble theatre, *Apple Time* invites you on a mythical journey of immigration and migration on the Deaf high seas,” says director Joanne Weber. “*Apple Time* is about the longing for an invitation to participate in a community where all languages,

cultures, and beliefs intersect to create a whole new intercultural space. For this reason, this event is accessible to all audience members regardless of language preferences.”



produced by Deaf Crows Collective.



“Apple Time” // Deaf Crows Collective

“[It’s] a contemporary, youth-driven vision of the future Deaf community,” Weber says.

The Deaf Crows Collective brought their flagship play *Deaf Crows* to the inaugural *SOUND OFF* in 2016.

The festival has provided opportunities for youth performers to showcase original works featuring Deaf themes and to network with other Deaf artists and performers, Weber says, who is also a teacher in the DHH program.

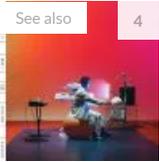
“Since the youth are in a small resource program in a city school board in Regina, Saskatchewan, the festival has broadened their horizons by exposing them to national Deaf leaders, Deaf organizations, artists and even a greater signing repertoire [ASL].”

The establishment of Deaf Crows Collective in 2016 has helped to revitalize the Deaf community in Regina and to provide more opportunities for presenting, preserving and promoting Deaf culture in the province, she says.

For those new to Deaf theatre performance, Dodd says to expect a true sensory experience.



The show *Tales From the East Coast* will showcase Maritime Sign Language, rarely seen outside Canada's Atlantic provinces.



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“Audiences will feel included, regardless of whether they know sign language or not, as we provide ASL to English interpreting that verbalizes what the actors sign on stage. As well, audiences will come away with a deeper appreciation for Deaf culture.”

The Deaf opera being done by Edmonton's Concrete Theatre called *Songs My Mother Never Sung Me* is also incorporating special subwoofers in the Westbury Theatre at the Arts Barns to make the seating tactile and make the show even more engaging for Deaf and Hard of Hearing audiences.



SONGS
MY MOTHER NEVER SANG ME

Music & Lyrics by Dave Clarke
An Opera for families sung in English and signed in American Sign Language

At the Westbury Theatre, ATB Financial Arts Barns, 10330 84 Ave, Edmonton

February 2019: Wednesday the 13th, 1pm & 7pm
Thursday the 14th, 7pm
Friday the 15th, 1pm & 8:30pm
Saturday the 16th, 2pm
Sunday the 17th, 2pm

\$25 tickets.fringetheatre.ca
Limited PWYW 2 hours before show

DIRECTED BY
Mieko Ouchi & Caroline Howarth

FEATURING
Susan Gilmour
Elizabeth Morris
Kieran Martin Murphy
Luc Tellier

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
Erik Mortimer

Poster for "Songs My Mother Never Sung Me."

What started as a 15-minute staged reading at Concrete Theatre's Sprouts New Play Festival for Kids in 2008, has grown into a full-length opera, making its premiere at *SOUND OFF*.

Written by composer and playwright Dave Clarke *Songs My Mother Never Sung Me* is his story of being the hearing child of Deaf parents, presented for a young audience (recommended for ages five and over).

"We loved that it both educated hearing audiences about Deaf culture, but that it also welcomed Deaf, hard of hearing and CODA (Children of Deaf Adults) community members in to see aspects of their own experience portrayed on stage. That has been a powerful experience for all of us!" says co-director and Concrete Theatre's artistic director, Mieko Ouchi.

The production team has chosen to look at the opportunities working with Deaf performers and audiences presents, instead of any perceived challenges or limitations. They've done away with traditional accessibility tools like surtitles and ASL interpreters



“Our Deaf actor Elizabeth Morris is also wearing a vibrational puck in her costume that allows her to feel the music during the show. This helps her with rhythm and connection to the music, as well as with cues. As the show is performed in sung English and ASL only by our mixed Deaf and hearing cast, Elizabeth has to rely on her fellow actors, eye contact, the information from her vibrational aid and her own amazing skills of observation and connection to know where we are in the music and in the show,” Ouchi says.

“Songs My Mother Never Sung Me” also stars internationally acclaimed, local singer/actress Susan Gilmour, Kieren Martin Murphy and Luc Tellier.

– Mary Ellen Green

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