

For Immediate Release

Young People's Theatre
World Premiere of Epic Indigenous Tale
BENTBOY

By **Herbie Barnes**
Directed by **Eric Coates**

October 3 – 23, 2022

Toronto, Sept. 15, 2019 - [Young People's Theatre](#) (YPT) is thrilled to announce the opening of its 2022.23 season with the world premiere of [Bentboy](#) – a heroic First Nations tale about an unlikely warrior told through movement, dance and myth. As *Bentboy* opens YPT's newly named **Ada Slaight Stage**, its audiences will be the first to experience the theatre's historic \$13.5 million expansion and renovation. Written by YPT Artistic Director **Herbie Barnes** and directed by **Eric Coates**, former GCTC Artistic Director, the play features choreography by Dora Award-winner **Waawaate Fobister**, and a dynamic cast and creative team that includes Indigenous artists from across Canada. *Bentboy* runs from October 3 to 23, 2022.

"I am so excited to be welcoming audiences back in person – for the first time in three years – to YPT's brand new spaces," said **Herbie Barnes**. "Not only will *Bentboy* be a joyful experience for our young audiences, but it's also an eye-opening play of heroism and learning. It reveals the epic simplicity of a child seeing their whole world for the first time."

In his first engagement with the historic theatre, YPT welcomes veteran theatre director **Eric Coates**. "I've always aspired to work at YPT, so I was delighted when Herbie invited me to join this project," he said. "*Bentboy* explores the interconnectedness of all elements, which is of particular interest to me. In a world that has suffered so deeply in recent years from a lack of personal connection, *Bentboy* reminds us that we are all part of the same circle."

The story begins deep in a forest, in another time, with a child called Bentboy. Hunched and hobbled by his curved back, Bentboy is cast aside by his village. Until one day, he is chosen by an elder as the unlikely warrior to embark on a quest to save the village from grave danger. And so begins his epic adventure, and a tale both treacherous and tender. Along the way, Bentboy encounters an uninvited companion, and the two are plunged into a world that comes to life in perilous and astonishing ways. Each on their own path, it will become a journey that transforms them both.

After workshops with Manitoba Theatre for Young People and Native Earth Performing Arts, *Bentboy* entered into development at YPT under former Artistic Director Allen MacInnis. The play received development support and two workshops with YPT in 2019. It was shortlisted for the Sharon Enkin Plays for Young People Award in 2020.

The title character, Bentboy, is played by **Dylan Thomas-Bouchier**, a Cree and Dene storyteller, and graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada. Joining Dylan as "Eagleseye" is Métis playwright and performer **PJ Prudat**. PJ holds artistic/creator residencies with Nightswimming and the Theatre Centre, and is a Co-Artistic Director at Shakespeare in the Ruff. The role of "Hummingbird" is played by Ojibwe performer **Dillan Meighan-Chiblow**, recipient of the Musical Stage Company's Syd & Shirley Banks Prize in 2020. **Ashley Cook**, **Brianne Tucker** and **Daniel Yeh** complete the cast as "Deerchild", "Tree/Anona Mouse" and "Greyfowl" respectively.

Additional credits include: Set & Video Designer: **Hailey Verbonac**; Costume Designer: **Nishina Shapwaykeesic-Loft**; Lighting Designer: **Shawn Henry**; Sound Designer: **Keith Thomas**; Dramaturg: **Stephen Colella**; Auntie-in-Residence:

Kelly Brownbill; Stage Manager: **Fiona Jones**; Assistant Stage Manager: **Kelsey Rae**.

YPT's 2022.23 season is proudly supported by **BMO as Season Presenting Sponsor**.

***Bentboy* Performances:**

Weekdays: Oct. 3, 4, 14, 19 & 21 at 10:15AM | Oct. 12, 13, 18 & 20 at 10:15 & 1PM

Saturdays and Sundays: Oct. 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23 at 2PM

Recommended for ages 5-12

Run Time: Approx. 60 minutes

Tickets: \$10-\$39 (plus HST & service charges)

Purchase Online: youngpeoplestheatre.org

Box Office: 416.862.2222 x2

MEDIA OPENING:

Thursday, October 6 at 7PM

RSVP to Clare Hill, Communications Manager

chill@youngpeoplestheatre.org | 647.267.6550

Photos: Login **yptmedia** | password **yptphotos**

HERBIE BARNES, Playwright

Herbie Barnes is an accomplished playwright, performer, director and arts educator whose 30-year career spans stages across North America. Herbie officially began his tenure as Artistic Director at YPT in October 2021. An Anishinaabe theatre artist from Aundeck Omni Kaning First Nation on Manitoulin Island, Herbie was among the generation of young Indigenous artists in the 1990s breaking down barriers to forge professional careers in Canadian theatre. Barnes was raised in Toronto. His theatre career began in 1989 with Debajehmujig Theatre Group, touring Ontario with the first run of Drew Hayden Taylor's *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock*. Since then he has collaborated with some of North America's largest theatre companies and was nominated for a John Hirsch Director's Award.

ERIC COATES, Director

Eric Coates has worked as a director, dramaturg, administrator and actor since entering professional theatre in 1986. The bulk of his career has been spent working with playwrights to bring new scripts to production. To date, he has commissioned and/or developed and premiered forty scripts. Most recently, he directed the premiere of Laura Michel's *Echoes of the Homesick Heart*, a verbatim piece on Secwepemc language for Western Canada Theatre (WCT) in Kamloops. He served as the Artistic Director of the Great Canadian Theatre Company from 2012 through 2021. For GCTC he directed *Daisy, Lo or Dear Mr. Wells*, *The Virgin Trial*, *Gracie*, *Ordinary Days*, 1979 (in co-production with the Shaw Festival), *Butcher*, *Generous*, *Best Brothers*, *This is War*, and *The Boy in the Moon*. He was the Artistic Director of the Blyth Festival for ten seasons, from 2003 through 2012, where premieres included *Innocence Lost: A Play about Steven Truscott* by Beverley Cooper and *Reverend Jonah* by Paul Ciufo, both finalists for the Governor General's Award. He has directed productions for Western Canada Theatre, Theatre Calgary, Drayton Entertainment, Thousand Islands Playhouse, Lighthouse Festival, CBC Radio and numerous productions with the Blyth Festival. Eric served as the President of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) from 2009-2015. He is a tribal member and canoe skipper of the Samish Indian Nation and is an active participant in Straits Salish language revitalization.

WAAWAATE FOBISTER, Choreographer

Waawaate Fobister is an actor, dancer, playwright, choreographer, instructor, and a producer, currently residing in Shoal Lake. A proud Anishnaabe from Grassy Narrows First Nation, Waawaate is a recipient of two Dora Awards for outstanding actor and play for *Agokwe*, outstanding actor from Humber College, and the University of Toronto's Mark S. Bonham Centre award for their advocacy and public knowledge in sexual diversity. Waawaate also has many award nominations, including the Ontario Premier's Award, the K.M. Hunter Award and the Sterling Award - Edmonton. Waawaate trained and studied Theatre Arts – Performance at Humber College, Indigenous Dance at Banff Centre for

the Arts, Summer School Intensives at Toronto Dance Theatre, Intensives at Centre for Indigenous Theatre and Kaha:wi Dance Theatre. Waawaate has performed in many major theatre companies across Canada and their work and research has taken them to many places as an artist, including Japan, UK, US, and many coasts across Turtle Island. Waawaate has had numerous residencies as playwright and choreographer, including Banff Centre for the Arts, Native Earth Performing Arts, Playwrights Theatre Centre, Playwrights' Workshop Montréal and Magnus Theatre. Waawaate was curator for three seasons at the Kick & Push Festival in Kingston, Indigenous Programming, and most recently organized the establishment of a 2SLGBTQ+ Council for an Indigenous governing body at Grand Council Treaty #3 - the first ever in Canada.

ASHLEY COOK as Deerchild

Ashley Cook is Saulteaux, Metis and Anishinaabe and resides in Treaty One Territory. Her most recent acting credits include *Zhaboonigan*, *The Rez Sisters* (Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre); *Barb, Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* (Firehall Arts Centre); and *Anon, Anon[ymous]* (Studio 58). She studied acting, voice, movement and physical theatre at Studio 58's acting program and graduated with honours in 2019. She has been performing professionally since 2007 and teaches classes at Native Youth Theatre and Manitoba Theatre for Young People and has a play in development for young audiences commissioned by Green Thumb Theatre.

DILLAN MEIGHAN-CHIBLOW as Hummingbird

Dillan (He/They) is an Ojibwe storyteller from Garden River First Nation. He was awarded the Musical Stage Company's Syd & Shirley Banks Prize in 2020. Dillan graduated from Sheridan College's Musical Theatre program and has a Master's degree in Musical Theatre from The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He also teaches singing lessons at his old school, Sheridan, in their Musical Theatre department. Dillan is the very first Indigenous singing teacher at Sheridan. Dillan has a passion for telling Indigenous stories from Turtle Island. For more on Dillan's work please check out www.dillanchiblow.com! Selected credits: *Run the Burbs*, *Murdoch Mysteries* (CBC); *Baapii Roho* (Banks Prize, The Musical Stage Company); *Mahagonny-Songspiel* (Talk Is Free Theatre); Tom/Tommy in *Children of God* (Segal Centre, The Cultch, WCT, Citadel, Urban Ink); Fulmar in *SEDNA* (Caravan Farm Theatre/Urban Ink); Rodney in *Only Drunks and Children Tell The Truth* (Magnus Theatre).

PJ PRUDAT as Eagleseye

PJ Prudat is a Treaty 6 born, proud Métis/nehiyaw and European descended playwright, actor and writer, (matrilineal family names of Oke-Mas-Kwe, Umphreville, Ledoux, Dubois, McGillis, Villeneuve, Lussier, Brass, Desjarlais, Allary, Nolin, hereditary Chief John Smith). PJ holds artistic/creator residencies with Nightswimming and the Theatre Centre and is a Co-Artistic Director at Shakespeare in the Ruff. PJ has performed as a company actor at the Shaw Festival, the National Arts Centre English & Indigenous Theatres and in luminous IBPOC creative-led shows across the country. Her maternal 3rd great-grandparents travelled by dog team, were Buffalo hunters, Michif Résistance fighters, and Treaty 6 hereditary-chief signatories.

DYLAN THOMAS-BOUCHIER as Bentboy

Dylan Thomas-Bouchier is a Cree and Dene dis-arts storyteller. Born and raised in Fort McMurray and the Fort McKay First Nation (Treaty 8), he graduated from the National Theatre School of Canada (NTS) acting program. Previous credits include: *The Herd* (Citadel/Tarragon); *Indecent*, *Everybody* (NTS); *Comedy of Errors* (Theatre Calgary).

BRIANNE TUCKER as Tree/Old Person

Métis performer Brianne Tucker's favourite credits include: *The 39 Steps* (St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival); *Salt Baby* and *Boeing Boeing* (Magnus Theatre); *Mno Bimaadiziwin* (Theatre By The Bay); *Murder at the Howard Johnson's* (Orillia Opera House); *One Slight Hitch* (Upper Canada Playhouse); *Dark Heart* (Thought for Food); and *Perfect Wedding* (Lighthouse Festival & Showboat Festival Theatre).

DANIEL YEH as Greyfowl

Daniel Yeh is an Asian-Indigenous actor, singer, and dancer who wants to continually develop his craft through stage

and film productions, while contributing to a more inclusive and diverse Canadian Industry. Recently seen in the Thousand Islands Playhouse production of *The Music Man* as Tommy Djilas; Theatre Sheridan's production of *Happy End* as Bill Cracker; the new podcast musical *Destination Wedding*; and the original dance piece *Working Title*.

See full cast and creative team bios [here](#).

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About Young People's Theatre

Young People's Theatre (YPT) launches the next stage in the company's 57-year history, co-led by Indigenous artist and new Artistic Director Herbie Barnes, and Executive Director Nancy Webster. This new era also marks the unveiling of YPT's expanded and renovated theatre complex, more than 10 years in the making. As Canada's largest and oldest professional theatre for young audiences, the company produces and presents a full season of theatre and arts education programming, serving approximately 150,000 patrons annually. With the purchase of a multi-use building across the street from its historic theatre, YPT has expanded its footprint, increased its accessibility, refreshed its lobbies, and upgraded the theatrical equipment capabilities of its 450-seat Ada Slaight Stage and 115-seat Studio. United in vision, the two facilities now anchor the corner of Front and Frederick Streets in downtown Toronto creating Canada's largest theatre complex for young people.

Connect with Young People's Theatre



For more information, visit youngpeoplestheatre.org.