

Toronto's largest and most celebrated theater

SOULPEPPER THEATER COMPANY

Presents first-ever season of work in the U.S.

SOULPEPPER ON 42ND ST: CANADA CROSSES THE BORDER

July 1 through July 29, 2017 at The Pershing Square Signature Center

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Original Adaptations of SPOON RIVER, OF HUMAN BONDAGE, and (RE)BIRTH: E.E. CUMMINGS IN SONG,

and the runaway hit "KIM'S CONVENIENCE"

among works to be presented.

"Soulpepper knocks it out of the park time and again."

--Richard Ouzounian, former critic, Toronto Star

SOULPEPPER – Toronto's largest and most celebrated theatre company, marking its 20th anniversary season as the most populous city in Canada's leading producer of revivals and new works – will make its U.S. debut next summer during a 4-week engagement Off-Broadway at The Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W 42nd St, in New York City, it has been announced by Albert Schultz, SOULPEPPER'S Founding Artistic Director, and Leslie Lester, SOULPEPPER'S Executive Director. This festival of plays and musical performances – entitled SOULPEPPER ON 42ND ST.: CANADA CROSSES THE BORDER– will be presented June 29 through July 29, 2017.

SOULPEPPER's stateside premiere coincides with the 150th birthday of Canada as a nation, and is expected to be the largest Canadian artistic expression in the U.S. during Canada's sesquicentennial celebration. It will showcase a diverse collection of Canada's finest theatre, literary and musical artists. In recognition of the deep 150 year old friendship between both nations, Soulpepper will have opening weekend celebrations from June 30 to July 2, recognizing July 1st as annual Canada Day and the birth of the U.S. on July 4th.

A four-seasons repertory company, SOULPEPPER maintains a stable year-round company of over 40 artists, and employs more than 250 artists each year. SOULPEPPER is considered a National Civic Theatre and is widely-known for its award-winning productions of new plays, contemporary works, and revivals, several of which will be presented during the 2017 summer season in New York.

During its 2015-16 season, SOULPEPPER presented 584 performances and public events including 23 mainstage productions, six concerts, 33 cabarets, and two Festivals, and toured productions across Canada. Shows last season included award-winning productions of Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* and Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*, a new version of Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade*, and the world premiere of *Happy Place* by Pamela Mala Sinha.

Among the company's celebrated productions comprising the SOULPEPPER ON 42ND ST: CANADA CROSSES THE BORDER festival are:

==KIM'S CONVENIENCE – written by SOULPEPPER Academy graduate Ins Choi, this comedy-drama is the most successful new Canadian play in recent history, and depicts the life of a Korean Canadian family making a new life in a corner store in downtown Toronto. This award-winning work is in the process of becoming a television series on Canada's national CBC network.

==OF HUMAN BONDAGE – For the first time anywhere W. Somerset Maugham's classic novel is adapted for the stage by Canadian playwright Vern Thiessen, and directed by Artistic Director Albert Schultz. In 2014 this production set a record by winning seven Dora Awards (Toronto's Tonys) including Best Production, Best Play, Best Direction, Best Ensemble and Best Design.

==SPOON RIVER – an original musical based on the Spoon River Anthology by American poet Edgar Lee Masters. Adapted by Albert Schultz and Mike Ross, with original music by Mike Ross. In 2015, this production was named Best New Musical at both the Dora Awards and at the Toronto Theatre Critics' Awards.

==A BRIMFUL OF ASHA – After winning over crowds around the globe, makes its New York debut. SOULPEPPER Associate Artistic Director Ravi Jain shares the stage with his real life non-actor mother, Asha, to tell each other's side of Asha's attempt to arrange Ravi's marriage.

==(RE)BIRTH: E. E. CUMMINGS IN SONG – An original Soulpepper collective creation based on the legendary American poet, essayist, painter, and playwright E. E. Cummings. A musical, innovative, immersive, and highly theatrical perspective on one of the preeminent creative voices of the 20th century.

==ALLIGATOR PIE – An award winning Soulpepper Adaptation of the wonderfully whimsical children's poems of Canada's "Father Goose", Dennis Lee (also known for writing the lyrics for Jim Henson's *Fraggle Rock*). This delightful piece of music theatre is a delight for the child in all of us.

==SOULPEPPER CONCERTS– A series of original works mixing music, narrative and visual design to create unique "docu-musical" events.

As it does in its own theater in Toronto – with its three theatres, cabaret venues, café and library – SOULPEPPER will occupy, in rep, all stages of The Pershing Square Signature Center during its 2017 New York season. As well it will engage the New York community in workshops, symposia, master-classes and outreach events throughout the month.

Says Mr. Schultz, "The entire Soulpepper company is terribly excited to celebrate our 20th anniversary in the city that we love and aspire to. It is important to us that we share our work with New York audiences not through the merits of one particular show, but rather through the strength of our entire

creative community. To be able to do it in the home of such a distinguished company as The Pershing Square Signature Center, and in a space designed by Toronto's own Frank Gehry is particularly thrilling."

Signature Theatre's Artistic Director Paige Evans said, "All of us at Signature Theatre are very pleased to welcome Soulpepper to our home at The Pershing Square Signature Center. The Center was designed to be a place with a rich diversity of programming, and we're thrilled that this distinguished Canadian company will be making its NYC debut here. I can't wait to see their exciting line-up next summer."

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier of the Province of Ontario said, "The Soulpepper Theatre Company has delighted audiences across Ontario for almost 20 years, and I am thrilled that New York theatre-goers will now get to share this experience. Our support for arts and culture organizations like Soulpepper is creating opportunities to showcase our homegrown talent to the world."

His Worship, John Tory, Mayor of Toronto voiced his support: "Toronto has a vibrant theatre scene, and Soulpepper continues to be an industry leader in Canada and great cultural ambassadors. It is not enough to tell our stories to ourselves – we must share them with the world. I'm proud to support Soulpepper in showcasing Toronto artists and building stronger ties between two great cultural centres."

Says respected theatre critic Richard Ouzounian, "In the 15 years I served as Theatre Critic for the Toronto Star, the one company that knocked it out of the park time and time again was Soulpepper. Under the inspired direction of Albert Schultz, they created a world of drama, music and comedy that entertained, enlightened and energized the city we lived in. Sometimes they held up a mirror, sometimes they opened a door, but they always made theatre a cause for celebration. I'm thrilled that they're bringing such life-affirming shows as *Spoon River* and *Kim's Convenience* to New York and I'm happy that my first home town will be getting a chance to welcome this gift from my second one."

Founded in 1998 by Mr. Schultz and a small group of theater artists SOULPEPPER grew from its initial 2-production season in downtown Toronto to an annual year-round slate of approximately 20+ productions presented in the company's multi-theater complex in a renovated distillery in Toronto's Distillery Historic District on the fringes of downtown Toronto. Now operating on an annual budget of \$12 million, SOULPEPPER was the first tenant to anchor what is now a thriving, fully-integrated neighborhood of housing, restaurants, shops and arts.

As a National Civic Theatre SOULPEPPER has a uniquely complex mission. From its inception the company has existed not only as a producer of theatre, but as a generator of "belonging" through a vast array of civic outreach programs and youth mentorship.

The company is home to the Soulpepper Academy, the only full-time, multi-year **paid** artistic training program in North America for the training of Actors, Composers, Designers, Directors, Playwrights and Producers.

This year Soulpepper announced "Project imagiNation", the largest commissioning project in the history of the performing arts in Canada.

Reaching over 130,000 patrons annually in its Toronto home, the company also tours across Canada from coast to coast, and is fast establishing its presence as a National Theatre, in and outside of the country.

In the last two years Soulpepper has begun the creation of digital and broadcast programming based on its mainstage activities. Its works have been adapted for radio, film, and podcasts. The company's recording of *Spoon River* recently was awarded the Silver Medal at the New York Festival of Radio, and in October of 2016 Soulpepper's first television series (Kim's Convenience) will air on the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC), the national network.

www.soulpepper.org