

LOCAL NEWS

The people of Ottawa star in new stage play

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Whether they knew it or not, the citizens of Ottawa were the stars of a new, groundbreaking theatre show.

"Diplomatic Immunities: The End," recently played Ottawa as part of the Magnetic North Theatre Festival, but was not your typical evening out at the theatre. The play is described as a multimedia, interactive ensemble piece,

in which members of the four to six member troupe go out into the community and interview local residents on camera, while trying to engage in meaningful dialogue and experiences with local residents. They then return to the theatre to report on their findings, creating a show specific to the city being explored. The Ottawa run employed the acting skills of local actors Helen Choi and Oni the Haitian Sensation as part of the group.

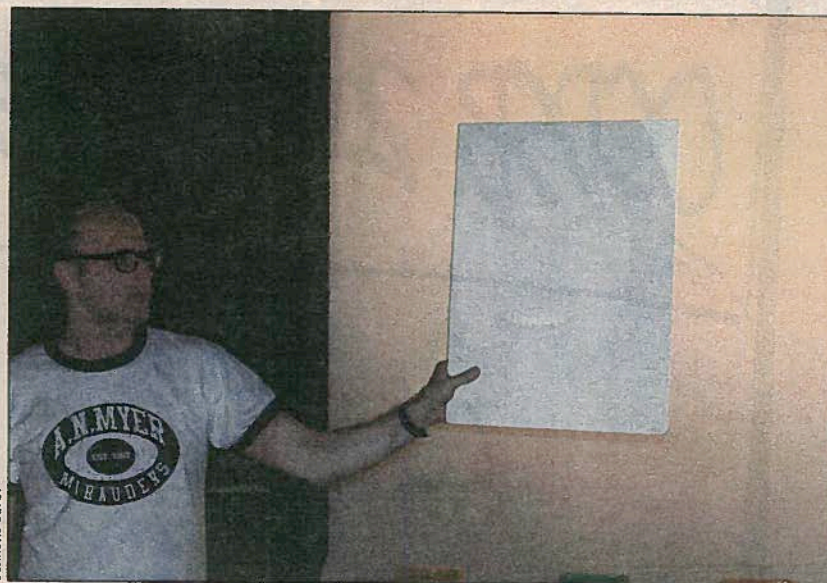
"We also work with the

audience. We interview people on stage and invite them up on stage," explained the show's director, Darren O'Donnell, during a photo call at the Great Canadian Theatre Company at 910 Gladstone Avenue on the afternoon of June 13th. The audience is also polled during the evening for their opinion.

"We were more successful here than anywhere else," said O'Donnell. "Ottawa people are nice. We invite people we interview to the show. In Ottawa, we've had a high return rate [of people who see the show after having been interviewed]. I can't explain why," he says, adding that "the rich people here are better than the rich people in Calgary," where the show had a run in February 2005 and 2006.

The show was honed and work-shopped at the Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto from 2005 to 2006, having its premiere this past February. The show has since been nominated for Outstanding New Play, Outstanding Production and Outstanding Direction in the Independent Theatre Division of the Dora Mavor Moore Canadian theatre awards for 2007. It ran in Ottawa from June 13th to 16th.

O'Donnell conceived the idea of the show dur-



Director Darren O'Donnell holds a screen during a scene from "Diplomatic Immunities: The End," which uses video and live interviews with real Ottawa natives.



Actress Tanya Pillay, who stars in "Diplomatic Immunities," poses during a photo call on June 13th.

ing a long bout of illness, and from his "dissatisfaction and a fatigue with theatre that didn't create a real community with people. I wanted to create a form of social activity," he said.

While there are set pieces that accompany the show, each new edition in each new city provides fresh fodder for new stories and discoveries amongst the local inhabitants. Ottawa did not disappoint.

"We were invited by a woman in Rockcliffe Park

to a BBQ at her home," O'Donnell remembers. The whole crew from the play showed up at the woman's home, including some of the staffer's children. Other Ottawa natives provided some colour to the play's proceedings as well.

"We met some people whose stories were quite complex and debatable," O'Donnell said, noting one man in particular whose stories seemed to easily traverse the line between reality and fantasy. Another

woman felt comfortable enough to show the film crew part of the rash on her body.

"People are pretty candid and forthcoming," he said, almost as an understatement.

While this is the show's third cross-Canadian stop, O'Donnell said that it was unlikely that it would return to Ottawa.

"Once you do it in a place, it would be hard to do it again. It's tough to show in a place twice," he said.