

This is CANCER: A HISTORY

Bruce Horak: Performer and Co-Creator of This Is CANCER.

Bruce Horak was diagnosed with bi-lateral Retinoblastoma (cancer of the retina) when he was a baby. With one eye removed and with less than 10% of his vision in the remaining eye, Bruce was left legally blind. Retinoblastoma patients have an increased risk of developing another cancer later in life, and as a result this disease has been a specter for Bruce since childhood.

Bruce studied Theatre Arts at *Mount Royal College* in Calgary, Alberta and went on to amass an impressive resume, as his skill onstage often left his audiences (and co-workers) completely unaware of his disability. Bruce performed at Calgary's ***Shakespeare in the Park*** for seven consecutive summers; in the resident company, as composer/musician, and as a guest artist. He was also a mainstay with ***Quest Theatre***, Calgary's only professional Theatre for Young Audiences and trained at the renowned ***Loose Moose Theatre*** with improvisation Guru *Keith Johnstone*.

In 1997, Bruce's semi-autobiographical play for children, *What You Can't See* was nominated for a **Betty Mitchell Award** in Calgary in the category of *Outstanding New Play*. In 1999, Bruce starred as King Richard III at Calgary's ***Shakespeare in the Park***, a highlight in his career to that point.

In 2001, Bruce began touring the *Canadian Fringe Theatre circuit* with ***Monster Theatre***. He co-wrote (with Ryan Gladstone) the award-winning *The Canada Show: The Complete History of Canada in One Hour*, ***Monster Theatre's*** longest-running hit. Since 2001, he continued to create and tour with ***Monster Theatre***:

The Big Rock Show – The Complete History of the World

Fringe Show: A Love Story

The History of the Future

Confessions of a Class Clown (Director)

Jesus Christ: The Lost Years (Director/Co-writer)

Freud VS His Ego (Actor/Dramaturge)

Bruce moved to Toronto, Ontario in 2001 to pursue his career in live theatre. He continued to write, perform, and direct, and began to

study the Pochinko-style technique of clowning through mask with Mike Kennard and John Turner (*Mump and Smoot*).

Bruce lost his father to cancer, August 5th 2003. It was a devastating time. Using his dark sense of humour, his skills as an improviser/performer and his recent experience with clown, he developed a character who would become the living embodiment of cancer; arrogant and destructive, charming and devil-may-care.

CANCER was first seen onstage at the *Lunacy Cabaret*, a circus-themed monthly event at the *Centre of Gravity* in Toronto's East-end. The grotesque character was wildly embraced from his very first appearance. From here, the beginnings of the full-length show were envisioned.

Bruce approached his partner, creator/performer/director **Rebecca Northan** in the fall of 2005 to begin working together on developing a full-length show featuring CANCER. They would tell both Bruce's and his father's story, but from CANCER's point of view. It was intended to be dark, funny, poignant, and moving. The original audio-recording of Bruce's father, **Carl Horak** dictating his own obituary to Bruce one month before he passed away became a seminal part of the show from the early stages of its inception.

In what would turn out to be another in a long line of serendipitous moments, they were invited as last-minute additions in the 2006 *Summerworks Theatre Festival* lineup in Toronto Ontario. With only a few short weeks to prepare, the first incarnation of *This is CANCER* (titled: *An Intimate Evening with CANCER*) premiered on August 4th, 2006 at the *Factory Studio Theatre* in Toronto, Ontario. *Dora Award*-winning composer **Waylen Miki** joined the team, along with choreographer **Sarah Robichaud** and creative consultant **Patrick Brown**, helping to shape the show into what would become one of *Now Magazine's Critic's Picks* of the festival.

Following the run in Toronto, *This Is CANCER* was then asked to participate in *Alberta Theatre Project's 2007 PlayRites Festival of New Canadian Works* in Calgary Alberta (again, as a last-minute replacement). The team work-shopped the show in Toronto, choosing to focus on the cultural obsession with cancer, and turning the character into an egotistical celebrity. His grotesque features remained, but he would now be costumed in a gold-lame bodysuit as a sort of deformed Oscar. The team presented a staged reading of the newly revised version at the historic *Arts and Letters Club* in Toronto in early 2007.

Bruce, Rebecca and Waylen then traveled to Calgary and presented the work as part of the festival, and were nominated for two **Betty Mitchell Awards** - in the categories of *Outstanding Production of a Musical or Comedy* and winning for *Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Musical or Comedy*.

The Calgary run saw the inclusion of a talk-back/feedback session following each performance as a way for the creators/performers to gauge the material, make alterations, and to invite audiences to share their own stories. It became an important part of the event, as what they were presenting was so unique. Cancer-survivors, cancer-patients, and their friends and family would stay behind to share their own remarkable insights into the show and the disease. The feedback given during these sessions has helped to shape the show into what it is today. Since 2006, the show has gone on to tour across the country and into the United States. It has been featured on CNN, and received rave reviews not only from critics and peers, but also from the cancer-community at large.

Performance History:

*Factory Theatre, Studio, Toronto, ON - **Summerworks**, 2006*
The Arts and Letters Club, Toronto, ON (workshop)- 2007
*Alberta Theatre Projects, **PlayRites Festival of New Canadian Plays** 2007*
Theatre In Port, St. Catharine's ON, 2007
Toronto Fringe Theatre Festival, 2007
***Here Be Monsters Carnival of the Arts**, Vancouver B.C., 2007*
Hectik Theatre, Regina, S.K.2007
Pivot Festival, Nakai Theatre, Whitehorse YK, 2008
The Comedy Bar, Toronto, ON, 2008
Nakai Theatre, Whitehorse, YK, 2008
*Workshop West Theatre, **Canoe Festival**, Edmonton, AB, 2009*
Loose Moose Theatre, Calgary, AB, 2009
Intrepid Theatre Club, Victoria, BC, 2009
Beaumont Studio, Vancouver, BC, 2009
Stand Up To Cancer – a benefit, Toronto, ON, 2009
Comedy Bar, Toronto, ON, 2009
Edmonton Fringe Theatre Festival, 2010
*Alberta Rose Theatre, **The Mennen Project** – a benefit, Portland, Oregon, 2010*

*Cowichan Theatre, **Fringe Revival**, Duncan, B.C., 2010*

Bruce Horak continues to work as a writer, performer, director and musician. He won his second ***Betty Mitchell Award*** in 2009 for his performance as Good Ol' Reliable Jake in **Ground Zero Theatre's** production of *Evil Dead: The Musical*. He has taught Clown and Improvisation sessions at Toronto's *Player's Academy, Randolph Academy,* and *Tarragon Theatre.*

BIO FOR REBECCA NORTHAN

BIO FOR WAYLEN MIKI