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December 18, 2014

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## TOP PLAYS OF 2014

Coast theatre critic Kate Watson plays favourites with the best of the best on stages this year

By Kate Watson



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### *Chess and the Doomsday Machine* (Onelight)

This play about a young soldier in Abadan during the Iraq-Iran war is told in a manner that engages on many levels. Music, projections and three "languages" (English, Farsi and unverballed communication) are all integral to telling the story. The result is startlingly unique and emotionally captivating.

### *Gallathea* (Vile Passéist)

Sometimes a play just makes your heart sing, and this 16th-century script did that for me. It was beautifully staged and

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Billy Bishop Goes to War  
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*Heaven* can't wait

Kazan Co-op launches Halifax's newest black box theatre space, The Waiting Room, with *Heaven Above/Heaven Below*

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filled with memorable, quirky performances. It conveyed a simple but important message: love is love.

*Marion Bridge* (Valley Summer Theatre)

Daniel MacIvor's perfectly crafted Cape Breton family drama is always a sure-fire crowd-pleaser, but this particular production stood out for me because of actor Stephanie MacDonald's remarkable portrayal of the socially stunted yet surprisingly wise youngest sister, Louise.

*David for Queen* (Halifax Theatre for Young People)

Saying a play is "important" makes it sound stuffy, but *David for Queen*, which tackles issues like cyber-bullying and homophobia, is accessible, entertaining and compelling for youth and adults. It sparked dialogue and drew a diverse audience.

*Woman in Black* (Dartmouth Players)

This old-fashioned, shiver-inducing ghost story requires a surprising amount of technical finesse to pull off, and this little community theatre delivered. Patrons were held spell-bound by its sound, lighting and special effects, as well as by first-class performances.

*Doubt* (Theatre Arts Guild)

It's a testament to the calibre of Halifax's community theatre that two plays from their ranks have made this list. *Doubt* is a dialogue-heavy drama that could be rendered boring and inert in the wrong hands, but the brilliant, nuanced performances and pace-conscious direction in TAG's production made it totally engaging.

*His Greatness* (Kazan Co-op)

This play, based on an actual visit to Vancouver by Tennessee Williams, offers a beautiful balance of tragedy and comedy while exploring the emotional cost of fame and the power of theatre. Richard Donat truly shone as the world-weary Williams.

*The Miracle Man* (Two Planks and a Passion)

In retrospect, this was one of the most enjoyable theatre experiences of the year. The musical itself, by Allen Cole and Michael O'Brien, is entertaining, but it is the magic of music, voices and story shared in a heavenly outdoor setting that makes theatre at Ross Creek a perpetual favourite.

*Oil and Water* (Neptune Theatre/Artistic Fraud)

This play, based on the true story of an African-American sailor who survived a shipwreck off the coast of Newfoundland during World War II, layered multiple stories and periods in time to deliver a powerful message about the power of kindness. Haunting.

*Tribe of One* and *The Contribution* (Doppler Effect) At the 2014 Fringe Festival, the award-winning *Tribe of One* introduced us to a chilling vision of our world in a future where the survival of humanity requires social engineering. *The Contribution*, another story from the same future, delved deeper into the emotional cost of ensuring the continuity of our species. The world is fascinating and finely realized in details like language and fashion. a

*Kate Watson has been the Coast's theatre critic since 2006. Her first real job was as an animator in the kitchen at Toronto's Fort York. That means she can bake delicious bread, but only in a brick oven, 50 loaves at a time.*

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