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Ottawa-based playwright Sean Devine wins University of Lethbridge's Fiction at Fifty competition

After a process that lasted more than two years, involved two juries, 75 entries and three finalists, the winner of Fiction at Fifty, the University of Lethbridge Playwriting Competition, has been selected: Sean Devine with his play When There's Nothing Left to Burn.

The Ottawa-based Devine is a playwright and theatre maker, as well as the artistic director of Horseshoes & Hand Grenades Theatre. Recent and upcoming productions of Devine's plays include Re:Union, at the 2015 Magnetic North Theatre Festival, and Daisy, at ACT Theatre in Seattle.

The jury, made up of faculty members from the U of L Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts, admired the play's dynamic story, insightful perspectives and ambitious scope. Moreover, the jury expects the play's innovative structure and topical subject matter will provide vibrant experiences for U of L drama students.

Discussing the play's origin, Devine says, "The genesis came during the 2014 revolution in Kiev, which itself seemed to be just one more in an unending stream of citizen-led revolutions and uprisings across the globe. Perhaps I'm a pessimist, but I just can't see this trend abating anytime soon. I wanted to create something that encapsulated all the divergent voices and faces of a city in the midst of a siege."

The world premiere of When There's Nothing Left to Burn is scheduled for November 2017, as part of the mainstage season of the Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts. The Fiction at Fifty competition was structured to feature special experiences for

students; on multiple occasions, Devine will visit the university to include students in workshops related to the play's development.

"I'm very excited about the opportunity to work with a group of young students at the beginning of their practice, to see how they react to the overtly political nature of my writing, and how we can devise our own method for collaboration," says Devine.

The Fiction at Fifty competition, one of the first ideas about ways to celebrate the University's 50th anniversary, was suggested and financially supported by U of L alumnus Terry Whitehead (BA '94).

"We wanted to do something national to raise the profile of the U of L and this competition did just that," says Whitehead. "Fiction at Fifty also inspired two other exciting 50th anniversary activities – the commissioning of a song and a commemorative edition of Whetstone, the University's student literary magazine."

Whitehead has for many years been a strong backer of the University and drama program through the Plays and Prose competitions for undergraduate students, which he also supports annually.

"We are continually appreciative of Terry's support for theatre activities; his imagination and generosity have deeply enriched our students," says Nicholas Hanson, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts.

Already looking ahead to the 50th celebration, Whitehead says, "We only have one opportunity to celebrate the University's anniversary, and the excitement is building. I'm glad I could play a small role, and congratulations to Sean Devine. I can't wait to be in the audience on opening night of When There's Nothing Left to Burn!"

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