

I have spent a lifetime in the professional theatre and, like any professional in a specific field, the technicalities of the work I observe being done by other artists often blurs my emotional connection to the theatrical truths being attempted. It is hard for me, after all these years, to let a performance simply "wash over me" and to let myself go deep into the heart of the work being presented. When I saw NEW BLOOD at the Strathmore High School, a school and community project, I was transported to another plane and captivated by the piece from the first phrase sung by one of the most beautiful male-youth voices I have heard for a long time.

Director/Choreographer/Teacher/Mentor **Deanne Bertsch** assembled her "Glee" class, Her "Blackfoot" class, and her "Dance" class to work on a project that would address the Year of Reconciliation that followed the closing of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission addressing the historical and contemporary damage done by so-called "Indian Residential Schools" across Canada. The outcome of this adventure was NEW BLOOD and it was a remarkable and powerful piece of theatre. I was blown away by the powerful images, the deeply held conviction and determination of the performers, the power of the storytelling, and the emotional impact of the work. Using Peter Gabriel music with singers, percussion and a merger of traditional first nations drumming and song spoken word, dance and silks arial work, fancy dancing and three generations of people; the story was told with alacrity. What was lacking in professional polish was more than compensated by the honesty and integrity, the simplicity and clarity, and the visual results of the work. It was a privilege to see this happening in a school. THE STUDENTS, the community adults, the volunteers, and many other people had obviously invested a great deal of time and effort, thought and care into this show. It was surprising to learn that it came about over such a relatively short preparation period and involving so many people. It was really good theatre. It was really strong social commentary. It was deeply moving and powerful. It was an honour to see it and I hope that this project will have a prolonged life.

## **D. Michael Dobbin**

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