

Myra's Story History

- Written by Brian Foster (copyright 2002); original version called ***Maire: A Woman of Derry***
- First produced at Playhouse Theatre, Derry, Northern Ireland, 2001, with actress Carmel Mc Cafferty
- Broke box office records at Derry's 1,000-seat Millennium Forum Theatre
- Rewritten by Foster in 2009 as "Myra's Story," set in Dublin
- Exclusive Canadian production rights granted to Jennifer Cornish in 2013
- **Canadian Premiere** June 2013, London Fringe Festival
- **Outstanding Production** (2013 London Fringe Festival juried panel)
- **Critic's Choice** (2013 Hamilton Fringe media award)
- Endorsed as a **Community Partner** in 2016 by:
 - YWCA
 - House of Friendship
 - FoodBank of Waterloo Region
 - Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region



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Myra's Story

The Story

Hilarious and heartbreaking, Myra's Story portrays a day in the life of a feisty homeless "wine connoisseur" as she goes about her daily routine on the streets of Dublin, Ireland. Jumping from character to colourful character, Myra tells her life story with street-smart style, wry wit and unflinching honesty.

Myra begins her narrative as she recovers from the celebration of her 48th birthday, reflecting on her attempt to escape what her father calls "The Beast" of alcoholism by marrying at sixteen and beginning a new life with her beloved Tommy McLaughlin.

Audiences have both laughed and cried with Myra — often at the same time — as she recounts her adventures, becoming the characters who have shaped her life, from her quick-tempered father and idealistic husband, to her neighbours: Tina the Tap, Big Bridie, Jimmy the Tadpole, and, Norris the Gnome.

As another "morning after" turns to yet another cold, bleak December night, Myra reflects without bitterness or self-pity on what she has become — and with the knowledge that she is but one of many souls who have landed here, each with her or his own story to tell.

"Stunning . . . Myra's Story is a powerful way for us to broaden awareness about the impact of addictions on people's lives." — John Neufeld, CEO, House of Friendship

Myra's Story

Playwright, Brian Foster

Irish playwright Brian Foster “fell into” writing at age 39, despite coming from a tough background where visits to the theatre were unheard of and writing was a skill reserved for bookies and dockets. He left school at 16 with no qualifications except street smarts. Woven of truth and fiction, the hugely likeable, hugely vulnerable character Myra is an amalgam of several street drinkers Foster was familiar with in his home town of Derry (Londonderry), Northern Ireland.

Myra, says Foster, “is not an educated woman — but she has a street-nurtured intelligence about her.” And *Myra's Story* is merely a small window into the life of someone whom almost anyone could become.

“Street alcoholics are those who have stumbled over that line and (generally) can find no way back,” says Foster. “When I was researching the play a doctor pointed out to me that heavy street drinkers are terminally ill people. Their affliction will kill them in the end, yet we tend not to view them with the same compassion we would cancer sufferers, for instance.”

Foster is confident that Canadian audiences will embrace his character’s candid sense of humour and gritty authenticity.

“I was looking for a very special someone with the ability not just to act Myra, but to physically and mentally become her for each performance,” says Foster. “I was delighted to find such a special person in Jennifer Cornish. A rare find indeed.”

Some of Foster’s other works include: *When The Bogside Spinster Met The Carndonagh Stud* (2016), *From The Camp To The Creggan* (2013) *The Trophy Collector* (2010), *The Most Haunted House in Derry* (2005), *The Butterfly of Killybegs* (2000), *A Miracle in Ballymore* (2000), *Colm Cille* (film 2000) and *Lillibulero* (1996).



“I have yet to meet anyone who encountered Myra on stage and didn’t like her.”

— Brian Foster, Playwright

Myra's Story

Production Team

Myra
Director
Stage Manager
Lighting Design
Sound Design
Costume Design

Jennifer Cornish
Darlene Spencer
Selin Erkaya
Allan Hoch
Zack Russell
Katharine Mills

Executive Producer
Media
Marketing
Web Design
Photography

Sheryl Cronk
Tracy Morency
Trevor Smith Diggins
Javajoy
Brian Z. Kelly



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[@Myras_Story](https://twitter.com/Myras_Story)



[Myra's Story Trailer \(2 min\)](#)

Myra's Story

Reviews



The London Free Press
June 9, 2013
By Joe Belanger

Five Stars. Cornish's performance is riveting, holding the audience spellbound for nearly 90 minutes . . . telling her life story as she desperately begs for coins to buy the "medicine" that allows her to forget the past and find warmth to sleep on her park bench on a cold winter's night. Best performance by a woman I saw last year.

This show should be on everyone's must-see list.



The Beat Magazine
June 2013
By Trish West

Jennifer Cornish gives us beautiful portrayal for each of the individuals within her story . . . her alcoholic father, husband Tommy, close friends and even Norris the gnome.

It is one of those performances that will stay with you long after it's over.



The View Magazine
July 25, 2013
By Patricia Bradbury

A virtuoso performance by Jennifer Cornish makes this play a must-not-miss.

Finely directed by Darlene Spencer on a bare stage with nothing but a bench and a chair, this glorious and gripping one woman play gives a portrait of Dublin that is vivid and taut. Cornish . . . inhabits the character so truthfully we relive all the jokes, all the losses, all the sweetness . . .

Myra's story stays with you long past the closing line.



The Record
September 26, 2013
By Robert Reid

Equal parts James Joyce and Carol Burnett, *Myra's Story* . . . is an acting tour-de-force . . .

Cornish . . . weaves a spell that holds us transfixed. She compels us to look at Myra, to acknowledge her as she is "in body and soul."



Monkeybiz.ca
July 23, 2013
By Rebecca Costie

Jennifer Cornish is a theatrical force who uses her voice, facial expressions, and body to bring to life a collection of believable and memorable characters, including the witty, sometimes vulgar, and ever-reflective Myra.

Brian Foster's writing, sharp, unrelenting, and stuffed with figurative language and Irish colloquialisms, and Cornish's skill, confidence, and abundant energy are an excellent match.



Hamilton Arts Council
July 2013
John Girhiny

The words and portrayal of her descent into alcoholism and subsequent climb back out only to be followed by her final descent are masterpieces. The ability of one person to hold our attention for a full 90 minutes while she delivers flawlessly the script and to give life to the script at the same time is an outstanding talent.

Excellent, Excellent, Excellent are the only words to describe this production.

Myra's Story

Tour History



Ontario Street Theatre, Port Hope, August 2015
Photo: Sean Carthew

Toronto	Red Sandcastle Theatre	July 2015
Kitchener	Food Bank Waterloo Reg.	Jan 2015
Kitchener	House of Friendship	Jun 2014
Toronto	Annex Theatre	Feb 2014
Kitchener	IMPACT Festival	Sept 2013
Fergus	Grand Theatre	Sept 2013
Hamilton	Fringe Festival	July 2013
London	Fringe Festival	Jun 2013
Cambridge	Idea Exchange	Jun 2013



The Gaol Yard, Kitchener, September 2013 (Impact 2013)
Photo: David Bebee, The Record

New York City	United Solo Festival	Nov 2016
Waterloo	Wilfred Laurier University	Sept 2016
Waterloo	Theatre of the Arts U of W	Sept 2016
Cambridge	Hotel & Conference Centre	Aug 2016
Toronto	One More Night Festival	Sept 2015
Port Hope	Ontario Street Theatre	Aug 2015
Kitchener	Registry Theatre	July 2015



The Gaol Yard, Kitchener, September 2013 (IMPACT 13)
Photo: David Bebee, The Record



The Food Bank of Waterloo Region, 2014
Photo: Tracy Morency

Myra's Story

Director, Darlene Spencer



Artistic director of the Randolph Academy for the Performing Arts in Toronto from 2009 - 2016, Darlene Spencer has been an active and passionate director of theatrical productions, documentaries, educational and industrial films for the past 30 years. Selected directorial credits include:

- *The Skriker* by Caryl Churchill
- *Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker
- *If We Were Birds* by Erin Shields
- *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder
- *Falling; A Wake* by Gary Kirkham
- *Pride and Prejudice* adapted by Christina Calvit
- *String of Pearls* by Michele Lowe
- *Three Cities in the Life of Norman Bethune* by Tim Brady
- *The Children's Hour* by Lillian Hellman
- *Spring Awakening* by Frank Wedekind
- *Les Belles Soeurs* by Michel Tremblay
- *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller
- *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare
- and Fringe favorites: *Water* and *Timmy's Sexual Adventure* by Brad Curtain.

She is the past president of the Board for Kitchener's *Inter Arts Matrix*, the birthplace of Hybrid Art, an organization that fosters development of integrated art.

Darlene is also an actor who has performed in theatres across Canada, and for television and film. Favourite roles include:

Bernarda in *The House of Bernarda Alba* by Lorca (Toronto Fringe Festival), Titania/Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Resurgence Theatre Company), Paulina in *A Winter's Tale* (Burton Theatre), Helga Ten Dorp in *Deathtrap* (Waterloo Stage Theatre), and Sarah in the film *976*, for which she won the Planet Indie Film Festival Best Supporting Actor award.

Darlene Spencer...

... on Jennifer Cornish

"Jennifer Cornish is a wonder — a performer capable of transforming herself into the complex, colorful, and gritty characters in *Myra's Story* with integrity, specificity and credibility."

... on *Myra's Story*

"'*Myra's Story*' grabs a hold of your heart, tickles it to near death and then gently rips it out; and in this you find yourself delighted and complicit."

Myra's Story

Actor, Jennifer Cornish

Trained by industry pros from Stratford, Shaw, Second City and Kids in the Hall, Jennifer Cornish has worked in film and television, but says she has spent the best parts of her life onstage, a place she has been since the age of 8. She founded Waterloo-based PrACTical TheACTrics in 2010. Jennifer was the recipient in 2011 of the Region of Waterloo Arts Award for Performing Arts.

"Theatre, to me, is the art of witnessing humanity — in myself and in the world. It asks the actor, and the audience, to walk a mile in someone else's shoes, to experience someone else's story."

Stories have the power to change the way we think, which is big magic because changing the way we think is the only way to change pretty much anything."



Recent Roles

- Shirley Valentine
- Debra in *Kimberly Akimbo*
- Liz in *Dine Her*
- Mrs. Lintott in *History Boys*
- Jeri Neal in *Dixie Swim Club*
- Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*
- Ensemble member with Flush Ink Productions. Annual shows include *Asphalt Jungle Shorts*, *She Speaks*
- Television & Film Credits include: *Suddenly Super*, *American Shot* (GHIST Productions), *Almost Grown* (Atlantis Films), *A Family Matter* (CBC – Gemini Award for Best Short Drama), *After Midnight* (ABC)
- Edith in *Pearl Gidley*
- Edna in *Nowhere Ontario*
- Louise in *Hollywood Arms*
- Alexa in *As Bees in Honey Drown*
- Mona in *Queen Milli of Galt*
- Sally in *Alien Guest*

Testimonials

"Cornish makes us listen, truly listen, to Myra's story, which we are not soon to forget."

— **Robert Reid, *The Record***

"Five stars. The best performance by a woman I saw last year. [Cornish] burrowed so deep beneath the skin of an alcoholic street person I wasn't sure if she'd been recruited from the street."

— **Joe Belanger, *The London Free Press***

"Jennifer Cornish turns in a remarkable performance. *Myra's Story* leaves us thoughtful but not disheartened, and primed to be more cognizant of the humanity of everyone we encounter."

— **Kathleen Sheehy, Artistic Director, *Lost & Found Theatre***

Her performance was second to none and the play itself is brilliant. The audience was in awe.

— **Sean Carthew, Artistic Director, *Ontario Street Theatre***

I always come away from her performances with a deeper understanding of the world.

— **Dwight Storning, *Digital Media Producer***

Jennifer Cornish is an actor like no other. As Brando is synonymous for Stanley Kowalski so will Cornish be known for her Myra.

— **Jeremy Ratchford, Actor *SAG/AFTRA***

Love love love this show.

— **Gary Kirkham, *Playwright***