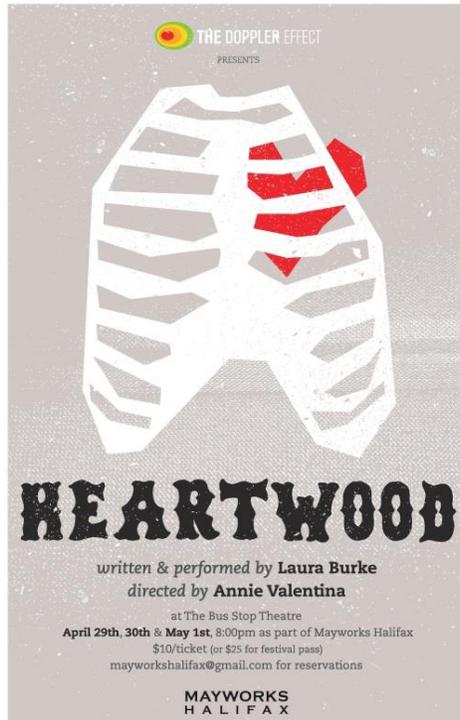


For immediate release: April 2013

The Doppler Effect presents 'Heartwood', a new play by Laura Burke



'I am so scared. I am so fucking scared. I read the Schizophrenia Digests to try to acclimatize myself to my future, but these hope stories still do not match what I had wished for in my life. And knowing the worst case scenario, fearing it, tasting it like the buttery flavor of popcorn I eat while watching a horror movie about my own life: I see myself shuffling down the hallway, eyes wild, muttering to myself in a pink fuzzy bathrobe with coffee stains down the front, hair matted. It is grey. I have been like this for 50 years. And then I die.'

Laura Burke was a theatre student at Concordia University when she was first diagnosed with schizophrenia. Now – many years and hospital waiting rooms later – she returns to the stage to tell her story of struggle and recovery.

Heartwood, an autobiographical one-woman-show, follows a young Laura through anorexia, depression and psychosis, navigating pitfalls in the mental health care system and battling social stigma attached to her illness.

The journey is an exhilarating ride, alternating between darkness and hilarity, woven with pitch-perfect poetry and intimate confession. In the end, we are left both charmed and awed by the brave spirit behind the words: the Survivor, who – according to the artist – could be any one of us.

This spring, Burke has teamed up with local production company The Doppler Effect to give *Heartwood* a theatrical premiere in the Mayworks Festival. The company's Artistic Producer, Annie Valentina, became interested in the project when she directed a workshop version of it in 2012. Under the mentorship of veteran theatre artist Mary-Colin Chisholm, Burke and Valentina initially developed the piece for presentation at the Douglas Psychiatric Institute in Montreal and a psychosis-themed conference in Ottawa.

But the 'dynamic, meta-theatrical poem', written as part of Burke's thesis in drama therapy, appealed to Valentina and partner Michael McPhee so much, they decided to approach Laura about producing it. "We wanted to help *Heartwood* continue to grow, add more layers of creativity and realize its full potential", says McPhee – the creative force behind Doppler hit shows *Logan and I* (2010) and



Annie Valentina (director, left) with Laura Burke (writer/performer, right). Photo credit: Ashley Marie Pike

Blood and Quick Silver (2012). “It tells a very powerful and necessary story. Statistics show that one in five Canadians will suffer from a mental disorder in their lifetime. How we represent that reality in art is important.”

Annie Valentina, who directs Burke in *Heartwood*'s stage debut, is an actor/writer herself – most recently on *Touch*, which The Doppler Effect produced in the 2012 Queer Acts Festival. “I’m drawn to theatre that exposes the truths behind things that are difficult to talk about”, she says of Burke’s play, which will premiere at the Bus Stop Theatre in late April. “Laura is someone with a unique perspective and a very fresh voice in Halifax theatre. *Heartwood* is at once unlike anything Doppler has produced before and completely up our alley, thematically.”

The Doppler Effect is locally known for their prolific, all-original output which readily tackles dark subject matter (2011’s *CU2morrow* was inspired by a real-life internet predator who drove young girls to suicide). Since forming in 2010 they have mounted three full-scale shows, two Fringe Hits, and been nominated for three Merritt Awards. *Heartwood* will mark the first time they produce the work of a playwright outside the company.

Burke – an award-winning poet whose credits include performing at the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word in Victoria, BC (2009) and the Canadian Alliance of Mental Illness and Mental Health Awards in Ottawa (2010), is very excited for this opportunity. “Being able to bring *Heartwood* to a real theatre audience is a gift”, she says. “Thanks to the creative minds at The Doppler Effect for all their inspiration and support; I feel very lucky to be where I am.”

Other key artists on board for the production are lighting/set designer Garrett Barker – past collaborator and Associate Artist to The Doppler Effect – and musical composer Emily Shute.

Heartwood runs **April 29th, 30th & May 1st, 8pm** at **The Bus Stop Theatre**, 2203 Gottingen St.

Tickets are **\$10** and can be reserved by e-mailing mayworkshalifax@gmail.com.

THREE SHOWS ONLY, small house, limited seating – book early!!!!