

WRITTEN BY **NICOLAS BILLON** DIRECTED BY **MATT WHITE** FROM **FEB 24 - MAR 15, 2026**

# THE NEIGHBOURS



**TARRAGON** THEATRE



A GREEN LIGHT ARTS PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH TARRAGON THEATRE

**February 24 - March 15**  
**Extraspace**

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Please Note: icons highlighted in orange may be of particular interest to educators.

# About the Playwright

Nic's literary vocation surfaced at the age of six, when he wrote and illustrated a story on index cards about a rampaging robot. He stapled the cards together and sold "Le Robot" to his mother for a tidy profit.

Today, his work is known for its challenging subject matter blended with humour, twists, and deep humanism.

*The Elephant Song*, Nic's first play, premiered at the Stratford Festival in 2004; it has since been produced around the world and was made into a feature film in 2014. Several of his other plays, most notably *Iceland* and *Butcher*, have had major productions across Canada and internationally. Accolades include a Governor General's Award for Drama, a Canadian Screen Award, and a Writers Guild of Canada Screenwriting Award.

Nic is a strong supporter of the serial comma and of Caryl Churchill's adage that "Playwrights don't give answers, they ask questions."

# Creative Team

**Matt White** - Director

**Kelly Wolf** - Set Designer

**Des'ree Gray** - Costume Designer

**Paul Cegys** - Lighting Designer

**Braeden Etienne** - Sound Designer

**May Nemat Allah** - Stage Manager

**Alex Joyce** - Apprentice Stage Manager

# Cast

**Tony Nappo** - Simon Armstrong

**Ordena Stephens-Thompson** - Denise Armstrong

**Richard Tse** - Au Yeung Wei

# About the Play

## Synopsis

Simon and Denise reside in a modest house on a quiet street, their life blissfully low-key and unassuming. But when it comes to light that their next-door neighbour has been hiding a sinister secret, it forces the couple to re-examine the past, leading the audience to a surprising conclusion that asks hard questions about the bonds that unite us.

From Governor General's Award winner, Nicolas Billon (*Butcher, Iceland*), *The Neighbours* examines how good people can be complicit in acts of cruelty.

# Playwright's Note

Thank you for joining us for this performance of *The Neighbours*.

The play was written in early 2018, and had its first production the following year in Tokyo. I'd hoped it would premiere in Canada soon after, but the theatre gods (and pandemic) had other plans.

So here we are, and I'm delighted you're going to meet the residents of Stanley Court. Simon and Denise have graciously agreed to host. Will you get along, I wonder? Would you be happy to have them as your neighbours, or does that notion fill you with dread?

Good news: There are no wrong answers. In fact (spoiler alert!) there are few definitive answers in *The Neighbours*. I'm suspicious of certainty, especially when it comes to the behaviour of humans. We may well call ourselves *Homo sapiens*, but the gap between "Man" and "Wise" seems wider than the single tap of a spacebar. It will certainly not be resolved in a 90-minute play.

The Neighbours continues my exploration of direct address, of having characters speak directly to you. I firmly believe theatre must be a conversation - one-sided, granted, but one that acknowledges your presence and recognizes that you are here, that you've made the effort to inhabit the same space as us. Thank you.

And further gratitude is extended to the creative team of The Neighbours, along with the production and admin teams at Tarragon and Green Light Arts. It's my first time working with them and it has been a privilege.

Matt White and I have been friends for over a decade (along with being a solid shortstop/third base combo) and I'm delighted we finally got the chance to be in a rehearsal hall together.

Finally, a big shout-out and merci to my spouse Christine, who took care of our two chaos monsters while I was away rehearsing in Toronto. She's the Superwoman to my Clark Kent.

**-Nicolas Billon**

# Director's Note

When programming for Green Light Arts I'm drawn by two questions: 1) Why does this need to be experienced today? and 2) What might it challenge me to reflect on within my own life? The answer to question #2 often informs the answer to question #1.

Our first production, *The Amish Project*, asked me to consider whether I'd forgive someone if they did something awful to my kids. That's a heckuva thought to ruminate on with an audience night after night.

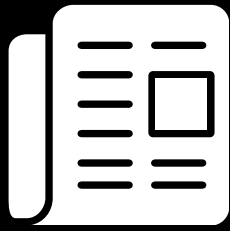
So when Nic told me about this play he had written for a company in Japan, about neighbours dealing with a traumatic event (while casually playing catch the spring after he'd moved to Kitchener-Waterloo) I was hooked.

The fun thing with *The Neighbours* is that Nic's writing inspires multiple aspects to reflect on (what is truth, the dangers of bias, the folly of assumptions) but the one that I keep coming back to and circling in rehearsal is when Denise asks her husband Simon if he'd really save a stranger's life if it meant risking his own.

I mean, sure, I'd risk my life for my kids, my wife, my family, and most of my friends (kidding, friends, I'd risk my life for all of you!) but a stranger? I'd like to say yes but... I don't know. Would you?

**-Matt White**

# Bystander Effect/Apathy



1

**Bystander Effect**  
From Psychology Today.

2

**What Is the Bystander Effect?**  
A 2min video.



3

**TedxTalks**



Why Some  
People Act and  
Others Don't



The Bystander Effect  
is Complicated --  
Here's Why

4

**Kitty Genovese and "Bystander Apathy"**

Sarah Marshal discusses how The New York Times turned a suburban murder into an urban legend.



Prefer an article? Check out "The Bystander Effect Started from a Lie"



5

**From Empathy to Apathy:  
The Bystander Effect Revisited**

A new perspective on bystander apathy.



# True Crime and its Effects

1

From Emma Berquist



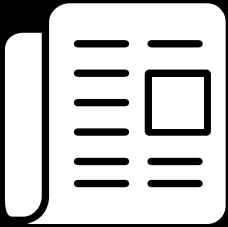
True Crime Is Rotting Our Brains



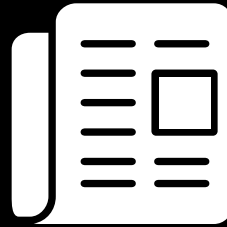
From the *You're Wrong About* podcast.

2

From Psychology Today



The Popularity of True Crime: Why We Can't Stop

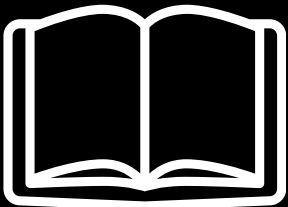


The True Crime Genre Is a Catharsis for Fear

3

Savage Appetites

Four True Stories of Women, Crime and Obsession  
By Rachel Monroe



4

How True Crime Stories are Influencing the Real-Life Justice System  
From the CBC



5

Studies

Abducted then Murdered Children: A Canadian Study



Canadian Mainstream Media Portrayals of Child Abduction



# Neighbours

1



## **The Power of Knowing Your Neighbours: From Hello to Help**

Community connections can have a profound impact on well-being.

2

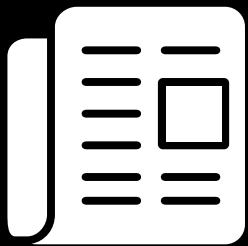
## **Trust in Neighbours**

Information from Statistics Canada



3

**The Time Canadians Spend with  
Their Neighbours has been Shrinking**  
Canadians know less and less about the people next door, but some have been trying to change that.



4

## **Neighbours Project**

Hosted by Scarborough Arts



5

## **How to Reclaim a Sense of Community When True Crime Lands on Your Doorstep**

By Nandini Maharaj, a freelance writer with a master's degree in counseling and a PhD in public health.



# True Crime: For the Fans



1

## CBC True Crime Podcasts

CBC offers a wide variety of True Crime Podcast Series.



Check out *Abducted in Plain Sight: The Jan Broberg Story*,  
for a true crime kidnapping by a neighbour.

2

## How Reddit Solved a Cold Case // Lyle Stevik

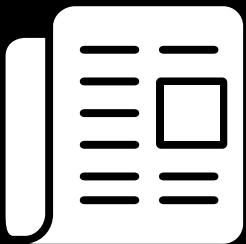
From the *Heart Starts Pounding: Horrors, Haunting and Mysteries* podcast.



3

## The Jayme Closs Case

A series of articles from the New York Times about Jayme's kidnapping, escape and help from neighbours.



4

## Canada Unsolved

A database of cold cases, missing persons, unsolved murders, and personal stories.



# True Crime: Influential & Similar Cases

1

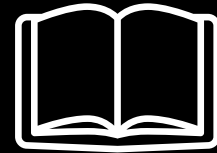
## The Natascha Kampusch Case



Inside the  
Head of  
my Torturer



3096  
DAYS



3,096  
Days in  
Captivity

2

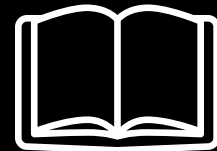
## The Ariel Castro Kidnappings



10 years after  
Cleveland  
Escape



Cleveland  
Abduction



The Lost  
Girls

3

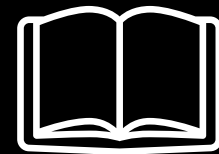
## The Jaycee Dugard Case



**SURVIVED**  
from *Crime  
Junky Podcast*



Flourishing  
After 18  
Year Long  
Kidnapping



A Stolen  
Life

\*Includes an interview with  
Jaycee & her doctor.

4

## The Elisabeth Fritzl Case



Crime  
Documentary  
from *Real Stories*



Article from  
*People Magazine*

# Mental Health Resources

Missing Kids  
Database and resources.



## Warm Lines (non-crises)

- Warm Line (for peer support, 18+): Call 416-960-WARM (9276) or text 647-557-5882 (everyday 6pm-midnight)
- BeanBagChat (for youth 16-29): chat-based counselling service (Monday-Thursday, 4-9pm)

## Sexual Assault Specific

- Assaulted Women's Helpline (for survivors of gender-based or sexual violence or abuse): 1-866-863-0511, TTY 1-866-863-7868, Text #SAFE (#7233)
- Toronto Rape Crisis Centre (for survivors of gender-based or sexual violence): 416-597-8808

## Youth Specific

- Kids Help Phone (for children and youth, 20yr and under): 1-800-668-6868, Text #686868, or Live Chat
- Youthdale (for children and families): 416-363-9990
- Good2Talk (for post-secondary students): 1-866-925-5454
- LGBT YouthLine (peer support helpline for youth of all sexual and gender identities, under 29 years old): 1-800-268-9688, Text 647-694-4275, or Chat (Sun-Fri 4pm-9:30pm)

## General

- Victim Services (for anyone affected by crime and sudden tragedies): 416-808-7066
- Toronto Distress Centre (for anyone in crisis or distress): 416-408-4357, Text 45645
- Gerstein Centre (for anyone in crisis or distress): 416-929-5200
- CAMH Virtual Urgent Care same-day virtual mental health advice (Monday-Thursday 11am-7pm, Friday 9am-6pm)

## Conversation Starters

What, if anything, do you think the on-stage characters are guilty of? Innocent of?

What do you think the purpose of Au Yeung Wei's character was?  
How did it affect your understanding of the play?

How did the set and lighting design affect your understanding of the play?