

Acorn frontman doesn't fall far from the tree

musicpreview

The Acorn

With Elliott Brood and The Sun Parlour Players
Tuesday, 30 October at 8pm
Starlite Room

KATHLEEN BELL
Arts & Entertainment Writer

To dedicate the time we have now to uncovering moments of someone else's life that have long since past isn't something many of us ever aspire to do. However, Rolf Klausener, songwriter and vocalist for Ottawa's The Acorn, was struck with the kind of motivation most of us hope never to have.

"My father died when I was about 15, and it was a really huge regret that I never got to know a lot of his secrets," Klausener says. "I didn't really want to let that happen with my mom."

The band's latest release, *Glory Hope Mountain*, is Klausener's attempt to evade that fear. The album is a musical manuscript that navigates the course of his mother Glory's life—a life that began in Honduras and made its way to Montreal, replete with dark moments and filled with more than enough triumph to turn the album from a simple biography into a celebration.

"I really wanted to reflect the joy, the

celebration of her life in the songs, and I didn't want them to just harp on all the dark elements because it's too easy," Klausener notes. "Especially for me. The way I write, I've always had trouble writing happy songs, and I wanted to write some of the most jubilant and uplifting stuff that I've ever written."

To arrive at a mental place where composing such songs would be possible required a lot of work. The initial idea turned into hours of interview sessions, in which Klausener would set up a couple of mics in his home and have his mom come over to recount her story, beginning with her earliest memories.

"You don't get a lot of opportunity to just sit down and talk to your parent as a person," Klausener says. "A lot of times, it's them complaining about you being too messy or not paying your car insurance or whatever. It was really nice to just be like, 'Alright, I'm Rolf and you're Glory—now tell me about your life.'"

The egalitarianism with which Klausener approached these mother-son interviews is echoed in the album, where the songwriter surrounds his subject matter in waves of experimental folk full of rhythmic drumming, twinkling guitar, and delicate vocals. And while for some, the proposition of having their entire existence compiled into twelve tracks might leave them feeling exposed, Glory was unfazed.



Her reaction was shaped by two factors: her unquestioning support for her son's many endeavours and her own obliviousness.

"My mom grew up in a completely different world than you or I did, and her upbringing was pretty scattered," Klausener explains. "She had to defend herself from a very young age, so stuff like recording albums and putting in grant proposals to provincial funding bodies—stuff like that is so archaic, it makes absolutely no sense in her

practical mind. Her initial reaction was just like, 'Okay.' I might as well have been telling her I was going to have lasagna for dinner."

While the focus of *Glory Hope Mountain* centred around another, Klausener found himself walking away from the whole experience not only with a few new songs but also with a couple of life lessons.

"I realized that ideas sometimes have a life of their own," Klausener admits. "If you give birth to an idea, you have to

let go of it and let it take on its own shape and form. That's the fear and the joy of something like this, and that's one of the things that I really enjoyed learning.

"I was reminded that there are no rules. There's no rule to writing, to art, to anything really. And that's the most joyful thing in the world—just letting go of preconceived ideas and thinking that anything has to be any one way. It doesn't. Nothing has to be in any kind of way. There aren't any rules."

Citadel's *Vimy* could use some braver soldiers

The WWI-era recollection shines flawlessly in every category except acting

theatre review

Vimy

Runs until 11 November
Directed by James MacDonald
Starring Mat Busby, Sheldon Elter, Phil Fulton, Vincent Hoss-Desmarais, Billy MacLellan, and Daniela Vlskalic
Citadel Theatre

BRYAN SAUNDERS
Arts & Entertainment Staff

It took Edmontonian playwright Vern Thiessen nearly four years to prepare the script for *Vimy*. He researched, wrote, and edited the script himself, and all of this hard work has made the recent world premiere of *Vimy* at the Citadel a dramatic triumph.

Vimy, a play that examines the World War I battle of Vimy Ridge, is a superbly crafted masterpiece: in bringing to life just a small part of the war, Thiessen allows his audience to better understand the whole of it. Basing many characters in *Vimy* on real people who fought in the war, Thiessen successfully explores what defines Canadians as a nation.

But a powerful script alone doesn't assure a production's success: all the other elements of theatre—direction, design, and acting—must come together as well.

The first of these, direction, is nearly flawless. Director James MacDonald—also the Citadel's associate artistic director—is as dedicated to faithfully recounting the Battle of Vimy Ridge as Thiessen is. Furthermore, his desire to push the envelope is clearly evident through the directorial choices seen on stage—notably some very inventive and visually exciting blocking.

Vimy is being shown in the Citadel's distinctive MacLab Theatre, a venue with a stage layout unlike most theatres in Edmonton. However, co-designers Bretta Gerecke and Narda McCarroll masterfully use the unique space to their advantage in their design for *Vimy*. As a result, the audience is mentally pulled into every scene. The sound design by Dave Clarke adds even further to this feeling of being consumed by *Vimy*.

The acting plays a huge role in drawing the audience into the narrative fabric, although it isn't completely consistent. Phil Fulton, playing the daydreaming prairie infantryman Sid,

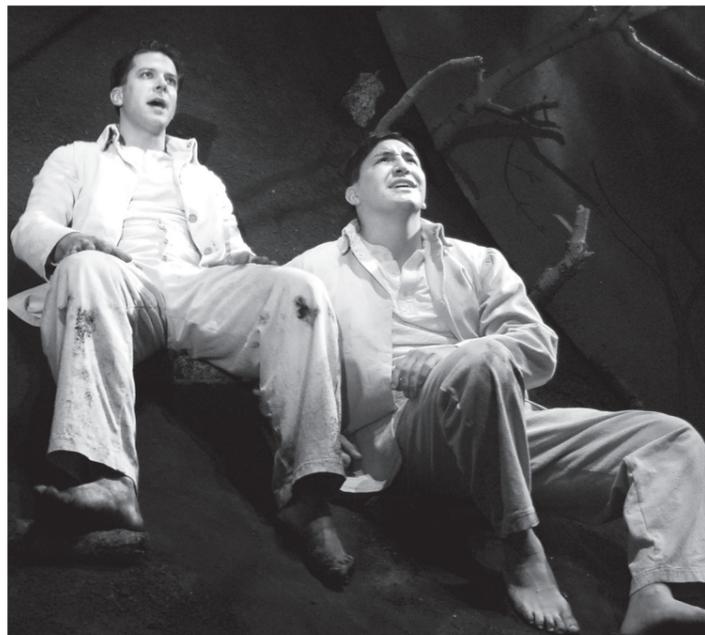
makes his Citadel debut with *Vimy* and delivers a remarkably true-to-life performance in the process.

Fulton is superb in his role of a WWI-era soldier while on stage and lends an unbelievable air of authenticity to his character in doing so.

Two others go beyond the call of duty. The first is Vincent Hoss-Desmarais as francophone infantryman Jean-Paul, and the second is Shelton Elter, who plays Blood Indian infantryman Mike. Both of them grapple with the question of what constitutes bravery, and both commit themselves to these roles fearlessly.

On the other end, Mat Busby, filling the shoes of Ontario infantryman Will, seems afraid of dedicating himself to his role, ready to desert the stage at any moment. Near the end of the play, he has a line regarding loneliness which could have been the most powerful line in *Vimy*, and he completely glibly it. Busby swallows it when delivering instead of screaming it loudly, clearly, and with commitment.

While Daniela Vlskalic is focused in her role, she's unfortunately inconsistent in how she plays Nova Scotian



KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

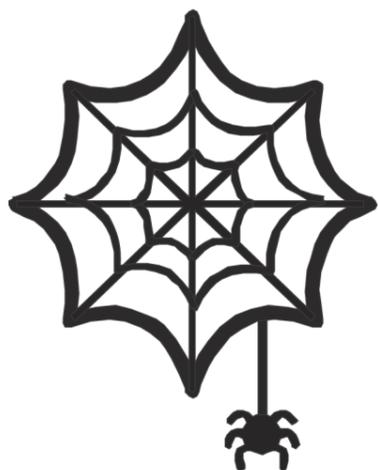
ON YOUR FEET, SOLDIERS *Vimy*'s cast could use a little more basic training.

nurse Clare. Sometimes Daniela slips out of her accent or seemingly becomes another character entirely.

Finally, we come to Billy MacLellan, who makes his Citadel debut playing the role of Nova Scotian soldier and engineer Laurie. While adequate, MacLellan's performance isn't likely to garner any medals of honour—he doesn't add anything to the

character that Thiessen created on paper.

Fortunately, Thiessen created such powerful characters in *Vimy* that such small acting disappointments are easily brushed aside. Thiessen's *Vimy* is a psychologically engaging rollercoaster of a play. For any history or war buffs, or anyone who enjoys phenomenal playwriting, *Vimy* is definitely a must see.



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