



# BATTERED

BY ARTHUR HOLDEN

## ACTION INFINI STUDY GUIDE

*A discussion document relating to **Battered**,  
a play in two acts*

Presented by Infinithéâtre at the Rialto Theatre  
18 October to 6 November, 2016

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# INFINITHÉÂTRE'S MANDATE

## REFLECTING AND EXPLORING LIFE IN 21ST CENTURY MONTRÉAL

**Infinithéâtre's** mission is to develop, produce and broker new Québec theatre to ever-widening audiences. We are dedicated to staging theatre that is as entertaining as it is relevant. We believe that live theatre is an essential part of our society's democratic discourse and that great theatre speaks to and about its' own community.

Great theatre begins with great writing. We challenge writers from other media—journalists, poets, and novelists—to write for the stage. We seek out innovative Québec plays, playwrights, and new theatrical styles. In addition, we tackle and adapt classic plays when the themes and characters are relevant.

Anglophone artistic expression is **Infinithéâtre's** mother tongue. However, as life in the great creative crucible of Montréal is primarily conducted in French, inevitably some of our work is bilingual, even multilingual. Language, and the paradox of creating in English in Québec, a linguistic minority within a linguistic minority, helps shape our identity and fuels our creative work.

With our unique record of longevity and achievement as an independent Anglophone theatre company in Montréal, we play a leadership role in the relève of Québécois theatre in English. With the digital screens of our wired universe dominating the mindset and quality of contemporary life, we strive to celebrate live human connection. We believe it is especially important to ensure a younger generation of theatregoers has a chance to celebrate community and collectivity through the experience of live theatre.

**INFINITE VISION ∞ INFINITE POSSIBILITIES**

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# Notes from the Playwright

## Before Getting Started

As you approach this study guide for **Infinithéâtre**'s production of *Battered*, you should know that three assumptions have been made about you.

First, and most importantly, it's assumed that you've seen – or at least read – the play.

Second, it's assumed that you have no difficulty reading and communicating in English at a fairly high level.

Finally, it's assumed that you're comfortable discussing the subjects that come up in the play. These subjects include issues some people might find disturbing: physical violence, psychological aggression and the emotional dynamics of intimate relationships. If you find these subjects painful or awkward to talk about, then this document may not be for you. In that case, you may want to stop reading now and advise your instructor that the subject matter causes you some difficulty.

Otherwise, if you're okay with the three assumptions listed above, read on.

- Arthur Holden



Arthur Holden has always depended on the kindness of **Infinithéâtre**.

*Battered* is his third play to be produced by the company. The first two were *Father Land* and *Ars Poetica*, both directed by Guy Sprung.

His most recent play, *The Book of Bob*, premiered at the Centaur Theatre under Ellen David's direction.

Arthur is married to novelist Claire Holden Rothman. They have two grown sons.

He extends his heartfelt gratitude to Brett Watson and Gitanjali Jain for inspiring and supporting *Battered* from the moment of its inception.

# In a Nutshell

*Battered* tells the story of Bobby Lyons, and his difficult relationship with girlfriend, Filomena. Bobby must undergo court-ordered counseling after breaking Filo's arm during an argument. His therapist, Eleanor Stoll, has relationship problems of her own, most recently with her current boyfriend, Frederick.

During their first session together, Bobby and Eleanor discuss the circumstances that led to Bobby's therapy, while Bobby struggles with his role in Filo's injury. During this first meeting, Eleanor is harsh and unsympathetic towards Bobby and his situation. It is later revealed that Eleanor's initial reaction to Bobby may be colored by her own difficult relationships, particularly with her ex-husband.

Eleanor discusses her feelings regarding the case and Bobby's situation with her boyfriend, Frederick, and the pair debate (sometimes heatedly) Bobby's culpability in the incident. Their relationship, like Bobby and Filo's, suffers from instances of miscommunication and insecurity.

As the therapy sessions continue, Bobby and Eleanor delve further into his history, as Bobby discusses his troubled childhood and the early loss of his father. Meanwhile, outside of the therapy room, Bobby repeatedly violates his court order to stay away from Filo, visiting her both at the café, and their apartment.

As the estranged couple grapples with their situation, it is revealed that Filo was injured while trying to leave their apartment following an argument. A concerned neighbor, who was once a victim of domestic violence herself, insists on taking Filo to the emergency room. It is also revealed that Filo is pregnant with Bobby's child, with the pair facing mounting pressure to salvage their relationship.

A chance encounter soon changes everything for these wayward lovers, when Frederick happens into Filo's café. The coincidental run-in leads to a series of miscommunications and quarrels for the four characters, culminating in a final confrontation that erupts in another violent act. The play ends with the four characters contemplating their futures, as they are forced to confront their own culpability in the cycles of violence and betrayal.

# Questions

- 1) If you had to describe *Battered* in a few words, what would you call it? A comedy? A drama? Why?
- 2) Do you think the play offers a generally upbeat view of human nature? Is it pessimistic about people's capacity for decent, sensible behavior? Or does the truth lie somewhere in between?
- 3) Did you enjoy the play? Why or why not?
- 4) Did you find any elements of the play offensive? Why or why not?
- 5) Thinking about the play, what light, if any, does it shed on your own life? What broader truths, if any, does it offer us about human experience?
- 6) Why does the playwright break the 4<sup>th</sup> wall? How does it affect the piece?

**Notes:**



# Character Context/Description

*Battered* by Arthur Holden features four characters:

**Bobby**, a 40-year-old manual labourer;  
**Eleanor**, a 50-something psychiatrist;  
**Filo**, a 30-something business owner;  
**Frederick**, a 50-something money manager.

## Questions

- 1) None of the characters seem to view themselves as bad people. Do you agree with their assessments of themselves?
- 2) Can you think of a moment in the play when a character behaves nobly, yet gets blamed for it?
- 3) Can you think of a moment when a character behaves badly, but doesn't get blamed for it?
- 4) After seeing *Battered*, do you have any thoughts about what it means to call someone a good person?

Notes:

# ***Bobby Lyons***

40 years old, Bobby is a laborer and employee at the Taza Café, which is owned by his girlfriend, Filo. Bobby is a slacker with little direction in life and is often reluctant to take on serious responsibilities in his life. After breaking Filo's arm during an argument, Bobby is ordered to undergo counselling with psychiatrist, Eleanor Stoll. In counselling, Bobby tells Eleanor that he suffered violence throughout his childhood and that his father was killed in a car accident when he was twelve years old. Upon learning of his impending fatherhood, Bobby struggles with the prospect of parenthood and worries that he will be unable to fulfill the responsibilities of being a father.

## **Questions**

- 1) Is Bobby a good person? Why or why not?
- 2) Bobby constantly violates his court order. Do you think he takes responsibility for his actions? Why or why not?

*"Yeah, sure, I mean, I did what I did. But it was in the heat of the moment. I slipped up, something got away from me. Now I'm being treated like a bad person. But I am not a bad person. I made a mistake. There's a difference."* – BOBBY (Battered, p.10)

- 3) Do you agree with Bobby's argument here? Is he a bad person or a good person who made a mistake? Do you think Bobby shows genuine remorse for his actions? Do you think he has taken full responsibility for his part in Filo's injury?
- 4) Should Bobby have served jail time for what he did?

*"[...] why can't you do this? I'm not asking you to be my mouthpiece. God forbid you should actually take my side. I just want you to go to her with the invitation. Because you, an adult person in adult clothes with an adult way of talking, will have, what do you call it, credibility. Which means Filo might come, and there'll be a spark of hope. But if you say no, I'll have to go myself, and she'll call the police, and I'll wind up in prison with the burglars and homicidal drug kingpins, and it will be partly your fault."*

– BOBBY (Battered, p.90)

- 5) Bobby pleads with Eleanor to talk to Filo on his behalf – what do you think of this decision? Is it a good decision or a bad decision? What is Bobby's tone here and how do you think it reflects on his character? Eleanor refers to his plea as "emotional blackmail." Do you agree with her assessment?

### **Notes:**

# *Filomena (Filo) Del Bosque*

In her late 30s, Filo is the owner of Taza Café and girlfriend of Bobby Lyons. During one of their arguments, Filo suffers a broken arm and is left wearing a cast. When it comes to her boyfriend, Filo often feels frustrated with his lack of direction and motivation. Although in love with Bobby, Filo struggles to untangle the implications of his actions and to determine if they can still share a future together. Her pregnancy (revealed part-way through the play) further complicates her strained relationship with Bobby. While Filo desperately wants a child, she is unsure if Bobby is ready for fatherhood.

## Questions

- 1) It seems easy to conclude that Filo is a good person. Does she do anything that might cast doubt on that assessment?
- 2) How do you feel about Filo's love for Bobby?

*'Shut up. You were right just now. You are a moron. You are a despicable spineless worm and I'm not going to be a vessel for the continuance of your blood line. I'm not going to give you the opportunity to poison an innocent child's life with your atrocious genes and repellent habits'. – FILO (Battered, p.83)*

- 3) Speak about the differences and similarities between physical and verbal violence. Is one worse than the other? Why? Why not?
- 4) Do you think Filo was actually going to follow-through with an abortion or was she bluffing? Why or why not?
- 5) What future do you foresee for Filo and her café?

### Notes:

# *Eleanor Stoll*

In her 50s, Eleanor is a psychiatrist who treats Bobby following his court order. Prior to the events of the play, she was in a difficult and unhappy marriage for fifteen years. Now divorced, she is currently in a relationship with Frederick Josephson. Without giving names or specifics, Eleanor discusses Bobby's case with Fredrick and the pair heatedly debate Bobby's role in the incident and the implications of his actions. A mental health professional for twenty-five years, Eleanor is fiercely protective of the therapeutic process. She believes any person, given the right circumstances, is capable of violence. This belief often puts her at odds with Frederick.

## Questions

- 1) Is Eleanor a good person? Why or why not?
- 2) Do you think Eleanor was behaving unethically when she;
  - A) Chastised Bobby for harming Filo during a counselling session?
  - B) Divulged some of the situation with Frederick?
  - C) Went to Filo's café on Bobby's behalf?
- 3) What are the ethical implications of Eleanor's behavior? Does her choice to speak with Filo on Bobby's behalf cross ethical or professional boundaries? Do you agree with her choice? What do you think motivates Eleanor to act in such a way?

ELEANOR

*Enlightened fatalism isn't cheerless. It's a liberation.*

FREDERICK

*Ah. Liberation. I'll keep my chains, thanks.*

– (*Battered*, p.92)

- 4) Based on the dialogue between the two characters, do you find Eleanor's view of the world pessimistic or realistic? Do you find Frederick's view optimistic or naïve? Are either right or wrong? Where do you fit on this spectrum?

### Notes:

# *Frederick Josephson*

A widower in his 50s, Frederick is a successful investment manager who is in a relationship with Eleanor Stoll. Filo's café in Monkland was once a rotisserie where Fredrick ate regularly with his late wife, Sarah. He believes Bobby committed a violent and criminal act, and disagrees with Eleanor's assessment of the situation and her inability to condemn Bobby as a bad person. Frederick expresses a desire to share a deeper, tenderer connection with Eleanor within their relationship. He also views himself as a generally good and respectful man.

## Questions

*'That was unacceptable. Not on your part. On mine. You should be aware that I've never, sincerely, never been the kind of person who would consciously show a lack of respect for anyone, least of all a troubled young woman. Not that I think you're troubled in the sense of... I was going to say instability, but that's not the right word...'* – FRED (Battered, p48)

- 1) Do you agree with Frederick's assessment of himself? He seems to think of himself as a good man. Would you say he is? Would you say that he is respectful towards other character's throughout the play? Is he being respectful to Filo during this exchange?

*'If I'm guilty of anything, it's... and this is debatable... being economical with the truth.'*  
– FRED (Battered, p107)

- 2) Again, do you agree with Frederick's assessment of himself?
- 3) Is omission lying?
- 4) Is it ever ok to lie? If so, when? Why?
- 5) Where is the line between white lying and bold-faced lying?
- 6) Which character is the most truthful and why?
- 7) What is the truth?

### Notes:

# Violence

*Battered* opens in the aftermath of a violent act. Bobby has broken Filo's arm and is now paying a price for his behavior. Over the course of the play, the characters express various opinions on the subject of violence. There are also some exchanges during which characters say extremely harsh things to each other. The story ends with another violent act: Eleanor punches Frederick. The play seems to be asking us to look harder at our understanding of violence, in all its forms.

## Questions

- 1) Filo is a victim of violence in this story. But does she do or say anything over the course of the play that might qualify as violent?
- 2) Bobby is convicted of assault. Yet we hear accounts that make it sound like his actions may have had an accidental element. What does it mean to talk about conjugal violence in ways that don't identify the assailant as a guilty person?

The following blurb was used to promote *Battered*:

*'Bobby Lyons is in trouble. During a quarrel, he **inadvertently** broke the arm of his girlfriend Filo.'*

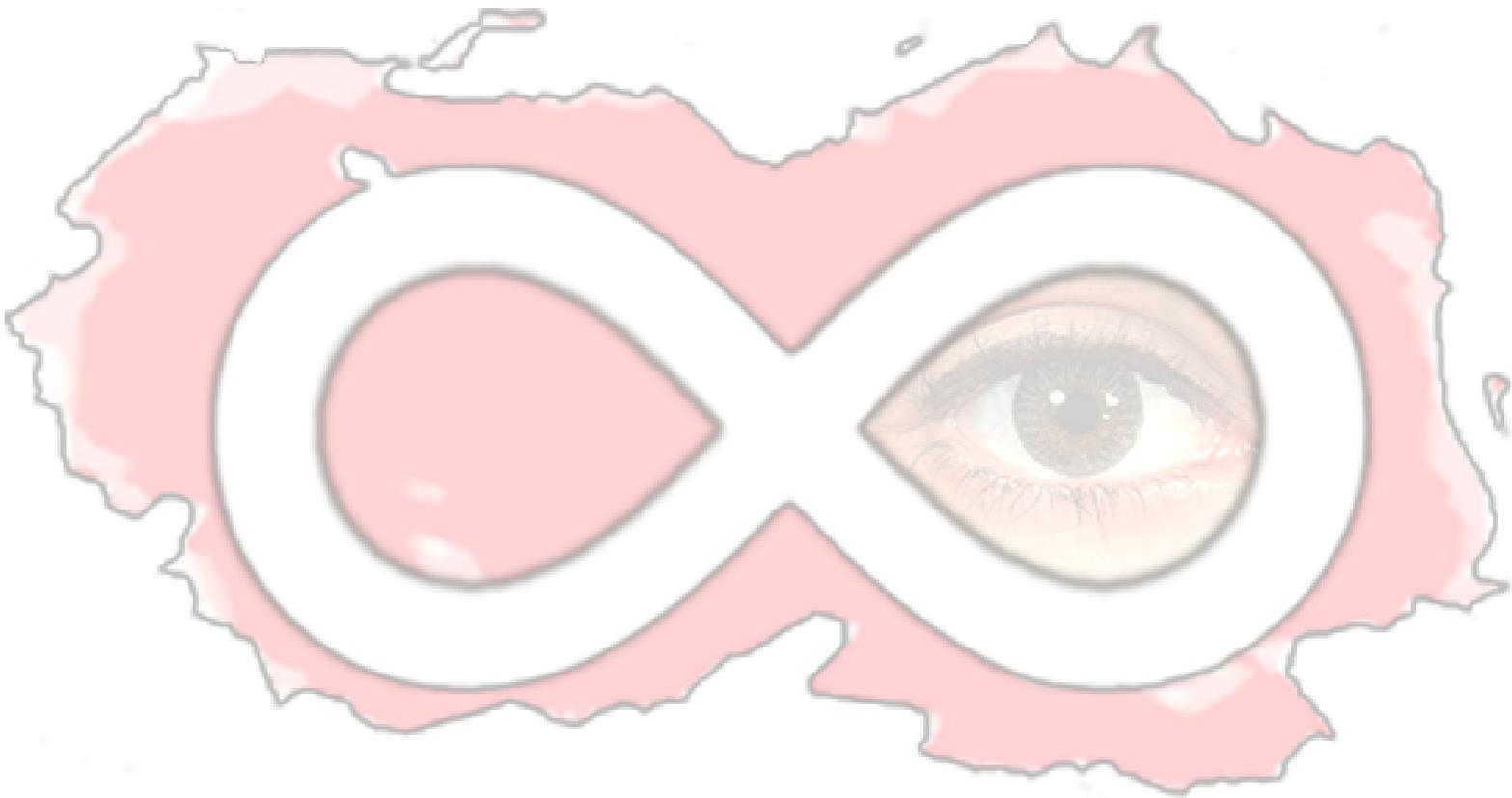
- 3) Inadvertently? How do you feel about that word? To what extent can an act of violence be inadvertent?
- 4) Eleanor commits an act of violence before our eyes. Is her guilt equal to Bobby's? If not, why not?
- 5) How did that punch make you feel? Was Eleanor justified? Is violence ever justified?
- 6) Should Fred charge Eleanor with assault at the end of the play?
- 7) Can a woman attack a man in the same way as a man can attack a woman? Does gender make a difference? What about power dynamics?
- 8) Frederick doesn't hit anyone. But he makes a ruthless speech to Filo in which he lists Bobby's deficiencies, then urges her to have an abortion. Is this violence? If not, what is it?
- 9) Early in the play, when challenged by Frederick, Eleanor defends the proposition that all people have it in them to commit violence: "Given the right stimulus. Pretty well all." Do

you agree? If so, how does that affect your views on issues of guilt and innocence in this play?

10) Animals are violent by nature. Are we not essentially animals? And if so, can we be blamed for committing acts of violence? Is it simply human nature?

**Notes:**

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# Redemption & the Unending Complications of Love

In the promotional materials for *Battered* there is a line that refers to the play as “a story of violence, redemption and the unending complications of love.”

## Questions

- 1) From the outset of the play, Bobby clearly wants to redeem himself in Filo’s eyes. He wants to win back her favor. Does he go about it in a very sensible way? Do you think he succeeds?
- 2) After punching Frederick, Eleanor declares, “I’ll say I’m sorry. I’ll mean it.” Do you believe her? Is an apology enough to redeem her after what she’s done? And if it’s enough for Eleanor, should it be enough for Bobby?
- 3) More generally, do you think physical violence damages loving relationships in a way that is beyond redemption? Do acts of violence poison human relations in a way verbal abuse doesn’t?
- 4) At one point in the play, Filo says of Bobby: “I love him.” Do you think he deserves her love? Does your opinion of what Bobby deserves change over the course of the play?
- 5) Does Frederick deserve Eleanor’s love? Does she deserve his?
- 6) Which relationship do you think is likelier to last: Filo’s with Bobby or Eleanor’s with Frederick?

### Notes:

# Literary References

## The Sword of Damocles (p.38)

- Bobby references Damocles when talking to Eleanor about his fight with Filo over whether the pair should take in a kitten. He is describing the argument that would ultimately end in Filo's broken arm.
- Damocles was a legendary courtier who extravagantly praised the happiness of Dionysius II, ruler of Syracuse. To show him how precarious the happiness of a great ruler was, Dionysius seated Damocles at banquet while a sword hanging from a single hair dangled above his head.
- A frequently used allusion, it generally refers to a precarious situation or to invoke an impending sense of doom

## A Streetcar Named Desire (p.47)

- First, when Frederick speaks with Filo in her café: "Ah, you've always depended on the kindness of others" – Spoken to Filo by Fredrick, the quote is a reference to the last line of *A Streetcar Named Desire*

- 1) Why do you think the playwright references *A Streetcar Named Desire*? Are there any thematic similarities between the two plays?

## Casablanca (p.49)

- Filo also quotes this movie in reference to Frederick when she says: "Of all the cafes in the city he had to walk into mine"
- 2) Why does Filo reference this film? Is she alluding to something? Who is she saying this line to and why?

## Notes:

# Definition of Terms and Phrases

(from The Oxford Dictionary Online)

## Acrimony (p.55)

- Bitterness or ill feeling.

## Amenable (p.85)

- Open and responsive to suggestion; easily persuaded or controlled  
Capable of being acted upon in a particular way; susceptible.

## Existential Threat (p.71)

- Generally defined as something that poses a threat to existence.

## Fatalism (p.92)

- The belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable.  
- A submissive attitude to events, resulting from a fatalistic attitude.

## Mendacious (p.53)

- Not telling the truth; lying.

## Psychotherapy (p.29)

- The treatment of medical disorder by psychological rather than medical means.

## Vociferous (p.85)

- Expressing or characterized by vehement opinions; loud and forceful.

# Legal Terminology

(from The Oxford Dictionary Online)

## Abuse

Verb:

- Use (something) to bad effect or for a bad purpose – misuse.
- Treat with cruelty or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly
- Assault (someone, especially a woman or child) sexually
- Use or treat in such a way as to cause damage or harm
- Speak to (someone) in an insulting and offensive way.

Noun:

- Treat with cruelty or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly
- Use or treat in such a way as to cause damage or harm
- Speak to (someone) in an insulting and offensive way.

## Assault

Verb:

Make a physical attack on.

- Carry out a military attack or raid on (an enemy position)
- Bombard with something undesirable or unpleasant.

Noun:

A physical attack.

- In law; An act that threatens physical harm to a person, whether or not actual harm is done.
- A military attack or raid on an enemy position.
- A strong verbal attack.
- A concerted attempt to do something demanding.

## Domestic Violence

- Violent or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a partner or spouse.

## Harassment

- Aggressive pressure or intimidation.

## Violence

- Behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something.

- In Law, the unlawful exercise of physical force or intimidation by the exhibition of such force.

- Strength of emotion or of a destructive natural force.

# Questions

- 1) Based on the **Legal Terminology**, at what point does each character commit any of these acts (if at all)?
- 2) At what point does a violent act become criminal?
- 3) Place the word 'Verbal' in front of any of those terms. Can any of these acts now be criminal?

*Now you can take a moment to experience your emotions. You never set out to hurt Filo. Yet you did hurt her. In that gap, in that unlit space between your intentions and your actions, you've been inflicting pain on yourself ever since. It isn't easy to look at what's going on inside you. But I can help. I don't have to be the science lady. I don't want to be. I want to be your ally.* – ELEANOR (*Battered*, p.32)

- 4) This quote begs the question: is it the intention that really counts?

[THIS](#) video from **The Leakey Foundation** gives a good summary of criminal intent.

*I don't think you came here to be intimate. Talking about Sarah. Urging me to recreate the sentimental experiences you used to have with her. These aren't things you said to get closer to me. You came with the aggressive intention of trespassing upon my most private environment. Of violating it. Of pissing in it and leaving your scent all over it. You came here to trouble my peace of mind. To lacerate me with recollections of the love you once felt for a woman who is not me.* – ELEANOR (*Battered*, p.54)

*Men who don't understand words like "stop" and "enough." You go see her and tell her you've got a problem. This is me being useful to you. Tell her you need to learn about boundaries and limits and why, when a woman tells you repeatedly to back off, it is very important that you back the fuck off.* – FILO (*Battered*, p.74)

- 5) Though Frederick doesn't seem to intend harm on Eleanor or Filo, do you think his invasion of their boundaries is a form of violence? Why or why not?
- 6) If you see someone being abused, do you report it? How? Where? How would you deal with it yourself?

# Resources

[The Montreal Assault Prevention Centre](#) has an amazing Database of various resources available to the public.

# Classroom Activities

- 1) Ask students to bring in a current article about violence and discuss its' similarities and differences using the themes and issues discussed in *Battered* by Arthur Holden.

## Example Articles:

[‘Rhianna and Chris Brown are proof that domestic violence is everyone’s business’](#)  
by Michelle Bernard of **The Washington Post**

## Questions

- 1) Is Chris Brown a good person? Why or why not?
- 2) How do you feel about Rhianna’s love for Chris Brown?
- 3) Like Bobby, can Chris Brown ever be redeemed for what he did?

[‘Ghomeshi acquitted: Read the verdict and catch up on what you missed’](#)  
by Chris Young, The Canadian Press

## Questions

- 1) Is Jian Ghomeshi a good person? Why or why not?
- 2) Consider the role of witnesses in the Jian Ghomeshi trial and in *Battered*. How did each affect their respective situations?
- 3) Like Bobby, can Jian Ghomeshi ever be redeemed for what he did?

## Notes:

# *Battered*

## Creative Team

**Artistic Director:** Guy Sprung

**Playwright:** Arthur Holden

**Director:** Diana Fajrajsl

## Cast

Shawn Campbell as **Frederick Josephson**

Susan Glover as **Eleanor Stoll**

Gitanjali Jain as **Filomena Del Bosque**

Brett Watson as **Bobby Lyons**

## Production Team

**Set, Props, and Costumes Designer :** Cassandre Chatonnier

**Lighting Designer :** Eric Mongerson

**Sound Designer and Production Manager:** Andrew Scriver

**Assistant Technical Director:** Chris Wardell

**Stage Manager :** Jennifer Stobart

**Apprentice Stage Manager :** Melissa Kay Langille

# WHAT'S NEXT?

## *Mr. Goldberg goes to Tel Aviv*

by Oren Safdie

(author of *Unseamly*, the hit from our 2014 season)



Tony Goldberg is an award-winning, Jewish-Canadian gay author who arrives in Tel Aviv to deliver a blistering attack on the Israeli government to the country's left leaning literate. But before he leaves his hotel room, the conflict in the Middle East will come to him. Part farce, part suspenseful drama, *Mr. Goldberg Goes to Tel Aviv*, is a jaw-rattling ride through the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, where allegiances constantly shift, religion is irreverent, and politics is a matter of survival.

**Directed by** Guy Sprung

**Starring:** David Gale; Howard Rosenstein; Mohsen El Gharb

**From January 31<sup>st</sup> to March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Previews Jan 31 and Feb 1

Shows at 8pm, Sunday Matinees at 2pm

*Théâtre St-James*

*265 Rue Saint-Jacques,*

*Montréal, QC H2Y 1M6*

# THANK YOU

## for taking part in the

# Action Infini Program!

The **Action Infini** program makes theatre accessible, affordable and engaging. Student tickets are only \$12 per student (\$13.80 tax included) and educators are invited to attend free of charge. We are happy to help accommodate your scheduling needs by staging extra matinee performances upon request.

If you are interested in bringing your classes to new, cutting-edge theatre in Montréal, please contact us. **Infinithéâtre** will foster a love of culture in your students and get them talking about current events, social issues, and literature like never before! For more information about the **Action Infini** program or to reserve, please contact the box office at [box-office@infinitheatre.com](mailto:box-office@infinitheatre.com) or by phone at **514-987-1774 ext.104**

#### WHAT TEACHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT THE PROGRAM

“When my students see how you transform what was once a swimming pool, The Bain-St-Michel, their imaginations soar.”

“This experience is an invaluable part of a student’s CEGEP semester.”

“The play, its relevance to modern society, and the performance of the actors was excellent!”

#### WHAT STUDENTS HAVE SAID ABOUT THE PROGRAM

“What I really enjoyed was all the questions that popped into my head during the play.”

“I don’t know how the actors did it, but I truly felt the emotions, the fears... I could.”

We look forward to seeing you again soon!

- The **Infinithéâtre** Team