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# Play Guide



**LIBERATION DAYS**

By David van Belle

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***Liberation Days* runs from October 14 to November 9, 2014**

**For tickets, visit [theatrecalgary.com](http://theatrecalgary.com) or call (403) 294-7447**

Front cover image by David Cooper

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## Cast and Creative Team

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# LIBERATION DAYS

By David van Belle

### THE CAST

Byron Allen	Alex King
Lindsey Angell	Emma de Bruijn
Kelsey Gilker	Marijke Bos
Duval Lang	Dominee Herman van Egmond
Valerie Planche	Aaltje de Bruijn
Garett Ross	Miles Cavendish
Jonathan Seinen	Jan van Egmond

### THE CREATIVE TEAM

Daryl Cloran	Director
Cory Sincennes	Set and Costume Design
Gerald King	Lighting Design
Jamie Nesbitt	Projection Design
Jonathan Lewis	Original Music and Sound Design
Shari Wattling	Dramaturg
Jane MacFarlane	Vocal Coach
Dymphny Dronyk	Dutch Language and Cultural Consultant
Karl H. Sine	Fight Director
Byron Allen	Fight Captain
Kerry Johnson	Stage Manager
Sarah Walling	Assistant Stage Manager
Alexandra Shewan	Apprentice Stage Manager

*Liberation Days* was developed with the support of FUSE: The Enbridge New Play Development Program as well as additional support from Alberta Playwrights' Network and the Canada Council for the Arts.

## Time and Place

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*Liberation Days* is set in a small village in the Eastern Netherlands, from May to August 1945.

The action happens at locations that include the house shared by Aaltje and Emma, the local Canadian headquarters, and other places in and around the village.

## Story

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After years of terror and suffering under German occupation in World War II, the Netherlands has been liberated by Canadian forces. In one small village, a love affair between a Dutch woman and a Canadian soldier causes turmoil as the community discovers what remains of their old lives, and what's been lost forever.

## Who's Who?

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**Emma de Bruijn:** A Dutch woman, 27.

**Aaltje de Bruijn:** Emma's mother, 53.

**Marijke Bos:** A former friend of Emma, 25.

**Dominee Herman van Egmond:** The minister of the village's Dutch Reformed Church, early 60s.

**Jan van Egmond:** His son and Emma's fiancé, who was sent to a German labour camp, 30.

**Miles Cavendish:** The commanding officer of the Canadian soldiers stationed in the village, 34.

**Alex King:** His clerk, who falls in love with Emma, 22.

## The Opportunity to Change

### A Note from Playwright David van Belle

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The liberation of the Netherlands is one of those stories that we love to tell. And it's a good one, especially because it happens to be true – for the most part it was Canadian soldiers that brought freedom from violence, hunger and fear to the Dutch people in April and May of 1945. They were welcomed as the heroes that they were, with joy and celebration. It's a good story.



**David van Belle (Citrus Photography)**

It's not only a good national story, it's a powerful personal story for me, and not just because my birthday happens to be May 5, which is celebrated as Liberation Day in the Netherlands. Both of my parents were children during the war and were liberated by the Canadians. And that contact changed my life – both my mother and my father's families were so impressed by the soldiers that when they decided to emigrate in 1951, they chose Canada. The liberation is the reason I'm a Canadian, not a New Zealander or a South African.

But when my parents returned to the Netherlands for my dad's doctoral studies in 1967, after they had met and married in Canada, they discovered a country that was vastly different from the one they had left. Old social, religious and economic divisions had broken down, and the country resembled the progressive, secular society it is today. Something akin to Quebec's Quiet Revolution had taken place. My parents moved back to Canada in 1971, after my brother and I were born, having

themselves been transformed religiously and politically by their experience in their changed homeland.

The roots of this change are the other part of this national story, an aspect that not many of us know about in Canada. When the Canadians rolled into the Netherlands in the last weeks of the war they found a society that had experienced the catastrophes of destruction, starvation and betrayal. As the dust of war settled, the Dutch began to consider all that had happened and to determine how or if they wanted to reassemble their damaged society. At the same time, two nations who had become friends soon became roommates during the months that followed. And as we all know, even the best of friends don't always make ideal roommates. Therein lies the action of the play.

I find it a satisfying paradox that while most of the characters in *Liberation Days* are Dutch, the play is profoundly about Canada, as seen from the outside. And while it's a portrayal that's certainly more complex than the story we know, it's no less heroic. Canada, as seen by the Dutch, is downright sexy. It represents the opportunity to change: the chance to build new lives out of the rubble. But Canada is also dangerous. It challenges your loyalties and your deeply-held beliefs. And if you decide to emigrate to Canada, especially in the days before weekly KLM flights from Calgary to Amsterdam, you'll never be seen again.

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*"The Germans stole our food, the Canadians our heart."*

*– Text from a Dutch postcard, 1945*

## The Netherlands and Dutch Culture

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The Netherlands is a small, densely populated country comprised of twelve provinces. At 41,500 km<sup>2</sup>, the country could fit over 15 times into the province of Alberta. Nearly one quarter of the country is at or below sea level, with much of the land reclaimed from the sea by an elaborate system of dykes, canals and levees creating tracts of low land known as polders – hence the name “Netherlands” or “low lands.” The three largest cities are Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. At the start of World War II, the Netherlands had a population of just over 9 million people. Today the population is approximately 17 million.

The political system is a constitutional monarchy combined with a parliamentary democracy. When the country was occupied by Germany in 1940, the Dutch royal family fled to London, England, while Princess Juliana and her young family took refuge in Canada. When her third child, Princess Margriet, was born, the Governor General granted a special law declaring her maternity suite at the Ottawa Civic Hospital as “extraterritorial” so the royal baby would have exclusively Dutch citizenship. The Dutch flag was flown from the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill to commemorate the birth of the young princess – the first time a foreign flag was ever raised above our seat of government. As a thank you, Princess Juliana sent thousands of tulip bulbs to Ottawa every year, a tradition continued by the Dutch royal family since her death.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Netherlands has witnessed a strong trend toward secularism, most predominantly since the 1960s. Today, it is one of the most secular countries in Western Europe, with only 39% of the population stating a religious affiliation and only 5% of the population attending church regularly. At the time of World War II, the majority of citizens were either Roman Catholic or members of the neo-Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church, and these two religions formed two of the central pillars of politics, education, social clubs, trade unions and

communications in Dutch society. At the beginning of the war about 1.5% of the Dutch population was Jewish.

The Dutch are well known for their efficient and compact use of space, especially in personal gardens and agriculture. This is largely due to the shortage of available land that is carefully kept from submergence, and perhaps also arose from the Reformed church tradition of order and uniformity as a reflection of “godliness.”

The Dutch also have a reputation for being blunt and directly expressing what they think. What might be rude or impolite to express in Canadian society is valued as being honest and sincere to the Dutch. Mincing words or not stating an opinion is seen as hypocritical and dishonest. In short, the Dutch are renowned for saying it like it is.



**The Netherlands with its provinces. David van Belle's family comes from Overijssel in the east of the country. (wikimedia user Alphathon)**

## Canadians in the Netherlands: A Timeline

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### **May 10, 1940**

German forces invade the Netherlands.

### **May 15, 1940**

The Netherlands surrenders to Germany, which occupies the country. Over the next month, Belgium and France are occupied as well.

### **June 6, 1944**

British, American, and Canadian military forces land on the beaches of Normandy in France.

### **June to September, 1944**

Allied forces, including divisions of the First Canadian Army, push eastward through France and Belgium. Expecting a quick end to the war, the Dutch government-in-exile calls for a railway strike. The Germans retaliate by halting shipments of food and fuel, while the Allied advance is slowed in the southern part of the Netherlands.

### **October, 1944 to April, 1945**

The lack of food and fuel, along with an unusually harsh winter, leads to starvation and illness in the unliberated north and west of the country.

### **February to May, 1945**

The First Canadian Army, around 200,000 soldiers strong, joins the Allied advance north and west through the country against pockets of German resistance. Canadian troops are greeted by enthusiastic celebration.

### **May 5, 1945**

German forces in the Netherlands surrender to the Allies, three days before the German High Command's total surrender.

### **August, 1945**

More than 100,000 Canadian troops remain in the Netherlands, waiting to ship home.

### **May, 1946**

The last Canadian troops ship home from the Netherlands.

## The German Occupation of the Netherlands

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At the outset of the Second World War in 1939, the Netherlands had hoped to remain neutral as it did during World War I. But despite reassurances from Germany, the Netherlands was invaded in the spring of 1940 in a ferocious assault of airborne troops, bombings, and blitzkrieg attacks. During the four-day invasion, approximately 2,200 Dutch soldiers and 3,000 Dutch civilians lost their lives. With little hope of military support from France or Britain, the Netherlands surrendered and five long years of German occupation began.

The German administration implemented a policy of “forced conformity” and systematically eliminated all non-Nazi organizations and political parties, hoping to quickly absorb the Netherlands into the German Reich. Met with Dutch resistance, the occupation took a more violent turn from 1941 to 1944, with harsh acts of public repression

such as confiscation of property, the involuntary transportation of Dutch citizens to Germany as forced labour, and the murder of Jews and members of resistance groups. Approximately 250,000 Netherlands died as a result of the war and occupation, including 104,000 Jews who represented 75% of the pre-war Jewish population.



**The destruction of Rotterdam, May 1940  
(U.S. Defense Visual Information Center)**

## Forced Labour under the Reich

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Nazi Germany created one of the largest forced labour systems in history. Forced labour transportations not only supplied the German war industry with workers, but also weakened resistance movements in occupied countries by removing able-bodied men from their communities. As many as 10 million civilians from occupied countries were transported to Germany as labourers over the course of the war, including more than 300,000 Dutch citizens.

Most civilian forced labourers worked for little or no pay in agriculture, mining, or war manufacturing. The hours were long and conditions were poor, with workers often going hungry and falling ill. According to Red Cross estimates, approximately 30,000 Dutch civilian workers died in Germany during the war.



**Polish forced labourers dig an irrigation ditch at Krychów, 1940**

## The Hunger Winter

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In the months after the Allied landing in Normandy in June 1944, conditions grew worse in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands. Convinced that the Allies would soon end the war, the Dutch government-in-exile called for a general railway strike to disrupt the flow of German troops and supplies. The Germans retaliated by cutting off all fuel and food shipments to much of the country, just as the Allied advance slowed and an unusually harsh and early winter set in.

Fuel shortages meant that village trees were cut down for fuel, and wood from furniture, railroad ties, and public buildings was scavenged as well. Many Dutch men were forced into hiding or had been transported to labour camps, so women and children became responsible for gathering food and fuel, often trekking for dozens of kilometres to forage and barter.

Conditions grew more and more dire as the winter went on. In November 1944, the average daily ration (composed mainly of bread, potatoes and sugar beets) was 1,040 calories. By January 1945, the ration was about 580 calories, and by April it had fallen to 320 calories. As well, malnutrition and a shortage of doctors and medical supplies led to widespread outbreaks of diseases such as typhus and diphtheria. Over the course of the winter, approximately 20,000 Netherlands died from starvation, cold, and disease.



**Women collect food in a stroller during the Hunger Winter, 1944**  
(National Archive of the Netherlands)

## Liberation and Beyond

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The First Canadian Army advanced northwest with the Allied forces through the Netherlands in the spring of 1945, liberating village after village against pockets of German resistance. As they went, they were greeted with enthusiastic celebrations by Dutch citizens. Nearly 200,000 Canadians came through the Netherlands during the war and tens of thousands remained stationed there for several months after the German surrender in May, 1945.

Canadian soldiers were (and still are) celebrated as heroes throughout the Netherlands, but some tensions began to emerge as the weeks and months went on. Resources remained scarce in the months after the liberation, with food, clothing, fuel, and other daily necessities still in short supply, and it didn't take long for some soldiers to take advantage of the thriving black market. Waiting to ship home, the Canadian soldiers were billeted



**Canadian Troops pass a windmill in Rijssen-Holten, April 1945  
(National Archives and Records Administration)**

in houses, schools, theatres, and factories at a time when many other buildings were damaged or destroyed. Military commanders tried to keep the soldiers busy clearing war damage and rebuilding bridges and canals, but they struggled to avoid the perception that the Canadians were taking away work from Dutch men who desperately needed wages.

Apart from these economic concerns, the Canadian soldiers found themselves living in a different culture. Before the war, Dutch society had been dominated by paternalistic and conservative codes of social and sexual behavior, particularly in small villages where the Catholic and Reformed churches held strong influence in all facets of community life. The war had begun to change these practices as women and young people became the primary providers in many households, and the presence of Canadian soldiers in small villages accentuated the cultural shift – the soldiers were an attractive diversion for young Dutch women. Birth rates increased considerably, along with incidences of sexually transmitted diseases. Religious leaders tried in vain to discourage drinking and fraternization with servicemen, and several popular songs of the day (such as "[Trees heeft een Canadees](#)") warned women of the dangers of being seduced by Canadian soldiers.



**Citizens of Utrecht celebrate the arrival of the First Canadian Army, 1945 (Alexander Mackenzie Stirton, Canadian Department of National Defence. Library and Archives Canada Collection.)**

For most Netherlanders, however, these concerns could not diminish their overwhelming respect for Canadian bravery and loss in the fight to free their country. As the final Canadian soldiers left for home a year after liberation, they took with them an entire country's gratitude.

## **“When They Ask Who Freed Us...”**

### **A Letter to Canadian Soldiers from *Our Free Holland***

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*The following is an edited version of a letter written by the editors of the weekly newspaper Our Free Holland and published in the Hamilton Spectator on March 25, 1946. Liberation Days director Daryl Cloran read the full letter to the cast and creative team on the first day of rehearsal.*

Open letter to the Canadian soldiers!

To Jimmy, Jack, Harold, Reggie, Tom, Bill and Harry and the thousands of other battle-dressed boys of the Canadian Army.

Old boy! With the farewells that finally you, too, had to take from your Dutch friends, now you return to your country. You will permit me to give you a few words in a heart-to-heart talk.

When you, eight months ago, on a, for us, historic day, entered the capital of our country, from all sides the boys and girls jumped on your jeeps, then you found a nation of grateful and moved people, who hardly knew their happiness.

First you didn't understand the tear you saw in many eyes and you couldn't understand that, because you didn't know the sufferings which we had to bear during five years, the sufferings from which thousands of men, women and children went to rack and ruin and that we all, when you got acquainted with us, bore in despair.

[...] The German yoke of bondage, the Jerries, as you used to call them, gave themselves the name of “nation of gentlemen,” and when I think now – excuse me – that you Canadian boys often brought us the memories of the cowboys from the American Wild West pictures, then, I must say, that the acquaintance with the “boys,” in spite of all, was much better than that one with the “gentlemen.”

I said, in spite of all, for you know as well as I know you sometimes gave us reason for uneasiness and worry. You see, sometimes you were a little bit too spontaneous and too tempestuous. You were a little bit too rough with your vehicles on our roads and “a little bit” too tempestuous with our girls.

As we, free Dutchmen, were fit again after our “struggle for life,” you and your friends started your “struggle for love,” and be sure that you presented troubles to many Dutch mothers. They spoke and wrote much about you, and I don’t like to be severe on you for that, for the carelessness with which you threw yourself into the reckless love affairs was an understandable result of this hard war, with its privation, solitude and want, that you hadn’t wanted any more than we.

[...] We can say again what we like to say, we can write everything and we don’t spare our statesmen our criticism, thanks to you. We are no more hungry, since we started to eat your biscuits and now eat tarts again; our trains and streetcars go again, we have coals for our stoves and food for our children. That was your work.

And now, take to your Canadian country a good lasting memory of us, the gratitude of a nation that was itself again by your co-operation. [...] Godspeed, boys, and welcome home!

Maybe you will see a tear in the eyes of your mother, your wife, your girl or your sister, but don’t forget that a tear is a smile of the heart, and that same heart is beating in the small low-lying country near the sea, Holland, that will set down your name in the chronicles of its history.

In the name of thousands,

The editorship of a Dutch illustrated weekly, *Our Free Holland*.

## Dutch War Brides and Immigration to Canada

In 1945 and 1946, the Canadian government paid for the passage to Canada of 1,886 Dutch wives of Canadian servicemen and 428 children, making the Dutch contingent the second largest group of war brides immigrating to Canada (almost 45,000 came from Britain). The total number of Dutch immigrants through marriage in the years that followed liberation is likely much higher.

Dutch war brides were transported across the Atlantic aboard converted troop ships and luxury liners. After a week-long passage, they landed at Pier 21 in Halifax. Immigrants travelling west from there boarded special “war bride trains” bound for locations

across Canada. The Canadian War Brides Bureau helped women make arrangements to join their husbands and also aided their transition to Canadian life by creating local clubs, publishing practical information, and even distributing a Canadian cookbook.

In the years after 1946, a growing number of Dutch immigrants made their way to Canada, lured by the prospect of work (especially in the agricultural regions of Ontario and Alberta) as well as the warm and friendly images conjured by Canadian soldiers. According to Pier 21 records, an estimated 165,000 Netherlanders had arrived in Canada by 1967. On the 2006 census, 172,000 Albertans reported Dutch origin – around 5% of the province’s population.



**Sheet music for the popular song "Trees Heeft een Canadees"**

## **My Culture is *Een Beetje Gek* (A Little Bit Crazy)**

### **A Note from Dutch Language and Cultural Consultant Dymphny Dronyk**

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It has been a great honour and a fascinating challenge to work on *Liberation Days*. A mutual friend took me to see David van Belle's powerful play *Everything Is Terribly Nice Here* (about Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh) and introduced us afterwards. There was an immediate curiosity – typical of the children of the immigrants of the Dutch diaspora. It's almost like we eye each other up, wondering “are you as *gek* as I am?” We know our culture is strange and full of impossible-to-explain dichotomies. As immigrant kids who have assimilated and absorbed traits of each of our countries, we no longer totally fit in either culture. In the Netherlands we are too Canadian, and in Canada we are too Dutch.

For a wee country, so small it would fit between Calgary and Red Deer, the Netherlands has had a significant influence on Canada and the world. There are 23 million native Dutch speakers in the world and another 4 million for whom it is a second language. There are around 900,000 people of Dutch descent in Canada, making it one of the largest diasporas.

Over beer in a bar strewn with soccer scarves (of course), David and I discussed our current writing projects and discovered that we each were intrigued (obsessed?) with how World War II has had an impact on our psyches through the trauma inflicted on our parents and grandparents. Eventually this led to my work as translator on this script and as language and cultural consultant in rehearsal.

My first job was to translate lines that David had written in English into character-appropriate Dutch from 1945. Translation is an art in itself. The spoken language of a 47-year-old Dutch Christian Reformed woman would be very different from that of the 25-year-old rebellious village girl or a well-educated reverend in his 60s.

The initial translation process led to lively discussions regarding the absurdity of our Dutch language, as well as its many nuances. Our language is heavily influenced by the dialects of different regions, and by the class system that still exists. Sometimes dialects are so strong we can't understand each other! I could ride my bike from my province of Nord Holland to David's province of Overijssel, but our mother tongues sound very different. We are taught *standaardnederlands* in school, a polite and homogenized version for public and professional use, but many of us use our regional dialect and slang at home.

While Dutch is my first language and I am bilingual, I was keenly aware that language gets dated the further you are from where it is spoken. So I was diligent about checking my language assumptions with my Dutch friends and relatives. The final step was writing both a literal translation, to help the actors understand the emotional inflection required by the words, and a phonetic explanation of all the lines.

Once rehearsals started, David and I had to explain and discuss the context of war – as well as our odd cultural habits – to the many talented people working on the production. We are a country of extremes of tolerance and intolerance, fervently adhering to traditions while embracing social freedoms. We are indeed *een beetje gek* (a little bit crazy).

I am amazed by the incredible dedication of the actors, who learned enough of our language to be able to tell this story in English, Dutch, and accented English – sometimes all in the same scene! Certain sounds of consonants and vowels are dauntingly *gek* to anyone who hasn't grown up with them. You have to hold your mouth and your tongue in a completely different way. I am in awe of their work.

I was deeply moved by everyone's intense work to understand the heart and cultural context of the story and to bring this world to life. I learned so much along the way. The more I tried to explain, the more I realized I needed to know. It has been an exhilarating journey.

## Glossary

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### **"The calendar in the WC"**

In the Netherlands, it is considered very rude to forget the birthday of a friend or family member. Many Dutch homes keep a perpetual birthday calendar near the toilet, where it will be seen on a regular basis.

### **Catechism**

A summary of religious principles in the form of questions and answers used as the basis for religious instruction. First published in 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism is a central doctrine of the Dutch Reformed Church.

### **"Corn-eaters"**

Unlike in Canada, corn is not a traditional table vegetable in the Netherlands and is more frequently used as a grain feed for animals.

### **Jenever**

A juniper-flavoured type of gin popular in Belgium and the Netherlands.

### **Karl May**

A best-selling German writer (1842-1912) known for his adventure novels set in the American West. Generations of German and Dutch children grew up idolizing his characters Old Shatterhand and Winnetou, an Apache chief, as well as his romanticized depictions of the American frontier.



**Illustration of Old Shatterhand and Winnetou by Oskar Herrfurth, from the 1897 edition of Karl May's *The Oil Prince***

**"Kraut whore"**

An English translation of the derisive Dutch profanity *moffenhoer*, which referred to a woman who was known to be romantically or sexually involved with a German during the war. After the liberation, some of these women had their heads shaved in the streets as a form of public humiliation for these romances.



**Dutch collaborators (including two women whose heads have been shaved) are marched through the streets after liberation, 1945**

**Li'l Abner and Daisy Mae**

Characters in a popular American comic strip set in the fictional town of Dogpatch, KY. It was written by Al Capp and ran from 1934 to 1977. The title character of Li'l Abner was a simple-minded hillbilly who was the object of affection for the beautiful and voluptuous Daisy Mae. At the height of its popularity, Li'l Abner was carried in more than 900 newspapers across the United States, Canada, and Europe.

**Molech**

An ancient Canaanite deity to whom children were sacrificed, according to the Old Testament.

**Swedish flour**

Swedish flour was a key part of Allied food relief sent to the Netherlands in the winter and spring of 1945. The flour made a white, cake-like bread.

**Tommies**

A common nickname for British soldiers. The term may have originated from the name "Tommy Atkins," a generic name used by the British War Office as an example on forms and publications.

## A Collaborative Act

### An Interview with Projection Designer Jamie Nesbitt

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Jamie Nesbitt is leading artist in one of theatre's most cutting-edge disciplines: projection design. Based out of Vancouver, he's designed at theatres across the country, as well as in New York and Europe. Here at Theatre Calgary, his work has been seen in *Enron*, *Lost – A Memoir*, and *Beyond Eden*.



**Jamie Nesbitt**

#### **What exactly is a projection designer responsible for?**

A projection designer animates and edits digital content – images and video – to project on to the stage, and integrates that content with the set design and lighting design to create an immersive design.

#### **Are there certain images or types of images that have been resonant for you in your work on *Liberation Days*?**

It's been a really intense process actually, because I've been dealing with some of the most vivid and brutal images from World War II. A very intense process.

#### **How are the projections integrated into the world of the play?**

Projection happens throughout, but it's most heavily present in heightened moments: transition sequences, heavily choreographed or stylized moments of staging, moments that veer away from the realistic into the abstract. But it is used everywhere. Sometimes it's used just to

locate us in an environment, which is a more traditional way of using projection.

**When it comes to those stylized sequences, there must be a lot of collaboration with the director and other artists.**

That's what makes theatre click. Theatre is a highly collaborative act. I don't consider myself a video person. I consider myself a theatre artist, and the reason why I've dedicated my life to being in the theatre is the people and the collaborations. Every moment that you see on stage comes from a long and thorough collaborative process between designers, directors, actors, technicians, carpenters... it's on a lot of levels. I find that thrilling and it's the reason why I do it.

**Is there are particular stage moment that's been particularly challenging or exciting to figure out?**

Yeah, definitely. The set design uses what they're calling a "travelator" – it's a moving sidewalk like at the airport. It stretches across the entire stage. So there are these heavily choreographed moments with actors moving on and off, changing directions, props being moved backwards and forwards. The projections have to connect with all that stage movement. It's a huge undertaking. It's frightening because of the complexity involved on so many levels, but hopefully it will quite a mesmerizing stage moment.

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*"Let's face it, after what we had been through the Canadians looked delicious!"*

*– Anonymous Dutch war bride*

## Conversation Starters

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- What's the biggest life-altering decision you've ever made?
- Have there been any moments in your life that felt like a fresh start? What was exciting or terrifying about those moments?
- In a time of crisis, is there an obligation to help others even if doing so would put oneself at risk?
- The Dutch characters in *Liberation Days* have a particular image of Canada and Canadians. To what extent did this image match your own sense of your country and yourself? In what ways was it surprising?
- Every character in *Liberation Days* has lived through the catastrophe of the war. Are some better able to cope with their traumatic experiences than others? Why do you think this is?
- *Liberation Days* takes place nearly seventy years ago, but we still live in a world where occupations and liberations take place. Did the play resonate with any current conflict for you?
- Characters in *Liberation Days* sometimes speak in Dutch. How did this affect your connection with those characters or your understanding of those scenes? What can be communicated without a common language?

## Collective Research

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Months before rehearsals began, the *Liberation Days* cast and creative team set up an online group to share and discuss their research about World War II, the Netherlands, and the world of the play. Here are some favourite links shared by the group:

- [Newsreel footage of the Netherlands during wartime and liberation](#)
- [Veteran's Affairs history of Canadian soldiers in the Netherlands](#)
- [Making Choices, a documentary about the Dutch resistance](#)
- [The website Stuff Dutch People Like](#)

## Family Stories

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Although *Liberation Days* isn't autobiographical, playwright David van Belle describes the play as "a powerful personal story" for him because of its connection with his Dutch heritage and his parents' immigration to Canada. A crucial part of his research for the play was a trip to the Netherlands with his father, who was eight years old on Liberation Day, to visit the town where his father had grown up during the war.

The tales we tell about our family histories are a vital and evocative link to the past – and they also shape our sense of identity in the present. Canadian historian Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett says that the keepers of family stories and traditions are "living links in the historical chain."

Here are some sources for the stories of Dutch immigrants to Canada:

- [Transcript of Dutch war bride stories from the Pier 21 Museum](#)
- [CBC Radio interview with a Dutch war bride](#)
- *Hope in the Colour of Orange*, a collection of 24 short memoirs written by Dutch-Canadians and published by the Monday Morning Writers Group of Black Diamond, AB. [[Calgary Public Library](#)]

If you'd like to investigate your own family's oral history, the online [Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide](#) by Marjorie Hunt is a great resource. It has helpful advice from the Smithsonian Museum's own researchers on how to approach family members, craft meaningful interview questions, and document your discoveries for posterity.

*What are your family's defining stories?*

*How are these stories passed on?*

*How do these stories affect who you are today?*

## Movie Night

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There are countless great World War II movies, but to help prepare for *Liberation Days* rehearsals, some members of the cast and creative team sought out films specifically about the Dutch experience of the war:

### ***Soldier of Orange***

Dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1977. Based on the memoir of a Dutch war hero, *Soldier of Orange* follows the paths of six university students during the German occupation – some collaborate, while others join the resistance.

### ***The Assault***

Dir. Fons Rademakers, 1987. The first Dutch movie to win the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, *The Assault* explores the consequences of the killing of a collaborator – and the vicious, arbitrary German retaliation that follows.

### ***Band of Brothers Episode #4: "Replacements"***

Dir. David Nutter, 2001. This episode of the acclaimed HBO miniseries follows a group of American soldiers as they take part in Operation Market Garden and the liberation of Eindhoven in September, 1944.

### ***Black Book***

Dir. Paul Verhoeven, 2006. This thriller, one of the most popular Dutch films ever, tells the story of a young Jewish woman who becomes a spy for the Dutch resistance in the late days of the war.

### ***Winter in Wartime***

Dir. Martin Koolhoven, 2008. In this film set during the last winter of the war, a teenage boy is drawn into the resistance movement after helping a wounded British soldier.

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