

Sept 16–Oct 19, 2014

**Belfry  
Theatre**



# THE REZ SISTERS

by Tomson Highway



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The Belfry Theatre presents

# The Rez Sisters

## By Tomson Highway

Starring

(in order of appearance)

<b>Tantoo Cardinal</b>	Pelajia Patchnose
<b>Tracey Nepinak</b>	Philomena Moosetail
<b>Lisa C. Ravensbergen</b>	Annie Cook
<b>Tasha Faye Evans</b>	Marie Adele Starblanket
<b>Waawaate Fobister</b>	Nanabush
<b>Cheri Maracle</b>	Veronique St. Pierre
<b>Tiffany Ayalik</b>	Zhaboonigan Peterson
<b>Reneltha Arluk</b>	Emily Dictionary

Director	<b>Peter Hinton</b>
Choreographer	<b>Denise Clarke</b>
Set and Costume Designer	<b>Catherine Hahn</b>
Lighting Designer	<b>Bonnie Beecher</b>
Composer and Sound Designer	<b>Troy Slocum</b>
Stage Manager	<b>Jennifer Swan</b>
Assistant Stage Manager	<b>Jessica McLeod</b>
Assistant Director	<b>Ryan Cunningham</b>

Tomson Highway is represented by Catherine Mensour, The Mensour Agency, Ottawa, ON.

The use of video or audio recording devices is strictly prohibited at all times.

*The Rez Sisters* is generously sponsored by



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The Belfry Theatre is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres and engages under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement professional artists who are members of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

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The Director of each production designates moments in the show when the seating of latecomers will cause the least amount of distraction for actors and audience members. Should you leave the theatre, our House Manager will not be able to reseat you until one of these breaks.

### Babes in Arms

The Belfry is proud to produce adult contemporary theatre. Our productions are not suitable for children 10 and under, including babes in arms.

### Recording Devices

No cameras or recording devices are permitted in the theatre.

### Audience Advisories / Running Times

We make every effort to advise you of strong language, subject matter or extreme technical effects (strobe lights, fog). Please look for signs at the entrances to the theatre. Advisories and running times are available at the Box Office as of the first preview.

### Food & Drinks

Please feel free to take only food and/or drinks you've purchased from the Belfry bar into the theatre. Our goodies are packaged so that they don't make a lot of noise and disturb your fellow audience members.

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Please refrain from using perfume and cologne when you come to the theatre. Some of our patrons are highly allergic to scents.

### Electronic Cigarettes

Please refrain from using electronic cigarettes in the theatre, to avoid distraction for other patrons and the Artists on stage.

Thank you for your consideration.  
Enjoy the performance.

## Artistic Director's Notes

Welcome to the Belfry's 39th season of exciting and thought-provoking theatre!

Every season I like to include one play from the archives of Canadian theatre – and *The Rez Sisters* is a true Canadian classic. When it premiered 28 years ago, *The Rez Sisters* created a seismic shift in the landscape of theatre in this country, connecting First Nations' writing with mainstream audiences. Tomson Highway's remarkable play paved the way and a wealth of exceptional artists and plays have followed.

I can think of no better director than Peter Hinton to bring this play to vibrant life. Together with this wildly talented cast – Reneltha Arluk, Tiffany Ayalik, Tasha Faye Evans, Waawaate Fobister, Cheri Maracle, Tracey Nepinak, Lisa Ravensbergen, and Tantoo Cardinal – for whom Tomson originally wrote one of the roles – I know that he will illuminate the beauty of this play, and revel in *The Rez Sisters*' unique mix of realism and magic realism.

Peter's fantastic creative team includes choreographer Denise Clark – a recent recipient of the Order of Canada – designer Catherine Hahn, composer Troy Slocum, lighting designer Bonnie Beecher, and assistant director Ryan Cunningham, Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts – the position that Tomson Highway held when he wrote *The Rez Sisters*.

A true classic: as relevant today as when it was first performed. (For more thoughts on the play's relevance, please see Tomson Highway's article in our newly launched "Upstage" Magazine – available in the lobby.)

Enjoy this vital and exuberant piece of theatre!



Michael

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## A Note from the Executive Director

As we begin our 39th year as a performing arts institution in Greater Victoria, we also enter the start of another election cycle – this time municipal. It seems appropriate therefore, that I take the time to thank our public funders and to express what their investment in the arts means to us.

Public funding of the Belfry is an investment in our patrons and our communities and encourages and is sometimes a prerequisite for donations and sponsorship from individuals, foundations and corporations. Public funds and private donations mean that we can keep ticket prices affordable and accessible to our community. Without this additional support, our ticket prices would have to increase dramatically, turning our average ticket price of under \$30 to \$60 or more.

So let me offer a profound thank you to all of our donors, including many of you, and to highlight at this time our public funders. Thank you to the Canada Council for the Arts and the BC Arts Council, whose staff and Boards invest many hours of work to ensure thoughtful public investment in a vibrant arts community across this province. Thank you to the Province of BC Community Gaming grants and the staff who analyze thousands of applications each year and whose support ensures that we can increase accessibility by providing discounted or free access to our programming. Thank you to Canadian Heritage for supporting the Spark Festival. Thank you to the City of Victoria, which through the property tax abatement recognizes the importance of this venue to the Greater Victoria community. Finally, thank you to the CRD Arts Development Fund who, through the funding provided by contributing municipalities, and the work of its staff, councillors and volunteer advisory members, ensure that the region is a vibrant and healthy creative community.

I encourage all of you to thank those elected individuals or candidates who support public investment in the arts. And I encourage anyone in public office or any candidate who does not believe that funding for the arts is an important civic investment to reconsider that position in light of the enjoyment, nourishment, economic and social value the arts adds to our communities.

*Van*

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*“Bravo to the Belfry for staging this rich First Nations story about seven strong women looking to change their lives.”*

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## Director's Notes

A theatre is not only a physical building, but a place where we dream together... a space that is at once both imaginatively private and collective. Theatre (like our dreaming) provides a safe place where we can explore dangerous ideas. Of all the plays written in Canada in the last 30 years, Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* is perhaps one of the greatest theatrical meditations on dreaming; its power and necessity, folly and cost. Through our dreams we see the double nature of aspiration and unrest – the dissatisfaction of social limitations and the capacity of the human spirit to overcome... anything – even death. It is the active conjuring of the life force. *The Rez Sisters* is a play that honours the resilient heart of our First Nations – and makes an uncompromising demand for change. I remember watching the first production 28 years ago at Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto – and was blown away... our country had a voice with its own originality and passion and great truth. I am honoured to direct this revival and long to see how it will be played 28 years from now – directed by someone who perhaps, seeing it for the first time tonight, is ignited by the power of Tomson Highway's play.

For the Belfry production, our assistant director is Ryan Cunningham, the current artistic director of Native Earth Performing Arts – a circle of dreams.

Chi-miigwetch! Peter Hinton

The Sacred Circle. In Indigenous culture everything moves in a circle; energy, people, spirits...plays. That circle has four stages, seasons, lessons. Four years after Native Earth was born, *The Rez Sisters* became one of the most lauded and popular plays of its time. When Peter first asked me to assist him, he didn't know I was in my new position at Native Earth 28 years after this play was born... 7 cycles of 4 years later. Nanabush! Thank-you, you trickster for nudging us along this circle; to learn, to grow, to be better to each other.

Hiy, Hiy. Ryan Cunningham

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## Acting Company



Tasha Faye Evan and Reneltta Arluk



Tiffany Ayalik



Tantoo Cardinal

*Rehearsal Photography by Peter Pokorny*

### Reneltta Arluk

*Emily Dictionary*

Reneltta is an Inuk/Dene woman from the Northwest Territories. She is a graduate of the BFA Acting program from the University of Alberta and founder of Akpik Theatre, a professional Indigenous Theatre company in the Northwest Territories. Recent and favourite acting credits include: *Night* (Human Cargo Theatre), feature films *Maïna* (Strada Films), *Salmon Row* (Mortal Coil), the reality series *Dene a Journey* (APTN), *TUMIT* (Akpik Theatre), a tour of Greece in *Utopian Floes* (Caravan Stage Tall Ship Theatre) and *Copper Thunderbird* (National Arts Centre). Reneltta's latest endeavor is writing a play about Tookoolito, the Inuit woman guide to explorer Charles Francis Hall.

### Tiffany Ayalik

*Zhaboonigan Peterson*

Tiffany Ayalik was born in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories and is of Inuit ancestry. It was in the North, listening to stories from her

elders, that she discovered her love of storytelling and the powerful change that hearing a story can bring about. After receiving her Diploma from Red Deer College, she continued her studies at the University of Alberta and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting. Some of Tiffany's other credits include *Piuyuq* in *Night* (Human Cargo), *Sedna* in *The Legend of Sedna* (Table D'Hote Theatre), *Woman* in *A Taste of the Wildcat* (Stuck in a Snowbank Theatre), *Bobby* in *The Big League* (Manitoba Theatre for Young People), singing and storytelling at the Vancouver 2010 Olympics (BDK Services), and *Lady Capulet* in *Romeo and Juliet* (University of Alberta). Tiffany would like to thank Klaus for his love and support.

### Tantoo Cardinal

*Pelajia Patchnose*

Born at Fort McMurray, Tantoo has created a number of memorable film roles in Canada and the US including Anne Wheeler's *Loyalties* (Genie Nomination, Best Actress Award - American

Indian Film Festival and the Alberta Motion Picture Industry), *Dances With Wolves*, *Black Robe*, *Mustard Bath*, *Legends of the Fall*, *Silent Tongue*, *Where the Rivers Flow North* (Best Actress Award - American Indian Film Festival), *Tecumseh*, *Smoke Signals*, and films by Vancouver-based independent filmmaker Carl Bessai, including *Unnatural & Accidental* and *Mothers & Daughters*.

Selected television credits include the CBC miniseries *Big Bear*, *Luna: Spirit of the Whale*, *Indian Summer: The Oka Crisis*, *The Englishman's Boy*, and *Older Than America*, *Spirit Bay*, *Dr. Quinn*, *Medicine Woman*, *North of 60* (Gemini Award for Best Actress in a Guest Role), 22 episodes of *Moccasin Flats*, and guest on 2 episodes of *Shattered*. On stage *All My Relations* (Catalyst Theatre - Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award), among others. She has also produced and appeared in Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*. She formerly worked with Peter Hinton in *King Lear* as Regan.

## Acting Company



Tasha Faye Evans



Waawaate Fobister



Cheri Maracle

*Rehearsal Photography by Peter Pokorny*

Tantoo received a lifetime contribution Eagle Spirit Award (Native Indian Film Festival), a National Aboriginal Achievement Award, an Outstanding Lifetime Achievement Award (Women in Film and Television), the Sir Peter Ustinov Award (Banff Television Festival), and the Sun Hill Award for Excellence in Native American Filmmaking. She is a founding member of the Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company, was appointed a member of the Order of Canada in 2009 and holds honorary doctorates from four universities.

### **Tasha Faye Evans** *Marie Adele Starblanket*

A member of Vancouver's innovative and multi-disciplinary theatre community, Tasha Faye's work includes critically acclaimed productions of Radix Theatre's *Box* and *Bewildered*, Boca Del Lupo's *The Beginners*, and her own one-woman play, *She Stands Still*. Recently dancing Starr Murranko's *Spine of the Mother* at Vancouver's *Dancing on the Edge Festival*, Tasha is thrilled

to bridge her theatre practice with her love of dance. A teacher, actress, and dancer, Tasha extends her gratefulness to this Coast Salish Land that runs strong through her blood and sings magic into her art, and to Tomson Highway for his vision and *Rez Sisters!* Huy chexw!

### **Waawaate Fobister** *Nanabush*

Waawaate is an award-winning actor and playwright. In 2009, his production of *Agokwe* – a one-man play which he wrote and starred in – won six Dora Awards. He is also a choreographer, dancer and producer. A proud Anishnaabe from Grassy Narrows First Nation, he is a graduate and winner of the Distinguished Performance – Male award from Humber College's Theatre Performance Program. Waawaate has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, and several from the Ontario Arts Council.

### **Cheri Maracle** *Veronique St. Pierre*

Cheri is a Mohawk/Irish actor/singer/songwriter of the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. She has numerous theatre and television credits to her name. Most recently, Cheri appeared in *The Honouring* with Kahawia Dance Theatre, *Paddle Song* – a one-woman show about famed Mohawk poet Pauline Johnson, and also regularly appears as Sara Bull on APTN's *Blackstone*, which earned her a Gemini nomination. Cheri recently released her third album *Ache of Love*, available on iTunes. She is incredibly honoured to be at the Belfry again and with such freakishly talented company! Nia:Wen!!

## Acting Company



Tracey Nepinak



Lisa C. Ravensbergen and Tiffany Ayalik

*Rehearsal Photography by Peter Pokorny*

### Tracey Nepinak *Philomena Moosetail*

Seeing *The Rez Sisters* featuring an all Aboriginal cast over 20 years ago inspired Tracey Nepinak to make the theatre her home and she is delighted to be making her first appearance at the Belfry Theatre as a Rez Sister! Other theatre credits include *Fefu and Her Friends* and *Jail Baby* (Sarasvati Productions), *Good People* and *The History of Manitoba in 45 Minutes* (Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre), *Romeo & Juliet*, *The Happy Prince*, *The Rememberer* and *Fabric of the Sky* (Manitoba Theatre for Young People), *Fare Wel*, *Great Expectations* and *A Doll's House* (Prairie Theatre Exchange) and *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Fish* (Firehall Arts Centre).

### Lisa C. Ravensbergen *Annie Cook*

A tawny mix of Ojibwe/ Swampy Cree and English/ Irish, Lisa is a multi-hyphenate theatre artist and Jessie-nominated actor. She supplements her somewhat eclectic performance and playmaking practice with the joys of motherhood and the delights of self-produced works. Performance highlights include: *Where the Blood Mixes* (Theatre North West), *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (Firehall, Western Canada Theatre, National Arts Centre), *The Unnatural and Accidental Woman* (Native Earth Performing Arts), along with the world premieres of *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout* by Tomson Highway (Western Canada Theatre), and *Burning Vision* (Western

Canada Theatre / Rumble Productions). New theatre and dance works currently in development include *The Seventh Fire* (with support from Playwrights Theatre Centre), *The World is the World* (BLAM Collective) and *The Art of Peace* (Pounds per Square Inch). A former Associate Playwright and Dramaturg-in-Residence with Playwrights Theatre Centre, she is also an Associate Artist with Full Circle: First Nations Performance, and a member of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. Lisa is a graduate of Trinity Western University and SFU's School for the Contemporary Arts. What an honor it is to be back at the Belfry. Chi-miigwetch!



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Tomson Highway



Peter Hinton

*Rehearsal Photography by Peter Pokorny*

### **Tomson Highway** *Playwright*

Tomson Highway was born in a snow bank on the Manitoba/Nunavut border to a family of nomadic caribou hunters. He was raised off-reserve, in the spectacularly beautiful natural landscape that is Canada's sub-Arctic. He had the great privilege of growing up in two languages, neither of which was French or English, but Cree, his mother tongue, and Dene, the language of the neighbouring "nation", a people with whom they roamed and hunted. Following an education where he earned both a Bachelor of Music and the equivalent of a Bachelor of Arts with an English major, he spent seven years immersed in the field of Native social work. He then combined his education and training and poured himself into writing. Today Tomson enjoys an international career as playwright, novelist, pianist, composer and song writer. Tomson is best known for universal hits such as *The Rez Sisters*, *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, *Rose*, *Ernestine Shuswap Gets*

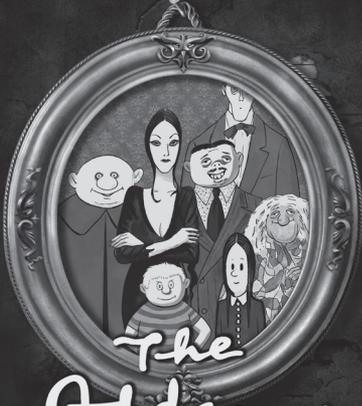
*her Trout* and the best-selling novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. He has also published a number of children's books, namely *Caribou Song*, *Dragon Fly Kites* and *Fox on the Ice*. His work has been translated into eleven languages. For many years Tomson was Artistic Director of Canada's premiere aboriginal theatre company, Native Earth Performing Arts, from which has emerged an entire generation of playwrights and theatre artists. Tomson is the recipient of ten honorary doctorates and is a member of the Order of Canada. His awards and nominations include Dora Mavor Moore Awards, Governor General's Literary Award, Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play Award, Toronto Arts Award, and National Aboriginal Achievement Award. Fluent in Cree, French and English, he continues to write, teach, lecture, and perform across Canada and around the world.

### **Peter Hinton** *Director*

Peter is a director and playwright and has worked across

Canada since 1984. Recent projects include *A Tender Thing* for the Belfry Theatre, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *When the Rain Stops Falling* and *Cabaret* for the Shaw Festival, as well as his own adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* for the Segal Centre in Montreal. Upcoming projects include *Pygmalion*; (Shaw Festival), and *Funny Girl* (Segal Centre), and he is very excited to be performing with One Yellow Rabbit in *What the Thunder Said* at the High Performance Rodeo in Calgary, January 2015. Peter was the Artistic Director of the National Arts Centre English Theatre from 2005 to 2012. He was an associate artist at the Stratford Festival for seven seasons, and spent five years as the dramaturg-in-residence at Playwrights Workshop Montreal. He has been Associate Artistic Director at both the Canadian Stage Company and Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto, and was named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2009.

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## Creative Team



Catherine Hahn



Bonnie Beecher



Troy Slocum



Denise Clarke

*Rehearsal Photography by Peter Pokorny*

### Catherine Hahn

#### *Set and Costume Designer*

Catherine has designed sets and costumes for the stage, film and television for almost 40 years. Her early work with the Royal Canadian Aerial Theatre and the Caravan Stage Company, (then Vancouver's Public Dreams), the Childrens Festival in BC Place Stadium, Bread and Puppet in Vermont, three International World's Fairs and Victoria's 150th anniversary, earned her a reputation as a specialist in outdoor theatre and helped hone a populist spectacle style for which she has achieved renown. Her recent designs include three outdoor winter shows for Theatre Columbus at Toronto's Brickworks, and the masks and wild assortment of puppets for the Caravan Farm Theatre's *Tragical Comedy of Punch and Judy*.

### Bonnie Beecher

#### *Lighting Designer*

Bonnie has designed lights for over 200 productions in theatre, opera and dance across Canada and internationally. Recent credits include

*Cabaret* and *Juno and the Paycock* (Shaw Festival), *Angels in America* (Soulpepper), *Isadora* (Kevin O'Day Ballet, Mannheim, Germany), *Krabat* (Stuttgart Ballet, Germany), *Persee* (Opera Atelier), *As You Like It* and *Titus Andronicus* (Canadian Stage). Upcoming projects include *Pure* (Kevin O'Day Ballet - Mannheim), *Aleina* (Opera Atelier), *Charlotte Solomon* (Ballet im Revier, Germany) and *Sweet Charity* (Shaw Festival). Bonnie has received 14 Dora nominations and has won the award twice. She lives in Toronto with her family Glenn, Jacob and Oliver.

### Troy Slocum

#### *Composer and Sound Designer*

Troy is an acclaimed sound designer and electronic music artist. He began designing sound for theatre on *girls! girls! girls!* (Teatro Comaneci) directed by Peter Hinton in 1999 at the Festival de Théâtre des Amériques. He has worked on countless theatre productions, many at Canada's National Arts Centre. Recent projects include music and sound design for the film *The*

*Language of Love* (Frog Girl Films, HOTDOC/imagiNative Film Festival), the multimedia musical event *The Road Forward* (Red Diva Projects/PuSh Festival), *Sal Capone: The Lamentable Tragedy of* (Black Theatre Workshop/Urban Ink Productions) and the film *Stain* (Small Axx Flms/NFB). Troy coaches students in sound design at the National Theatre School of Canada, and continues to explore all aspects of music and media technology.

### Denise Clarke

#### *Choreographer*

Denise Clarke is a theatre artist who works as a choreographer, actor, director, playwright and teacher. She is the Associate Artist and a permanent member of the One Yellow Rabbit Theatre Ensemble and the director of the OYR Summer Lab Intensive. She has written/directed several pieces including *The Erotic Irony of Old Glory*, *Touch*, *Breeder*, *So Low*, *Permission*, *Featherland*, *Sign Language*, *A Fabulous Disaster*, *Smash*, *Cut*, *Freeze* and her latest solo, *Wag*.

## Creative Team



Ryan Cunningham



Jennifer Swan



Jessica McLeod

*Rehearsal Photography by Peter Pokorny*

Denise was awarded the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Distinguished Artist Award in 2007. She received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Calgary in May 2013 and was appointed a member of the Order of Canada in December 2013.

### Ryan Cunningham

*Assistant Director*

Ryan is a Métis (Plains Cree/Scottish) Actor/Producer/Director from Edmonton, Alberta. He is the Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts and the co-founder of Alberta Aboriginal Performing Arts where he co-curates and co-produces The RUBABOO Arts Festival. Ryan is a board member of IPAA (Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance) and the CanDANCE Network and co-founding/co-producer of The Agkowe Collective. Selected Acting credits include: *King Lear*, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (National Arts Centre), *Yukonstyle* (Canadian Stage), *Annie Mae's Movement*, *Death of a Chief*, *Dreary & Izzy* (Native Earth Performing

Arts), *Urinetown: The Musical*, *Vimy* (Firehall Arts Centre) and *Next Year's Man of Steel* (Shadow Theatre). Selected film and television credits include *Blackstone*, *Mixed Blessings*, *Earth: Final Contact*, *Blue Murder*, *Spinning Out of Control*, *Sir Parker*, *Hiding Mentors* and *I Think I Do*.

### Jennifer Swan

*Stage Manager*

Born and raised in Victoria, Jen is happy to once again be Island-based and back at the Belfry. This is her tenth season (over fifteen years) working at the Belfry, and other favourite Canadian theatres include: Theatre SKAM, Electric Company Theatre, Vancouver Playhouse, Canadian Stage, Caravan Farm Theatre, and Theatre Calgary. Coming up, Jen returns to Calgary to stage manage the premiere of *The Last Voyage of Donald Crowhurst* at Alberta Theatre Projects. She also works as Company Manager for Electric Company Theatre in Vancouver.

### Jessica McLeod

*Assistant Stage Manager*

Jessica is thrilled to be back in Victoria making her official Belfry début! Recent credits include *Waiting for the Parade*, *Munschercise*, and *Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story* (Chemainus Theatre Festival). Jessica is a graduate of the University of Victoria and has worked with theatre companies from BC to Saskatchewan. Born and raised on Vancouver Island, she spends her downtime farming organic vegetables and dressing up, even if there's nowhere to go.

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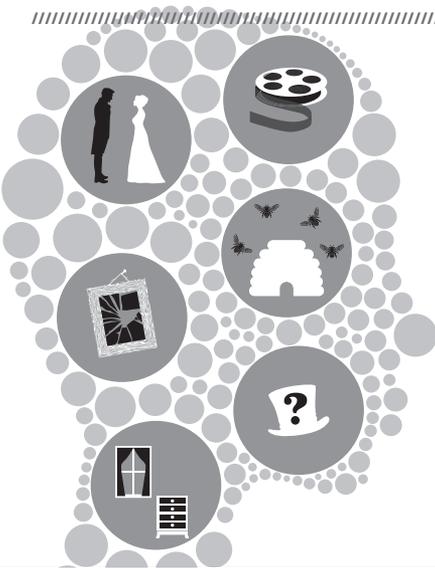
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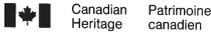
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## Bravo!

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