



seeds

PORTE PAROLE



CBC News
February 12, 2016
Joff Schmidt

REVIEW - Eric Peterson delivers stellar performance in Schmeiser docudrama *Seeds*

In its program notes, Annabel Soutar's play *Seeds* is called "thought-provoking and entertaining."
By a spokesperson for Monsanto.

Which is interesting, given that the subject matter of Soutar's 2005 docudrama — a production by Montreal's Porte Parole, given its Winnipeg premiere by Prairie Theatre Exchange after touring extensively — is Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser's famous legal battle with the chemical and biotech giant.

In the well-publicized case, he was accused of infringing on Monsanto's Roundup Ready canola patent — a case he fought all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Monsanto happens to be the actor accommodation sponsor for the PTE run — hence the program note. But this is no one-sided screed. Soutar, as playwright, has interviewed Schmeiser, and Monsanto spokespeople, and lawyers, and scientists, and seemingly everyone else connected to the case in her exhaustive research for the play. The end result is — and this may be the first time I've ever agreed with a Monsanto theatre review — entirely thought-provoking and entertaining. What Soutar accomplishes here is quite remarkable — in particular because *Seeds* is even-handed, avoiding vilifying or lionizing Schmeiser, and treating Monsanto with the same journalistic levelness.

It's also a dramatically compelling distillation of an incredibly divisive and complex court case. Amelia Sargisson as The Playwright in Annabel Soutar's smart, even-handed docudrama *Seeds*. (Haanita Seval)

Seeds is presented in the style of "verbatim theatre" — all of the play's dialogue is drawn from Soutar's interviews, court transcripts and other factual sources.

It all becomes an intriguing blend of courtroom drama, documentary and agricultural procedural.

It's in the editing that the playwright shows a keen dramatist's eye and ear.

She also wisely injects the character of The Playwright (performed here by Amelia Sargisson) — a version of Soutar who acts as a sort of narrator, helps smoothly guide us through some of the

tricky legalese and scientific concepts the play throws our way, and gives the play much of its human heart in a more philosophical second act.

It's all beautifully staged in director Chris Abraham's snappy, clockwork-precise production. The show is anchored by the work of Eric Peterson as Schmeiser — the only actor in the seven-person cast who plays just one character.

And yes, this is the Eric Peterson of *Street Legal* and *Corner Gas* fame. But this is also the Eric Peterson who's considered a Canadian theatre legend thanks to his work in shows like *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, and he amply demonstrates why in a performance that's subtle, raging and completely human.

So it's an added bonus that the supporting cast (Sargisson and Peterson are joined by Marion Adler, Bruce Dinsmore, Mariah Inger, Alex Ivanovici, and Cary Lawrence) are all remarkably skilled performers, smoothly and distinctly transitioning among a host of characters.

It's challenging material. The play begins by aiming a camera at the audience and asking pointed questions of us, like "What is life?" It goes on to wade through legal arguments, explanations of DNA and a range of points in between during its 150 minutes (with intermission).

But it's constructed and executed smartly enough to never let go of our attention.

Regardless of where you come down on the case of *Monsanto v. Schmeiser*, it's hard to reach any verdict other than concluding this is compelling theatre.

Seeds runs at Prairie Theatre Exchange until Feb. 28.

link: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/eric-peterson-delivers-stellar-performance-in-schmeiser-docudrama-seeds-1.3444756>

GMO court case harvests organic drama

Prairie Theatre Exchange's thought-provoking latest production will likely have special resonance for Manitoba audiences.

Seeds follows the case of Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser, who took his battle with biotech firm Monsanto all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada in 2004.

Monsanto's Canadian headquarters are in Winnipeg: the company's director of public and industry affairs, Trish Jordan, portrayed in the play, is a Winnipegger. Two University of Manitoba scientists are featured and Winnipeg Free Press publisher Bob Cox is mentioned (albeit in his previous role as national editor at the *Globe and Mail*). Perhaps most significantly, the drama by Montreal's

Annabel Soutar revolves around genetically modified canola seeds. The research that created the first canola variety with oil suitable for human consumption was done at the U of M; today Manitoba produces 20 per cent of the country's canola crop. So many audience members may already have opinions on whether Schmeiser did indeed infringe on Monsanto's patent when he was found to be growing Roundup resistant canola on his Bruno, Sask., farm in 1997. They may also have opinions on whether GMO seeds should be used in the first place.

The cleverness of Soutar's work (2 1/2 hours plus intermission) is the way it turns reality — including all those conflicting opinions — into art. She calls it documentary theatre, and *Seeds* is a verbatim play, meaning the dialogue is all taken from her interviews and conversations with the actual people involved, as well court transcripts, public speeches or broadcasts. All too often "thought-provoking" is code for "well-meaning but dull," but *Seeds* is gripping, combining courtroom suspense with human drama, as Schmeiser turns his legal battle into a crusade against GMO foods.

Crisply directed by Chris Abraham, the production by Montreal's Porte Parole Theatre flips back and forth in time without losing the narrative thread and conveys an enormous amount of information — legal and scientific — in an engaging and entertaining way.

Eric Peterson plays Schmeiser, and the former Corner Gas star is note-perfect in the role. He's a lovable old coot, a cantankerous lover of the land who's going up against a multinational corporation to honour his principles. However, as he becomes a globetrotting public speaker and

seed-keeping activist, questions are raised about his motivations and whether his salt-of-the-earth demeanour hides a canny operator.

Soutar includes her own voice among the others (she's played by Amelia Sargisson in an unshowy but vital role), which allows the playwright to link the case — which was, on its face, about patent infringement, nothing more — with larger ideas about food security, the safety of biotechnology and the question of whether life itself can be patented. (It also allows her to interject with corrections when her characters speak lines that contain inaccuracies or factual errors.)

Casting (everyone but Sargisson and Peterson takes on multiple roles) is refreshingly gender- and colour-blind and universally excellent. Mariah Inger portrays several hilariously gruff, taciturn men and wild-haired activist Nadège Adam. Bearded Bruce Dinsmore plays female environmental activist Vandana Shiva. Marion Adler is all lovely domestic warmth as Schmeiser's wife, Louise, and then turns sharky as Monsanto's patent lawyer.

Cary Lawrence takes the somewhat thankless role of Monsanto PR flack Jordan and finds humanity below the brittle professional exterior, and chameleonic Alex Ivanovici morphs into myriad people, from Schmeiser's lawyer to a weaselly scientist.

Sharp staging and creative video projections keep the play's many moving parts in focus (although some might find the lighting distracting, as it shifts dramatically and characters often step in and out of shadow). *Seeds* presents a balanced view of a story that inspires knee-jerk reactions. Left-leaning viewers will no doubt side with Schmeiser against Monsanto — it's tough to rehabilitate the image of the company that developed Agent Orange — but Soutar makes the case that though humankind may be bred to resistant alternate viewpoints, in this increasingly complicated world, it's best to allow for further research.

link: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/entertainment/arts/gmo-court-case-harvests-organic-drama-368502071.html>

Theatre Review: Annabel Soutar's Seeds a brilliant docudrama

PATRICK LANGSTON, OTTAWA CITIZEN 03.28.2014 |



Eric Peterson stars in the production *Seeds* which is running at the National Arts Centre until April 12. *WAYNE CUDDINGTON / OTTAWA CITIZEN*

Who would have guessed that a legal battle over genetically modified canola could be scintillating?

Yet that's precisely what Montreal playwright Annabel Soutar's docudrama *Seeds* achieves. Not to mention being a smart and sympathetic study of the complexities of human nature, a challenge to our tendency to operate on presuppositions, and a meditation on the nature of life.

The story seems straightforward. In the late 1990s, Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser (played here flawlessly by Eric Peterson of television's *Corner Gas* and *Street Legal*) was accused of patent infringement by agribusiness titan Monsanto Canada for planting their genetically modified (GM) canola seed without a licence.

Schmeiser claimed that the seeds had wound up on his property by accident, and that as a property owner he had the right to do with those seeds as he wished.

Monsanto figured he'd buckle under their pressure, but he fought back. The case wove its way to the Supreme Court of Canada where Schmeiser lost in a five to four decision in 2004.

That several-years journey from farm field to the highest court in the land is Soutar's subject. She's used information from countless interviews and court transcripts to create a textured and demanding play that reflects the intricacies of what she encountered as she first researched in exhausting detail and then wrote about the battle.

Directed with a steady hand by Chris Abraham, the show shifts, courtesy of Julie Fox's clever set, from Schmeiser's kitchen to courtroom to a prairie restaurant to Monsanto corporate offices to Soutar's home where we see her struggling over her script.

There are videos including clips from Monsanto commercials with stirring

orchestral scores and shots of sturdy, dedicated farmers.

There's a rapid-fire and entertaining explanation of how DNA works courtesy of Tanja Jacobs as a lab scientist (like all the actors except Peterson, she takes on multiple roles in the show).

There's a starry prairie night, startling in its calm and majesty.

And there is, trust me, much, much more.

Soutar has wisely injected herself into the show. Pregnant, blessed with the hound dog instincts of a good investigative journalist, and played with the right mix of objective curiosity and personal uncertainty by Christine Beaulieu, she's our guide through the labyrinth of scientific, legal and ethical detail.

Sometimes the playwright addresses us directly, sometimes she re-enacts scenes with the other characters she's interviewing, especially Schmeiser whose farm she visits. She thereby captures her own experience of being both inside and outside the story she's written.

We identify with Soutar as she struggles to digest the masses of information — much of it coloured by human emotion or larger agendas — thrown at her by the various players.

Like her, we are forced to confront our own assumptions (among them: David, aka prairie farmer, good; Goliath, profit-hungry corporation, bad).

And like Soutar, we discover that there are more mysteries here than our philosophy had anticipated, from how the GM canola actually wound up on Schmeiser's farm to speculation about a Monsanto plot to sneak their seed into Canadian life without our knowledge to the definition of life itself.

Lawyers (Alex Ivanovici is particularly good as Schmeiser's representative and in his other roles), scientists, a gas station attendant, Schmeiser's quirky wife Louise (Jacobs, in fine form): they help people the story swirling around Schmeiser who, we discover, is one savvy guy who knows what buttons to push in making his case.

Soutar and company employ humour, entertaining visual devices and a well-paced rhythm to help us absorb everything. However, the sheer volume of information and range of topics, including the basic question of whether GM food is even safe, sometimes becomes too much and your brain takes a brief vacation.

As well, there's a pointless, time-consuming bit of audience interaction at the top of the show. It's picked up again later at which point it feels downright artificial in a show that's anything but.

That said, this production is a winner, and Soutar's even-handed presentation of all sides a pleasure to witness. We leave the theatre aware that the stuff of life, whether genes or food, is too important to let slip from our control.

Continues until April 12. Tickets: NAC box office, 1-888-991-2787, nac-cna.ca

Organic genius

By Anna Fuerstenberg, 11.11.2013

Some people think that a docu-drama is like a documentary film, and in some ways that is so; both require an exhausting amount of research. However the live performance of SEEDS with its organic overlay of technology is a multi dimensional and fascinating evening of theatre that simply cannot be matched by anything two dimensional on this planet.

Starring the brilliant and very familiar Eric Peterson, as Percy Schmeiser, the man who stood up to Monsanto, It gives us the portrait of a complicated farmer who is as multifaceted as the story. liisa Repo-Martel plays Annabel ,the actual playwright of the story, a part that she inhabits with tremendous passion and sensitivity. Bruce Dinsmore, is rather terrific in his many incarnations and does a convincing symbolic and very presentational Dr. Vandana Shiva.

Mariah Inger is utterly convincing in her many roles, particularly as a Saskatchewan farmer. Cary Lawrence was a terrifying Monsanto spokesperson, and then amazing as a scientist, a farmer's wife and others. Tanya Jacobs is a fantastic Louise Schmeiser one minute and then comes on as a horrifying patent lawyer and judge the next.

Alex Ivanovici is totally compelling as the lawyer for Schmeiser and convincing as a farmer. But his moment of genius is to play himself, trying to get out of going for a yogurt for his pregnant playwright wife. This tiny domestic scene, where Annabel announces that she will have to leave home yet again because her research is not complete, captures the genius of the production. It is not just self critical and self reflective, at no time is the play didactic or overbearing. The scenes are brilliantly conveyed with the highest technology, and call upon the simplest of popular theatre methods to convey mood and time.

The nuanced tale is brilliantly lit by Ana Capelluto, and Chris Abrams has amply displayed why he was awarded the prestigious Siminovitch award.

This is an extraordinary work, brilliantly performed and magically conceived. IF you see nothing else this year, you will be able to say, I have seen a work of genius on stage in a Montreal theatre.

Theatre Review: Seeds is an impressive retelling of Monsanto court case



ROBERT CUSHMAN | February 25, 2012 11:30 AM ET
[More from Robert Cushman](#)



Republish
Reprint

Seeds is an impressive docu-drama telling of Monsanto court case

The documentary play *Seeds* centres on the 2004 patent infringement case of Monsanto vs. Schmeiser. Monsanto, the bio-tech company, claimed that Percy Schmeiser, a Saskatchewan farmer, had in effect stolen a batch of seeds for their genetically modified canola plant, a seed resistant to their own brand of Roundup herbicide. (That's an awesomely symmetrical business model. You sell something, and then you sell something else to counteract it.) Schmeiser claimed that the seeds had found their way on to his 1,000-acre farm by accident, maybe blown there from a passing truck. After a long process, with many adjournments, the court found for Monsanto. The decision stuck in a lot of throats — nobody likes to see David crushed by Goliath — and the analogy, made by Schmeiser's own supporters, gave the case an afterlife that includes this play.

Its author, Annabel Soutar, is herself one of the characters; the play is the narrative of her investigation, interview by interview. She was pregnant at the time, and this also feeds into the play, which periodically asks the question, what is life? It's suggestive, if not as strong a unifying theme as the author might wishfully have thought. As narrative, though, her script is both thoughtful and exciting; it makes the science fairly clear and the personal issues convincingly complex. The play has been masterfully staged by Chris Abraham. (The show is a co-production of Crow's Theatre, which Abraham directs, and Soutar's own Montreal company *Porte Parole*.) The design team has done superb work. Julie Fox designed the set, a deep wide space that looks initially like a lab but can take on any identity that's required. Richard Feren did the sound, Ana Capellutto the lighting and Elysha Poirier is responsible for the projections, which are exceptionally clear and helpful.

The play splits sharply into two halves. Act One ends with the initial trial verdict. Act Two shows Schmeiser emerging as a crusader, sounding alarm bells worldwide about the dangers of genetically modified foods. A Monsanto mouthpiece points out that this is not actually what the trial was about, and that's fair comment. It's also true that Schmeiser himself never mentioned it before, at least not in the play's hearing. Maybe he was some combination of victim, opportunist and self-publicist. That doesn't dispose of the validity of his concerns. He also has plenty to say about Monsanto's continued harassment of him; about the treats, ranging from jackets to junkets, that they bestowed on his enemies; and on the inspection of his land by what he calls "the gene police."

Eric Peterson is dream casting for Schmeiser, cranky and scrappy. The guy's no innocent, as he keeps telling us he's an experienced politician, in fact an ex-mayor. He's a believer, who knows how to frame his beliefs to advantage. He can be grand and he can be petty — witness the way he turns on his chief defender at the end. Peterson's stumbles and hesitations when confronting the press or making a speech are dead on; it does seem to be the character who's stumbling rather than the actor, since in his domestic scenes he's perfectly fluent. As his quietly supportive wife, Tanja Jacobs delivers one of a whole series of fine lightning sketches; others include Monsanto's steamrolling counsel and a thoughtful academic (Alex Ivanovici, Mariah Inger). Bruce Dinsmore and Cary Lawrence are all fine in multiple roles, and Liisa Repo-Martell makes an involving playwright's stand-in, though having her double as the voice of the supreme court is confusing. The whole is one of the most impressive docu-dramas I've seen.

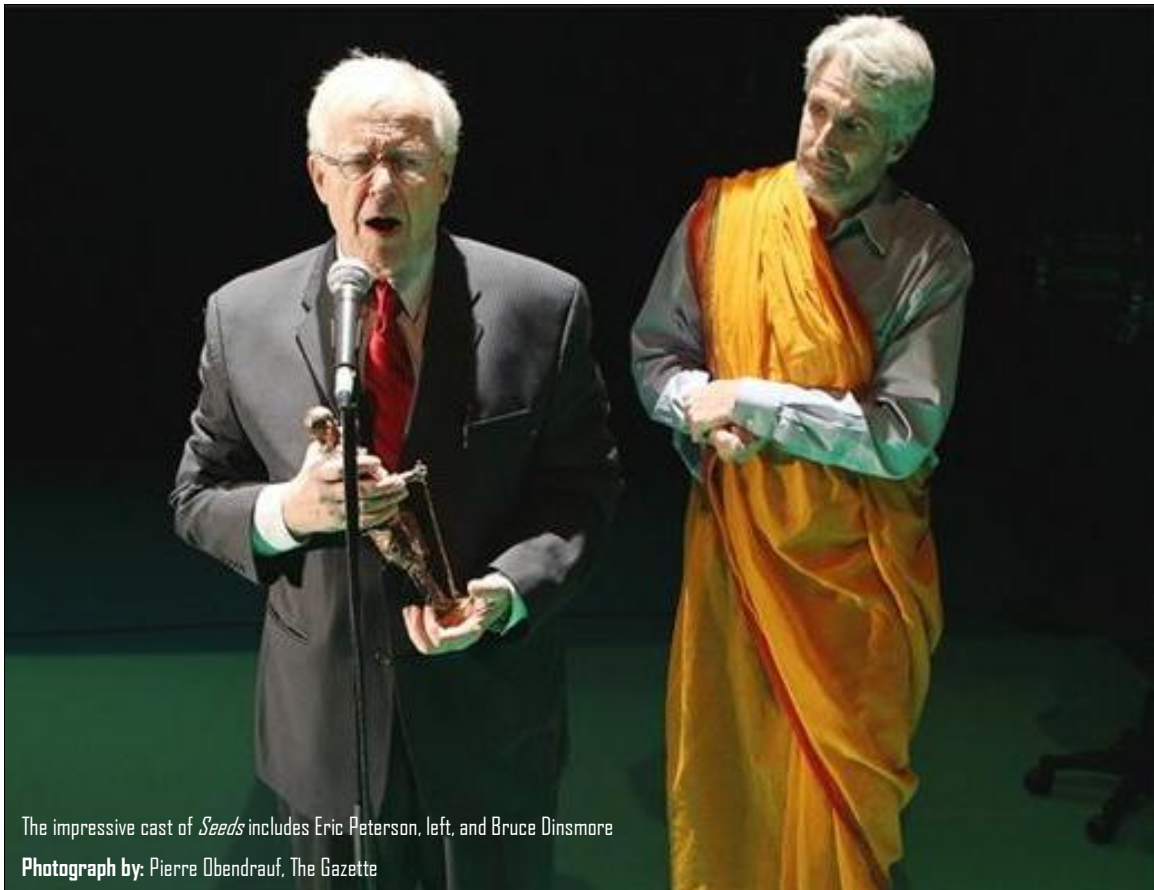
Confession of interest: The assistant director of *Seeds* is my son. Confession of further interest: *Dani Girl*, a musical born in the United States, but premiered here, is produced by Talk Is Free Theatre, who also this week produced a reading of a play of my own, and it's directed by Richard Ouzounian, my opposite number at the *Toronto Star*. It's about a pre-teen girl and boy, sharing a terminal cancer ward. This is a brave subject for a musical, but it's also a terrible one, especially as the chosen tone — starting with the forced joke of the title — is cute-fantastical, involving the kids' imaginary flight to heaven to ask God the question "Why is cancer?", dramatically an even less fruitful inquiry than "What is life?"

The show's book is better than its score though, frustratingly enough, it couldn't exist in this form without the score. Michael Kooman's tunes, handling the fantasy, are lightweight, with one notable exception near the end; Christopher Dimond's script, handling more of the facts, gets a touching counterpart going between Dani girl and her companion, and a moving one between Dani and her mother. The latter partnership indeed tears your heart out, but then it would be hard for it not to. The performances are excellent, and very well co-ordinated. Gabi Epstein is crystal-bright as Dani; Jonathan Logan unforcedly endearing as her sci-fi obsessed companion; Amanda Leblanc steadfastly helpful as the mother; and Jeff Madden a fount of deep-focused energy as a succession of imaginary friends, even though most of them are profoundly irritating. It's in these figures that form meets subject and retires defeated. You can, of course, write a musical about anything. But you don't have to.

The Gazette

Theatre review: Seeds

BY PAT DONNELLY, GAZETTE THEATRE CRITIC NOVEMBER 4, 2013



The impressive cast of *Seeds* includes Eric Peterson, left, and Bruce Dinsmore
Photograph by: Pierre Obendrauf, The Gazette

MONTREAL -- Why would a huge multinational company like Monsanto sue an ordinary Saskatchewan farmer for allowing certain innocent plants (not marijuana) to grow in his fields? And who was this wily farmer who fought back?

When Montreal playwright Annabel Soutar became interested in the Monsanto-vs.-Percy-Schmeiser patent infringement case, she pursued these questions as relentlessly as an investigative reporter. The result, after many years of digging, writing and refining, is a documentary drama titled *Seeds* that lays all the cards on the table and leaves it to the public to judge.

First staged in Montreal in 2005, when it was cited as Best English production of the year by the Association québécoise des critiques de théâtre (AQCT), *Seeds* has had a highly successful run in Toronto and is now playing at Centaur Theatre prior to a national tour.

A PLAY by
Annabel Soutar

DIRECTED by
Chris Abraham

This is a truly worthwhile piece of theatre. But it's not easy listening. Seeing it for the third time, I still find the fact-filled, briskly paced first act, which focuses on the scientific arguments of the courtroom battle, a challenge to fully absorb. And being the daughter of a Saskatchewan farmer, I'm at least acquainted with the basics of prairie cultivation.

In my father's time, saving enough seed to plant next year's crop was a basic, unquestioned ritual. If he had been forbidden to do it by a big-city company trying to force him to sign a complex contract before using their labour-saving, genetically modified seed, he would have been shocked and angry, just like Schmeiser was. Young farmers now just play along, because they have to. Schmeiser fought back.

In the end, Monsanto won — in court. It lost major ground, however, in public relations. Forever.

Actor Eric Peterson, born and raised in Saskatchewan, doesn't just play the part of Schmeiser, he lives it, nailing the vocal nuances and gestures of rural-prairie-speak perfectly. This is crucial to the understanding of a play that highlights the linguistic and cultural divide between rural and urban, East and West.

Liisa Repo-Martell plays her main role of the sleuthing playwright with sincere intensity, carefully assessing the credibility of the people she encounters. Later, she briefly portrays a Supreme Court judge.

The rest of the actors prove their versatility in multiple roles. Bruce Dinsmore, Cary Lawrence, Tanja Jacobs, Alex Ivanovici and Mariah Inger transform themselves again and again. Lawrence plays her main, Monsanto-representative character with CEO cool, but slips smoothly into gruff Manitoba scientist and other roles. Ivanovici is passionate as Schmeiser's limping lawyer, cautious as a squint-eyed canola grower. Jacobs is hilarious as the nun who takes up the cause, intimidating as the Monsanto lawyer, grandma-like as Mrs. Schmeiser. And so on.

Director Chris Abraham (recent winner of the Siminovitch Award) combines rustic storytelling means (a plastic pail used as a truck wheel) and high-tech savvy (live video cameras) to deliver this complex, argumentative text. *Seeds* is a must-must-see.

Source:

<http://www.montrealgazette.com/life/Theatre+review+Seeds/9112969/story.html>

THE MÉTROPOLITAIN

Ensemble et libre Together and free

Seeds: Monsanto Under The Microscope

Alan Hustak, November 2nd 2013

Who would have thought a play about canola, corn, soybeans and wheat could be so, uhm, damned entertaining and thought provoking. *Seeds*, Annabel Soutar's docudrama at the Centaur until Nov. 24 is all about the perceived evils of Monsanto Inc., the international bio-tech seed monopoly, and the meaning of life.

It is a complex, fast paced, three-hour experience which examines the "unintended consequences of genetically modified seeds." The Montreal playwright injects herself into the script as a character to tell the story of a Saskatchewan farmer and Liberal MLA, Percy Schmeiser who raged against the Monsanto machine in a celebrated court battle. Her play raises the question: where do farmer's rights begin and Monsanto's rights end. In 1997, Schmeiser, discovered genetically modified canola plants growing in his field near Bruno, Saskatchewan, which he had sprayed with poison, only to discover the plants survived.

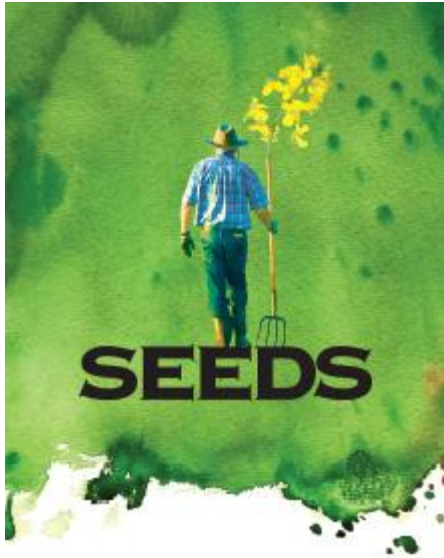
Curious as to why, he saved the seeds and planted them the following year. Monsanto then sued him for using patented technology without paying the multinational company a license fee. Schmeiser believed that farmers have a right to use their own farm bred and farmer saved seeds and fought back saying. "We have a right to know what we are eating."



He took the case to the Supreme Court. In a landmark decision four years ago he lost. But he won a moral victory when the court ruled he did not have to pay the substantial legal fees and damages because he had not profited from his canola growing venture. *Seeds* is in part a court-room drama. Everything on stage is verbatim, based on court transcripts and interviews that Soutar conducted. Sometimes it is hard to keep track of the huge cast of almost 40 characters: various plant seed biologists, weed biologists, corporate lawyers, farmhands and political activists. But Siminovitch award-winning director Chris Abraham has put it all together with rat-a-tat precision. His cinematic vision is inseparable from the work of three superlative designers: Julie Fox, who did the set and costumes, Anna Cappelluto's lighting and sound designer Richard Feren. The production makes effective use of a horizontal stage-wide scene-shifting television monitor above a multi-purpose laboratory. Eric Peterson gives an exemplary performance as Schmeiser, the indignant, passionate, sometimes bewildered prairie farmer with a spine of steel. Peterson is one of those rare performers who can command attention just by rifling through a stack of papers on a lectern without saying a word. Cary Lawrence as the always reassuring public relations voice of Monsanto brings an icy corporate chill to her principal character. Lisa Repo-Martell as Soutar, the crusading playwright, infuses her character with an understandable pamphleteering tone. Alex Ivanovici does a fine job as Schmeiser's lawyer, and Tanja Jacobs shines in a cameo role as a crusading nun. The actors all take turns playing other characters, mere pawns in roles which are there to drive the narrative forward. One brief comic scene in India, however, comes perilously close to racial stereotyping. Near the end of the play, when asked why he pressed his case, Schmeiser says with a startling nonchalance: "It was their (Monsanto's) opinion, and my opinion was different." What makes the line so startling is that it serves as a sharp warning to a complacent public. Are transgeneric seeds, round-up ready crops and the increased yield worth the detrimental side effects, both social and agricultural? It is a question that has not yet been answered to everyone's satisfaction. *Seeds* is a perceptive work of theatre that is not only adds to the debate over multinational control, but could serve as a valuable contribution to public policy.



Seeds @ Centaur Theatre



[November 10, 2013](#) by [liliumorientalis](#)

If nothing else, maybe you've seen the online petitions: Monsanto bad, genetically modified organisms bad. Sign here. You think, "Oh, that does sound bad. How terrible." Maybe you sign the petition, maybe you don't, and then you move on with your day. Been there? If you've ever given biotech's role in agriculture any thought, or maybe especially if you haven't, I urge you to see Porte Parole's *Seeds* at Centaur Theatre.

Seeds is a documentary play based on the case of Monsanto, biotechnology giant, vs Percy Schmeiser, a 71-year old canola farmer from Bruno, Saskatchewan. Monsanto contended Schmeiser was illegally growing canola that contained a patented gene that enables the plants to resist Roundup, a widely-used herbicide. Schmeiser, in turn, stated that he was growing conventional canola, but that genetically modified seed and pollen from GM plants blew into his fields from neighboring farms. Monsanto insisted Schmeiser pay for the use of their "technology," Schmeiser refused, as he had never intentionally planted their seeds. His case garnered worldwide attention, and was eventually heard by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2004. The play's dialogue is taken verbatim from interviews, testimonies, and court transcripts, and brought to life by a versatile corps of actors who each embody various players in the case. Liisa Repo-Martell, as The Playwright, serves as our compassionate and tireless guide.

This is a classic David and Goliath tale, and while the natural urge is to side with the underdog farmer (played with warmth and conviction by legendary Canadian actor Eric Peterson), I commend playwright Annabel Soutar for giving Monsanto room to plead their case as well. This issue is perhaps not as cut and dried as the online petitions would have one believe. Monsanto rep Trish Jordan, portrayed by Cary Lawrence, argues that patents offer protection to innovators, and without them there would be limited incentive to further research. Schmeiser argues the flip-side: that farmers should be able to save their seeds (something that isn't allowed under a Monsanto user agreement), and furthermore, that GM plants have contaminated one of Canada's biggest cash crops, making it difficult to grow non-GM canola even if one wanted to.

While the play clocks in at 160 minutes, the pacing was snappy and the story filled with enough intrigue and subterfuge to keep me riveted. The basics of the science of genetic modification are explained clearly, and the arguments are balanced. No one is spared Soutar's scrutiny, and there are no clear bad guys or good guys. *Seeds* asks all the right questions, and lets the audience decide. This is an important story, told well. See it.

Source:

<http://bloodyunderrated.net/2013/11/10/seeds-centaur-theatre/>



Everything you thought you knew about the Monsanto Canada Inc. vs. Schmeiser case will be challenged by Porte Parole's [Seeds](#) at Theatre Junction Grand.

If you assumed Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser was an innocent victim of a bully corporation that sells Roundup-resistant canola seeds to farmers, you will find yourself doubting at least part of his story. If you assumed Monsanto was rightfully protecting its patent against a farmer who used the seeds without paying the licensing fee, you will question the validity of the "evidence" it collected, and the testimony — or lack of testimony — from the experts.

Ultimately, the story presents a compelling debate on what is a more pressing concern: has Canada allowed the use of genetically modified crops without adequate testing to determine their safety and to assess the long-term implications? In that case, regardless of your position on GMOs, the answer comes across loud and clear.

Annabel Soutar's docudrama is comprised of her interviews with Schmeiser, Monsanto's Tracy Jordan, farmers, scientists and others involved in the case, as well as court transcripts. She uses the text from those interviews and transcripts verbatim, comparing people's words to "fingerprints."

The resulting dialogue moves quickly from one perspective to another, leaving the audience to examine all sides and assume the role of judge along with Soutar, who narrates the investigative process she went through in the search for answers. One interview leads to another, and another, and another.

Seeds does not feel long despite its two-hour-plus run time, moving at a fast but not hurried pace, and making good use of video, set and props to propel the story — it comes across as more of a live documentary film than a play, as Soutar's "documentary theatre" label would suggest.

However, it would not hurt the story to eliminate the audience interviews right at the start, in which actors asked a few people to share their views on questions related to life and nature. The discussions were interesting, but not enlightening or necessary, and did not warrant the time spent. Thankfully, once the action moved to the stage, there was no further audience participation.

Canadian icon Eric Peterson is the undisputed star on the stage as the flawed "hero" Schmeiser, but the rest of the cast more than hold their own, playing multiple characters in what is an excellent performance from all involved.

[Source: http://www.ffwdweekly.com/calgary-blogs/culture/2014/01/17/seeds-docudrama-is-food-for-thought-1430/](http://www.ffwdweekly.com/calgary-blogs/culture/2014/01/17/seeds-docudrama-is-food-for-thought-1430/)

SEEDS, PORTE PAROLE, PUSH FESTIVAL



Montreal-based theatre company [Porte Parole](#) self-identify as the place “where spectators become engaged citizens through the power of theatre.” After watching [Seeds](#), a documentary theatre piece written by Annabel Soutar and directed by Chris Abraham, I dare say this tagline stands firm.

As a dramatization of Soutar’s research into the [Monsanto Canada Inc. vs. Schmeiser case](#), the bulk of the production used court transcripts, recorded interviews, and public speeches, all performed verbatim by a chameleon cast of seven playing dozens. Only Saskatchewan farmer, Percy Schmeiser (Eric Peterson) remained the same throughout as his character represents the narrative arc while also serving as his own foil as our perspectives shift and slide over the course of this two hour production. Soutar’s character (played by Liisa Repo-Martell) also largely stays the same, in constant pregnancy as an extended metaphor, breaking only once to symbolically stand in as the Judge in the Supreme Court trial (there was no judge on stage for the lower court trial), which as an act of dramaturgy, was the only heavy-handed nod to the double-bind role of playwright and researcher.

Compressing five years of time involving a thorough explanation of biotechnology, law proceedings, and small town farming life into a seamless stream of vignettes and rapid-fire dialogue, the direction and staging of the play was remarkable in its flow. Using a three channel projection and a green screen on the floor to convey different settings as well as a live feed camera, the technology never overshadowed the performance of the cast, which sped and hummed across the stage together like a scroll unfurling.

While at times I questioned Soutar’s ethics that are neither journalistic or artistically sound in using material said off record or under the guise of remaining anonymous, she has written a play that calls into question the complexities of individual will in a globalized and multinational market place, starting with herself and her role in dramatizing and enterprising this story. Keeping a steady hand in balancing the story of her own experiences and letting the story breathe, the play works because the personal has been encouraged and allowed in as the main entry point into an otherwise clinical subject matter of patent rights and business ethics.

By now, it is no secret the Canadian Government has a complete lack of empathy towards ([or calculated rejection of](#)) science-based research, and continues to turn a blind eye over regulating the growth and labeling of [Genetically Modified Organisms/Food](#). Government is called to task, but the weight of the show is about the multiplicity of individual perspectives involved. Presenting voices from both sides of Schmeiser and Monsanto, *Seeds* does successfully complicate the media myth of David vs. Goliath. While sympathies were near impossible to form for the fast-talking suits and lab coats of Monsanto and hearts glowed afire for the humble passion of Schmeiser despite the mystery of his actions, the play ultimately leaves each spectator to form our own opinion, and perhaps partake in our own research and engaged citizenry based upon these facts sown.

[Seeds continues through Jan 26 at The Freddy Wood Theatre as part of PuSh Festival](#)

http://tumblr.co/Z_vxVw15AdQCW

[#Seeds](#) [#Porte Parole](#) [#Percy Schmeiser](#) [#Monsanto](#) [#farming](#) [#biotechnology](#) [#GMO](#) [#Annabel Soutar](#) [#Chris Abraham](#) [#David](#) [#Goliath](#) [#science-based research](#) [#citizenry](#) [#public engagement](#) [#documentary theatre](#)

By Heidi J. Loos



Two men wearing white lab coats make their way into the audience. They have a few questions for tonight’s chosen ones. They jot down notes on their clipboards as they ask certain audience members questions like, what is life?

“In your own words, could you please define life?”

A woman in another long white coat films these impromptu interviews from the stage. The speaker’s faces are projected onto a large rectangular screen at the back of the theatre. Their voices, amplified by the microphone, crackle out of the overhead speakers. On the stage there are more researchers, doctors, and scientists in white coats. The stage is divided into part lab, part living room, part prairie farmhouse, and part courtroom. Somewhere out of sight a chicken is clucking.

This is how Chris Abraham’s staging of Annabel Soutar’s exhilarating docu-drama, SEEDS, begins.

We are told that the following piece of theatre has been made, pieced together from questions and answers, court transcripts, quotes, and interviews much like these ones.

[SEEDS](#) is the story of Percy Schmeiser (played by Canadian television star [Eric Peterson](#)) the Saskatchewan canola farmer who was sued for patent infringement in 1998 by the multi-billion dollar biochemical corporation, Monsanto. They accused Schmeiser of illegally obtaining and growing their genetically modified canola seed. The Monsanto seed, “Roundup Ready Canola” (which Schmeiser claimed must have blown onto his property or fallen out of a fellow farmer’s truck sometime in 1997), was a canola seed that had been genetically modified to be resistant to Monsanto’s own brand of herbicide “Round Up”.

To be honest, I had some doubts about a play created word-for-word from court transcripts and recorded interviews. I thought it might be a little dry, or a little too sophisticated for my tastes: too much lawyer jargon and not enough good old-fashioned drama. However, three minutes into the first act of SEEDS, my doubts vanished. I leaned back to enjoy the ride, all 145 minutes of it (which may sound daunting, but Soutar's storytelling is so poignant and rich, and the details and characters so juicy that by the end of the second act you'll be wishing there could be a third!).

The third act, is you, at your home afterwards, so moved by what you've just seen that you decide to conduct your own research to learn even more about this particular lawsuit and about genetically modified grains and foods that have made their way (unlabeled) onto the shelves of Canadian grocery stores.

Anabel Soutar spent years researching, collecting data, and conducting interviews with witnesses, doctors, lawyers, farmers and scientists. Her diligent investigative techniques really shine through, and make for an engaging and informative storyline.

Soutar's research process is also documented within the script. The lovely and talented actor, Liisa Repo-Martell plays a younger, pregnant Anabel Soutar travelling across the country to uncover truths, first-hand accounts, and contradictions of what really happened between Schmeiser and Monsanto, the modern-day David versus Goliath.

Soutar delivers characters and arguments from all sides and angles, showing us that it is not good vs. evil, but rather everything and everyone in between. The ending is deliciously ambiguous, and we are urged to come to our own conclusions.

There is plenty of 'lawyer talk' and lengthy scientific terms sprinkled throughout the script, but stripped down, the heart of this play, is pure gripping, dramatic storytelling. There are complex, compelling characters with real relationships that grow and bend and shatter. Characters you become invested in; relationships, feelings, and struggles we can all relate to.

With a handful of wonderfully versatile and experienced actors and an intricate and visually stimulating set, SEEDS is a one-of-a-kind production that plants critical questions in the minds of its viewers. Questions and thoughts, that are sure to grow and blossom in our minds, long after we've left the theatre.

Chris Abraham's staging of Anabel Soutar's carefully crafted documentary-play is a mind-blowing, original theatrical experience that promotes independent learning and cultivates resistance.



Seeds of Prophecy: Annabel Soutar's *Seeds*

Joel Fishbane

From: Canadian Theatre Review

Volume 154, Spring 2013

pp. 82-83

Seeds opened at Toronto's Young Centre in the winter of 2012 with famed Canuck Eric Petersen in the weighty role of Percy Schmeiser.¹ Abraham brought unique ideas to the table, working with designer Julie Fox to turn the stage into a labyrinth of furniture and scientific equipment. Pieces of a farmhouse mix with office furniture, which in turn are dwarfed by a rack of flowering plants. Amorphous in design, the setting easily moves from the courtroom to a field of canola. This concept ramps up the inherent theatricality of the script and annihilates the fourth wall: there are no wings, and the cast is onstage to greet the audience, introducing themselves with their actual names. This technique alters the manner in which we distill the story of the play. Often, in verbatim theatre, we are asked to pretend the actors are the people they're quoting. This imposes a form of fictional reality on the piece, one which may distance us from the facts being presented. With Abraham's technique, however, this fiction is instantly dismissed. The actors admit they're actors right from the start: they present themselves as a group of friends who have been altered by a story and are now telling it to us because it's something they think we should hear.

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

You've barely found your seat when a scientist asks you, "What is life?" Anywhere else you might ignore him, but this is the theatre, the place where weighty questions are meant to be asked. You realize you're being filmed: your face has been projected onto a screen that stretches across the back of the stage. What is life? All you can think is what US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart once said about pornography.

"I know it when I see it," you reply.

The lights fade, and Annabel Soutar's docudrama *Seeds* begins. As the action plays out, you realize your clever answer will not quite suffice. Thanks to the introduction of genetic modification, we might not know life when we see it. Or, if you're a Saskatchewan farmer named Percy Schmeiser, when it blows onto your field.

With a script taken entirely from printed documents and interviews, *Seeds* is an exquisite reinvention of the verbatim theatre form. A David-and-Goliath story in which you're never quite sure who is who, the play is only ostensibly about the legal battle between Schmeiser, a canola farmer, and Monsanto Canada, an agricultural biotech firm that licenses crop-protection chemicals and seeds to farmers worldwide. In 1997, Schmeiser was sued for patent infringement after Monsanto claimed he had used their genetically modified seeds without a licence. But Soutar, a playwright who works exclusively in verbatim theatre, knew at once the story had deep implications about our relationship to life created in a laboratory (Soutar). Schmeiser claimed that the seeds blew onto his field without his knowledge, but the Supreme Court sided with Monsanto. The implications were staggering: if life itself can be patented, then ordinary citizens may be legally liable when life acts in unpredictable ways. The philosophical implications of this intrigued both Soutar and her director—Chris Abraham, the artistic director of Toronto's Crow's Theatre—leading them to create something more than a recitation of court transcripts and press clippings. Rather than simply report the facts, the pair shifted their attention to the larger impact of the story on the world around them. Through an array of innovative techniques, they explored the many ways the story affected its creators, changing *Seeds* into a play that, appropriately, explores the process of growth and transformation.

«*Seeds* is an exquisite reinvention of the
verbatim theatre form.

A David-and-Goliath story in which you're
never quite sure who is who»



JAN 17

Theatre Junction's 'Seeds' is a compelling docudrama

by [JENNA SHUMMOOGUM](#) · [0 COMMENTS](#)

The legal battles of biotech giant Monsanto and Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser is something that most people remember hearing about. Vaguely, at least. Playwright Annabel Soutar created a docudrama, comprising interviews with all of the pertinent players, including Schmeiser, Monsanto representatives, experts on genetically Modified foods, and farmers within the community. Add the deft direction of Chris Abraham and starring Eric Peterson, best known for his role in *Corner Gas*, along with a cast of amazing talent and you get Porte Parole's *Seeds* presented by Theatre Junction Grand.

The first thing you'll notice about the production is the use of multimedia. The play opens to members of the cast asking members of the audience various questions, such as: When have you felt apart from nature? a camera captures this and projects on a screen at the back of the stage. *Seeds* is full of multimedia, right down to the floor. Julie Fox's set design has the entire floor in green, which then turns into a green screen later on in the play. But at no point does Elysha Poirier's media design go over the top. It is well thought out and neatly rendered.

The play follows Sutar (played by Liisa Repo-Martell) as she conducts interviews and tries her best to show all sides of the story. She strives to show a balanced view, but as it also was illustrated in the media at the time, the case really was depicted as in the line of David vs Goliath. We all want to cheer for the little guy who in this case was getting sued for patent infringement. The play does veer into the bigger seed of the narrative, which is investigating and conducting interviews on whether GMO foods are actually safe. At the end of the story, you are left to make your own judgement on both the case and the bigger picture. Is Monsanto just trying to intimidate the smaller farmers with the threat of lawsuits? Do they really sue first and ask questions later? Or was Schmeiser trying to get a seed that was resistant to roundup without paying for it. These are all questions that the audience is left with.

What makes *Seeds* a poignant and compelling piece of theatre is how intricately all the elements fit together, coupled with the fact that the ensemble slips into each role seamlessly. It's a well researched, eye opening look into the industry of GMOs and at its heart is great storytelling.

«What makes *Seeds* a poignant and compelling piece of theatre is how intricately all the elements fit together, coupled with the fact that the ensemble slips into each role seamlessly.»