



**LEAH CHERNIAK, Toronto, ON**  
**WIDC 2005 Director Participant**

Leah is an award winning theatre director, actor and writer living in Toronto. With her company, THEATRE COLUMBUS that she co-founded with Martha Ross in 1984, she has created over 25 new Canadian plays. THEATRE COLUMBUS creates plays in collaboration with other artists through a process of improvisation and writing. The work is known for its unique style that sits between “the comic and the sublime” (Globe and Mail), exploring the fine line between the comic and the tragic.

Leah graduated from The University of Toronto. She studied courses such as Russian Playwrights, Political Philosophy, Shakespeare, Film Theory (101) Scandinavian Poetry, The Politics of Sex and Acting among others. She began directing theatre at university, already adapting plays by extracting text and adding visual and movement based interpretations. Someone who saw her work suggested she go study with Jacques Lecoq. Having no clue as to what else she might do, she set off to Paris France for 2 years to an international theatre school that has been the foundation for all her subsequent creative work. Primarily an acting school, Leah got in great shape learning mime, mask work, acrobatics and various styles of European theatre such as Commedia Del Arte, Tragedy, Clown and Bouffon.

Lecoq also encouraged creating work through collaboration. With THEATRE COLUMBUS, Leah has developed several different processes for creating collective work through improvisation. Among the plays that she has co-created and directed have been: LONELY NIGHTS AND OTHER STORIES, THE BETRAYAL which won The Chalmers Playwrights Award (a cash prize of \$25,000 shared amongst 5 creators) and PARANOIA. Two Dora Award winning plays have been published; In 1990, THE ANGER IN ERNEST AND ERNESTINE (which has had productions in Canada from Whitehorse to Newfoundland as well as Texas, Cuba and Prague to name a few), and in 1999, THE ATTIC, THE PEARLS AND 3 FINE GIRLS (in which Leah created and performed the role of the youngest Fine sister, Jelly). Leah is also known for her innovative approach to classical texts such as TWELFTH NIGHT and THE CHERRY ORCHARD, as well as adaptations – GYNTY (a five person PEER GYNT) and a new musical version of THE BARBER OF SEVILLE. In 1991, she was chosen for the Pauline McGibbon Award for Directing.

Leah also directs more traditional plays in Toronto theatres. Most recently she directed RUNE ARLIDGE, by Michael Healey at The Tarragon Theatre and NEW CANADIAN KID, by Dennis Foon at The Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People. Other plays she has loved directing are: THE MIRACLE WORKER, THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, LYSISTRATA; and other Canadian plays such as OLD BUSINESS, by Susan Coyne and Jason Sherman, ROSE and A TRICKSTER TALE, both by Tomson Highway. In all her directing, Leah is known for her visual panache, and movement style. She is also applauded by actors for creating excellent working environments that inspire creative bests.

Leah teaches and directs acting students in various institutions across Canada. She has taught at University of Alberta, Toronto, Guelph and Queens to name a few. She teaches at The National Theatre School in Montreal (clown for 14 years, now solo shows) and teaches clown at Ryerson University and George Brown in Toronto. She plans to make a short film this summer called LATELY based on a middle-aged couple who meet through the Internet and would like to make a longer film that experiments with text improvisation. Leah has a 7 year old daughter who refuses to do well in any Math or Science and only wants to sing made up songs and dance to Mozart or David Bowie. It is likely that a film will be made of her as well.