



## *High-Flying Canadian Classic Reopens St. Jacobs Schoolhouse Theatre*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – The incredible true story of Canadian WWI flying ace Billy Bishop comes alive on stage in a powerful and gripping theatre experience in the intimate **St. Jacobs Schoolhouse Theatre**.

For the first time, the popular cabaret-style venue will be open in the spring months, thanks to funding provided by the **Government of Ontario**.

“We are thrilled that audiences are so excited to see *Billy Bishop Goes To War*,” says **Alex Mustakas**, Artistic Director of Drayton Entertainment. “The show brings an important era in Canadian history to life in a way that’s both touching and thoroughly entertaining. I know audiences are going to be moved as they follow the sentimental journey of one of Canada’s most beloved heroes”.

Underachiever extraordinaire William Avery Bishop is the Royal Military College's worst student ever. But before he can be expelled, he enlists for service in the miserable trenches of the First World War. One day, the brash recruit spots a single-seater plane circling overhead, igniting his passion for flight. Defying intense prejudice and astonishing danger, he rises through the Royal Canadian Air Force ranks and transforms from a rebellious young man into the most successful fighter pilot of his generation.

Winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama, *Billy Bishop Goes To War* examines the cost of war, the complexities of Britain's colonial past, and the true story of a soldier's survival through rousing stories, haunting memories, and vibrant song.

Expert Director **Max Reimer** will helm this critically-acclaimed musical memoir. He will be joined by Music Director **Jim Hodgkinson**, Set Designer **Brian Dudkiewicz**, Costume Coordinator **Nicole Del Cul**, Lighting Designer **Lyle Franklin**, Stage Manager **Nadene Riehl**, and Apprentice Stage Manager **Kayla Ado**.

Starring as the famous fighter pilot is Canadian actor **Jacob James**. An accomplished performer, James is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada, Birmingham Conservatory in

Stratford, and Second City Conservatory in Toronto. He has also taught Shakespeare and Acting at universities across North America for 15 years. James has appeared in a number of productions for Drayton Entertainment including *Twelve Angry Men*, *The Foursome*, and *Office Hours*, among others. In addition to his stage work, he has appeared in a number of movies and series including *TURN: Washington's Spies* (AMC), *Fireman Sam* (Calon UK), and *The Martian Chronicles* (BBC).

Renowned musician **Jim Hodgkinson** is serving double duty as the show's Music Director and tickling the ivories in the role of Piano Player. Hodgkinson has worked with theatres across Canada, including composing *Little Women: A Classic Family Musical* for Chemainus Theatre Festival in 2018. He was a soloist at the official opening of Canada's Modern Embassy to the United States in 1999, and appeared with jazz vibraphonist Ted Piltzecker and U.S. Orchestras at Carnegie Recital Hall in New York City.

*Billy Bishop Goes To War* was written by **John MacLachlan Gray** (*18 Wheels*, *Don Messer's Jubilee*, *Amelia: The Girl Who Wants to Fly*) in collaboration with actor **Eric Peterson** (*Street Legal*, *This is Wonderland*, *Corner Gas*), who originally starred in the Billy Bishop role.

The duo developed the music and storyline in 1978, and the play premiered at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre later that year. The show was produced on Broadway at the Morosco Theatre in 1980, and ran for 12 performances before moving off-Broadway to the Lucille Lortel Theatre. The production won the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Award in 1981, the Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play Award in 1982, and the Governor General's Award for English Drama. A cast recording of the production was released in 1979, and received a Juno Award nomination for Comedy Album of the Year. CBC and BBC then coproduced a television adaptation of the play starring Gray and Peterson which aired in 1982.

Gray and Peterson revived the production in 1998, adding a new song and changing the setting. Soulpepper Theatre produced the new version in 2009 and again in 2017, with both actors reprising their roles. This second adaptation was recorded as well, and premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2010. Both on stage and on screen, the production has become one of the most widely produced plays in Canadian theatre.

*Billy Bishop Goes To War* is proudly sponsored by **96.7 CHYM FM** and **Home Hardware**. The Media Sponsors are **City News 570**, **106.7 Country**, and **The Waterloo Region Record**. The 2022 Season Media Sponsor is **CTV**.

*Billy Bishop Goes to War* is on stage from **May 25** to **June 12** at the St. Jacobs Schoolhouse Theatre, and marks the first venue in Drayton Entertainment's family of theatres to reopen in 2022. Regular performance tickets are \$53 for adults, \$32 for youth under 20 years of age and \$43 for groups of 20 or more and select Discount Dates. HST is applicable to all ticket prices. Tickets may be purchased in person at any Drayton Entertainment Box Office, by calling the Box Office at **519-747-7788** or toll free at **1-855-drayton (372-9866)**, or online instantly at [www.draytonentertainment.com](http://www.draytonentertainment.com).