

THINGS TO DO: Theatre of the Beat at Toronto festival

# Prison performances opened actors' eyes

BY SANDRA BOLAN  
sbolan@yrmg.com



Benjamin Wert (from left), Rebecca Steiner, Leah Harder Wideman, Kimberlee Walker and Johnny Wideman of Stouffville's Theatre of the Beat on the road at Kakabeka Falls in Northwestern Ontario this spring.

Performing a play about convicts and their victims in front of the incarcerated can be a daunting task.

But when a big, burly inmate walks up to the actors in tears to shake their hands for getting it right, you know things are going to be OK.

Stouffville's Theatre of the Beat recently returned from staging 34 shows of *Forgiven/Forgotten* throughout four provinces in just over a month.

Four of those performances took place in prisons.

The play delves into the issues of restorative justice and tackles questions such as how would you react if a convict served out his or her parole in your community.

It was sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee's restorative justice program and based on group meetings for offenders and victims attended by playwright Johnny Wideman for research.

Inmates understand their crimes have victims but prisons aren't exactly five-star hotels with room service and as such, convicts spend their time looking over their shoulders, not thinking about what they

did, according to Mr. Wideman.

Prisoners are not hateful but fearful and they "just want to be seen as humans and (they) do make mistakes," Mr. Wideman said.

Other audiences were empathetic towards the characters, according to Mr. Wideman, who noted "people seemed to be challenged in that if we do have a role in creating safer communities, what does that mean?"

This month, Theatre of the Beat is at the Toronto Fringe Festival with its production of *This Prison Or He Came Through the Floor*. Shows continue tonight through next Saturday at the Robert Gill Theatre, 21 College St.

Tickets are \$11 through [fringetoronto.com](http://fringetoronto.com) or 416-966-1062.

This show is not about penitentiaries but about someone stuck in his old ways. It's also a comedy that is "somewhere between *Plat and Play Dough*," according to Mr. Wideman.

The troupe will also perform *This Prison Or* at the Winnipeg Fringe and Edmonton International Fringe festivals later this summer.

For more information on the group, go to [www.theatreofthebeat.com](http://www.theatreofthebeat.com)

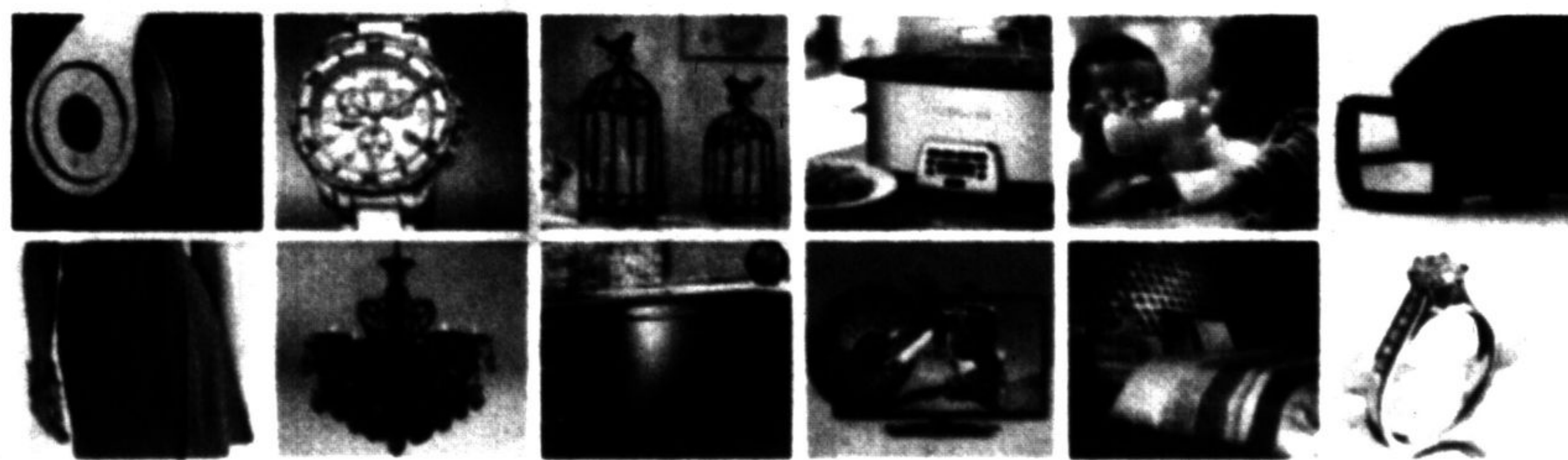
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### Get Internet safety tips at seminar

Almost 40 per cent of school-aged kids believe their parents are out of touch with today's technology and their online activities, according to a KnowledgeFlow CyberSafety Education survey. The poll also revealed one out of five youths are approached by malicious strangers online.

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library and Informatica Education are hosting a free Internet safety seminar for parents, teachers

and families, July 11 from 7 to 8 p.m. at the library. The presentation will cover cyber fraud, online malware as well as the danger of social media and smartphones.

"It will be up to the parents to make decisions regarding their children's level of access," said Claudiu Popa of Informatica Corp.

People receive two free tickets when they register at [register@knowledgeflow.ca](mailto:register@knowledgeflow.ca)

Mr. Popa presented a KnowledgeFlow CyberSafety champion award to Ann Cavoukian, Ontario's privacy commissioner, this week.

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