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## Theatre preview: Trapped in Space //Space can be funny onstage

By Liz Nicholls, Edmonton Journal November 19, 2014



**Nadien Chu and Trevor Duplessis in Space // Space, the season-opener at Northern Light Theatre**

## **PREVIEW**

Space // Space

**Theatre:** Northern Light

**Directed by:** Trevor Schmidt

**Starring:** Nadien Chu, Trevor Duplessis

**Where:** PCL Studio Theatre, ATB Financial Arts Barns, 10330 84th Ave.

**Running:** through Nov. 29

**Tickets:** 780-109-1910, fringetheatre.ca, or at the door

“What in the world ...?”

Nadien Chu was intrigued when she caught sight of the challenging 40-page “skeleton of a script” that becomes Northern Light’s season-opener Friday. “What is it going to be when it’s onstage?”

Her co-star Trevor Duplessis had much the same reaction. “Strange! That’s why I took (the role!)” he says of the come-hither prospect that Space // Space presents to a director/designer like Northern Light’s Trevor Schmidt. “No clue what to do with it, so I knew I’d have to do it!”

Chu is an actor who’s up for a provocation. Last winter, she spent night after night literally hung up on a butcher’s hook in the season’s most controversial offering, Pig Girl, at Theatre Network. “For an 8 o’clock curtain, I’d start my warm-up at 4:30 p.m.,” she smiles. “On days I tried to chintz that out, I paid the price.”

The controversies surrounding Colleen Murphy’s blistering take on the grisly Robert Pickton murders didn’t dismay Chu — though she admits to a certain resistance to objections put forward by people who hadn’t seen the play. In fact, she welcomed the strong and varied reaction. “There was so much discussion happening. All different ethnicities and social groups showed up, sex trade workers and professors.”

After that, Chu played a mentally challenged sometime hooker, in the dark booze- and drug-fuelled demi-monde of Judith Thompson’s The Crackwalker. “My season of disenfranchised characters,” says Chu cheerfully. “Funny how a season takes on a theme.”

Regina-born Duplessis, a Métis who writes novels, plays in a blues duo (Injun Josephine), and teaches drama at Yellowhead Tribal College, returns to theatre, “my first love,” from TV-Land. That’s where he’s been, as love interest Greg Nepoose for the four seasons of Blackstone, the hit APTN series shot in Edmonton. Audiences here may remember Duplessis’s smouldering rage-filled performance as the aboriginal half of a pair of half-brothers in In A World Created By A

Drunken God. When this explosive play became a film, it garnered the University of Alberta theatre school grad the best actor award at the American Indian Film Festival, and a Gemini nomination too.

So, both actors know from intense. But nothing about any of the above will prepare you for the enigmatic claustrophobia created in *Space // Space* by Jason Craig, a Brooklyn playwright who is the muse of the experimental indie company Banana Bag & Bodice. Theatre people are fond, to distraction, of saying that they're attached to an art form that is, by definition, collaborative, its practitioners inextricably entwined. This will seem like mild understatement when you consider the dramatic premise of *Space // Space*, "a claustrophobic container tale" with added complications.

For openers, "it's set inside a space ship," explains Duplessis, on a mid-rehearsal break. "We're brothers who were shot into space some time ago, we don't exactly know when," says Chu, with a grin. "We started small, and we don't really fit any more." Says Duplessis, "we explore the space; we don't have much space to explore."

And then the complications set in. Lumus, says Duplessis, who plays him, has been trying for three years to occupy himself working on a standup comedy routine, which makes him a punchline on legs. His brother Penryn has been sleeping. "When I wake up, I've changed into a woman — that's the starting point," says Chu of her character. "My brother has become my sister," says Duplessis.

It starts with being trapped in a confined space, for reasons that aren't explained. And then, the mysterious gender change that's the play's calling card in Northern Light's season of gender exploration.

Why are the brothers in space in the first place? Not explained. Where are the brothers going? "We'll know when we get there ... We're trapped in a confined space. Very Beckett," says Chu. "Very Sartre's *No Exit*."

Unlike Sartre, though, "this script is funny," says Duplessis. "Cabin fever is funny to watch. Not to have."

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