

One of the "Top Ten Shows of the Decade"

NOW MAGAZINE

# Goodness

by Michael Redhill

Winner of the 2006  
Carol Tambor  
Best of Edinburgh award.  
A VOLCANO PRODUCTION

Jan. 14 – 31, 2010

PREVIEW JANUARY 13



HIGH SCHOOL MATINEE  
STUDY GUIDE

By Lisa Martin

3rd floor Portage Place

[www.pte.mb.ca](http://www.pte.mb.ca)

PRAIRIE **THEATRE**  
EXCHANGE

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Prairie Theatre Exchange presents

# GOODNESS

By Michael Redhill

A Volcano Production

Director: Ross Manson

Music Director: Brenna MacCrimmon

Costume Design: Teresa Przybylski

Lighting Design: Rebecca Picherack

Sound Design: John Gzowski

Fight Director: Daniel Levinson

Music Coaches: Waleed Abdulhamid, Teddy Masuku,

Sarah Sanford

Stage Manager: Guillaume Houët-Brisebois

**Featuring:**

Layne Coleman                      *Mathias Todd*

Lili Francks                              *Older Althea*

Tara Hughes                              *Young Althea*

J. D. Nichol森                              *Stephen Part*

Gord Rand                                  *Michael Redhill*

Amy Rutherford                              *Julia Todd*

There will be one intermission.

There will be a single, loud simulated gunshot during play.

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts which  
last year invested \$5.9 million in the arts in Manitoba.

Nous remercions de son soutien le Conseil des Arts du Canada.,  
qui a investi 5,9 millions de dollars l'an dernier dans les arts au Manitoba.

Prairie Theatre Exchange is a not-for-profit theatre and an active member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT), and engages, under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional artists who are members of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

## About the Play

Michael's marriage has fallen apart, so he does what everyone tells him to do – he gets out of town for a while. Instead of taking a nice, relaxing vacation, however, he goes to Poland – where many of his ancestors met their demise during WWII. Not getting the welcome or answers he was hoping for, he begins the journey home, which includes a stop in London. He meets a man in a bar...

After listening to Michael's story, the man decides what would be best for Michael would be to talk to a woman he knows – that happens to live across the street. This woman – Althea – has first-hand experience with the atrocities of war, but is reticent to share it with Michael, a writer with pen and paper in hand. In a dark apartment shut away from the world, she slowly reveals to him her story – one that brings many ethical questions to the table for both of them.

Two countries forced to live together as one. An outspoken man in a position of great influence incites genocide. Years later, behind bars awaiting trial, the same man seems to suffer from dementia, Alzheimer's – or some disease of the mind that leaves him unable to remember the destruction that he was so much a part of. Althea, her entire family murdered years earlier, is his prison guard.

Never revealing the country or ethnicity of the people in Althea's story, the play allows the audience to fill in those blanks for themselves. Putting several topics forward with regards to blame, punishment, and evil, *Goodness* is a conversation started, not ended.

### SETTING

*"...an imaginative space in which Michael Redhill, the character, is writing the play."*

**Play Warnings:** Violence, controversial issues

## About The Playwright

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, Michael Redhill was raised in Toronto, Ontario. Studying at York University and the University of Toronto, Redhill is known for his poetry, fiction, and dramatic writing. He served on the editorial board of Coach House Press for several years, and is now the editor of the Canadian literary magazine *Brick*.

A previous play, *Building Jerusalem*, won the Dora Award for Best New Play, the Chalmers Award, and was nominated for the Governor General's Award for Drama. *Goodness* won the Carol Tambor award, awarding the production – named Best of the Edinburgh Fringe – a production in Manhattan. Mr. Redhill has also won numerous other awards for his poetry and fiction.

## Some of the Issues Raised in This Play:

- Human rights, justice and world issues
- The toll of genocide
- How can those responsible for atrocities be held accountable, and how can we all be accountable for our own actions
- The power of forgiveness
- The influence of words versus actions
- How basically good people can end up doing horrible things

## Play Etiquette

When young people attend a live theatrical performance for the first time, they often come into the theatre without the understanding how different it is from watching TV or a movie – that as well as the audience can hear the performers, the performers can hear the audience!

### **Please remind your students that:**

- The actors would appreciate a quiet audience – that means no talking, eating or drinking, which is distracting not only for the actors, but also for the rest of the audience members in a small theatre like PTE.
- Cell phones must be turned off – even if the ringer is silent, the light from phone screens during texting and other functions is really disruptive and distracting. Imagine waving a flashlight around in a darkened room!
- They need to remain in their seats once the play has started – there will be an intermission for bathroom and cell phone breaks.
- Once the play has started, latecomers will not be admitted. If someone leaves during the show, they will not be able to get back into the theatre.

## Active Viewing

To make the most out of watching this live performance, please encourage your students to not only watch the play for the story, but to also pay attention to the set, costumes, music and lighting. These aspects are an important part of a live performance and will enhance later discussions about the play and the students' experience watching it.

## After the Show

The actors invite the student audience to remain seated – they will come back onto the stage to answer questions about the play, and about acting in general.

## A Message from the Director, Ross Manson

This project began seven years ago with a research trip to Princeton University's Philosophy department. I spoke with some brilliant thinkers about the state of morality in the present moment. I gathered a great deal of information, but had no clear idea of how to approach this material dramatically. My friend, writer Michael Redhill, supplied the missing piece: a story idea that had been in his head for years, but had not yet found the right project in which to settle. *Goodness* became that project. We have since taken this play to Edinburgh, Helsinki, New York and Vancouver, with the help of many people: actors, donors, theatre technicians, producers, festivals, foundations, arts councils, journalists, volunteers, other theatres (especially the Tarragon, which deserves a special thank you for its unswerving support), and citizens. Many hands make a play a success. But because this play has had the luxury of many incarnations, with each city visited we have also had the opportunity to take what we have learned from the last audience, and hone our work for the next one. So the version of the show you are now seeing has benefited from the input of many people such as yourselves. We're thankful for all of this.

In addition to our 2009 Toronto run, we also traveled at the behest of founding Artistic Director Odile Gakire Katese to her extraordinary Festival Arts Azimuts in Rwanda in October of 2009. It is a small gesture for a group of Canadian theatre workers, supported by the generosity of many ordinary Canadian and US supporters, to travel to a land our countries collectively turned their backs on 15 years ago. I hope that, however small, it was a welcome gesture. Art is a candle that lets us peer safely into darkness, and it is one best shared. We humbly offer it in such a spirit. Genocide, as we have all learned, knows no boundaries of race, culture or epoch. Why is this so? We don't know. But as one of the Western chroniclers of the events in Rwanda in 1994, Philip Gourevitch, says, "The best reason I have come up with for looking closely into (these) stories is that ignoring them makes me even more uncomfortable about existence, and my place in it."

*To learn more about the trip to Rwanda, check out the blog at [volcanoinrwanda.blogspot.com](http://volcanoinrwanda.blogspot.com).*

## Music Director's Notes

The music used throughout the play is based on traditional folk songs from as far north as the Ukraine, and as far south as Zimbabwe, with a variety of stops throughout Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Africa. The themes of the songs run the gamut from love and loss to praise and celebration, however, there is no such thing as an innocent folk song: context can profoundly change the meaning of the simplest words. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of Waleed Abdulhamid, Kitka Women's Vocal Ensemble, Teddy Masuku, Mariana Sadowska and Sarah Sanford, who shared a number of these songs with us during the workshop process.

## A Message from PTE's Artistic Director, Robert Metcalfe

We are incredibly lucky to live in a country where we've been spared from the madness of civil war, or any descent into a type of tribal thinking which can lead to unimaginable horrors. We like to believe that we're immune, that we're too rational and too decent, but history is full of decent people perpetrating unspeakable cruelty on their neighbours, once those neighbours are identified as 'the other.' In order to strive to remain decent, we need to accept that all of us have the capacity for darkness and for light.

Art in general, and theatre in particular, articulates the common experience of being human. Everyone who has seen *Goodness*, whether in Vancouver, Toronto, or Rwanda, has reacted to it as an individual, through the filter of their own experience, but understood its core humanity from deep within. I hope that you watch with an open heart.

## About Volcano

*Goodness* is a Volcano production, presented by Prairie Theatre Exchange.

Volcano is an award-winning, internationally acclaimed experimental theatre company, based in Toronto, founded by Ross Manson in 1994.

Volcano is a theatre of ideas: ideas regarding formal experimentation; ideas regarding subject matter relevant to today's world. Volcano strives to bring modernity to the stage through an exploration of trends in world theatre practice and of all the ingredients that make up the human condition right now – the personal, the political, the ineffable – in short, all the currents present in modern day society, around the world, and next door.



## Pre-Show Group Discussion Topics

- Discuss the terms 'ethnic cleansing' and 'genocide'. Often, the Holocaust will be brought up, but what about more recent examples? Do Yugoslavia, Sudan, or Rwanda come up in the discussion? What do we know about what has happened in these countries?
- "The pen is mightier than the sword". Many of us have heard the saying, but how do we describe what it means? Most take it to mean that using words is better than resorting to violence, but can it also be construed that words can be more deadly, more powerful?
- Sometimes, a war criminal will be discovered decades after their crimes were committed. Is there a point where lenience should be shown for these past crimes? Should someone old or infirm still stand trial just as if the crimes had been committed yesterday?
- Ask students if they've ever been faced with a difficult choice of forgiving someone who has wronged them. Did they choose to forgive? If so, what are the redeeming elements of forgiveness, both for the victim and the offender? If not, why was forgiveness not the answer? Pose a hypothetical situation to students, where they would have to decide to forgive or not to forgive.

## Pre-Show Activity - Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful method of sharing our past, our culture, or even just our voice. Give students the opportunity to use this powerful community-building form of communication. First, a safe environment in which to share stories, however brief, must be created. Then, an example by the teacher is often helpful. These can be personal stories or stories that the students find and bring to class. A circle, in which there is no stage or main focal point and all are equal, is optimal for this activity.

## Post-Show Activities

### Psychology/Drama

How can ordinary people get caught up in the mob mentality to the point where they will do horrendous things to other people?

Jane Elliott: Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes Experiment  
Ron Jones: The Wave.

These two examples of teachers experimenting with role-playing and the ability to influence behaviour in the classroom are very relevant to the themes in *Goodness*. Look at one of both of these examples, and discuss what factors influence the behaviour of the students involved, or consider involving your students in a similar exercise. Related topics include power, bias, leadership, and conformity.

(See [www.janeelliott.com](http://www.janeelliott.com) for more on the Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes experiment, and [www.thewave.tk](http://www.thewave.tk) for more info and the 1981 film version of Ron Jones' 1967 classroom experiment, as written in the short story *Take As Directed*).

### English/World Issues

- **Research Project** – Human Rights. Human rights are defined as *basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled*. Ask students to choose and research a current human rights issue that a particular segment of the population is dealing with, somewhere in the world. Ask them to answer the following questions as part of their research:
  - Where is this struggle taking place?
  - What is the fundamental issue at hand?
  - Who are the people most affected by this human rights infringement?
  - How long has this problem existed? Is it ongoing or newly being addressed?
  - Is there progress being made?
  - Are the people responsible for restricting these rights and freedoms just following orders? Are they personally responsible for their actions when they act under their governments' jurisdiction?

This can be done as an internet research project, or, if available, magazines and news articles as well as recent books can be used. See examples below.

*-A recent article in the Winnipeg Free Press told of a 16 year-old girl in Sudan who was taken out of a market by police and lashed 50 times because she was wearing a skirt above her ankles.*

*-John Demjanjuk is currently on trial again for his actions as a prison guard at Nazi death camps during WWII. Find out more about this on Wikipedia, and at [www.holocaustresearchproject.org](http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org).*

## Post-Show Activities

### English/World Issues (cont'd)

- **Debate** - Plan and carry out a debate, given the topic “the pen is mightier than the sword”. In the Parliamentary style of debating, there are two people arguing for the resolution, and two arguing against it. There is time to prepare, examples are found and cited in the argument, and there are rules to follow regarding length and content. Have the class prepare their arguments in groups of 2, and get the class involved in the judging. How much these rules are adhered to is at the discretion of the teacher. *For more structure regarding Parliamentary debates, for educators interested in more about debating, or for a judge’s sheet visit [www.sjr.mb.ca/debate](http://www.sjr.mb.ca/debate) for the website of the Manitoba Association of Speech and Debating.*

### English

- Poetry – *Newspaper Poem*. Give students an article from a newspaper or magazine that addresses the past or present atrocities in a specific country. Ask them to circle words in the article that they deem to be the ‘most important’, be they descriptive words, facts, etc. Once this step is completed, ask that they take those words and copy them onto a separate piece of paper. Lastly, ask them to arrange the words they chose into a poem that, in turn, will reflect their own take on the issue at hand. Suggest that certain words can be repeated if desired.

### English/Drama

- Playwriting Activity – Look at a play and discuss how plays are structured (stage directions, dialogue, etc.) Also, discuss how *Goodness* used only 6 actors to play all the roles. Why might this have been done? If you were writing about your own life experiences, as the character of Michael does, what would you write about? Who would be in the play? Try writing a short scene where you are one of the main characters, and it is based (even loosely) on a past event in your life.

### Drama

- Monologue – “*It wasn’t my fault this happened, was it?*” Think of a situation where someone could be blamed for an event that they were not necessarily *physically* responsible for (ie. I give my car keys to an intoxicated friend, and the friend dies in a car crash.) Write from this person’s perspective as they break down the argument as to whether they are to blame, how they feel, etc.

## Further Reading

### **Plays**

Redhill, Michael, *Building Jerusalem*, Playwrights Union Canada, Toronto, 2001.

Redhill, Michael, *Goodness*, Coach House Books, Toronto, 2005.

### **Fiction**

Redhill, Michael, *Martin Sloane*, Doubleday Canada, Toronto, 2001.

### **Drama Books**

Hajidiacos, Demetra, *Acting Alone: A Drama Teacher's Monologue Survival Kit*, J. Gordon Shillingford Pub., Winnipeg, 2006.

Pura, Talia, *Stages: Creative Ideas for Teaching Drama*, J. Gordon Shillingford Pub., Winnipeg, 2002.

Wagner, Betty Jane, *Dorothy Heathcote – Drama as a Learning Medium*, Revised Edition, Calendar Island Publishers, 1999.