



## CULTURE STORM

1277 Bloor Street West  
Toronto, ON M6H1N7  
[www.culturestorm.ca](http://www.culturestorm.ca)  
[heather@culturestorm.ca](mailto:heather@culturestorm.ca)

### ARTIST STATEMENT FOR *STITCH* BY CLIFF CARDINAL

I started writing *Stitch* when I was 22. I was living in a roach infested basement. There was no natural light- I wrote under fluorescence. I shared the apartment with a prostitute who paid me \$10/trick to rent the bedroom. I'd be writing late at night or early in the morning, get a knock at the door, and have to walk around outside for fifteen minutes and write in a notebook. Imagine following a mascara-d stranger into a dank basement and seeing cheerful, little me making myself scarce, skittering out like one of the roaches: "have a nice time."

Then I'd come back and write until I had to go to work for a special event company. I barely ate, just smoked.

*Stitch* came from a dream that my mother had. The form was influenced by The Video Cabaret, Linda Griffith's *Baby Finger*, and Daniel Brooks and Daniel MacIvor's *Monster*. Also I was reading a lot of Hubert Selby Jr., Chuck Palahniuk, and Irvine Welsh.

I was just beginning to write me. What scared and turned me on. I was beginning to write what embarrassed me.

At the time my sister was doing some acting and I thought about how great it would be to create a role for her that was dynamic and challenging. I switched to the first person and I found my voice.

Looking back, I know why I'm a writer. No writer enjoys writing- don't tell me it's fun. Acting is fun; writing is very, very difficult work. It happens because you're compelled. I know why I'm compelled.

It's mommy issues. My mom is an actor. She traveled around a lot. And she was consistently underused and misrepresented in the work she was doing. She fought hard for years for incremental changes in the way we tell stories. Her work is still felt. But still, she was stressed out a lot. She traveled and worked so hard for so little- a lot of the time doing stuff that didn't deserve her. But the one thing that made her happiest, the one thing that made her walk on air: was when she'd been working on good writing.

I wanted to write something that would show everyone the power I see in my mom and my sister.

So I wrote the draft. It was messy and heartbroken. I loved it. Then I decided to burn it. You know, to punish a sick world by keeping it from my beautiful work. Only ego got the best of me. I thought about some writers who I badly wanted to think I was cool. I shared the script. One of them, Leanna Brodie, saw the value in it as a piece of theatre. She introduced me to a few dramaturges. From that conversation I started working with her husband, Giovanni Sy.

Giovanni has been a really engaging and generous collaborator. His eye for detail and specificity is razor-sharp. I think he was an engineer before, you can tell by the clarity of his perspective; but he's also a big, warm soul. The kind of guy you'd love to make a porno with.

Andy Moro has been a hero of mine since I was fifteen. Anyone who knows me knows I'm a total VideoCab groupie. Also the play *Monster* completely detached my head from my body. I sent Andy the script like a message in a bottle. He gave a really generous read.

These two guys have been the best collaborators I could have asked for. They feel the energy of the story and continue to ask difficult questions.

We did some workshops at some places. We worked with some very talented performers and we learned a lot. We met Cara Gee and were blown away- not just by her talent; but also by her empathy and understanding of the rhythms of Kylie Grandview. We won two awards at SummerWorks. Cara's a movie star now.

Then we met Heather Haynes. Heather has been doing controversial work for a long time. I think she saw *Stitch* as a piece of art on its own, outside theatre. We formed an ad hoc collective and Heather raised the money for a re-mount. We approached Native Earth about presenting in their theatre and they said they'd do it as long as they didn't have to cover the vast majority of the cost. (Yes! We're doing this!)

Since then we're really stoked that Jen Stobart came on to Stage Manage; and to have Luca Moro as composer.

Okay, casting the re-mount. Let me tell you the end of this story first:

Georgina Beatty. Exclamation point. Georgina absolutely destroyed us- and with a taped audition. Again not just with her talent, we saw a lot of talented performances, but with the way she embodied the character. I was at once excited and intimidated. I ached for her to play Kylie Grandview.

The only downside is that she's white. Okay, okay, I shouldn't say that, but there you go: I'm a racist. I'm about putting First Nations artists, particularly women, on the stage. Even though Kylie Grandview isn't First Nations I was really hoping that we'd cast a First Nations performer. But we didn't. Not this time.

Here's three reasons why it was good that we didn't: One, The art. Georgina is very well suited to the role. Both her style and aesthetic and also her experience on stage as an actor, a creator, and as a director of other projects make her an extremely potent collaborator. The production is truly blessed to be working with her. Two, *Stitch* is not about a First Nations woman, or First Nations women; it's about why Kylie Grandview tells her story. I'm a First Nations artist; but culturally specific stories aren't the only ones that compel me. I think our community's theatre should be up for our artists' explorations even if they're not culturally specific. Three, Murdered and missing women. The conversation has gained velocity since 2011. It was happening before but now the scope is being exposed and people are really fucking pissed off- and we should be. I think that casting a First Nations performer in the role of Kylie Grandview would reference a conversation that we're just not prepared to have with this play.

I've been in rehearsals for the past week. Everyone's in the room. It's a beautiful creative synergy. I am very proud to invite you to come see our offering for this summer.

Cliff Cardinal