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Why #MeToo matters for Canadian theatre

Why #MeToo matters for Canadian theatre

Audiences need to re-evaluate who they want to support

January 18, 2018

[Vishmayaa Jeyamoorthy](#)



Credit:

wikicommons

It's the age of reckoning for sexual predators in the arts.

When the first few accusations came out, I was stunned. As more and more women stepped forward, I became resigned. Then one of my favourite artists was accused of being a sexual predator and I was crushed.

My immediate — and shameful — response was to hope it wasn't true. Could my favourite artist really be an abuser?

The #MeToo movement has swept through Hollywood, and women are finally being heard as they speak out about the long history of abuse in the film and television industry. As more and more A-list celebrities step forward with their stories, we're finally seeing the conversation and action so many survivors have wished for.

This has led to many more women to step forward as well.

Earlier this month, four women in Canadian theatre — Patricia Fagan, Kristin Booth, Diana Bentley and Hannah Miller — all filed separate lawsuits seeking damages from Albert Schultz for allegedly sexually harassing and assaulting them.

Schultz was the artistic director of Toronto-based theatre company Soulpepper. Schultz was one of 12 co-founders of the company in 1998; the suits filed against him list instances of abusive behaviour from him from as early as 2000. The allegations against Schultz shook the Canadian theatre scene as deeply as the allegations against Harvey Weinstein shook Hollywood.

The timing of these allegations against Schultz is too coincidental not to be tied to the fact that across the border, the same thing is happening.

All of this is to say that when Hollywood started going after its predators, women in other industries, especially arts industries, felt they could do the same thing.

Here's why that's important.

When survivors on the Hollywood A-list come out against their abusers, it's easier for others with less privilege to do the same. When the women from Soulpepper stepped forward, students at George Brown Theatre School — one of the leading theatre schools in the country — similarly came forward with allegations against one of the school's acting teachers.

This then led to conversations about sexual assault at other theatre schools, which ties into the greater conversation of sexual assault on Canadian campuses.

If this conversation continues to gain momentum, it will lead to action. That will eventually lead to a full societal shift for all people, regardless of industry.

However, the movement can't be truly successful without the support of audiences as well. If the average audience member says that they only watch plays and films by directors who aren't sexual abusers, that will become a huge step towards creating that societal shift.

By taking into account the character and integrity of the artists and actors we choose to support, we signal that, as viewers, we'll no longer accept the separation of artists from their art. We all need to examine our own reactions to the accusations that are being levelled against our favourite artists if we want to act in support of the survivors that are stepping forward.

It can be heartbreaking to find out someone who has been an inspiration to you for so long is actually a predator.

But after that first instance of hope for your favourite artist, you need to consider the message you're sending when you continue to endorse them. Are you still advocating for an artist because you truly believe they're innocent, or because it's uncomfortable to believe they're an abuser? Or are you just unwilling to give up the art they've produced?

Would you rather support an alleged abuser or the survivor who made the allegation in the first place?

**Tags:** [Soulpepper](#)  
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