

Freeze

# Freeze



Stephen Orlov



GUERNICA  
EDITIONS

TORONTO • BUFFALO • LANCASTER (U.K.)  
2016

Copyright © 2016, Stephen Orlov and Guernica Editions Inc.

All rights reserved. The use of any part of this publication, reproduced, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise stored in a retrieval system, without the prior consent of the publisher is an infringement of the copyright law.

Michael Mirolla, general editor

David Moratto, cover and interior design

Peter Stubbs, Front Cover Photo

Guernica Editions Inc.

1569 Heritage Way, Oakville, (ON), Canada L6M 2Z7

2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, N.Y. 14150-6000 U.S.A.

[www.guernicaeditions.com](http://www.guernicaeditions.com)

Distributors:

University of Toronto Press Distribution,

5201 Dufferin Street, Toronto (ON), Canada M3H 5T8

Gazelle Book Services, White Cross Mills, High Town,

Lancaster LA1 4XS U.K.

First edition.

Printed in Canada.

Legal Deposit – Third Quarter

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2016935364

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Orlov, Stephen, author

Freeze / Stephen Orlov. -- First edition.

(Essential drama series ; 36)

A play.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-77183-068-3 (paperback).--ISBN 978-1-77183-051-5

(epub).--ISBN 978-1-77183-052-2 (mobi)

I. Title. II. Series: Drama series ; 36

PS8579.R558F74 2016 C812'.6 C2016-901529-7 C2016-901530-0

*To my wife, Karen, for inspiring me with her  
creativity and nurturing me with her love.*



# Acknowledgements



I extend my deep gratitude to former Artistic Director of the Centaur Theatre, Gordon McCall, for staging the world premiere of *Freeze* and for his insightful dramaturgy during my year as resident playwright.

I was blessed with a dream premiere cast of Tyrone Benskin, Mark Gamacho, Mary Long, Michel Perron and France Rolland. Their outstanding performances under the insightful directorship of Harry Standjofski, and the exceptional work of our creative crew, supported by Gordon, GM Chuck Childs and the entire Centaur staff, collectively transformed my script on paper into a box-office hit on stage.

I greatly appreciate script feedback I've received from friends and colleagues, including dramatists Raymond Villeneuve and Norm Foster, and dramaturg Maureen Labonté for her polishing of my French-Québécois colloquialism.

I applaud Guernica Publisher Michael Mirolla for his artistic vision that promotes drama as an integral component of Canada's literary canon and for appreciating that good plays delivering compelling stories will captivate readers.

And much thanks to Canada Council for the Arts and Playwrights Guild of Canada for supporting play-readings

of scenes from *Freeze* at various theatre events and especially to PGC for its invaluable work promoting our playwrights and ensuring that our rights and royalties are respected under contract.

# Playwright's Preface



I weathered the Great Ice Storm of the Century on crutches, recovering from surgery at my power-outed cottage in Montreal's Anglo neighbourhood of Notre Dame de Grace. Living for so long without light, heat, power or transport never became a daily routine, for no one knew when it would all end. Back then in January of '98, I was a single dad parenting a daughter determined to make the most of her adolescent rebellion, and I was in the midst of a painful breakup with a girlfriend. They were trying times, but there was no room for self-pity, for we were all drawn into the same lifeboat facing the perfect storm.

Others were coping in far worse circumstances and tragically some died. But most were doing their very best to help each other out. Battery-run radio was our lifeline to the ice-coated world outside our frosted windows, and every day new stories were told of heroes on the job—Hydro linemen and health-care workers, firemen and police, ambulance and taxi drivers, neighbours and strangers—rising to the challenge. That's what kept up my spirits.

In the midst of this dark hour, I sensed that a bigger story was passing through us. It was an extraordinary moment in history, when all Québécois, no matter their

race, religion, language, birthplace or work, became “*pure laine*” to the core, as we collectively faced the wrath of nature. For the first time since I had moved to Montreal from Boston 25 years earlier, I finally felt at home. That is what inspired me to write *Freeze*.

So I chose to pen an allegorical comedy that depicts the historic Ice Storm as a metaphor presaging “cooler” more inclusive times in Québec compared to the separatist firestorms of earlier decades. Now, nearly twenty years later, that vision has been validated.

My goal was to capture with stylized humour the drama and the camaraderie that friends, families and strangers experienced together. But how to project on-stage the intimacy of a big city and warmth of heart that so many felt despite no heat?

The plot? Five quirky characters, a dysfunctional mélange of Québécois from diverse backgrounds, get trapped together overnight, butting heads by candlelight over love, language and politics, as the raging storm forces them to unwittingly bond. And perhaps for the first time on Canadian stage race was never raised as an issue in the relationship of a black and white romantic couple.

My hope is that this story, published on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Ice Storm of ‘98, will provoke you to ponder with hits of laughter whether the “two solitudes” of Montreal’s past has become a stereotype in this new 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Stephen Orlov, Montréal, 2016*





*Freeze* is set in Montréal in January of 1998, during the worst evening of the Great Ice Storm of the Century.

This two-act allegorical comedy  
requires a cast of five actors.

THE CHARACTERS (in order of appearance):

**NICOLE GAGNON**

A savvy 39-year-old award-winning journalist at Québec's main pro-sovereignty newspaper, *Le Devoir*.

**MICKEY BRENNAN**

A street-smart 50-year-old handyman from Montréal's Irish working-class neighbourhood of Pointe-Saint-Charles.

**CURTIS BROCK**

A passionate 40-year-old African-Canadian jazz musician, who twenty years earlier had left Montréal's neighbourhood of Little Burgundy for a career in Toronto.

**RÉJEAN CHARTRAND**

A husky 33-year-old Hydro-Québec lineman from Laval.

**CLAIRE PERKINS**

A bubbly, horny 70-year-old widow,  
a tenant in the upper duplex.



## Notes on a Set



The play takes place in the lower duplex of NICOLE GAGNON. A long ice-coated branch stretches along the outdoor roof line above. An open living room (stage right) / dining room (stage left) area is furnished in traditional Québec pine antiques. The front door (stage right) opens to a vestibule area with a coat closet. A swinging door (stage left) opens to the off-stage kitchen and back porch. A large bay window on the back wall is sandwiched between a china cabinet (upstage right) and a bookshelf (upstage left) stacked tightly with books, journals and an unlit stereo system. A battery-powered boom box ghetto blaster sits on a table near a small fish tank. An entrance way leads to an imaginary offstage back porch. An open-flue fireplace with a large decorative smoke vent hanging from above is located centre stage between a dining room set and a leather sofa and reclining chairs. The stage lighting, often filtered slightly blue, is complemented by natural candlelight.



The Centaur Theatre, Montréal,  
produced the world premiere run of *Freeze*  
from January to March of 2002.

### THE CAST

NICOLE GAGNON: *France Rolland*  
MICKEY BRENNAN: *Mark Camacho*  
CURTIS BROCK: *Tyrone Benskin*  
RÉJEAN CHARTRAND: *Michel Perron*  
CLAIRE PERKINS: *Mary Long*

### THE CREW

Director: *Harry Standjofski*  
Dramaturge: *Gordon McCall*  
Set and Costume Designer: *Guido Tondino*  
Assistant Designer: *Victoria Zimski*  
Light Designer: *Luc Prairie*  
Sound Designer: *Howard Mendelsohn*  
Stage Manager: *Wendy Rockburn*  
Apprentice Stage Manager: *Daveen Garland*



# Act I, Scene 1



About 5:30 in the afternoon. The play opens in the dark to the loud sound of a slow water drip. A howling wind blows and freezing rain patters on a roof, as spinner lights bounce off the theatre walls, revealing frosted tree branches nestled across a cool blue-lit sky line of ice-coated roof tops that envelopes the dimmed interior set below. A slide montage of scenes of the 1998 ice storm in Quebec flash across a horizontal screen above the set, as the outdoor sounds of salt trucks and snow blowers, sirens, spinning wheels and engines not turning over, ambulances and police cruisers, a transformer blowout and sparks of downed power lines cross fade into the indoor sounds of a crackling fire and a whistling kettle. Spotlight on an unplugged battery-powered ghetto blaster that broadcasts static-laced radio storm bulletins, alternating in English and French, and then cross dubs to an interview with an old farmer, as lights rise on NICOLE GAGNON in the double salon of her lower duplex. NICOLE, wearing a fur coat, hat and fur slippers, enters with a lit candle. SHE tries in vain to cut a log into kindling with a cleaver.

RADIO (guest): Once you got the foil on the spoon, I use Reynolds Wrap myself, it's thicker than those no-namers. You just sit your egg on the spoon, table spoon, not a tea spoon, eh? Something about the shape. Add a few drops of water, not much. And you just keep it there, on top of that flame for a good five minutes. Not in the flame, on top of the flame. Turn it once or twice. Of course, if it's a small egg, knock off thirty seconds or it'll end up hard boiled, eh?

**NICOLE taps her fish aquarium and then feels the freezing water.**

NICOLE: (*overlaps with the radio report*) *Allo Tiger Boy! Comment ça va? Oh!! Il fait froid!! Attends!*

**NICOLE exits.**

RADIO (host): Fascinating. Well, Mr. Jenkins, I can't speak for all three million Québécois now shivering without power, but I'm sure most of our listeners across the province appreciate your recipe tip. (*pause*) Mr. Jenkins? (*static*) It appears that we lost Mr. Jenkins.

**NICOLE, a toothbrush in her mouth, enters holding a frozen tube of toothpaste in one hand and a bowl full of water in the other. SHE carefully scoops up a tropical fish from the tank and places it in the bowl.**

NICOLE: (*overlaps with the radio*) *Eh Tiger Boy, Viens ... viens ici. Ça, c'est un bon garçon.*

RADIO (host): It's day five of what many are now calling "the storm of the century." Once again Québec is being pounded by another wave of freezing rain, and Environment Canada's latest emergency bulletin predicts no end in sight. Over 400 emergency shelters have been set up across the province. Most bridges to Montréal are closed, 46 regional highways shut down. Grocers report short supplies, as people are stocking up on canned food, bottled water and candles. Police are warning people to stay off the roads. So please folks, play it safe, stay at home. And now on a more upbeat note, let's play a song that's sure to cheer you up. Here's her latest.

**A song like "My Heart Will Go On," Céline Dion's hit from the movie, *Titanic*, plays. NICOLE feeds the fish.**

NICOLE: *Oui, il fait froid. Eh, Tiger Boy, t'es un grand garçon, oui. Et t'as très faim? Mmm, c'est bon.*

**The house phone rings.**

NICOLE: *Oui, allô? ... Curtis! Attends! (clicks off the radio with a remote) Where are you?! ... Oh, you'll be here any minute ... it's that bad? ...Yes, I told you it's an icebox in here ...We could have survived another week apart, you didn't need to risk ... Oh, you know I do ... *Moi aussi ... Oui ... Take it slow, especially down the hill ... Be careful! ...Okay, à bientôt.**

**NICOLE hangs up and tries to open the frozen toothpaste tube with her teeth. She whacks it on**

**the side of the table, and then takes a cork screw to it as there's a knock on the door.**

NICOLE: Oh Curtis! Did you lose your keys? *Attendez une seconde! J'arrive!*

**SHE quickly slips into her heels and shivers as she yanks off her fur coat, revealing a sexy dress. SHE checks her hair on the run and swings open the door.**

NICOLE: Oh, *mon Dieu!*

MICKEY: I'm afraid not, *madame*. The name's Brennan, Mickey Brennan.

NICOLE: *Bonsoir. Est-ce qu'il ya un problème?*

MICKEY: Me? I have no problem, thanks. But you might have one. You mind if I step in? It's nasty out there.

NICOLE: I'm sorry, but—

**MICKEY steps in and shakes the ice off his tuque.**

MICKEY: That's okay. Christ, it's hailing bullets out there. You need a crash helmet, eh?

NICOLE: *Monsieur*, I did not invite you in. But now that you are here, you can tell me why you rang my bell.

MICKEY: Wood, you need some?

NICOLE: Would I need some what?

MICKEY: Wood, firewood. Do you need any?

NICOLE: Ahhh, firewood. Do you have kindling?

MICKEY: Free kindling, every cord.

NICOLE: (*puts her coat back on*) You're in luck, I ran out of kindling last night, and so did two *dépanneurs* and three gas stations. *Bon*, I'll buy two bags now and perhaps a cord next week?

MICKEY: Next week? You better ask the storm that question, we travel together. Business partners, you might say. (*nods at a few logs by the fireplace*) That's all you got?

NICOLE: I have enough for tonight.

MICKEY: You have enough for two hours.

NICOLE: There is more in the back, so—

MICKEY: What, half a cord?

NICOLE: You checked?

MICKEY: (*slips off his boots*) In this neighborhood? That's about average. You mind? (NICOLE *waves him in to check the logs*) No wonder you need kindling, these logs are greener than clover. You smell that sap?



NICOLE: I am expecting a dear friend very soon. Just the kindling please—*combien?*

MICKEY: I'm sure you and your dear friend want to cozy up in front of a nice warm fire, but no cord, no kindling. Sorry, union rules.

NICOLE: Union? What union?

MICKEY: You're looking at it.

NICOLE: (*points*) *Monsieur*, you are—

MICKEY: (*shakes her hand*) Mickey.

NICOLE: Your wood, is it dry?

MICKEY: Year and a half, all sugar maple, 100%.

NICOLE: How much for a cord?

MICKEY: (*checks out the expensive decor of the room*) Tonight ... mid-winter special ... 200.

NICOLE: *Deux cents!* I pay 75.

MICKEY: Not tonight. Half the city needs firewood tonight.

NICOLE: *Comme vous êtes gentil.*

MICKEY: Anything to help out the community.

NICOLE: *D'accord. Je vais prendre la moitié.*

MICKEY: That'll be 150.

NICOLE: You said 200 a cord.

MICKEY: That's right, half is one-fifty.

NICOLE: That's wrong, half is one hundred.

MICKEY: Plus the kindling.

NICOLE: The kindling's free.

MICKEY: With a full cord. Who knows how long this storm will last.

NICOLE: Okay, one cord, stack it on the back porch.

MICKEY: Stacked? 250, and that's a bargain on a night like this. Car keys? (NICOLE *hesitates*) Look, we got a basic logistical problem here. That's a hell of a long narrow driveway you got and damn slippery to boot. So I gotta move my truck up to your back porch but that red Jetta of yours, it's in the way. Now either I move that redhead into the garage at the end of your driveway or I stack that cord on your front steps.

NICOLE: Okay, I'll pay you—

MICKEY: Cash.

NICOLE: (*hands him her car keys*) Cash, when you're done.

MICKEY: Tax free, of course. No need to tip the big boys in Québec City, eh?

NICOLE: Or Ottawa.

**MICKEY checks out the fireplace.**

MICKEY: You dipped into your cookie jar for this baby, eh? That's no Reno Depot job. (*checks up the flue and her dress*) Skirt's a bit tight, but she's a looker. Christ, you haven't cleaned her out in a while, eh?

NICOLE: *Monsieur?* The bag of kindling? I need to light my fire.

**MICKEY whips out a hatchet from his holster, provoking NICOLE to do a double take.**

MICKEY: Oh, I'll light her up for you. Looks like you could use a bit of warming up.

**MICKEY splits some kindling.**

NICOLE: Do you light a fire for all of your customers?

MICKEY: The pretty ones, just the women, eh?

NICOLE: And pretty men, they don't get your full service?

MICKEY: Most men I know want to light their own fire. But don't get me wrong, I got nothing against, uh, what do ya call it there ... alternative lifestyles? Some people like vanilla ice cream, others prefer chocolate.

NICOLE: And your preference?

MICKEY: Me? Chocolate chip.

NICOLE: Ah, so you're bi-sexual?

MICKEY: No, I just like chocolate chip ice cream. My favourite, always has been. My sister, on the other hand, she goes both ways. My sister-in-law, to be more specific.

NICOLE: Your sister does it with your sister-in-law?

MICKEY: No, my sister-in-law, she does it both ways, herself. Not with herself, I mean with someone else. Well, maybe with herself, too, I wouldn't know, I never asked. But not with my sister. I don't have a sister. Actually, she's my ex-sister-in-law. Damn good mother, though. Newspaper? (NICOLE *checks her watch*) Oh, this won't take more than a minute. You can time me if you want. I work best under pressure, that's—

**NICOLE opens the closet and a knee-high pile of newspapers tumble out.**

MICKEY: Jesus! You lost your recycling bin, did ya?

NICOLE: The plague of a journalist.

**MICKEY looks her over, as she bends for the newspapers.**

MICKEY: A journalist, eh?

NICOLE: I write for *Le Devoir*. I suppose you read the Gazette?

MICKEY: (*sets up the kindling*) No, I talk.

NICOLE: You talk? Who do you talk to?

MICKEY: Friends ... the boys down at Hurley's, they say what's on their minds.

NICOLE: And journalists don't write what's on their minds?

MICKEY: Of course not. You write what's on other peoples' minds. That's your job.

NICOLE: Our job is to offer the public an independent voice about the issues that matter.

MICKEY: An independent voice, you say?

NICOLE: Independent from the celebrities, the politicians, the power brokers. Are all of your friends down at Hurley's so skeptical?

MICKEY: Jesus, you ask a lot of questions. I feel like I'm being interviewed here. Tell me something, when you write those articles of yours for *Le Devoir*, how many times you write them?

NICOLE: How many times?

MICKEY: How many times you do over your article? You know, rewrite it? Two? Three?

NICOLE: It depends on the subject, the deadline. One story took three months of revisions, the Cotroni case?

MICKEY: Cotroni! You took on Vic Cotroni!

NICOLE: His brother Frank. I didn't exactly put him away, he was tried in the States, but my feature was timely, lots of rewrites.

MICKEY: Old Frankie, hmmm ... me, only one, first time, every time.

NICOLE: Oh, you write?

MICKEY: No, my job is to light your fire. One match, only one. If it takes more than one, your wood is free.

NICOLE: *Si je comprends bien là ...* If you can't light that fire with one match, I don't pay for the wood?

MICKEY: *Gratuit.* Of course if I pull it off, you pay me five hundred, double or nothing.

NICOLE: Do you take VISA?

MICKEY: How about a side bet? Say ... a hundred?

NICOLE: Fifty.

MICKEY: You're on. It's a good thing you didn't go double or nothing 'cause ... Christ!

## About the Author



Stephen Orlov is an award-winning Montreal playwright, whose plays have been showcased in such major theatre centres as Montreal, Chicago and London. He is co-editor of *Double Exposure: Plays of the Jewish and Palestinian Diasporas* and he has recently served on the Executive Boards of Playwrights Guild of Canada and Playwrights Canada Press.