

## Trudeau, the opera

Love him or hate him, there's a larger-than-life quality about former prime minister **Pierre Elliott Trudeau** that makes him the perfect subject for an opera---a fact that was not lost on **George Elliott Clarke**.

In 2007, the award-winning Nova Scotian poet/writer again teamed up with jazz composer **DD Jackson** (Clarke and Jackson had previously worked together to create an opera called *Quebecite*). The pair was awarded a commission by Toronto's **Harbourfront Centre** to create a work called *Trudeau: Long March/Shining Path*. The opera, based on Trudeau's triumphs, tragedies and passions during the '60s and '70s, was presented in a recital version in TO that year, and is now having its world premiere as a fully staged opera in Halifax.

Vocalypse Productions' **Janice Jackson** has taken on the dual roles of producer and performer with *Trudeau*. She plays Margaret Trudeau from her first meeting in Tahiti with her future husband through to the breakdown of their marriage. While some actors might find it difficult to portray a living person, Jackson says the material makes the role simply come alive. "I get my cues from the music and the text," she explains over coffee on the Halifax waterfront. "My responsibility is to go from what George gave us and what DD gave us, and to draw on my memories of what it's like to be a bouncy, energetic, flirtatious young girl."

Rather than aiming to be an accurate historical account of the politician's career, Clarke has used poetic licence to create a kind of portrait of the controversial former prime minister. He has fictionalized Trudeau's life journey and imagined what went on during his meetings with world leaders such as Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, John F. Kennedy and Nelson Mandela. "One of the really great things about George's portrait of Trudeau is that he shows him as a real man rather than some kind of idol," says Jackson. "It's not a work of hero-worship, but a chance to see a great man with all his failures, faults and successes."

*Trudeau* is billed as a jazz opera, but Jackson says that DD Jackson has infused it with many types of music. "The score really has something for everyone. There's jazz, big band and classical and it definitely incorporates harmony and rhythms from other cultures. There's even some rock and roll."

Slipping on her producer's hat, Jackson predicts that tickets to this show are going to go fast. "Six performances is pretty standard for opera, just because of the physical demands on the performers. But that means there isn't a lot of time to catch this sexy, sensual, playful work." —Kate Watson, The Coast, Halifax, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010