

 **CENTAUR  
THEATRE** SEASON  
2022-23

# AT THE BEGINNING OF TIME



**By Steve Galluccio**  
February 21 - March 12, 2023

## Theatre Study Guide

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## About the Playwright – Steve Galluccio



Steve Galluccio is a Canadian playwright and screenwriter. Born and raised in Montreal, Quebec to immigrant Italian parents, Galluccio went on to study translation at Concordia University in Montreal. His first play, “My Mom was on the Radio”, premiered at the Quebec Drama Festival in 1990, but Galluccio’s most well-known play is *Mambo Italiano*, a semi-autobiographical comedy about a young man who comes out as gay to his Italian-Canadian family. The play was the most successful and popular production in the Centaur Theatre’s history and was turned into a film in 2003, directed by Émile Gaudreault. Galluccio is also a two-time Genie Award winner, recognized for his work in the *Mambo Italiano* and *Funkytown* movies.

His latest play, *At the Beginning of Time*, received an online reading from the Centaur Theatre in 2020 during the COVID 19 pandemic and is partly based on the challenges and experiences he faced after his husband died of Alzheimer’s disease in 2022.

### A note from the author

“*At the Beginning of Time* is my most personal play since *Mambo Italiano*. It seems only fitting that 20-some-odd years later I am back at Centaur to share this new chapter. In 2018 my life exploded, and I was forced to re-imagine my existence. I was a gay man in my late 50s who thought his life was settled. Overnight I found myself at the beginning of time, in a new chapter, in a new world, and a new reality. New beginnings are frightening and overwhelming, but if you surrender to the journey, the destination will ultimately be... spectacular. Thank you, Centaur Theatre, for taking my broken heart and turning it into art. Theatre, much like time, heals all wounds.”

– Steve Galluccio

### Theatre Etiquette

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To ensure an enjoyable, safe, and respectful experience for the audience as well as the performers we ask that you refrain from using your phone, talking to others, and being disruptive during the performance. We also ask that before and after the show, when circulating in the theatre, you treat other audience members, staff, and the physical environment with respect.

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## Synopsis

*An autobiographical story of a gay man in his late 50's who thought his life was settled only to be thrown into a new world where he has to reimagine everything...*

Upon returning from a trip to an all-inclusive Mexican resort, Michael, 59, is hospitalized after suffering an acute prostatitis infection which almost sends him into kidney failure. In the hospital emergency room, his nurse Nella, recognizes him from their high school days, and they begin to reminisce about their shared acquaintances from the Italian Montreal community. While in hospital, Michael is visited by his two life-long friends, Lou and Pat. With nothing to do but reminisce, the three men listen to music from David Bowie, the Village People and Blondie and transport themselves back to the days of adolescent self-discovery, Sunday family dinners, New York City at the height of the AIDS epidemic and other important milestones in their lives.

## Characters



**Michael:** performed by Richard Jutras

**Pat (Patrizio):** performed by Stephen Lawson

**Lou (Luigi):** performed by Michael Miranda

**Nella:** performed by Nadia Verrucci

Mentioned characters not portrayed:

**David:** Michael's boyfriend

**John:** Michael's husband

**Phillip:** Pat's late partner

## Themes

Life and death

Dealing with loss

Sexuality and society

Identity and Belonging

Music evoking the past

## Vocabulary – Part 1

Match the vocabulary term with its appropriate definition.

### Definitions:

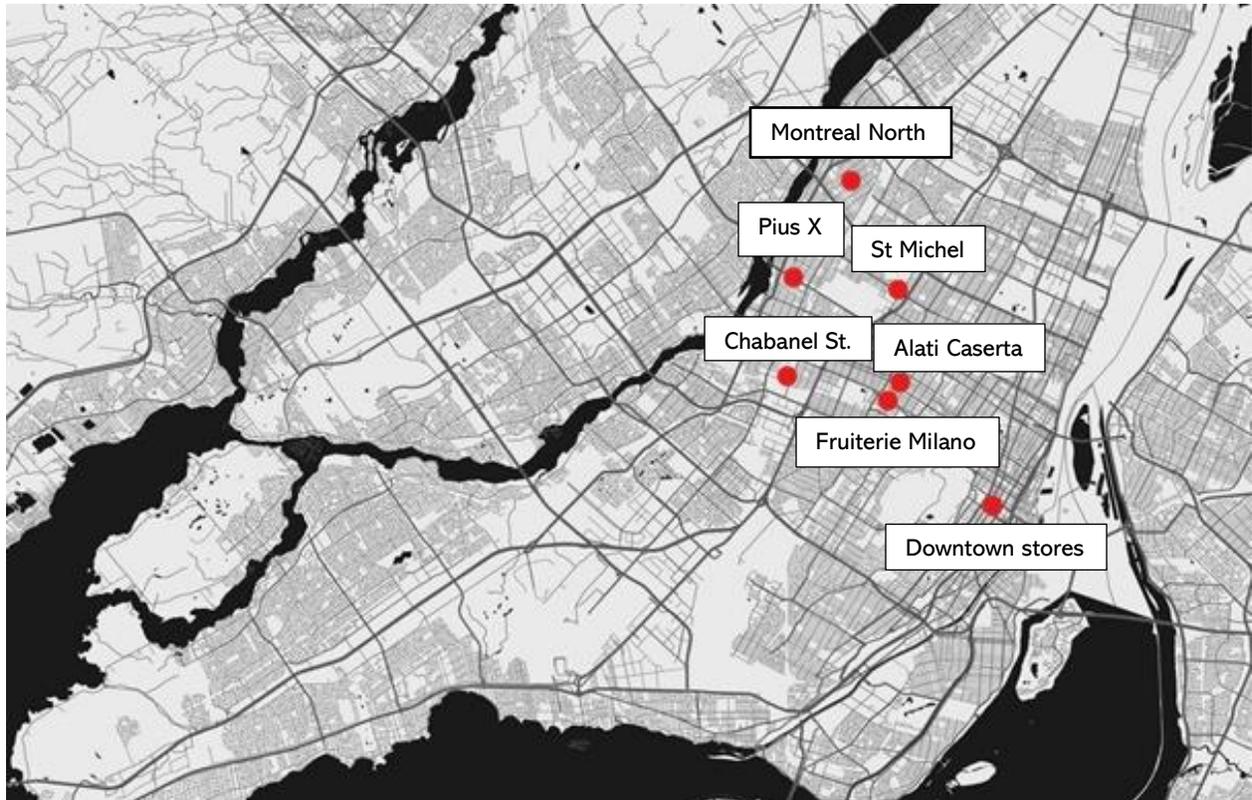
1. \_\_\_\_\_ : of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth
2. \_\_\_\_\_ : of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity differs from the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth
3. \_\_\_\_\_ : of, relating to, or characterized by sexual or romantic attraction that is not limited to people of a particular gender identity or sexual orientation
4. \_\_\_\_\_ : a division into two groups or classes that are considered diametrically opposite
5. \_\_\_\_\_ : usually a progressive condition, marked by the development of multiple cognitive deficits, such as memory impairment, aphasia, and the inability to plan and initiate complex behaviour.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ : a degenerative brain disease of unknown cause that usually starts in late middle age or in old age, that results in progressive memory loss, impaired thinking, disorientation, and changes in personality and mood, and that is marked histologically by the degeneration of brain neurons.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ : either of two retroviruses that infect and destroy helper T cells of the immune system causing the marked reduction in their numbers,
8. \_\_\_\_\_ : fashion that is strikingly outrageous; related to popular music that is less raw than punk rock and typically including unconventional melodies and quirky lyrics

**Terms:** Pansexual - Alzheimer's – Trans - New Wave – HIV – Cisgender – Binary - Dementia

\*all definitions from Merriam-Webster.com

## Vocabulary Part 2 – Montreal Glossary

The play references many historic spots in Montreal, some that still exist to this day and others that are long gone.



**Pius X:** St Pius X Comprehensive School was a former high school located in the Ahuntsic neighbourhood of Montreal. The majority of its student population was from Montreal's Italian immigrant community.

**Chabanel street:** Main street in Montreal's garment district. Many European immigrants worked in the garment district during the 60s and 70s.

**Eaton:** Canadian department store chain that was once the largest in Canada, founded by Timothy Eaton in 1869. Montreal's Eaton department store closed in 1999.

**Saint Michel:** neighborhood in Montreal in which Italian immigrants settled.

**Montreal North:** borough of Montreal, bordered to the west by Ahuntsic (where Pius is located) and to the southwest by Villeray-Saint-Michel-Parc-Extension.

**CHSLD:** Centres d'hébergement de soins de longue durée; long term care facilities in the province of Quebec (multiple locations around Montreal).

**Woolworth's:** American five-and-dime stores, several stores existed in Montreal and across Canada before being sold off to Wal-Mart in 1994.

**Milano grocery store:** Known as Fruiterie Milano, an historic grocery store in Montreal's Little Italy neighbourhood. It has served Montreal's Italian-Canadian community for 66 years in selling Italian foods and products.

**Alati:** full name, Alati Caserta, iconic pastry shop in Little Italy, located on Dante Street. Known for Italian specialist pastries, such as the Neapolitan *sfogliatelle* and the Sicilian *cannoli*.

## Pre-show Discussion Questions:

The following questions can be answered individually or in a group. If they are discussed in a group, each one will nominate one spokesperson to discuss the group's answers.

1. The play's characters reminisce a lot about growing up in the 1970s. What do you know about the 1970s in Canada, and around the world? What political movements, or cultural events do we often associate with the 70s?
2. In your teams, list as many Montreal neighbourhoods as you can; are there certain stereotypes associated with these neighbourhoods? Why is that the case? Discuss your findings with your team members.
3. The play features music that brings the characters back to a specific time and place; why do you think music can bring such evocative and important memories? List some songs that are important to you and that remind you of a specific time, or place, or person?

## Post-show Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss Nella's role in the play; what function does her character serve?
2. What is the beginning of time? Is it something religious, philosophical, spiritual or scientific?
3. How do the songs throughout the play parallel the discussions going on? Why did the author choose to use music as a catalyst for emotional conversation?
4. Michael and Lou have different opinions about social media; Facebook makes Michael feel less alone, but Lou doesn't see the need for it, telling Michael he doesn't need Facebook to understand who he is. Discuss the way social media and technology, in general, is treated in the play. Does it bring people together? Or does it create divisions?

5. Michael recognizes that some of the things they are discussing among themselves are sexist. Do you agree? What does the play say about women?
6. Death preoccupies all three of the male characters. Why do you think that is? How do their different life philosophies affect their views and sentiments on death?
7. Discuss how the men express their experiences of physical and emotional intimacy. What is the play trying to tell us about how we connect with people?

## Research Questions:

1. In the play, Michael says, *"I still think that deep down, even though we can get married now, and we're 'equal', straights believe that gay love is lesser than straight love."* Research the history of same-sex marriage and rights in Canada. Identify and explain some major changes and precedents from the last 100 years.
2. Research the impacts of the AIDS epidemic. What lasting effects did it have on the Canadian gay community? Why was the disease so misunderstood from the beginning? How do we view the illness today?
3. References are made throughout the play about the trauma experienced by Italian immigrants who left behind a war-torn Italy to resettle in Canada. Research the period immediately following World War 2; what economic, social and political factors motivated Italians to move abroad? What did they find when they came to Canada?
4. The play references music genres such as disco and new wave. Conduct some research into the history of these musical styles, major musicians and songs. Why do you think they were culturally significant decades later for the characters of the play?

## Essay Questions:

1. Compare and contrast Pat and Michael's romantic relationships. They clearly don't see eye to eye on how to come to terms with the loss of their respective partners and their grief. What do these two different examples of grief tell us?
2. Nella says, "my father would always say, look forwards, not backwards". In a play that is focused on the past and one's inability to reconcile the past with the present, why is looking forwards, "towards life" a recurring message? Which characters are following Nella's father's advice? Which ones aren't?
3. Is Michael a hero or anti-hero figure in this play? Has he succeeded in "re-booting" his life with David? Has he reached the beginning of time? Why or why not?