

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Caravan Stage Company
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Caravan Stage Company Tall Ship Theatre Banished from their Home!

The ***Caravan Stage Company***, with its tall ship, the ***Amara Zee***, was scheduled to return to Kingston, its home port, this summer. A tour of three Canadian cities have been long in the planning: Kingston, Brockville and Ste Anne de Bellevue...but now the Caravan ship and company have been banished from Canada and cannot return home.

For the past 4 decades, the Caravan has brought its own brand of colourful theatrical multi-disciplinary performances to a vast audience in Canada, the US and in Europe. The Caravan, established in 1970, is one of Canada's oldest non-profit theatre companies. The founding directors, Paul Kirby and Adriana Kelder started the Caravan to bring original contemporary theatre to popular audiences in a colourful and popular venue. The first venue was six large Caravans pulled by teams of Clydesdale horses and performing in a large tensile tent with a capacity of 800 people. For 20 years, the Caravan toured with horse and wagon along the west coast of Canada and the USA, Ontario and Florida, performed at Expo 86 and the World Stage Festival in Toronto in 1992.

In 1993 the company changed its mode of transport by building its very own nautical venue – the *Amara Zee*, a custom-built theatre ship. The ship was built to be the stage for the theatre and house the performers and theatre technicians who would then double as crew from site to site. The audiences would sit on shore watching the performance staged all over the decks and in the rigging of the 90ft *Amara Zee*.

From 1993 to 1997 the Caravan built, under the surveillance of the Canadian Marine Safety guidelines, their new touring theatre, the *Amara Zee*. In 1995, the Marine Safety tried to put a halt on the project by declaring the ship a “commercial” vessel. Marine Safety established that since the Caravan requests a fee for their shows, (which covers operational costs), hence the *Amara Zee* would be a commercial ship. The Caravan refused to accept this judgement, insisting that the *Amara Zee* was a Pleasure ship.

One day after the ship was launched in June of 1996, Transport Canada arrested the ship.

The Caravan's only recourse was to appeal to the "Court of Public Opinion"...the Media. The CBC's "Fifth Estate" did a feature called, "Arrest that Barge" in March of 1997 that brought the nation's attention to the Caravan's struggle with Transport Canada. As a result of the media stories, friends of the Caravan found a Supreme Court of Canada ruling that stated that a commercial enterprise is driven by the making of profit and non-profit organizations are by nature not commercial.

The Amara Zee was then classified a "pleasure ship" enabling the Caravan to operate without the very restrictive and expensive regulations that rule commercial vessels, while agreeing to comply with a specific set of safety standards designed for the Caravan's Amara Zee.

The Caravan has maintained these safety standards ever since. For the last 17 years, the Caravan has been touring and performing in Canada and the US (sailing all over the Eastern Seaboard, the Great Lakes, the Gulf of Mexico) and has just returned from an 8 year long tour of Europe having performed and toured in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Montenegro, Croatia and Italy, while, the rivers of Europe, the Black Sea, the Aegean, the Ionian, the Adriatic, the Straits of Sicily and the Mediterranean.

Returning to North America in July of 2013, the Caravan set up their 2014 Tour to include a return to their "Home", Kingston Ontario. En route from New Orleans to Jacksonville Florida in late March of 2014, the Caravan accidently learned that Transport Canada had changed the status of the ship without notifying the Caravan (in 2012). It took Transport Canada until June 23rd to "officially" tell the Caravan of their arbitrary and illegal (in direct contravention of the Supreme Court of Canada) decision to change the status of the Amara Zee from Pleasure Craft to Non-Pleasure (Commercial). When asked how they arrived at this "decision", Michael J Dwyer, Director of Marine Safety for Transport Canada stated: *"We looked at the Caravan website and decided that the ship was no longer a Pleasure vessel"*. The Caravan's director Paul Kirby, subsequently remarked: *"This admission by Dwyer, a man responsible for the safety of Canadian ships, is a stunning admission of an extremely dangerous, rogue authoritarian arrogance"*.

In subsequent conversations with officials of Transport Canada, the Caravan's appeals of hit stone walls and, what's more, Transport Canada has stated that the ship would not only have to undergo rigid inspections but also have the below decks accommodations subject to the rulings of another inspection and alterations...all at the expense of the Caravan. If the Caravan sailed into Canadian waters, the Amara Zee would be "arrested" (for the second time) and impounded until Transport Canada decides to set the ship free..."never".

"We have realized that this decision and continuing imposition of unjustified and unwarranted list of demands, inspections and rulings, is not just coming from these mid-level officials, it has to be coming from their "masters", the mafia goons of the Harper government", stated Paul Kirby and Adriana Kelder. Ironically, the Caravan's new show, HACKED...THE TREASURE OF THE EMPIRE, is an experimental opera exploring the machinations and criminal activities of a State Monopoly in conjunction with a Global Banking Corporate Conglomerate to suppress and incarcerate any deviant or dissenting voices. The plot has become the stuff of nightmares for the Caravan, now victims of this Canadian government's criminal machinations.

As of August 7, 2014, the Caravan has been forced to cancel its Homecoming Tour, banished from their Country of Origin. Brian Lewis, retired Lead Investigator of the Transport Safety Board, declared: *"This decision on the Caravan ship has nothing to do with the safety of the ship or crew. It is an unfounded and unwarranted declaration of war on a Canadian Cultural Icon and the only way the Caravan can continue is to register their ship in a foreign country...a flag of convenience".*

"We are now cultural refugees seeking asylum from the reckless endangerment and criminal stalking of the Government of Canada. Quite simply, they want to eliminate the voice and work of the Caravan...erase its presence and impact on the Canadian society", said Paul Kirby. *"But we will not let them stop us, we will sail on, performing our theatre all over the US, haunting them, provoking them, shinning the lights under the rocks where they hide and rule, until we can return home...as a Pleasure ship bringing freedom and inspiration back to the hearts of our fellow Canadians."*

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Links for articles NY Times & Toronto Star:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/06/nyregion/ships-reclassification-could-leave-floating-theater-group-without-venue.html>

http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/08/07/kingstonbased_floating_theatre_company_lost_amid_bureaucratic_storm.html

The Amara Zee sailing in Greece, 2009, Photo: Katerina Constantinou



The following Caravan show pictures of “Hacked, the Treasure of the Empire” were taken by Claire Sabattie:





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