Fascinated by the human fallout of war, Toronto theatre director Christopher Morris travelled to Afghanistan to assemble a team of local actors. Parwin Mustahel eagerly jumped on board. Then came a fatal and deadly knock at her family’s front door.

James Bradshaw reports

United by the theatre of war

On the outskirts of Kabul, an Afghan actor, knows the bullets underwritten by Jerry and Joan Lozinski (above, left) with dozens of others, they form the groundwork of Poppea, a collaborative theatre project being developed — in two cities, in two countries — by Christopher Morris, artistic director of company Human Carps. Morris began crafting the project early last year, aiming to examine “the long-term reverberations of war,” not only through the lens of Canadian soldiers fighting in border regions, but also of the parents, siblings and children of Pakistani soldiers fighting in border regions, and of Afghans embroiled in both sides of the conflict.

When he set out to gather those stories, he expected to hear tragic accounts of domestic strife andantic hardship and gruesome tales of war. What he did not foresee was how entwined his tales of war were with others of the same kind. He didn’t know how the tears of his comrades in arms would echo the tragedies that have reverberated in his own life.

Parwin Mushtahel (right), who escaped to Pakistan when her husband, a soldier fighting in Afghanistan, was gunned down, knows the bullets that have resonated from the war in Afghanistan and the war in her heart.

This is my profession and I love my profession. So whatever it costs, even if it costs my life, I will continue and go ahead with it.

Parwin Mushtahel

A Hollywood princess brings new life to squalid Grey Gardens

Drew Barrymore

There was a point towards the end of filming when we were doing one of the documentary scenes, and I realized that I wasn’t, like, on the verge of vomiting before we did it, and I thought, ‘Oh, this is good …’

Barrymore at the New York premiere of Grey Gardens this week.

There are two or three love stories that document the tremendous strains borne by families on both sides of the Afghan war. Written together with dozens of others, they form the groundwork of Poppea, a collaborative theatre project being developed — in two cities, in two countries — by Christopher Morris, artistic director of company Human Carps. Morris began crafting the project early last year, aiming to examine “the long-term reverberations of war,” not only through the lens of Canadian soldiers fighting in border regions, but also of the parents, siblings and children of Pakistani soldiers fighting in border regions, and of Afghans embroiled in both sides of the conflict.

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Parwin Mushtahel
Dramatic passions, deadly repercussions

FROM PAGE 1

Theatre director Morris: “That’s a generate group of energetic kids, and that will be a challenge for them to figure out their outlook. This is important stuff.”

FROM PAGE 1

Actress Mushtahel (left) with fellow actors.

FROM PAGE 1

The Globe and Mail, Saturday, April 18, 2009

Review R9

PETRAWAKH’S ROOTS

Morris, 29, was lured to Kabul by his wife, fellow actor and collaborator in the Afghan theatre, Mushtahel, who says she was determined to "do something new." In 2007, he took a leave of absence from a steady acting job in Canada to join her in her work as a "fixer" in Afghanistan. "I feel like I’ve been made to do this project," says Morris. "I’m in a play, on a stage, when I’m performing, when Mushtahel is on the stage, it’s all irrelevant. If it’s all irrelevant, it’s all relevant." He says playing a role that is completely different from his own is a "wonderful challenge." Mushtahel, too, remains determined to do the same, even though she has been forced to change her name and hide her identity due to threats to her life. "I think about the average Afghan woman," she says. "I think about the average Afghan woman who wants to pursue a career in the arts." She is a symbol of Afghanistan’s cultural life, and after the experience of working with Morris, she says she is convinced that their project will succeed. "I think the audience will love it," she says. "I think they will be interested in this project." Mushtahel’s unshakeable faith in the role theatre can play in influencing the next generation’s outlook, Morris says, is important. "It’s important stuff."