

# SCIENTIFIC AMERICANS

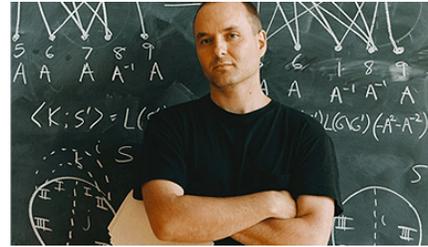


by JOHN MIGHTON

“Einstein said that the deepest sort of religious feeling is the sense of mystery, the feeling that something is shining through which you can barely grasp, but it lies behind everything. I'd like my plays to be an exploration of that mystery.”

## A PLAYGOER'S GUIDE

### about the playwright



John Mighton earned his BA in Philosophy in 1978, and in 2000 received his PhD in Mathematics from the Fields Institute for Research in Mathematical Sciences, both at the University of Toronto.

Mighton is the founder of JUMP (Junior Undiscovered Math Prodigies), and an award-winning playwright. He is currently an Adjunct Professor at the University of Toronto. He has been a volunteer with the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators and organized benefits for Oxfam. His plays include *Scientific Americans*, which won the Dora Mavor Moore award for best new play in 1988; *A Short History of Night*, which won the same award in 1989; *Possible Worlds*, which was the winner of the Governor General's Award in 1992 and was made into a film by Robert Lepage starring Tilda Swinton; and *Half Life*, which was awarded the 2005 Governor General's Award. In 2005 John Mighton was awarded the Siminovitch Prize in Theatre which is worth \$100,000. According to the prize Web site, the jury was particularly impressed by the profound combination of intellect and heart embodied in Mr. Mighton's work. "The writing represents a unique, singular and necessary worldview," the jury said. "Understated in a very positive sense, his plays are open ended and unresolved in a way that kindles and suggests possibilities. Mr. Mighton's voice possesses grace, delicacy and a gentle humanity. His line of inquiry is often shot through with a rare and fragile warmth. He also brings tremendous depth to the plays, taking complex, sophisticated ideas and making them playable in a truly theatrical manner."

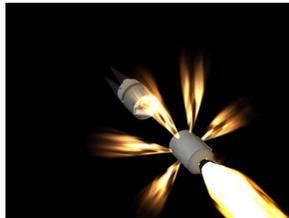
"Mr. Mighton's work takes a new direction in Canadian theatre, not by formal experimentation, but by its constantly probing nature, keeping it on the edge," jury chair Leonard McHardy says. "This playwright is a very gifted writer."

## Inspiration or perspiration?

A year after graduating from university, Mighton read a book of letters by American poet Sylvia Plath. He discovered that Plath had taught herself to write by learning everything she possibly could about poetic metre and form, and then writing dozens of imitations of poems she admired. Inspired by Plath's determination Mighton set about learning to write, and 10 years later he received a Governor General's Award for his work as a playwright. Mighton has come to the conclusion that the important qualities for learning are diligence, the love of beauty, a willingness to question conventional wisdom and a desire to make connections between things not usually found together. "Luck plays a role too," he adds. "It's the unpredictable element that changes everything." – Elke Town, *Professionally Speaking*

## Why "Scientific" Americans?

*Scientific Americans* "asks what it means if you're the person who develops a mathematical formula or computer code that eventually is used to create a missile . . . Can you disentangle yourself from that chain of events, even if you don't actually make the weapon?" It centres on a young physicist, Jim, whose relationship with his fiancée, Carol, is damaged when he goes to work for the American military. The tough questions about the connection between knowledge and violence eventually extend also to Carol, whose research in computers is not without dangerous repercussions. Although the plot focuses on weapons research . . . the play should also prompt a university audience to "think about the wider moral implications of our acquisition of knowledge." [drawn from a *CMU News* press release]



Mighton says he always felt a strong connection between the arts and sciences, believing there was an equal amount of creativity and spirituality in both realms of human endeavour. "As a child I had the idea that math was this magical language that would allow you to transcend the everyday world. I thought of it as a tool of the imagination."

"What's the best way to build a bomb? Convince your team of highly intelligent scientists that they're merely working out preliminary equations, of course. Set during the Reagan administration, John Mighton's *Scientific Americans* deals with the pressures of compromising one's moral integrity in the face of promised national advancement, and the costly effects of either result." – Lindsey Wilson, [talkinbroadway.com](http://talkinbroadway.com)

"The kind of thinking in mathematics, the creativity, the sense of pattern or poetry or resonance, is very similar to when I'm writing plays," he says. "When you understand math, you see how incredibly complex and elegant the universe is. You see the beauty of the invisible world that underlies everything."

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