

REVIEWS

Musical play starts March Break on a good note

DANIELLE BURNS
DANIELLE@QCTONLINE.COM

Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, ...? A musical about an oboe who loses his La, and uses puppet-like eyes to bring instruments to life, nearly fell apart after the lead actor had to step down due to health issues just two weeks before performances at Quebec City's Gros Becs Théâtre began.

Actor Valérie Descheneaux learned all the parts in 14 days to replace the lead role of Éloi so the show could go on! Playwright and director Philippe Robert spoke to the QCT on Feb. 20, the day of the première of *Éloi, le hautbois qui avait perdu son La* (*Éloi, the oboe who lost his La*) presented by Théâtre Advienne Que Pourra.

Robert said it was a "bit of a shocker" to lose the original actor, Florence Blain Mbaye, who is the only actor/oboist he knows. The choice was to cancel everything or find someone else. "It's a living art; we work with living people, so we have to face whatever living is (including illness)," said

Robert. The director was "so grateful," calling it "a miracle" that Descheneaux could step in and "do this remarkable job in this short period of time." Descheneaux is a musician but doesn't play the oboe. "But she knows how to make us believe." The children probably wouldn't guess she's air-playing recordings from the previous musician. "It's a little magic trick," said Robert.

The play "starts with the idea that when you hear a symphonic orchestra tuning up, the first note you hear is always the oboe, because its sound is pure, and physically it's central so everyone hears it. I had this idea of an anxious little boy, a little clumsy, and on the day of the performance he loses his La. So the whole harmony between instruments, the musical harmony, but also the human harmony, goes away." This leads Éloi the oboe on a musical journey to find his missing note, meeting other instruments on the way: the snare drum and xylophone with moving eyes, a grumpy French horn and a double bass "actress going downhill," all with their own distinct personalities.



Actor Valérie Descheneaux (right) stepped into the lead oboe role two weeks before the Gros Becs première of this very musical play.

French is a prerequisite to fully understand the play, since there's a lot of word-play and rhyming in the dialogue. "It's like poetry; the idea was to have a text that is also like music," explained Robert. Well-known pieces of orchestral music are played along with original music by composer Ludovic Bonnier

during shadow puppetry. The message overall, said Robert, is that "with human harmony, we can achieve beauty and higher things like music." The oboe on stage representing Éloi is his "old instrument shined up" even if he "didn't have the discipline" to master it. He explained the "energy is different" between a school



Musicians/actors from Philippe Robert's play take a bow: Olivier Maranda (percussion), Anne-Marie Levasseur (actor and horn), Valérie Descheneaux (Éloi the oboe) and Pierre-Alexandre Maranda (double bass).

performance (such as the 210 Grade 1 and 2 students who travelled by bus to the Gros Becs première from schools such as École Internationale de Saint-Sacrement) and a family performance. "When there are adults [in the audience] they hear the puns, the references and other levels of the text and the show at large.

I love family audiences that come during March Break."

The 45-minute harmonious play targeting kids ages four to nine (and their grownups) will be presented until March 10 at Les Gros Becs' temporary location in the Fleur de Lys shopping centre. See lesgrosbecs.qc.ca for more information.

collectif9 takes Club musical audience on an aquatic voyage

SHIRLEY NADEAU
SHIRLEY@QCTONLINE.COM

The audience at the Palais Montcalm was totally immersed in a concert entitled *Vagues et ombres / Waves and Shadows* on Feb. 16 by the collectif9 string ensemble. Literally a collection of nine musicians, the group is comprised of Chloé Chabanole, John Corban, Robert Margaryan and TJ Skinner (violins); Cynthia Blanchon and Xavier Lepage-Braut (violins); Jérémie Cloutier and Andrea Stewart (cellos); and bassist Thibault Bertin-Maghit, who is also the

group's artistic director.

The entire concert felt like a supernatural voyage under the sea. The stage lights were dim as the nonette quietly walked onstage, all dressed in pale white or beige clothing, including their shoes. They plunged themselves into the first of Claude Debussy's works, *La Mer*, arranged by Bertin-Maghit.

The intriguing program included *Contact* by Canadian-American composer Luna Pearl Woolf, which evoked the underwater sounds of belugas crying out to their calves among the noise of passing ships.

Tom Morrison's eerie *Sea Change* entirely captivated the audience's attention as the musicians drew unique and rare sounds from their instruments.

The concert ended as it began with a third excerpt from Debussy's *La Mer* and his well-known "Clair de lune."

Mere Phantoms projected images of aquatic plants and sea creatures on a large screen behind the musicians, and blue stage lighting added an underwater dimension to the concert.

This performance was part of the 2023-2024 Échos du Territoire series by the Club musical de Québec, which is



The collectif9, a nine-member string ensemble from Montreal, present their immersive concert of *Waves and Shadows* at the Palais Montcalm on Feb. 16.

dedicated to recitals and musical projects by established and emerging Quebec and

Canadian artists.

For details of upcoming concerts, visit

clubmusicaldequebec.com.

OSQ presentes Dvořák's New World Symphony

SHIRLEY NADEAU
SHIRLEY@QCTONLINE.COM

Feb. 18, was a lovely day to attend a concert by the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec at the Grand Théâtre, directed by renowned Japanese conductor Nodaka Okisawa.

The program opened with the "Moldau" movement of Czech composer Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884)'s symphonic poem *My Fatherland* which evokes the flow of the Moldau River through his country.

The program continued with award-winning French classical cellist Edgar Moreau, who played Austrian composer Erich Korngold's Cello Concerto

and Ernest Bloch's three short pieces *From Jewish Life*.

The *pièce de résistance* of the evening came after intermission.

The Symphony No. 9 in E minor, which Czech composer Antonín Dvořák subtitled "From the New World" and is now popularly known as the *New World Symphony*, was composed in 1893 while he was the director of the National Conservatory of Music of America from 1892 to 1895.

Dvořák's composition premiered in New York City in 1893 and is one of the most popular of all symphonies. Astronaut Neil Armstrong liked it so much that he took a recording of the *New World Symphony* along with him



French classical cellist Edgar Moreau and Japanese conductor Nodaka Okisawa congratulate each other after Moreau's performance with the OSQ. The orchestra alone then launched into the amazing *New World Symphony* by Antonín Dvořák.

during the Apollo 11 mission which included the first Moon landing, in 1969.

Dvořák was much influenced

by Native American music and the African-American spirituals he heard in North America. This particularly appears in the

second movement, or *Largo*, as the tune of the African-American spiritual "Steal Away" is clearly heard.

