

## Hockey Noir

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I love ambition.

Tonight I was plunged into a world completely unlike anything I've encountered in opera, and it will be replayed tomorrow. Okay, performed again I should say, even if it does feel like a hockey game at the Jane Mallet Theatre.

There are red and blue lines, boards, and lots of passion (as you can almost glimpse in this picture).



You can see a bit of the stage, although the main reason for this picture was the charming sweater of the gentleman directly in front of me.

Start with this premise:

- that we recall the rivalry between Toronto & Montreal in hockey from the era of black and white television
- that we make a kind of film noir story out of that rivalry by injecting some romance
- and it's an opera

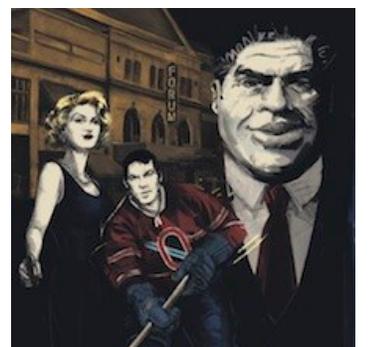
So did you get all that? They're presenting a 1950s film noir about the hockey rivalry between Toronto & Montreal. That's what I mean by ambition. You don't get much more Canadian than that, especially when it's in both official languages with splashes of Joulal.

And it's a collaboration between Continuum, Ensemble contemporain de Montreal (ECM+) and the Toronto Comic Arts Festival giving it great flair visually and aurally. It was not so much a film noir as a graphic novel, sepia images reminding me of old black and white TV hockey broadcasts. Still images or animated ones were projected onto the screen behind the live performers.

ECM+ filled Jane Mallet Theatre, a string quartet, keyboards and percussion, conducted by Veronique Lacroix. The opera is an 80 minute collaboration between librettist Cecil Castelucci (who has several graphic novels under her belt) and composer André Ristic, who has several previous commissions with ECM+, in four acts.

And like any good film noir it's narrated from the point of view of a detective, this time Detective Loiseau. I was immersed in something unlike any opera I've ever seen.

I love its ambitions even though the hockey fan in me quibbles with its anachronistic errors. For instance, "slot" and "slapshot" were words that were never heard before 1960, coined much later; and the image onscreen of a goal-crease is round... I just looked up a goal by Guy Lafleur from 1979 on youtube and



even then the crease was still rectangular.

Forgive me! I am a stickler. NB the teams in the opera can't be Leafs or Habs likely due to copyright concerns (as you can see in the picture above)



Even so this was a magical opera presentation. We were re-enacting Richard Wagner's point, from *Opera and Drama*, that opera was not a form employing music for dramatic ends, so much as a form using drama for a musical end. We were immersed in passionate singing about love and relationships and yes, sometimes about the game. Much of what we heard was marvelous, especially coupled with the sophisticated visuals. We were in no danger of mistaking this for real life because it was so stylized, surrounded by the magnificent projections.

I could be wrong but I think Quebec society & culture are more laid back, less likely to give too sh\*\*ts over what some hack writer like moi should have to say about anachronism and opera. They took their concept and ran with it, which is what we need to see more of here in Toronto. The adaptors were as bold as Mafia hitmen (yes that was in the story too), making no apologies for their eclectic mix of styles. The audience—who must be the youngest audience I've ever seen at an opera that wasn't geared for children—totally ate it up, likely because they were nerdy young graphic novel fans, entirely in their element.

It's like nothing I've ever seen, and I think that's a good thing. Continuum / ECM+ are back Friday night at 8 pm for another performance at the Jane Mallett Theatre.

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