



Catch Louis Riel,
this time at the HVT

Description

The Hudson Village Theatre extends the life of an intriguing META-winning play

Updated article

From **September 6 to 10**, the [Hudson Village Theatre \(HVT\)](#) remounts the 2016 production of **RustWerk ReFinery's LOUIS RIEL: A Comic-Strip Stage Play.**

RustWerk co-founder, **Zach Fraser**, directs his own adaptation of **Chester Brown's** seminal work, *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography*, bringing the Métis hero's story to life with simple two-dimensional black and white puppets and props, animated by five performers playing multiple roles. Any community living as a minority struggling to protect its place within a larger society will appreciate this unique and compelling tale; a rare treat for graphic novel fans, history buffs, and puppet lovers of all ages too.

First performed at Montreal's Théâtre La Chapelle, the animated retelling of Manitoba's founder, who fought to preserve his people's rights and culture, was nominated for seven Montreal English Theatre Awards and won three: Outstanding Independent Production, Outstanding New Text or Adaptation, and Outstanding Ensemble.

"A constant and endlessly inventive source of delight."
– Jim Burke, Montreal Gazette

"À new pas manquer."
– Françoise Grimaldi, Radio-Canada

LOUIS RIEL: A Comic-Strip Stage Play at **Hudson Village Theatre** from **September 6 to 10**.

Tickets: 450-458-5361, hvtbox@videotron.ca or villagetheatre.ca

The following is Byron Toben's original review of **LOUIS RIEL: A Comic-Strip Stage Play**, first performed at



Montreal's Théâtre La Chapelle.

Louis Riel: A Comic Strip Play

By **Byron Toben**

Chester Brown's best selling 2003 comic book has found new life as a puppet presentation on stage. But these aren't your 3D string marionettes or hand puppets. They are clever 2D cut-outs on sticks in the style of Brown's drawings, which were intentionally flat as in Harold Gray's popular Little Orphan Annie.

Besides heads of the key characters, there are representations of horsemen, trains and armed fighters. Under the direction of Zack Fraser, who also created the puppets, this innovation works. Original music by Tristan Capacchione serves to non-obtrusively cement the audience's attention.

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The cardboard principals are manipulated by five excellent actors in the manner of the black clad Japanese Bunraku but without the hoods so we can see who they are. Louis Riel himself is voiced by Charles Bender — and what a fine job he does. Popular META winner Cat Lemieux handles Gabriel Dumont, Riel's military colleague well, and also several other characters, as does actor and established puppeteer Anne Lalancette. Jon Lachlan Stewart (who played James Joyce in the Segal's Travesties) incarnates Riel opponents in Ottawa — John A. MacDonald and in Manitoba — John Schultz and Thomas Scott. Jimmy Blais (from Teesri Duniya's State of Denial) enlivens multitudinous crowds of settlers and combatants.





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The show, as was the graphic novel, is bilingual, depending on the characters. I would guess about 65% English.

Riel, sometimes called the most famous Canadian in history, was born in Manitoba, spent time in Montreal and the USA (where he became naturalized as a citizen) and instigated, as a last resort after unfruitful attempts at reasonable negotiations, the Red River rebellion in Manitoba and later, the North West rebellion in Saskatchewan. His tale entwines strands of ethnic cleansing, imperial land grabs, Protestant vs. Catholic enmity, railroad building, fears of U.S. expansionism and latter day messianic delusions.

The whole comprises a sort of a charming Riel for Dummies compendium, which even astute Westmount Magazine viewers, who are definitely not Dummies, would do well to view as a reminder of this key figure's influence even after his hanging in 1885.

[Click](#) to listen to [Phil Boyer's folk song](#) about Riel.

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Images: Sabrina Reeves

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Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.

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