



Me And You captures
immigrant confusion

Description

English version of French hit *Moi et L'Autre* at the MAI

By **Byron Toben**

Pronouns proliferate in play titles presented at the MAI — Me And You was preceded last month by She Said/He Said. While “You” has often been used — As You Like It (Shakespeare), You Never Can Tell (Shaw), You Can’t take it with You (Kaufman and Hart) and Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma’s Hung You in the Closet and I’m Feelin’ So Sad (Kopit) — other pronoun titles are not so frequent although an unnamed source tells me that a writer of some note is working on a drama about possible President Trump, entitled “I, I, Me, Me”.

Anyway, the show here reviewed is about the cultural confusion of a young immigrant to Quebec. Written in French by Talia Hallmona and Pascal Brullemans as *Moi et L'Autre*, it was a hit at the innovative Theatre aux Écuries in 2014. Now translated into English by Alison Bowie, it was restaged by Talisman Theatre, whose specialty is presenting French Quebec plays in English, making it a counterpart to the highly regarded Infitheatre, which does plays written by English Quebecers.

Talisman, co-founded by Emma Tibaldo (Playwrights Workshop Montreal) and present artistic director Lyne Paquette in 2006, has established a firm place in the local independent theatre landscape. Ms Paquette here doubled as the set designer. The set in the 77-seat configuration was essentially bare, with many light bulbs hanging or standing on steps, lending a vaguely surreal quality to the whole.

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Kathleen Stavert and Miriam Katrib

The two young ladies in the cast portrayed several characters, but the main two were Talia (Miriam Katrib) and Julie (Kathleen Stavert). Talia is a young Egyptian, brought to Quebec as a child. She is torn between missing her aunt and extended family and sounds, smells and music and suffering the exclusion as being shy and different by her new schoolmates in Laval. She eventually is befriended by the more outgoing Julie, and desires to become a clone of the lively Quebecoise. The whole is ably directed by NTS grad and teacher Arianna Bardesono, herself from Italy years ago.

Torn between two cultures is not new, from Nehru of India to Luigi of Montreal. The former, the famous first Prime Minister of India, educated in England — the latter an abstract painter splitting the year between Montreal and his native Italy. I did meet him casually at the old Carmen Hungarian restaurant and can confirm Don Bell's description of him in Saturday Night at the Bagel Factory that he constantly bemoaned life in Montreal while in Montreal but glorified it to his Italian audience when back there.

Many in the audience talk back felt *Me And You* would do well on tour to young audiences. Indeed, both co-authors have a youth theatre background.

Ms Katrib, is based in Toronto so unfortunately, we may not see her often in Montreal. Ms Stavert, who lives here, after six years studying theatre in London and Moscow, has a show in the forthcoming Fringe Festival in June called *As The Waters Rose*.

Me And You closed at the MAI on May 21.

For future Talisman Theatre shows, check talisman-theatre.com

Images: Maxime Côté

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



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