



## Cock examines sexual ambivalence

### Description

By **Byron Toben**

English playwright Mike Bartlett, only 36, has garnered a host of awards. He seems to have a penchant for one word (indeed often one syllable) titles.

These have included, not only *Cock*, but such as *Press*, *Game*, *Bull* and *Heart*. I wonder what he thinks of really long titles like *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum at Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*? Anyway, one syllable works — witness the success of the Canadian created *Hair*.

In *Cock*, Mike Payette plays John, an early 20's youth who has been in an exclusive sexual relationship with M, a ten year older lover (Éloi Archambaudoin) for seven years. The famous 7-year itch generates some increasing arguments about John's general indecisiveness. (He outdoes Peanut's wishy-washy Charlie Brown in this respect.) John leaves for a week and encounters W (Melanie Sirois), a recently divorced woman on a commuter train, with whom he timidly has a first time hetero relationship.



Melanie Sirois as W and Mike Payette as John

W insists he disengage completely from M, leading to a dinner conference of the three, to which M secretly had invited his father, F (Michel Perron). As you see, Bartlett's brevity extends to naming his characters as well as his titles. Even the stage directions request a minimal set.

A bitchy scene ensues between W vs. M and F for the commitment of John. If you enjoy vacillation, this piece is for you. The acting of the quartet is as good as it gets, done while standing for 90 minutes in the seat-less set. Director Liz Valdez moves things along crisply, despite frequent train noise signaling interludes.

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I thought the concept was clever, but differ from the Guardian reviewer of its Royal Court Theatre premiere who praised the "witty" dialogue. I found it too repetitious as I kept thinking of the Ames Brothers summation [You're Undecided Now](#)



(click to hear the song).

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At one point, even M complains about John's agony over choosing cock vs. vagina by pointing out real problems in the world, like Bangladeshi orphans and Sudanese bombings. I heartedly agree.

The writing is weak in not giving more background to John. He's just there and he waivers. What W sees in him to fight over him is bewildering. What ever happened to Plenty of Fish in the sea?

Still, not only is this piece worth viewing for the fine performances, but also to welcome the creation of a new company, Play Shed, which "aims to address unconventional issues from a humanist perspective."

Cock continues at the MAI (Montréal, arts interculturels) until **February 14**.

Tickets: 514 982-1812 or at [m-a-i.qc.ca/en](http://m-a-i.qc.ca/en)

*Feature image: Mike Payette as John and Éloi Archambaudoin as M.*

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

## Category

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