

Needles and Opium

(2013)



© Tristram Kenton

Robert Lepage / Ex Machina

Needles and Opium

Text: Robert Lepage
Direction: Robert Lepage
With Olivier Normand and Wellesley Robertson III

One night in 1949, on the plane bringing him back to France, Jean Cocteau writes his *Lettre aux Américains* in which fascination and disenchantment intertwine: he has just discovered New York, where he presented his most recent feature film, *L'Aigle à deux têtes*. At the same time, Miles Davis is visiting Paris for the first time, bringing *bebop* with him to the old continent. Parisian jazz fans are ecstatic. As the notes of *Je suis comme je suis* linger in the air, Juliette Greco opens her arms to him.

Forty years later, at the Hotel La Louisiane, in Paris, a lonely Québécois tries in vain to forget his former lover. His emotional torments echo Cocteau's dependence on opium and that of Davis' on heroin. There begins a spectacular withdrawal experience where the drawings of the prince of poets and the blue notes of the jazzman, accompany his leap into nothingness, the desperate effort of a man looking inwards in order to vanquish the pain and liberate himself from his love addiction.

Thru highly visual staging, which is as much magic as it is theatre, Robert Lepage revisits, 20 years after its first production, *Needles and Opium*. A new scenography, original images, and an acrobat onstage complement Cocteau's words. The result is a production with mesmerizing effects, a journey into the night that puts us under a spell and leads us into the light.

Estimated time: 1h35, no intermission

Terrified at the thought of being confronted by the ghosts of my old ideals, I avoid reviving my first shows as much as possible. And since I unfortunately don't have an ounce of nostalgia, I admit that I hesitated a long time when Marc Labrèche suggested remounting *Needles and Opium*. Created in 1991 following a painful break-up, *Needles and Opium* was a reflection on the impulses and sometimes painful situations that drive certain artists to create, drawing parallels between an addiction to love and a dependency on opiates.

I began the hard work of rewatching old VHS recordings from the archives and discovered that, although the staging was dated, the story hadn't lost any of its relevance. Written before the first Web browser, social media, and the events of September 11, the protagonist's existential questions are more universal than ever, and the excerpts from Jean Cocteau's *A Letter to Americans* now seem almost prophetic.

But it wasn't enough to just remount the play. I felt it was necessary to deepen it—and even finish writing it—because when dealing with feelings of love and relationship conflicts, there are things one only understands much later. Because of this, I believe that the current version of *Needles and Opium* has grown and matured significantly. The structure of the play is based on three men who lost a love: Jean Cocteau, Miles Davis and “Robert”. In the first version, the three-pronged story was uneven because the two white characters had a voice and were present in flesh and blood, but Miles Davis was only evoked by a silent, two-dimensional shadow. This time I felt the need to invite other performers onstage to allude to the famous trumpet player and to even make Juliette Gréco appear briefly. You might say that's a lot of people for a solo show, but I've discovered over the years that sometimes it takes a crowd to best express solitude.

Enjoy the show!

Robert Lepage

Needles and Opium

Text	Robert Lepage
English translation	Jenny Montgomery
Director	Robert Lepage
Director Assistant	Normand Bissonnette
Performed by	Marc Labrèche Wellesley Robertson III
Set Designer	Carl Fillion
Props Designer	Claudia Gendreau
Music and sound Designer	Jean-Sébastien Côté
Lighting Designer	Bruno Matte
Costume Designer	François St-Aubin
Images Designer	Lionel Arnould
The show contains excerpts from Jean Cocteau's <i>A Letter to Americans</i> and <i>Opium, the Diary of a Cure</i> .	
Director's Agent	Lynda Beaulieu
Production Manager Assisted by	Julie Marie Bourgeois Valérie Lambert
Technical Director	Michel Gosselin
Tour Manager	Charlotte Ménard
Stage Manager	Adèle Saint-Amand
Sound Manager	Marcin Bunar
Video Manager	Thomas Payette
Lighting Manager	Jean-François Piché
Costumes and Props Manager	Claudia Gendreau
Head Stagehand	Pierre Gagné
Stagehand	Sylvain Béland
Rigger	Julien Leclerc
Automation Consultant	Tobie Horswill
Video Consultant	Catherine Guay
Make-up Costumes	Jean Bégin Carl Bezanson Julie Sauriol
Set building	Scène Éthique Astuces Décor

Additional music

Générique by Miles Davis
Album: Ascenseur pour l'échafaud
Warner Chappell Music France / Bloc Notes Music Publishing
Courtesy of Universal Music Canada

Riff Tide

Words and music by Coleman Randolph Hawkins
© (ASCAP)

Tune Up (When Lights Are Low) by Miles Davis
Performed by Miles Davis Quintet
© 2006 Concord Music Group

Je suis comme je suis

Written by Joseph Kosma and Jacques Prévert
Courtesy of Universal Music Canada

My Funny Valentine

Music by Richard Rodgers, Lyrics by Lorenz Hart
Performed by Craig Pederson
© Courtesy of Rodgers & Hammerstein

The way you look tonight

Written by Dorothy Fields and Jerome Kern
© Universal - PolyGram International Publishing, Inc (ASCAP)
Used by Permission of Canadian Shapiro Bernstein
o/b/o Aldi Music Company
Performed by Marie Gignac

L'assassinat de Carala by Miles Davis

Album: Ascenseur pour l'échafaud
Warner Chappell Music France / Bloc Notes Music Publishing
Courtesy of Universal Music Canada

JS Côté

Contains a sample of *Départ de Belle*
Composed by Georges Auric
Performed by Adriano, Axios Chorus, Moscow Symphony
Orchestra & Sergei Krivobokov
Album: *La Belle et la Bête*
Courtesy of Naxos of America

Smooch de Miles Davis et Charles Mingus

Performed by Miles Davis
© 2006 Concord Music Group

Broadway Follies by Ray Davies

Audio Network Canada Inc.

Additional images

Ascenseur pour l'échafaud

Louis Malle
©1958 NOUVELLES EDITIONS DE FILMS

Bridgeman Art Library

Désordre de Jacques Baratier © 1949 Argos Films.

Getty Images

Studio Harcourt

LIFE/Copyrights 1949 Time Inc.

Philippe Halsman/Magnum photos

Succession Jean Cocteau/SODRAC

NASA

NY Transit Museum

Prelinger Archives

Un homme, une époque : Mouloudji

Réa : Jean-Marie Coldefy 28/07/1961 ©INA

Cinépanorama/ Réa : Jean Kerchbron 19/12/1957 © INA

Festival Européen du Jazz © INA

Les Actualités Françaises. Saint Germain des Prés va-t-il prendre la relève du boul'mich ? 27/10/1965 © INA

Trumpet played by

Craig L. Pedersen

Acrobatics consultants

Geneviève Bérubé,
Yves Gagnon,
Jean-Sébastien Fortin,
Jean-François Faber

Production

Ex Machina

Coproduction

Théâtre du Trident, Québec
Canadian Stage, Toronto
Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, Montréal
Adelaide Festival
New Zealand Festival
Le Grand T, théâtre de Loire-Atlantique
Les Quinconces-L'espal, scène conventionnée, théâtres du Mans
Célestins, Théâtre de Lyon
Le Volcan, Scène nationale du Havre
Festival de Otoño a Primavera, Madrid
ArtsEmerson: The World On Stage, Boston
NAC English Theatre with le Théâtre français du CNA
and the Magnetic North Theatre Festival
Setagaya Public Theatre, Tokyo
LG Arts Center, Seoul
the Barbican, London
La Comète - Scène nationale de Châlons-en-Champagne
La Comédie de Clermont-Ferrand scène nationale
Les Salins, scène nationale de Martigues

Ex Machina Producer

Associate Production - Europe, Japan

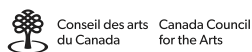
Associate Production - The Americas,
Asia (except Japan), Australia, NZ

Michel Bernatchez, assisted by Valérie Lambert

Epidemic (Richard Castelli, assisted by Chara Skiadelli,
Florence Berthaud et Claire Dugot)

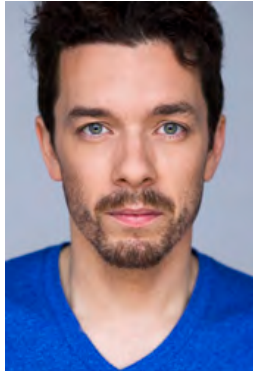
Menno Plukker Theatre Agent (Menno Plukker, assisted by
Dominique Sarrazin and Isaïe Richard)

Ex Machina is funded by the Canada Council for the Arts, Quebec's Arts and Literature Council and the City of Quebec.



Olivier Normand

Actor



© Jérémie Battaglia

A graduate of the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Québec, Olivier Normand has performed on all of Québec City's stages. Most notably, he has played in *Les Feluettes* by Michel-Marc Bouchard, *L'école des Femmes et Le Misanthrope* by Molière, *La nuit des rois* by Shakespeare and *Britannicus* by Racine. Olivier Normand has also had a lead role in *Playing Cards: Spades* by Robert Lepage and *Ex Machina* and has reprised the famous role created by Lepage in *Vinci* during a revival in 2015.

He co-founded the Théâtre des 4 Coins, a youth theatre company. Their first show, *Le fantôme de Canterville*, has been played more than 300 times and has won the 2006 Critics' Award.

Interested in movement, Olivier Normand teaches at the École de cirque de Québec.

As stage director, Olivier Normand created *Insomnia* for the 2013-2014 Carrefour international de théâtre de Québec, as well as designing Flip FabriQue's first show, a circus show that has toured in 10 countries. He has staged *Crépuscule*, another circus show seen by more than 110 000 people. A new version of this show will be presented in 2016.

Next year, he will be directing *Le songe d'une nuit d'été*, in co-production with Le Trident and Flip FabriQue.

Wellesley Robertson III

Actor



© Christian Lloyd

With a background in gymnastics, breakdance and acrobatics, Wellesley Robertson has been performing on stage across the world.

He is currently a member of Toronto based performance group Abstract Breaking Systems (A.B.S. Crew).

He has been touring with groups such as Cirque Sublime, on their cross-Canada tour for their show *Adamo*, and Circus Orange, on their tour of Bahrain.

Needles and Opium is his third production with Ex Machina, the first two being *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* (Québec City, Amsterdam, and Lyon, 2011-2012) and *The Tempest* (Québec City, and New York, 2012) both of which were directed by Robert Lepage.

Robert Lepage

Author and director



© Jocelyn Michel / Consulat
(leconsulat.ca)

Versatile in every form of theatre craft, Robert Lepage is equally talented as a director, playwright, actor and film director. His creative and original approach to theatre has won him international acclaim and shaken the dogma of classical stage direction to its foundations, especially through his use of new technologies.

He graduated from the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Québec and studied in Paris in 1978. In 1984, his play *Circulations* toured Canada. Followed *The Dragons' Trilogy* (1985), *Vinci* (1986), *Polygraph* (1987) and *Tectonic Plates* (1988).

From 1989 to 1993 he was Artistic Director of the Théâtre français at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. Meanwhile pursuing his own creative projects, he directed *Needles and Opium* (1991), *Coriolanus*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest* (1992). *With A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1992 he became the first North American to direct a Shakespeare play at the Royal National Theatre in London.

In 1994, he founded Ex Machina, then wrote and directed his first feature film, *Le Confessionnal*. Followed *Polygraph* (1996), *Nô* (1997), *Possible Worlds* (2000), and *The Far Side of the Moon* (2003). In 2013, he codirects *Triptych* with Pedro Pires, an adaptation of the play *Lipsynch*.

With Ex Machina, he creates for the stage *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* (1994), *Geometry of Miracles* (1998), *The Far Side of The Moon* (2000), a new version of *The Dragons' Trilogy* (2003), *The Andersen Project* (2005), *Lipsynch* (2007), *The Blue Dragon* (2008), *Eonnagata* (2009), *Playing Cards* (2012): *SPADES* and *HEARTS*, each exploring a universe inspired by the asset the suit represents, and new staging of *Needles and Opium* (2013).

Current productions include *887*, a solo performance by Robert Lepage (2015) and *Quills* (2016), Doug Wright's controversial work on censorship, Robert Lepage as the Marquis de Sade, co-directed with Jean-Pierre Cloutier.

Robert Lepage directed Peter Gabriel's *Secret World Tour* (1993) and *Growing Up Tour* (2002), designed and directed Cirque du Soleil shows *KÀ* (2005) and *TOTEM* (2010). For Quebec City's 400th anniversary in 2008, Robert Lepage and Ex Machina created the largest architectural projection ever achieved: *The Image Mill*.

As part of the festivities surrounding the Grand Bibliothèque's 10th anniversary, Ex Machina has created, based on an original idea by Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, an exhibition inspired by Alberto Manguel's *The Library at Night*. Multifaceted, *The Library at Night* (2015) embarks visitors on a journey through 10 libraries across the world, real or imagined, by means of virtual reality.

Robert Lepage made a grand entrance in the opera world with *Bluebeard's Castle* and *Erwartung* (1993). His continued with *La Damnation de Faust* (1999). Followed *1984* (2005) based on the novel by George Orwell, with Maestro Lorin Maazel providing the musical direction, *The Rake's Progress* (2007) and *The Nightingale and Other short Fables* (2009).

Das Rheingold, Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* prelude, premiered September 2010 at The Metropolitan Opera with the cycle being presented during the 2010-11 and 2011-12 seasons. His latest staging include *The Tempest* (2012), by Thomas Adès, libretto by Meredith Oakes, based on William Shakespeare's eponymous play, and *L'Amour de loin* (2015), with music by Kaija Saariaho and a libretto by Amin Maalouf.

Robert Lepage's work has been recognized by many awards. Among the most important: the Légion d'honneur (2002); the Denise Pelletier Prize (2003); the Hans Christian Andersen Prize (2004) for his outstanding artistic contribution to honouring Hans Christian Andersen worldwide; the Stanislavski Award (2005) for his contribution to international theatre; the Festival de l'Union des Théâtres de l'Europe honoured him with the distinguished Prix Europe (2007), previously awarded to Ariane Mnouchkine and Bob Wilson among others; the Médaille de la ville de Québec (2011); and the Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts at MIT (2012). In 2013, he became the recipient of the Tenth Glenn Gould Prize awarded by the Glenn Gould Foundation and in 2015 he was awarded by the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ) for his contribution, his commitment and his dedication in developing, promoting and extending the influence of the Quebec culture.

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