

ORFÉO

When *Orféo*, the latest stage production by Montréal-based Lemieux/Pilon Creation, had its U.S. première at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in February, there were many reasons to celebrate this new achievement of Canadian culture. For the first time ever, a Canadian play was co-produced by the Kennedy Center, one of the world's most prestigious art centres and the United States' national centre for the performing arts. One of the busiest performing arts facilities in North America, the Kennedy Center hosts about 2800 performances and attracts over 1.7 million spectators each year.

Canadian culture sweeps the world stage

The play's three-day run was virtually sold out. The Canadian Embassy in Washington, Québec Government House in New York City and the Kennedy Center press office had worked closely together to interest the American and Canadian media, with the result that coverage of the première was extensive. The play received rave reviews in the media in both the United States and Canada.

But the success did not stop there. The Canadian Embassy in Washington had used the Washington première to attract presenters from the mid-Atlantic region and as far afield as Kansas, with a view to selling a bigger tour in 2000. The initiative paid off: after performances in Long Beach, California, in late February, *Orféo* will be presented in Nebraska, Kansas and New York City early next year.

Orféo is a dance-theatre piece

about a young man who refuses to accept the death of his wife. In the play, Orpheus is a living man reaching out to the life-size, moving image of his dead love standing beside him—only to find her a bodiless phantom. Therein lies the main technical challenge of the play: to synchronize choreography between the living and the dead. Michel Lemieux and Victor Pilon have taken up the challenge eloquently using a combination of live actors and high tech to create virtual images.

Judging from Lemieux/Pilon Creation's past successes, we can expect *Orféo* to have a long international career.

What prompted the Kennedy Center to spend more than US\$50 000 to co-produce and present *Orféo*? The story begins two years ago, when the Canadian Embassy started implementing a strategy to better project Canadian culture in the United States by targeting key cultural institutions. The Embassy booked the Center for what turned out to be a very successful presentation last season of an earlier work by Lemieux/Pilon Creation, *Le Grand Hôtel des Étrangers*. This prompted the negotiations for the co-production of *Orféo*.

The play is a highly futuristic representation of a very old story: the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. In the words of Lewis Segal, the *Los Angeles Times*' dance critic, "High-tech Canadian theatre visionaries Michel Lemieux and Victor Pilon have turned the myth into a coldly beautiful neo-Romantic media opera . . . told through a series of haunting holographic images."

The play has also been co-produced by the Théâtre français of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and Usine C in Montréal. It received financial support from DFAIT's Cultural Program, the Arts Council of Canada and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. *Orféo* will be presented in four British cities next spring, including London and Glasgow, and in Hong Kong, Seoul and Taipei in May and June of 2000. This June, it appeared at the Jerusalem Festival in Israel. ●—

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