

cabaret
u~manô

Press book

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Canada

Puppets for a mature audience



Cabaret U-Mano is a musical show for mature audience with **29 stunning puppet** stars. 26 familiar songs revisited by **ten master puppeteers/dancers** to create a world of sensuality, humor and irresistible charm.

"The creators of this magical piece of mime, masque and puppetry will make you sit bolt upright and rub your eyes"

Metro, UK

"Hilarious show! A real challenge!"

Radio-Canada, Canada

"An outstanding performance"

The Art Magazine, Singapore

"A delectable work! Of a great staging expressivity"

Notitade, Venezuela

THE STARS

Biographical Notes

CONRAD, THE TRANSVESTITE

Discharged from the French military service where he entertained the troops in a personal fashion (one on one or group), Conrad sets off for America. Across the ocean, he tries a career as a radio host without success. He is said to be too blunt and direct for the listeners, to whom he unveils more every night: "Without all that paint on my face, I would be just like you: dull with no importance..."

Conrad has seen, done and used it all, and he keeps going because, as he says, "life is too rotten." He has become an unconditional of worldly nights because the stage is the only place where there is no danger... for the moment. His repertoire includes hundreds of titles such as Oops!... I Did It Again! I'm Super.

LORRAINE, THE DIVA

Under the baobabs trees, in the company of animals. Lorraine, kindly nicknamed the Black Snow-White, makes her début.

Her talent grows with experience and she starts at the Casa-Nova in Casablanca with a series of shows that will crown her "queen of the nightclubs of the globe". From there, the rebel asserts herself. She tolerates no one at her side. In her dressing room, she likes to burn incense: it stinks and keeps people at a distance. As the good queen that she is, she surrounds herself with feathers, glitter, silicone and gin gimlets, letting her primal chant resonate as a cry of the soul going back to its ancestral sources.

Within Cabaret U-MANO, her repertoire is most eclectic. Love Me or Leave Me, Taki-Rari, Peter Gun, Summertime and History Repeating: it shows the versatility of this extraordinary artist... extraordinarily hard to bear when she gets started!

MAUVE, THE STARLET

As soon as she is out of her hive. Mauve is thrown under the spotlights. "AH sweet with outlandish talent, she whispers, hops, twirls, flies, sings and dances for the great pleasure of voyeurs." (Déco-Vedette, 2002)

Her attitude and her flighty spirit induce many gossips in this merciless nightclubs world. She is said to have the brains of a bird, which is a compliment for the little wasp. "They say of me that I have a plastic personality. I asser... assim... assum... You see what I mean." (Splash, November 1999). Will she survive the bright spotlights of showbiz or will she burn her wings?

Mauve was able to memorize three songs: Pick-a-boo, Hard Day's Night and Honeysuckle Rosé, great classics that she performs in her own way. She is working very hard to memorize the tune and lyrics of a fourth one. The release is scheduled for 2019.

KIKO, THE LATIN LOVER

Pseudo-Latino, Kiko soaks up current fashion trends to seduce his audience. In 1995, after a spotty career he ends up as an exotic dancer in the Philippines. In those heavenly islands, the young flirt deceives many female vacationers with his look and seductive eyes. Kiko here, Kiko there, he spreads himself ail over, driven by his Don Juan instincts.

Back home, he enters the service of a great star of variety shows, which will propel him towards his career as a sex bomb. His success allows him to be crowned as Latin-Lover of the Club Bolo.

Today, no one can resist Kiko's charms and languorous voice... Men as well as women throw themselves at his feet!

JAZZ & JAVA

Wealthy British, from Crowtown's bourgeois circles. Jazz & Java are bridge partners and museum friends, discerning palates and stubborn. Each day, the two associates savors life at teatime. Babble, chatter, gossip and collateral damages are their discourse. Tittle-tattle epicureans such as the "Five o'clock tea", they greatly prefer crusty false rumors to humdrum truth. Greatly fond of gossips, they continually have a pièce of it at everyone's expense.

SIBA

Separated from his twin at birth, he was acquired by a one-legged man. Siba is what one could call a dryer refugee. Alternately, dust cloth and polishing shammy. He escapes into the unrealistic world of show business where he rapidly becomes a make-up powder puff. He takes the stage on an evening of selflessness and interprets Are you lonesome tonight as a tribute to Jim Henson. Since then, his charisma dusts the stage.

FRENCHFRAU

Love child of a French pastry chef and a Swiss colonel, FrenchFrau knows how to take advantage of her generous curves. Her physique, a blend of fluidity and rigor, leads her to model for the Columbian painter Botero at an early age. A daily tyrant, she manages for a few years a luxury domination camp for volunteer billionaires. Stimulated by the extreme, she is now a favorite model at Play-Toy...

SOMA INTERNATIONAL — Création

Founded in 1999 by Serge Deslauriers, Raynald Michaud and Énock Turcotte, the SOMA company has committed itself to fill with wonder, seduce and disconcert publics from here and elsewhere with productions mainly oriented towards puppets for adults.

The artistic objectives of SOMA International are many: to amuse, entertain the audience; to keep it alert on the edge of rational and fantastic; to astound it, bring it outside the known paths; to have it discover uncommon characters, captivating and sensual in a strange universe, zany and absurd; and finally, to never compromise on quality.

In its first production, the Cabaret Décadanse, has won the Public Award (popular vote) of Montréal Just for Laugh Festival in 1999 and has since continued to accumulate successes at an international level. The show was seen by thousands of spectators throughout the world and by millions of TV viewers when it appeared more than once on the French show Le plus grand cabaret du monde. The collective has well performed on stages in Québec,

Singapore, Japan, Italy, Spain, France, Great Britain, Swiss, New Zealand and Mexico, and has recently received the Tap Water Awards at the Edinburgh 2005 Fringe Festival.

REALISATIONS.NET — Production

Realisations.net is a business managed by Roger Parent, a creator and businessperson of international renown involved in the entertainment industry since the beginning of the 70s.

Technical Director, Designer and Producer, Roger Parent was, throughout his brilliant career, part of many artistic representations in America, Europe and Asia. As Production VP and Executive Producer for the Cirque du Soleil, he has collaborated to the positioning of the Nouvelle Expérience and Mystère shows in Las Vegas. He has also produced Alegria, Saltimbanco and Fascination in North America and in Japan.

Since 1994, Roger Parent has invested himself in the development of many concepts for casino hotels Caesars, MGM, Mandalay Bay and Luxor, which are majors in the entertainment business. He has participated to the construction of a theater on Maui island in Hawaii where he produced Ulalena, a theatrical show acclaimed by the local and international community.

Along with the production of Cabaret U-MANO, Roger Parent is currently busy with the elaboration of eight projects in the United States and two in Asia focusing on architecture, stage design, culture and technology.

Friday, September 15, 2006

Cabaret U-Mano introduces a new relationship between puppet and puppeteer, with the puppeteer no longer hidden but rather part of the character.

Photo: Annexe communications



Cabaret U-Mano: The Reinvention of Puppetry

Jean Beaunoyer

La Presse

After reinventing the circus and comedy to some extent, Quebecers have now reinvented puppetry and are putting on a kind of show that has never seen before at a major venue in Montreal with *Cabaret U-Mano*. There couldn't have been a better choice to mark the 10th anniversary of the Casino de Montréal than the performance by these 10 dancing puppeteers who literally bring alive 29 star puppets.

Created by Raynald Michaud, Serge Deslaurier and Énock Turcotte, the three members of Soma International, *Cabaret U-Mano* introduces a new relationship between puppeteer and puppet. The puppeteer is no longer hidden, but part of the character. In one skit, he lends his legs to the starlet puppet who sings and dances like all the others. It's a cabaret show, and the star puppets try to upstage each other with their talents, charm and sex appeal throughout the show. Lorraine the diva even bares her breasts while dancing to the *Peter Gunn* theme, and Conrad the transvestite gets annoyed when the band improvises too long during a jazz number, preventing him from displaying all his talents as he lies on the stage.

Obviously, it's a show for adults with its puppet who tries to get the pants off an audience member lured onstage. Don't worry, it's far from offensive and there's nothing in the show to attract the morality squad. The show is entirely in good taste and bubbles with the breathtaking skills of the puppeteers. They're all dancers and work the puppets into the choreography that makes up most of the show. The only solo number is performed by a sock. It's easy to make a puppet out of a sock, but when you add arms and legs that stretch and dance, the results are amazing and trigger resounding applause.

There's no dialogue in the show, just songs from every era and dancing. You get to hear a disco rendition of Gordon Lightfoot's *If You Could Read My Mind*, *It's Cold Outside* performed by a sheep made to jump by I have no idea what kind of animal, and *My Heart Belongs to Daddy* sung by Mauve the starlet. Finally, there's a number that's impressive because of its originality. It's a puppeteer-dancer who with a mask she holds at a distance from her face, except this is a mask that moves, makes expressions, and opens its mouth to sing *Quizas, quizas, quizas*. All in all, a show that should be a huge hit in Montreal and spend weeks at the Casino, but it's only booked for three days. Las Vegas is waiting for *U-Mano* and it's not hard to understand why.

Tuesday, September 12, 2006

The show running at Cabaret du Casino is more sensual than sexual.
Photo: U-Mano

Cabaret U-Mano: Puppets for Adults Only

Jean Beaunoyer
La Presse

As part of its 10th anniversary celebrations, Cabaret du Casino de Montréal is staging the sensual playful world of *Cabaret U-Mano*, a puppet show for adults, on September 14, 15 and 16.



Cabaret U-Mano, which will soon open in Las Vegas, has already toured the world. "Our appearance at the Tarega Festival in Spain put us on the map in Europe and we're gearing up for our third trip to Japan, yet we're practically unknown in Montreal," says Raynald Michaud, who founded Soma International in 1999 with two other Montrealers, Serge Deslauriers and Énock Turcotte. "We've only done one tour in Quebec – in the east. In fact, this will be our first major performance in Montreal with our entire troupe of dancers and puppeteers."

The company made its debut with *Cabaret décadence*, which was performed in the street during the *Just for Laughs* Festival with a mere three puppeteers. "*Cabaret U-Mano* is 90 minutes long and features 10 puppeteers and dancers," says Michaud. Michaud, Deslauriers and Turcotte, who studied fashion, dance and theatre, have designed a cabaret show with puppets that dance, do acrobatics, sing, and accompany the puppeteers, who aren't hidden below or behind the puppets. The skits that make up *Cabaret U-Mano* encompass some 20 characters including Conrad the transvestite, Lorraine the diva, Mauve the starlet, and Kiko the Latin Lover.

Though it's a show for adults, Michaud emphasizes it's not triple-X. "It's sensual rather than sexual, and we stressed the adult aspect of the show so that it wouldn't be mistaken for children's theatre. In any case, children aren't allowed into casinos. In other countries, there have been children in the audience but with their families – who had been warned. In fact, there are erotic suggestions, jokes, but it's never vulgar and the audience has fun."

Cabaret U-Mano was a big hit this summer at Théâtre du Casino du Lac-Leamy. Cabaret du Casino de Montréal wanted the production for its 10th anniversary and agreed to a brief three-night run before the troupe heads for Las Vegas. Will that mark the start of a permanent booking? In Las Vegas, you never know...

Thu, August 3, 2006

Puppet sex with no strings attached

By [ANN MARIE MCQUEEN](#)

Can a puppet give a hot-and-heavy lap dance?

Until catching a jaw-dropping performance of Cabaret U-Mano at Lac Leamy Casino, I wouldn't have believed it.

I now have to report -- and the man who was hauled up on stage as that night's guinea pig would, I'd wager, probably attest -- it's entirely mind-boggingly possible. A show featuring singing puppets, suitable for a mature audience, it turns out, is not only very entertaining but like nothing else you will see. I had been warmed up by catching a performance of the 2004 Tony Award-winning Avenue Q on Broadway recently, but those Sesame Street-like characters have nothing on Cabaret U-Mano's creations, which manage to be grotesque, compelling, flamboyant and erotic, all at the same time.

These puppets are fat -- all boobs popping out of bustiers, or giant behinds -- or skinny, their legs clad in garter belts. They are raunchy, perverted even, and hardly PC, particularly a bare-chested creature performing a tribal act.

Each puppet is operated by one, two or more actors, each somehow managing to suspend belief with their movements, disappearing into the background at the same time the audience member remains completely aware they are there.

LIP-SYNCHING FUN

The power of belief they create in the puppet's movements was evident in one scene, where the puppet was completely disassembled, leaving only the two hands which had been working it. Those hands, I could hardly believe, were fascinating.

The music consists of lip-synching to crowd-pleasing tunes such as If You Could Read My Mind, Let Me Entertain You and Hard Day's Night playing in the background. The show had more than its share of moments prompting whoops of approval and excitement from the delighted crowd.

The show is a visual, sexy feast for the eyes -- from thong-clad human dancers to the floating mermaid creations, half-human, half-doll, to horny hand puppets -- right up until it's Cirque du Soleil-style ending.

You could do worse things on a steamy night in the capital region. It would be hard to do much better.

'Fabulous!'

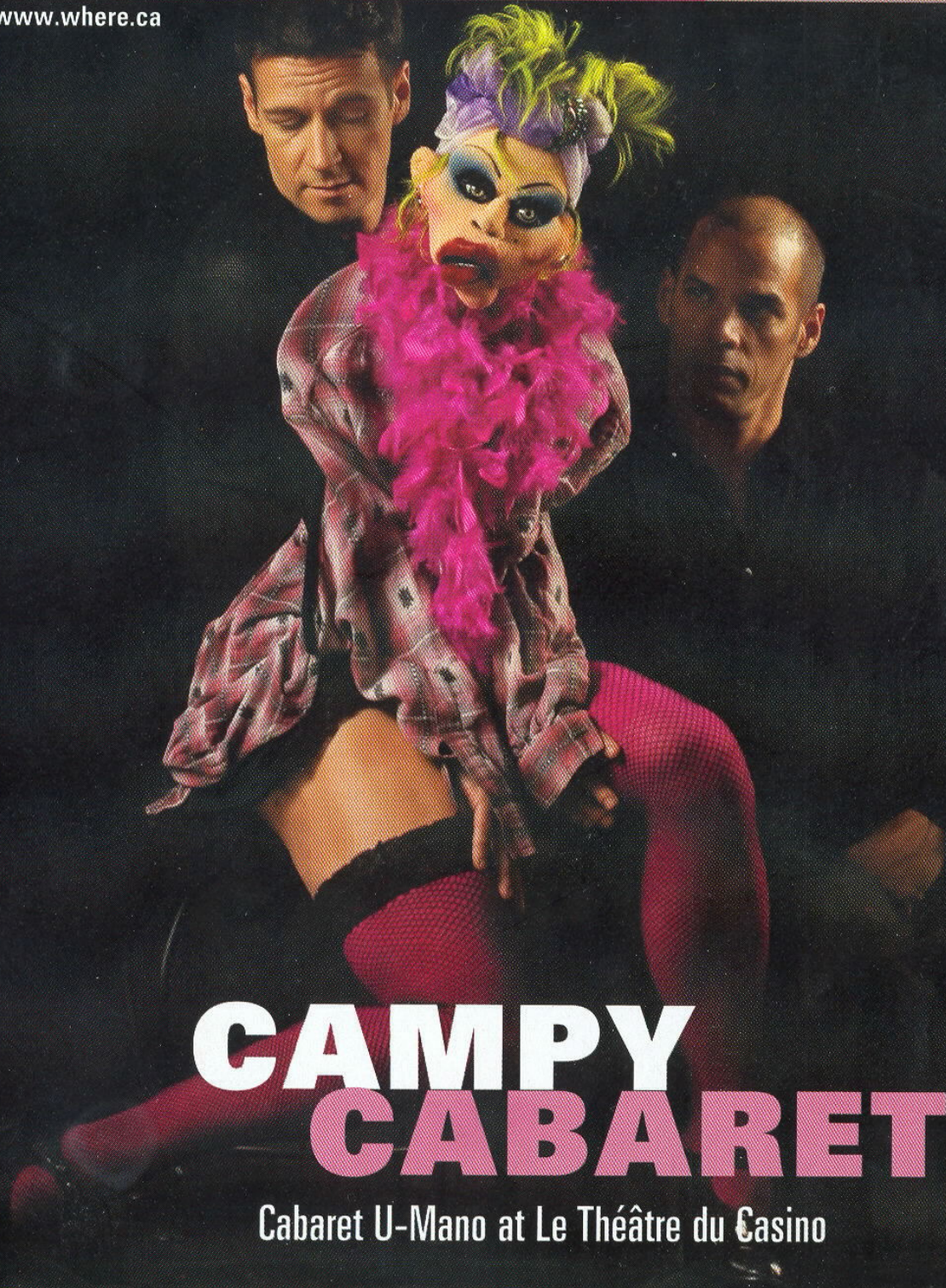
Sun Rating: 4 out of 5

AUGUST 2006 • OTTAWA/GATINEAU

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CAMPY CABARET

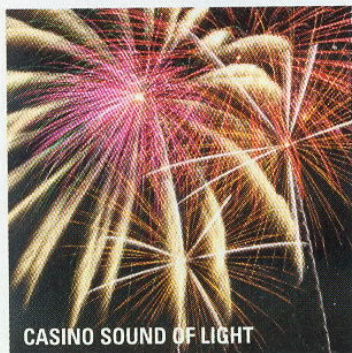
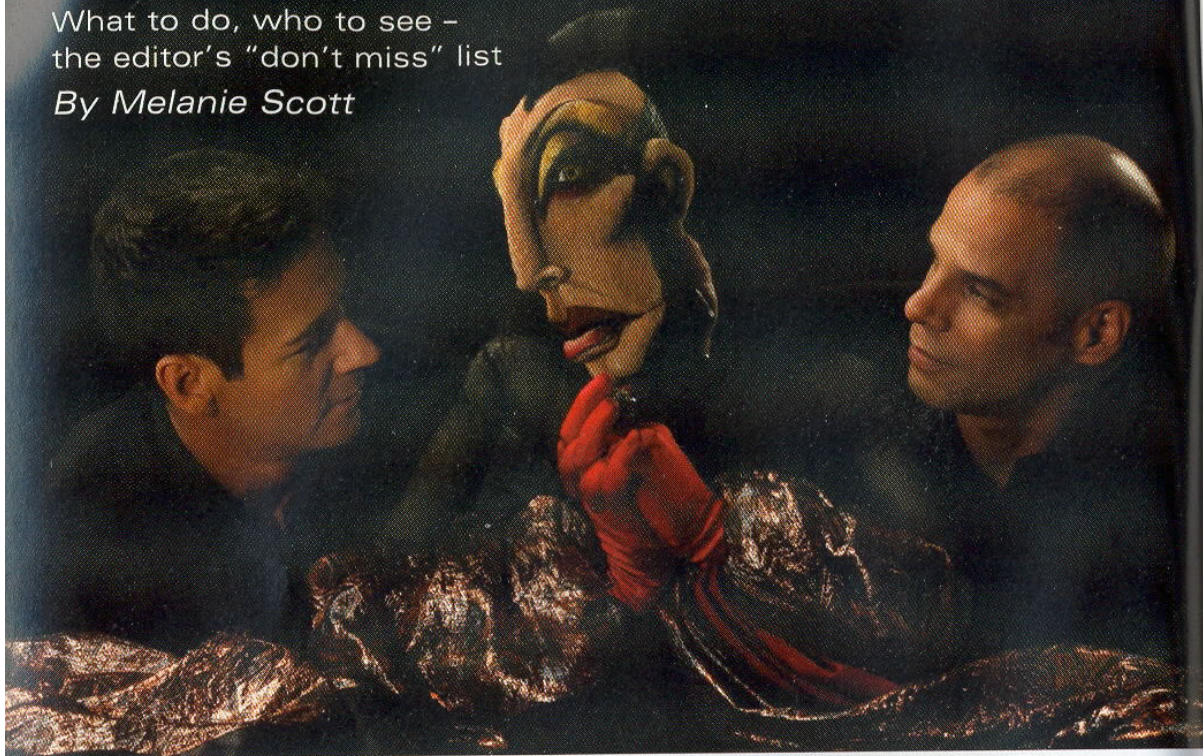
Cabaret U-Mano at Le Théâtre du Casino

HOT TIPS WHAT'S ON

CABARET U-MANO AT LE
THÉÂTRE DU CASINO

What to do, who to see –
the editor's "don't miss" list

By Melanie Scott



CASINO SOUND OF LIGHT

LIFE IS A CABARET

Who ever said puppets are for kids? Step aside Punch and Judy ... created by a quartet of multi-talented artists, **cabaret u-mano** is performed by almost-life-size marionettes, whose naughty antics have delighted audiences wherever they turn up. The show features a wealth of song standards, which are revived with sizzle and sensuality. Until Sept. 2. \$34-\$49. Le Théâtre du Casino, 1,

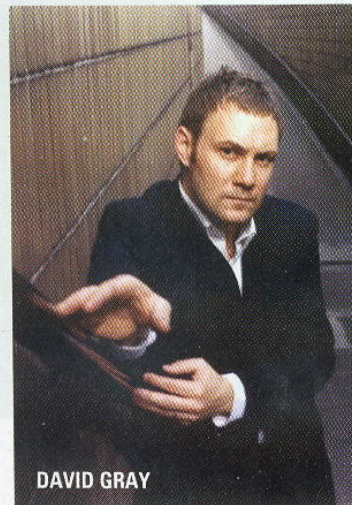
boulevard du Casino, Gatineau, 819-772-2530; 1-800-361-4595. www.casino-du-lac-leamy.com

SKY HIGH

This month, the **Casino Sound of Light** brings big booms and brilliant colour to the night sky. Hailing from nations abroad, teams of artists arrange hundreds of fireworks with intricate precision so that they explode at just the right moment to create breathtaking vistas. Also on the menu are a busker competition, live music, and kids' activities. Semi-finals on Aug. 2, 5, and 9 (\$10; reserved seats: \$19), and the grand finale happens on Aug. 12 (\$22. Five-night passport: \$72.) Group rates available. Children under 11 free. Lac Leamy, 1 boulevard du Casino, Gatineau, 819-771-3389. www.feux.qc.ca

OUR MAN FROM MANCHESTER

Most songwriters hit glitches now and again; and most would admit that they regretted including certain tunes on their recordings. But one can't imagine **David Gray** ever having musical regrets—he doesn't



DAVID GRAY

All the camp without the cringe

Dianna Graham

Cabaret U-Mano puppets deliver sexy-silly

Some endorsements do more harm than good. Imagine promoting Roquefort cheese: tastes amazing, smells like feet. Describing *Cabaret U-Mano* presents a similar challenge - how to describe it bluntly without doing damage?

The bare bones of Casino du Lac-Leamy's latest show is this: Stringless puppets dance and lip-synch to prerecorded music for 90 minutes; puppeteers double as backup dancers when they aren't busy working on stage with the puppets in full view of the audience.

And yes, in spite of the showgirls, high kicks and feathers, somehow it works. Montreal's Soma International (brainchild of Enock Turcotte, Serge Deslauriers and Raynal Michaud) delivers all the camp of casino cabaret without making you want to crawl under your chair.



Meet Chico, one of Cabaret U-Mano's sexy stringless starlets

Since there are no strings attached to the puppets, this is a very hands-on production. The continual presence of the puppeteers is odd at first - the puppets seem like hostages being masterfully manhandled from place to place. But once the onstage action picks up, the flash and dazzle of quick choreography makes it easier to ignore the human scaffolding. Gradually the puppets take charge, bowling over their handlers, groping them and commanding the stage.

The potential Vegas cheesiness of the show is largely avoided by having puppets centre stage at all times. Don't worry, these aren't fresh-faced Muppets with a gong to bang from time to time - they're mostly rough-looking, pint-sized survivors who, if they were human, would have seen their share of rehab visits.

While promoted as "absurd and hilarious," audiences aren't in for a night of wall-to-wall humour. Cabaret U-Mano has its share of comedy, but delivers equal parts fun and funny. As for sexiness, the show has its naughty parts, but anything raunchy is by default more sexy-silly. These are puppets after all.

The selection of music is both eclectic and astute, an important detail since the show relies on prerecorded music. Expect to hear a mix of music that includes Mississippi bluesman Little Milton and Belgium's Natacha Atlas with doses of One Ton (My Heart Belongs to Daddy) and Pussy Tourette (I Think He's Gay). And the interaction of performer and piece is such that you don't need to understand English or French to get the punch line - just one of the many reasons this show has done so well internationally.

Cabaret U-Mano: puppets gone wild

Catherine Lawson
The Ottawa Citizen

Friday, July 21, 2006

Who's manipulating whom?

That's the question you'll ask after an evening with the puppets of Cabaret U-Mano. Of course, the puppeteer controls the puppet, but the sexually aggressive marionette stars at Casino du Lac Leamy appear to have the upper hand.

Cabaret U-Mano is a glitzy revue of puppets lip-synching to nightclub standards (My Heart Belongs to Daddy) and tunes from the underground (I Think He's Gay). It's cheeky, clever and expertly performed by puppeteers who are always visible on stage.

This is not a new convention: Canadian puppeteer Ronnie Burkett was a pioneer. What is fresh and novel is the magical morphing of puppeteer into puppet. When puppet Chica performs I Can't Do it Alone, the legwork is supplied by Enock Turcotte (great gams, by the way).

At times the troupe -- Montreal-based Soma International -- push the boundaries of what can be defined as a puppet. Dolores is a head, nothing more, the body supplied by a graceful human. A trio inspired by The Supremes have bodies that are giant, gyrating Slinky toys.

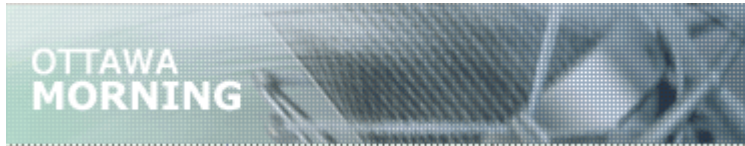
Others have a more conventional look. Lorraine the Diva is full-bodied, the puppeteer contributing the movement.

Cabaret U-Mano is a much expanded version of Soma International's Cabaret Decadance, which toured the world. U-Mano has some of the same characters and songs, but several more puppeteers.

These new cast members are also there to increase the "mature" content of the show. When they're not powering puppets, they also serve as a chorus line, shedding their track suits to cavort in black lace underwear.

This is all done somewhat self-consciously. The puppets, however, have no inhibitions. A grotesquely fat dominatrix performs with tasteless abandon. A half-naked puppet bumps and grinds on the head of a man pulled from the audience. Another attempts a sexual assault on a puppeteer.

It is this sniggering sexuality that sets Cabaret U-Mano firmly in the realm of ephemeral entertainment. The Casino Theatre, where you can order a drink while you watch, is the perfect setting.



Theatre with Alvina Ruprecht

Alvina Ruprecht reviews the latest in local performing arts but also stops in to catch alternative films and new art exhibits. Catch her once or twice a week in the last hour of Ottawa Morning.

July 4, 2006



Cabaret U-Mano

Created and produced by Soma International,

The World premier of their new show:

at the Casino of Lake Leamy

Created and designed by

Serge Deslauriers, Enok Turcotte, Raynald Michaud

Host: That was the voice of Serge Deslauriers, the designer and creator of those amazing puppets now appearing in a World premiere of their new show at the Casino at Lake Leamy. He spoke with All in a Day host Adrian Harewood last week about creating the puppets for his unusual show now appearing at the Casino at Lake Leamy. The company behind the puppets is called Soma International and it performs regularly around the world. The new show is called Cabaret U-Mano and it's billed as a "puppeteer play for mature audiences". ...Alvina has been to see it . Good morning Alvina. This appears to be something quite out of the ordinary. One does not associate a puppet show with high rolling Casino entertainment, where we see lots of skin, hear loud music. How does this fit in with puppet tradition in Canada?

ALVINA: Well, our tradition is very special. Recently in Canada, sophisticated puppet performances have been blooming. There is of course Ronny Burkett and his naughty little creatures: there is the Théâtre sans Fil from Montreal with its giant puppets and magic stage techniques, and in fact several of the puppeteers from the Cabaret U-Mano come out of the Sans fil tradition in Montreal. However, the basis of their inspiration is the traditional Japanese Bunraku, where the puppeteers are dressed in black and so they disappear into the background. Here the puppeteers are dressed in black...but there is a twist..

HOST: And what is that twist.?

ALVINA: U-Mano turns those demure little Japanese puppets, into splashy trashy kitschy and ultra sexy life size creatures with bulging eyes, huge rear ends, . Caricatures of North American beauty. These puppets are fast moving, and dressed to kill. They show lots of skin, and the music is loud. And the puppeteers fuse with their dolls so they become an integral part of the performance.

HOST: And what exactly do they do these creatures do on stage?

ALVINA: There are 14 characters, they give 29 lip sinc performances. Which means, these creatures are not actors and not story tellers, They are singers, and dancers and strippers and they are other things that I cant say on air. They flirt, they even make out on stage. They are campy, they are wickedly playful and most of all,,,,. They cross genders , they cross styles and they even cross species!!

HOST: What do you mean they cross genders and cross species???

ALVINA: that is an essential part of their performance..these puppets grow out of gender mixing . Many of these creatures are sexually ambiguous or or they are women who are constructed with the help of mixed body parts and criss crossing sexual codes and that is the

source of much of the playfulness. There is the aristocratic Transvestite who controls the show by snapping his fingers. ..He is the emblematic figure of the sexually split male-female warrior/ in his huge flowing Japanese Kimono / . Or there is the wild dance number where a male puppeteer slips into the skin of raucous singer and becomes the Tina turner style legs of a big blond head and torso with droopy eyes, huge wet lips and the biggest boobs on stage. But there is also species confusion.

HOST: Species confusion?? You mean the mixing of animals with humans?

ALVINA: That's it...the combinations are limitless. There are hysterical vultures and turkeys that squawk and squeal like opera singers or there are sheep and rams , or perhaps wolves cavorting shamelessly with half dressed human puppeteers on stage. There are sexy shrimp, and drag queen sea horses. This is a carnival of naughty figures that invent totally new mixtures of living creatures. ...And they are perversely fascinating..

HOST: Now what about the music? Since these puppets are singers and dancers, what kind of music do they work with?

ALVINA: It is contemporary pop music classics, including blues, and jazz and mambo, and ballads, .and numbers from musical theatre. These puppets feed off the music to create their show. Often, the song is a modern version of an older hit. So it also becomes a big musical send up..... The Gordon Lightfoot hit "If you could read my mind " because a bump and grind sung by 3 twirly shaped Supremes with huge white Afro hairdos and spirally hips that wave back and forth. My heart belongs to Daddy becomes a sado maso porn song sung by a huge half naked dominatrix, whose belly spills over her leather thongs as she crushes her male slaves...and finally the most brilliant bit of puppeteering comes from a number where a Sock sings Where do I begin.

HOST: A sock.? You mean a puppet made out of a sock...?

ALVINA : It's a sock that looks like its alive..it has a mouth..and 2 spindly arms...and it is brought to life by a hand that moves the jaws, like a muppet, and other hands that move the arms.. .And this puppet has a whole range of emotions. It flirts, it goes into ecstasy, it has fits of passion and it collapses and rolls over . It tickles Serge Deslaurier's belly and flies into hysterics and just creates an emotional atmosphere that is absolutely irresistible...Here, too, we finally really understand how brilliant the puppeteering is. And we see the exceptionally creative movements of Enoch Turcotte and Serge Deslauriers.

And in other numbers I also noticed the exceptional work of Christian Perrault.

HOST. All that sounds exciting and very entertaining..Were there any dancers??

ALVINA. Yes the dancers, are girls in black who eventually take off their clothes .but they were not yet up to the level of the puppets as far as their dancing technique was concerned. They were sloppy, not precise enough..the dancers still need some work..but that will come I am sure. This is a premiere..there is more work to be done before Cabaret U-mano goes to Las Vegas..

HOST: So big things are in store of it...

ALVINA Yes they are.

Paula Citron on the Arts



Diesel Playhouse--Cabaret U-Mano Tuesday, February 13, 2007

Cabaret U-Mano proves that Montreal is a wellspring of creativity. The whimsical adult puppet show is indescribably delicious.

The production is a song and dance revue, and the puppets are all divas who perform elaborate production numbers of pop tunes from mostly the 30s and 40s, surrounded by a live chorus line of winsome beauties. Nothing is concealed. We see the nine puppeteers not only manipulate these singing stars, but also from time to time, provide their legs and arms until what is alive and what is created becomes a dizzying blur.

Each act is very different, although certain divas and divos reappear. There is a melodramatic torch singer, a coy sex pot from the Busby Berkeley Thirties, and a long-haired blues singer, not to mention the wonderful trio of slinky toy Supremes and a pair of operatic birds.

This is simply one of the most imaginative shows in many a moon.

"A helping hand to beat the blues"

By Yann Buxeda

L'Express - week of January 23rd to January 29th 2007

"Cabaret U-mano". Many ideas come to mind with this locution. From the word mano come thoughts of humanism or physical contact. Rightly so, Cabaret U-mano is the expression of what mankind can artistically create when he lets his hands spontaneously express. A perfect merge between the worlds of showbiz and that of dreams, between the movements of a puppet and the body of the puppeteer.

It is the meeting of 3 completely different types of materials, that discovered in each other a large dose of adaptability and created a precious and unique finished product."

The somewhat chemical vision with which Raynald Michaud, the director of Cabaret U-Mano, describes the process that brought him to create the troupe could seem abstruse at first. However to try and define Cabaret U-Mano reveals the difficulty in finding the right word to communicate the overflow of emotions that we perceive during the 2 hours that the show runs.

Finally only a muffled rumbling expresses the frustration of having the feeling that you have spent only a half hour in the showroom: "WOW". For Anglophones, Francophones and Allophones "WOW" generally evokes unexpected and indescribable pleasure. Without bringing the spectator to an orgasm we must admit that the troupe succeeds in provoking peculiar emotions.

To a soundtrack that revisits some of English and French best classics, the ten cast members of Cabaret U-Mano give life to different characters in an atmosphere worthy of the best hours of old-fashion cabaret.

Consecutively, Kiko the Latin lover, Lorraine the diva, Mauve the Starlet and other stars perform their act, interrupted by Conrad the transvestite's mute appearances.

The characters come to life in the hand of the cabaret's ten cast members, who do not only manipulate them but interact with them.

A choice that Raynald Michaud defends passionately: "the puppeteers are so beautiful to hide them would be heresy! Seriously, in the show the puppeteers amplify the scene by accompanying the puppet. When a pianist plays, he does not hide his hands.." This results in puppets that come to life and awe us with their vitality.

Each character has its own personality, an attitude of its own that enables him to develop an affinity with the public. This is pushed to the extreme in the web site where you can find a biography of each star. www.cabaretu-mano.com

The interaction between the puppet and the puppeteer is rehearsed to the micron, as is the aesthetic of the characters and this plays an important part in the show's success. The protagonist has the look of Tim Burton's creations that intertwines beautifully with the sexy strass and sequins costumes made for each number. A movie influence that entertains the director: The puppet's creator, Serge Deslauriers is a big fan of Tim Burton. But this never concretely appeared in our aesthetic research. It must be a residual of our subconscious..."

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

It is evidently not a first show for this Québec company. Created in 1999 under the name Soma international by Serge Deslauriers, Raynald Michaud and Enock Turcotte, the trio has been working together since the end of the last century. Creators of a first show Cabaret Décadanse, they have toured the show in Europe, Asia and South America.

This opportunity gave them the chance to confront their art with different publics, Raynald says " Cultures are so diversified. In Europe, notably in Spain, the public was hysterical, they were screaming during the acts, it was so very intense. In Ireland, it was very different; people were dancing with the puppets. Asia did not have the same reaction at all. In Japan during the show we could hear a mosquito fly between the acts. But at the end of the show the applause was incredibly warm. It is very interesting to note how each public has its codes."

The team was confronted to very different reactions and cultures. Needless to say after these experiences, the apprehension of an Anglophone public that is reputedly cold does not worry the team. Finally while we could feel a certain restraint Toronto discovered itself in this cold weather, they screamed, applauded after and even during the numbers.

To succeed in taking the Torontonians out of their passive lethargy proves that Cabaret U-Mano is a must on your list.

January 29, 2007

Viewer Discretion Not Advised

Cabaret U-Mano ain't your regular puppet show ladies and gentlemen

By Antoine Tedesco

It's not every day I get a saucy puppet's nipples in my face as she gently seduces me to the Propellerheads' 'History Repeating' featuring Shirley Bassey. But that's exactly what happened that night at Diesel Playhouse where *Cabaret U-Mano* takes up residence for a limited run.

From Quebec's SOMA International and Réalisations.net comes *U-Mano*, a sexually-charged musical cabaret that borders on the erotic while never taking that notion too far -- they leave it up to the audience to run with the sensuality that drips throughout the show.



In perfect *Chicago* style, all you could see for the first few minutes where sexy legs in fishnet stockings parading across the stage behind a black curtain, lowered to just above each dancer's waistline. As the night moved along your memory takes you back to those legs, and the question hits you: Did those legs all belong to women? The gender bending started from the very first note.

Lorraine the Diva's opening number (Nina Simone's 'Love Me or Leave Me') captured the night. The lyrics worked as did the idea that you can either love *U-Mano* or you can leave it. If you decided on the latter, you'll miss out on a hell of a lot of sexy fun.

The music -- 26 pop, jazz and blues classics -- add a hip-swaying aspect to the show. The music also adds a lot to the performance dynamic and how each character and puppeteer work together. A great soundtrack will always elicit a cacophony of emotions.

From the oft-recorded 1940s pop standard 'Baby, It's Cold Outside' by Frank Loesser to Amber's take on Gordon Lightfoot's 'If You Could Read My Mind', a saucy version

of Beatles classic 'A Hard Day's Night', *Chicago's* 'I Can't Do It Alone', the title song from the late-1950s television show *Peter Gunn* and a Middle Eastern feel to one of rock and roll's signature tunes, Screamin' Jay Hawkins' 'I Put a Spell on You', each number provided an auditory backdrop to a stage very light on props.

Unlike your standard puppet show where those behind the movements are not seen, *Cabaret U-Mano* puts its puppeteers (and dancers) front and centre. Their bodies intertwine with those of the puppets; they are as much a part of the performance not just mere hands that animate foam. This is perfectly constructed with Conrad The Transvestite, whose legs, arms and hands are those of his/her puppeteer, and when a sexy sheep is being seduced by a hungry wolf, mixing together in a wild foursome with their two puppeteers.

U-Mano's three creators bring a mix of theatre (Raynald Michaud), design (Serge Deslauriers), and choreography (Enock Turcotte) to the show. The movements, style and demeanor of each puppet are nicely crafted, allowing them to play each part and sing each song with their own personality.

The cast is a mix of 29 puppets -- Mauve the Starlet, Kiko the Latin Lover, Conrad the Transvestite, the sock puppet Siba, Frenchfrau, Chica, Loupy Shepherd, Laina Wolfe, the Mermaid Triplets, and the Dragon Queens to name a few -- and a troupe of very attractive young backup dancers dressed in sexy vaudevillian 20s-style garb, who also dawn the roll of puppeteer for some numbers. Their sexy movements matched those of the puppet cast perfectly, adding a real element to an often-surreal show.

Fans of the Toronto drag scene will enjoy *U-Mano*; the costumes are as outrageous as the flamboyant larger-than-life puppets that blur gender and species lines as easily as they belt out a tune and entertain the crowd.

U-Mano, with its sensual characters (puppet and human) is scintillating, each puppet allowing you to dispel your reservations and get into the performance. Those who are heading to the show will discover that a puppet can be oddly sexy, even if their foam hands do not feel that great caressing your skin, or their nipples chaffing your lips.