

Show Biz Chez Nous: Cecil Castellucci pens Hockey Noir, The Opera

Film noir-comic project has lyrics in French, English and français: "It's so Quebec"



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"Montreal is the formation of every single art/heart thing about me," says Cecil Castellucci, who lives in Los Angeles. JOHN MAHONEY / MONTREAL GAZETTE

Hockey Noir, The Opera brings together four of the things Cecil Castellucci loves the most in life — Montreal, comic books, film noir and hockey.

This contemporary opera, which is being performed Thursday and Friday at the Monument-National, features comic-book-like illustrations from Toronto artist Kimberlyn Porter that are projected onstage. The libretto, penned by Castellucci, is a film-noir-esque detective story about a missing Montreal hockey player.

It is Castellucci's second opera. She also wrote the libretto for the 2010 opera *Les Aventures de Madame Merveille*, in collaboration with composer André Ristic. Ristic and Castellucci collaborated again on *Hockey Noir*, and both operas were done for the Ensemble contemporain de Montréal. The soloists for *Hockey Noir* are Pascale Beaudin (soprano), Marie-Annick Béliveau (mezzo), Michiel Schrey (tenor), Pierre-Étienne Bergeron (baritone), and Jean Marchand (narrator).

Hockey Noir, l'Opéra (bande-annonce, 2018)



The story for the new opera takes place during the Stanley Cup final between the Montreal Qabs and the Toronto Pine Needles sometime in the early 1950s. A rookie from the Qabs wants to throw the game because he is cahoots with a mob boss. Things go seriously wrong, and seriously film noir-ish, when the rookie goes missing during the series.

“After Madame Merveille, the comic-book opera, André and I wanted to find another visually stylistic kind of thing, and we found film noir, because noir has the lights and shadows and the iconic characters,” said Castellucci, in an interview this week at a Mile End café. “We’re both hockey fans and he told me the story of Bashin’ Bill Barilko, who scored the winning goal (in the Stanley Cup final) in 1951 for the Toronto Maple Leafs and they found him 11 years later. His plane had crashed. We just loved this idea of a missing hockey player who doesn’t show up for the finals and what could happen. It’s also classic film noir. There’s a detective, a mystery, a femme fatale and a mob boss.”

The lyrics are in French, English and *franglais*. As Castellucci says: “It’s so Quebec.”

The day we met, Castellucci was wearing a Los Angeles Kings sweater and under that she was sporting a Montreal Canadiens T-shirt, capturing her dual loyalties. She was a Habs fan, but is now a Kings supporter, having lived in Los Angeles for the past couple of decades.

She grew up in New York City in a family headed by Québécois parents, who were studying in the Big Apple, and they moved back to Montreal when Castellucci was 17. After studying film production at Concordia University, she jumped headfirst into the city’s alt-rock scene, forming Montreal’s first indie all-femme alt band Bite; when she was thrown out of Bite, she founded Nerdy Girl.

Castellucci — who at the time went by the stage name Cecil Seaskull — moved to Los Angeles in the late ‘90s to pursue her music career, but a few years later, she began writing young adult novels — and she hasn’t looked back since. Since *Boy Proof* in 2005, a novel about a girl obsessed with comic books, she has written 16 more young adult novels. She has also written a couple of comic-book series for DC Comics, including *Shade*, *The Changing Girl*, which was published in October 2016.

She says her early alt-rock days are a huge influence on her art.

“Montreal is the formation of every single art/heart thing about me,” Castellucci said. “I learned to make art by being in an indie rock band, just picking up an instrument and not knowing how to play it and saying ‘f— it, I’m just going to do it’. My ethics, my DIY (Do It Yourself) approach. I’m so grateful. Also thanks to Concordia (film school) for letting me be a weirdo experimental art filmmaker. I think the biggest thing that being in an indie-rock band in Montreal taught me was that you don’t necessarily need to know how to do

something in order to make art. It also taught me how to jam and collaborate, and that made me able to not be precious about my words and my art, but be able to think about what the bigger picture is.”

AT A GLANCE

Hockey Noir, The Opera will be performed at the Monument-National, 1182 St-Laurent Blvd., Thursday and Friday at 7:30 p.m. Tickets: 514-524-0173.

Hockey Noir, The Opera is also set to play the Jane Mallett Theatre in Toronto, May 10 and 11, part of the [Toronto Comic Arts Festival \(http://www.torontocomics.com/\)](http://www.torontocomics.com/).

On tour

[The Damn Truth](http://montrealgazette.com/entertainment/music/nothing-but-the-damn-truth-no-apologies), (<http://montrealgazette.com/entertainment/music/nothing-but-the-damn-truth-no-apologies>) one of Quebec’s hardest-working bands, is touring the province this month, with shows in Sherbrooke, Drummondville, Trois-Rivières, Sorel, Quebec City, Alma and at the Corona Theatre in Montreal on May 18. It has been a busy year of gigging for the bluesy hard-rock outfit, a run of shows that included a stint on the Rock Legends 2018 Cruise, alongside Sammy Hagar, Bad Company, Uriah Heep and many others.

THE DAMN TRUTH -WHITE LIES



Taste of summer

Ariane Moffatt has launched the first song Les Apparences from her upcoming album, her sixth, which is due this fall. The tune has a light summery sound with one mighty catchy chorus. Moffatt also announced a number of concerts for the first half of 2019, including a pit-stop at MTelus (formerly Metropolis) Feb. 22.