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Rouyn-Noranda Presents...Rock Opera!

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By Mike Landry



Céline B. La Terreur performing La Traviata. Photo: Sasha Brunelle

There are niches, and then there is Montreal-based interdisciplinary artist [Céline B. La Terreur](#). If anyone were to write the best Quebecois rock opera, it would be her.

So when Stefan St-Laurent, curator of the [4th Biennale of Performing Art of Rouyn-Noranda](#), asked her if she would like to participate in this year's biennale's theme of rock opera she jumped on the chance. With an interest in visual arts and the leader of an electronic alternative rock band she was both flattered and a little surprised to be invited.

"I was surprised rock opera was even known outside of Quebec and France, because I think it's a very francophone thing," says Terreur. "I didn't even think that kind of tacky project would be heard of outside of Quebec."

For the past six months, Terreur and her band (two other visual artists—Gyorgy Amadeus von Stockhausen, and E Catherina Zvalena) have worked on writing their unique spin on a traditional Quebec rock opera. Replete with tackiness, *The Fabulous Love Life of Gyorgy Amadeus von Stockhausen*, tells the dramatically cliché love story of the band's drummer.

In keeping with Terreur's belief that a successful performance can be gauged by how hard the audience laughs, her rock opera is tinged with irony.

"It's a satire of a regular Quebec rock opera, because I don't personally enjoy rock opera. I find them very cheesy and really boring. And the rock music is not really rocking, if you know what I mean"

Terreur didn't have much experience to help her write a rock opera. Other than a few excerpts she saw on television, she's never managed to sit through an entire performance. She was inspired by a few musicals. She says she loves Judy Garland, and had gone to *Cats* in the 80s.

The challenge for Terreur was to be humorous while writing songs with a strong narrative from start to finish, and had the same clichéd feel of normal rock operas.

"Among my family and friends it's just not our thing. The thing is all the singers that they usually use for rock operas like [Bruno Pelletier](#), they aren't really good singers. They are popular for our aunts and uncles and baby boomers maybe, but not for us."

Like much of her work, Terreur was also inspired by opera legend Maria Callas. Terreur often impersonates Callas in performance, and will be exhibiting *La Divine Tragédie: 1977 (Part III)* at local ARC L'Ecart in conjunction with the staging of her rock opera.

Terreur was first introduced to Callas when she was a teenager. Her uncle lent her a book with photos of Callas. Although she was at first indifferent to Callas—with her long nose, strong eyebrows and severe expressions—she soon became intrigued by Callas' ability to push the limits of beauty with dignity and grace.

“Maria Callas was such an avant-garde artist. She has influenced the divas of heavy metal music—Ozzy Osborn, Alice Cooper, MötleyCrüe— I think they were all influenced by the art and presence of Maria Callas. She was an exceptional artist.”

The experience of writing her own condensed rock opera hasn't changed Terreur's opinion of the genre, but Terreur may change Quebec's opinion.

“My rock opera is going to be the most amazing rock opera of all rock operas, because the one thing they lack is humour. Since mine's going to be a humorous rock opera it's going to be a big hit.”

Catch The Fabulous Love Life of Gyorgy Amadeus von Stockhausen during the 4th Biennale of Performing Art of Rouyn-Noranda from Fri October 3 - Sun October 5. And stop by L'Ecart to see La Divine Tragédie: 1977 on display until Sun October 12.

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