

Lipsynch.

Submitted by [Chris Baldock](#)

on Tuesday, 7th Aug 2012

[Ex Machina \(Canada\)](#) and [Théâtre Sans Frontières \(UK\)](#)

[Play](#)

[Professional Theatre](#)

TP Rating:

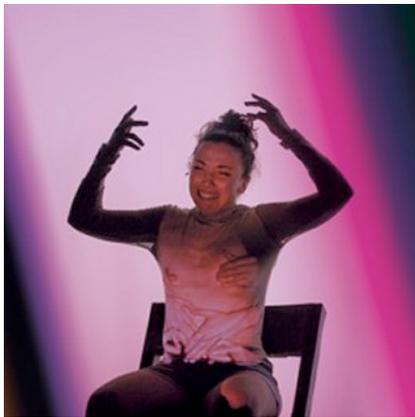
Date of Show: Saturday, 4th August 2012 (All day)

Venue: Arts Centre

Two things I need to state from the outset: first, no review or overview can adequately describe to the average theatre-going public just how magnificent this piece of theatre truly is. And second, if theatre is important to you, then you cannot afford to miss what is, in my mind, the epitome of genuine theatre in all its glorious forms.

Robert Lapage, justifiably labeled one of the best theatre directors in the world today, states in his notes that the work endeavours to signify the difference between voice, speech and language and show the importance of all three in "modern human expression". He states that voice has never been the focus of his previous works but here, complementing it with the masterful use of image, movement and music, he and his team have created, for this reviewer at least, near-perfect theatre.

The production is broken into seven acts, each divided by a 20-minute interval and one dinner break of 45 minutes. At no point did the day seem arduous or laboured. At no point did I think anything happening on the stage was superfluous or indulgent. I felt like I was witnessing something special, something unique.



The plot is at once, both accessible and profound. A young woman quietly dies on a plane leaving behind a baby. From there we are taken on a journey through many continents and decades, as the grown child searches for the answers and the truth about his parents. Spoken in four languages, there was a truly international flavor to the piece. Along the way we meet an ex-opera singer struggling to reconnect with her adopted son, a neurosurgeon hiding a tragic secret, a jazz singer desperate to remember her father's voice, her mentally unstable sister attempting to keep her inner demons at bay, an ex-prostitute struggling to flee her tragic past, a sound engineer who has no idea of his dead father's past, a lonely detective desperately trying to make a connection with another human being, and a fifteen year old girl whose life connects these people through time and fate.

The fusion of a naturalistic style of acting with the nuts and bolts staging made for riveting viewing. Sixteen crew members created theatrical magic with a deceptively simple yet highly

complex and fascinating modular set that became a dazzling array of locales: a train, an airplane, various apartments, a bookstore, a film set and trailer, recording studios to name but a few. The audience watched in awe at the transformations before us, all performed with military precision. The audio operators had their desks on either side of the stage, thus extending the motif regarding the use of voice and sound, and even blended into the action on a couple of occasions.

Each act focuses on a different character – some readily connected to the main plot at hand, others taking their time to connect the threads that bind these people together. As a theatre maker, I was particularly enthralled with the varying styles of each piece, allowing freshness and vitality to permeate the adventure the company was taking us on. The use of film, song, set, and props were used so cleverly yet effortlessly to enhance the story or to show the inner working of the minds of characters. To tell you about the setting up of the jazz café and how that cleverness is then used to play an important part in the inner turmoil of one character, would be to ruin the joy of seeing this created for yourself. To talk about the cinematic style used in the son, Jeremy's, story, would be to take away the audacity in presenting it in a way that reflects the low grade the film he is creating. Well placed humour, both verbally and visually, mark the signs of careful thought in the overall structure of the piece. I believe the production took three years to create. Every moment of careful attention to the craft shows on the stage. This is what can happen with the benefit of time and resources. But it is also what can happen when the audience is given the respect it deserves.

I cannot single out any performance, as each actor was sublime. Some, like Rick Miller as Jeremy, Nuria Garcia as Lupe and Hans Piesbergen as Thomas certainly had the opportunity to show more of their versatility but each actor had their moment to move and enlighten me.

There are images and moments that will stay with me: the mothers outside and on the airplane; the clever way the train stopped at each tube station; Marie recording the four-part vocal exercise; the aforementioned jazz café; Michelle's bookshop – from both perspectives; the madness and chaos of the film set transformations; and the devastating final ten minutes when the whole truth was finally revealed to the son. I needed that long journey to be incredibly moved by it but the final use of every resource and drop of creativity at the creators' disposal, resulted in an impact I have rarely experienced in theatre.





My only minor quibble, and it is minor, was that the surtitles were sometimes not in synch with the actors. It just took us out of the moment on occasion. I also worried for people sitting further back in the theatre that the titles would be difficult to read.

This may not be a piece for everyone. They may find the plot derivative or the characters needing more of an "inner turmoil". They might want a bit more mystery to their staging or things not so tidy with the plot. Ultimately for this viewer, it was a piece that did what I always crave theatre to do: to challenge, inspire, move, entertain, shock and transform me. I would state that this is perhaps the best piece of theatre I have seen. The excited butterflies in my stomach for hours afterwards were certainly a testament to that.

A final thought: when you go to the show this weekend, make sure you take up the dinner package. Highly recommended for staying refreshed throughout the day. The wonderful Arts Centre staff know how to look after you.

State: VIC

About the Author

Chris is a highly respected director/actor in the "straight" theatre scene. He directed the acclaimed production of *The Laramie Project* at Chapel off Chapel which won the Victorian Green Room Award for Best Independent Production. He also received critical praise for his productions of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* for *Midsumma* and The Australian premiere of *Shining City* for *Hoy Polloy*. Chris received VDL awards for directing (*Old Wicked Songs* and *The Grapes of Wrath*), acting (*Side Man*) and sound (*Old Wicked Songs* and *Kindertransport*), *Lyrebirds* for directing and sound (*Amadeus*) and many in-house awards. He also received Music Theatre Guild nominations for performance (*Big River*) and direction (the Victorian premiere of *A Slice of Saturday Night*). He has been an adjudicator for both The VDLs and The Music Theatre Guild. He is next appearing in WLT's *God of Carnage* and is preparing for the first production at Chapel off Chapel in October for his theatre company *Mockingbird Theatre*.