

Michel Lemieux

The Canadian cofounder of Lemieux.Pilon 4D Art, which is staging 'Norman' at the National Theater, talks about blurring the boundaries between theater, dance and cinema

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

Lemieux.Pilon 4D Art has reincarnated Norman McLaren. But rather than using flesh and blood, the Montreal-based performance group employs virtual projection to bring the Oscar-, BAFTA- and multiple Canadian Film Award-winning director and animator back to life. The Taipei debut of 4D Art's *Norman*, a tribute to the film guru, begins tomorrow night at Taipei's National Theater as part of the Taiwan International Festival.

Part documentary, part dance theater and part homage to the spirit and work of one of Canada's greatest innovators of film, *Norman* merges technology and art in a seamless matrix that brings McLaren and the people he inspired and influenced to life through technologies developed by 4D Art.

Peter Trosztmer, the production's solo performer, interacts directly with projected clips of McLaren's films and human figures that appear in midair on the stage. Trosztmer literally enters the films to dance, speak and interact with the virtual characters. In the process, the audience learns about the major themes of McLaren's life and work.

Michel Lemieux formed 4D Art in 1983, five years after graduating from the prestigious National Theater School of Canada. He has worked as a designer, scenographer, composer and director for both film and stage. Victor Pilon joined 4D Art in 1990 as designer and artistic codirector. Together they collaborated on and directed many shows including Cirque du Soleil's *Delirium*, a production that sold out to arena-sized audiences throughout North America and Europe, and *Starmania Opera*, a work that was coproduced by the Opera de Quebec and Opera de Montreal.

The *Taipei Times* spoke with Michel Lemieux over the phone from Montreal to discuss Lemieux.Pilon 4D Art, multidisciplinary theater and the inspiration for *Norman*.

Taipei Times: What was your purpose in forming 4D Art?

Michel Lemieux: We started to work with what we call virtual projections. Through this technique, characters and things appear in mid-air beside the actor. It's like holography. We work in a three-dimensional reality — the stage, set and the performers — and then we add a fourth reality, which is kind of a virtual reality.

TT: Before 4D Art, were you working in more traditional theater?

ML: No ... I've always worked in multidisciplinary theater. I began as a solo performer — I was singing and dancing and moving — using more traditional projections than the ones we use today. So I've always been in this field of new technology of performance art.

I like the [prefix] 'multi' in the words multidisciplinary or multimedia because it is a multiplication.

TT: You've described yourself in the past as a specialist of multidisciplinary creation (Lemieux laughs). Why do you merge different mediums on the stage?

ML: It's a world [trend] — and not just in the arts or on stage. In scientific research, for example, we see more and more multidisciplinary teams. Biologists working with mathematicians working with philosophers. I think it is part of a world current that will make the boundaries between countries, the boundaries between people, disappear. I mean, with the phone — you are on the other side of the world and we can speak together. So the idea is to make boundaries disappear.

In the arts we are just following this current and we are making this boundary disappear between theater and dance and music and cinema. And that's what we do in *Norman*. Who said these were different disciplines? They are all expressions so why not mix them together. It makes sense.

TT: With so many disciplines coming together, why do you think some theater professionals remain averse to merging technology with art?

ML: Well, because it is totally normal. When we have something new people resist it. Take Darwin, for example. People nowadays still resist his ideas. But technology is just another tool. What is really important is the expression of the artist on stage. To get this expression you have to master your tools. Otherwise you just hear or see the tool.

For example, I played violin when I was a child but now I don't. If I played violin for you, you would just hear the violin. If I were an incredible virtuoso of the violin, you wouldn't hear the violin. You would hear the emotion. You would be transported and moved by the music. So when you master the tool, the tool disappears. The tool is the interface between you and the audience and if you master your interface the interface disappears and it is just expression. So it's a bit the same when you work with technology. You have to master the tool of technology to make it disappear.

TT: How did your collaboration with Victor Pilon begin?

ML: It began in the mid 1980s. I was releasing a record and he took some pictures for the record jacket ... We became friends and then we started to create the shows together.

Victor is a great guy for ideas and he is an incredible artistic director. I did a lot of music and rock videos and advertising as a director. I'm working more with timelines and Victor is more into space. But we exchange — it is very much a symbiotic relationship.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



Above: Peter Trosztmer performs in *Norman*.

Left: Michel Lemieux.

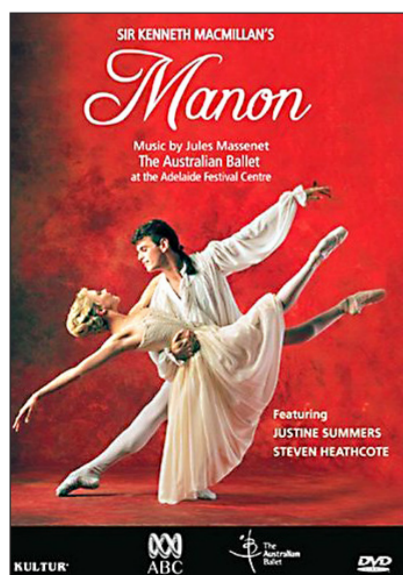
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARCO ST-JEAN AND LEMIEUX.PILON 4D ART



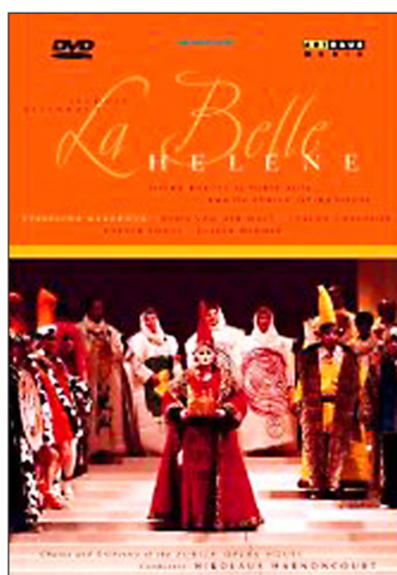
PERFORMANCE NOTES:

What: Lemieux.Pilon 4D Art's *Norman*
Where: National Theater, Taipei City
When: Tomorrow, Friday and Saturday at 7:30pm and Sunday at 2:30pm
Tickets: NT\$500 to NT\$2,500, available through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw

[CLASSICAL DVD REVIEWS]



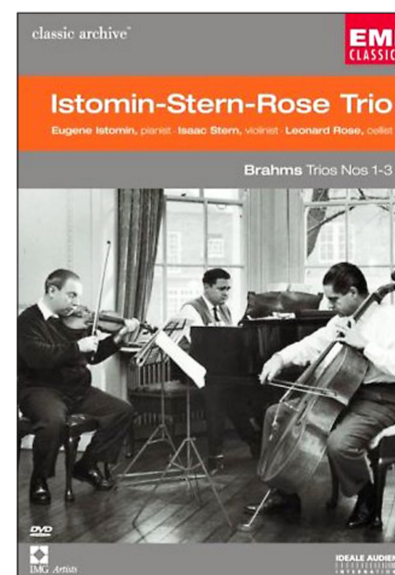
MASSENET
Manon
The Australian Ballet
KULTUR D4089



OFFENBACH
La Belle Helene
Conducted: Harmoncourt
KULTUR D2082



OFFENBACH
Orphee Aux Enfers
Conducted: Davin
ARTHAUS 100086



BRAHMS
Trios 1-3
Istomin, Stern, Rose
EMI 4359993997

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The great conductor Carlo Maria Giulini once said that he adored the music of Verdi's opera *Falstaff* even without the singers. Maybe, some think, he secretly preferred it that way. Whatever the truth, his remark came to mind this week while I was watching the ballet based on Massenet's opera *Manon* — the music sounded so much better when simply danced to than it ever had as an operatic score. And combined with Kenneth MacMillan's superlative choreography, plus the amazing versatility of the Australian Ballet's young dancers back in 1995, the DVD on the Kultur label is highly recommendable.

Its strong effect is all the more extraordinary because the dancing is largely traditional, though with some charismatic exceptions. There's a superbly choreographed fight to end

Act One, for instance, and a funny and acrobatic drunken dance by Manon's malevolent brother (danced by Nigel Burley) in the first scene of Act Two. In essence the style's conventional but eroticized, and the Adelaide audience clearly adored it.

The secret of this production's success is that the story is part of the personal history of millions — a girl who ditches her boyfriend for an older, richer man. The emotions of the rejected youth and the guilty but determined girl — Manon — are wonderfully encapsulated in the music. Justine Summers is ideally youthful, and then cynical, as Manon, while Steven Heathcote makes an exceptionally strong Des Grieux, the impoverished boyfriend.

The Adelaide Symphony Orchestra plays the music with obvious relish, and the sound quality is high. This is an outstanding version of *Manon* as a

ballet, and the most enjoyable DVD I've seen this month.

I must admit that Offenbach's comic operas are not to my taste, and it takes a very strong production for me to watch it without wincing. Two have recently come to hand, Zurich Opera's *La Belle Helene* conducted (astonishingly) by the Baroque expert Nikolaus Harnoncourt, and *Orphee aux Enfers* ("Orpheus in the Underworld") from the Theatre de la Monnaie in Brussels, conducted by Patrick Davin. There's no doubt which is preferable.

Both works retell Greek myths in a modern setting, the aim being to raise a laugh at the contrasts. Critics try to argue that they're satiric of the lifestyles of the Paris bourgeoisie of Offenbach's time, but they seem to be tailored for their amusement as much as anything else — drink and silly flirtation are the order of the day. These works can

occasionally be salvaged by introducing a darker element, however. Only then does their saccharine frivolity become remotely palatable.

Zurich's *La Belle Helene* is intensely colorful, brightly lit, and played for laughs. It didn't get mine, and the only favorable impression I carried away was of the very strong voice of Vesselina Kasarova in the title role. But if you want to experience the bizarre spectacle of Harnoncourt dancing, as he does along with the rest of the cast at the end, then this might be reason enough to take a look. Originally issued by Arthaus, this DVD is coming out from Kultur in the US next month, and is now available for pre-order.

Brussels' *Orphee aux Enfers*, by contrast, presents almost the entire story as taking place in a somber-looking restaurant that could well be in the Belgian capital itself. This certainly

makes for a darker reading, and provides a desirable contrast to the zestful but essentially trivial music, as well as being suitable for depicting Hades, as the story requires. It's impossible to repress the work's flippant high-spirits altogether, though — it does contain the famous Can-Can dance, after all, plus jocular reminiscences of Gluck's music in his 18th-century opera on the same topic.

Here there's even a dog included, though not a real one — Cerberus, perhaps, but something more as well as he's made to bark enthusiastically during the Can-Can. But the generally shadowy ambience makes this rendering of an Offenbach comedy one to go for if absolutely nothing will hold you back.

Finally, don't forget the existence of EMI's wonderful and ever-expanding Classic Archive series. It contains a huge treasury of old performances from different sources. Many of the most

famous names in classical music are here. One superb DVD is a performance by the Istomin-Stern-Rose Trio of Brahms' three piano trios, filmed at ORTF Paris in September 1974 — Eugene Istomin as pianist, Isaac Stern as violinist and Leonard Rose playing the cello. All were famous soloists in their day, and the combination on this DVD was a major occasion.

I don't know why instrumental music should benefit from the artists at work being filmed. It does, though. Maybe it's their finger-work, or maybe it's the glances they exchange. But above all, I think, it's the general atmosphere that's conveyed — of dedication, and (in this case) of a past era. Whatever it is, this DVD represents a good way to get into Brahms' not always easy-to-grapple-with chamber music. It's in color, by the way, despite the monochrome photo of the three musicians on the cover.