

# Champion conducts his own cause

Montréal-based Maxime Morin leaves composing behind for turntables, looped electric guitars and a set that changes every night

## Champion

With Malajube and You Say Party!  
We Say Die!  
Thursday, 29 March at 7pm  
Dinwoodie lounge

PAUL BLINOV  
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Crossover artists seem to be a dime a dozen these days, but Maxime Morin is a few pleasant steps astray of the pack. Originally a composer, his work having graced such acclaimed films as *The Triplets of Belleville*, he now fronts Champion, an unconventional combination of DJ set and live band. Morin plays the role of conductor, using live musicians like a DJ would use samples to weave a soundscape that's as much electronica as it is blues-tinged rock.

"The nature of the concert [is that] we're improvising all the structures," Morin explains over the phone. "The guitarists know what they're going to play, but not when or how. It's up to me to conduct the evolution of the songs and their structures."

"From the first concert it was obvious we had to keep on doing this," he continues. "People felt so good ... it was beautiful to see all those smiles. It was like, yeah, I have a band now."

Forming Champion was a risky venture for Morin, who turned his back on his successful composing career to get the band started. The first pressing of Champion's album *Chill 'em All* was extremely limited, but once the sales started coming in, Morin's doubts about the project were put to rest.



"The first pressing was 2000 copies, and we had to borrow money from a friend," Morin laughs. "[Once those sold], we were like, 'Let's take a chance, go for 3000 copies!' Now, more than 50 000 copies have sold. I'm like 'Wow, okay cool ... let's keep doing this!'"

Money wasn't the only issue, though. Composing music had been extremely profitable for Morin, but down the road he found himself feeling jaded and dejected, working solely

for a paycheque. It took a certain tragic morning to finally snap him out of it and plant the thoughts that would lead to Champion's creation.

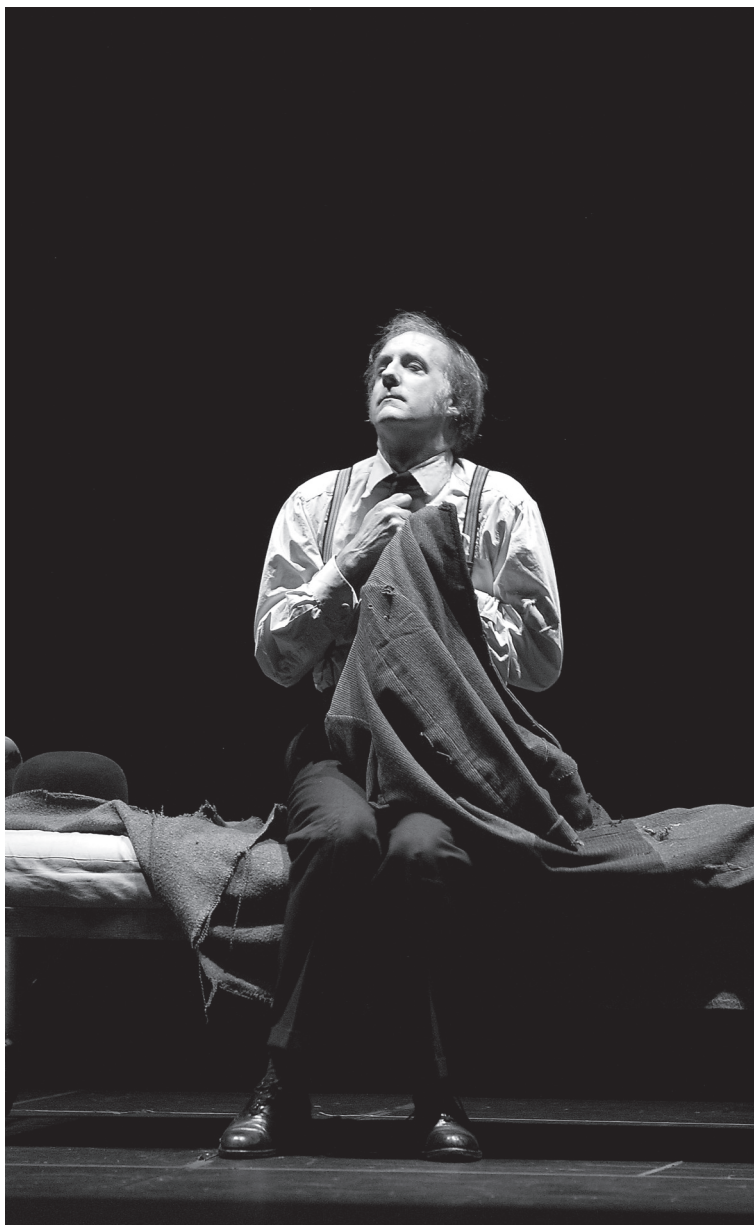
"The morning of September 11, 2001, I was finishing programming a concert, and I was going to go to New York to do this concert," Morin recalls. "Then I got a call at eight or nine o'clock, turned on the TV and, obviously, I never went. But after that I was like, 'Life sucks and I'm wasting my

time making money.' That's not good."

Jump ahead six years, thousands of purchased records and a headlining slot on *Exclaim's* Spring Fling tour and you can see that the moniker Morin chose for his act is especially fitting. And, because of the call-response nature of Champion's live shows, he'll never be forced to play a show the exact same way twice. Every audience will influence the show in a different way, which is exactly how

Morin wants it to be.

"With the live band, [the concert goes] a step further, because you can see people having a good time onstage, and that's magic," Morin beams. "And because the crowd seeing us having a good time onstage, and because of all this improvising, we can react to the crowd, and the crowd reacts to it, so at the end of the concert there's only one band: it's the crowd, the musicians and me."



## A well-tailored, wordless affair

### *The Overcoat*

Co-created and Directed by Morris Panych and Wendy Gorling  
Starring Peter Anderson  
Runs until 8 April  
Citadel Theatre

RYAN KENNY  
Arts & Entertainment Writer

*The Overcoat* is a play without dialogue. You might think a wordless production could sustain itself for only so long before driving its audience completely nuts, but in the end, *The Overcoat's* only real fault is leaving the audience hungry for more.

This Canadian production has been an international hit, touring through sold-out theatres over the past decade. Loosely based on a Nikolai Gogol's 1842 short story of the same name, *The Overcoat* follows the misfortunes of a talented but ultimately disrespected architect, whose overriding source of troubles comes from his tattered old overcoat. But with a simple trip to the tailor, the man decides to take his fortune into his own hands by buying himself an extravagant new coat. With this change of clothing, the man's life changes dramatically.

Peter Anderson has been playing the lead role throughout the show's international tour and seems to have perfected it. He's brilliantly animated, evoking images of silent film stars like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. The

huge cast backing him—22 actors in total—share the star's expressiveness. Of course, with no dialogue, large and meaningful movement is key to pushing the story forward and keeping the audience engaged. Surprisingly, though, the audience is never left longing for spoken word, but rather enjoys this unique and refreshing take on theatre.

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The set pieces also find themselves moving a lot during *The Overcoat*. Drawing boards dance along with their architects. The staircase spins while being ascended. Beds twirl as their inhabitants get up for the day. It all adds to the life of the scenes unfolding, further establishing the mood and feel of the situations. Interestingly, the stagehands that move the pieces around also become integrated into the scenes, often serving as a sort of reinforcement for the feelings and emotions of the characters.

To say there's no dialogue isn't

to say there's no sound; Dmitri Shostakovich's music is beautifully composed and absolutely integral to the play. It really dictates the pace, which is often swift, but slows down at just the right moments. Without the music, *The Overcoat* would be like a strange mime show, difficult to watch and to understand. Together, the music and movement blend seamlessly to create a detailed and intriguing narrative.

The play has a number of truly delightful scenes. The large cast allows for frantically staged ensembles, with pedestrians dodging buses comprised of tight groups of actors shuffling along with a bar held above their heads. Another highlight is a group of apron-clad musclemen feverishly sewing the architect's new overcoat, perfectly in time with a rousing musical number. An image that really sticks, however, is the man's romantic dance with his beautiful new overcoat. It's a pure moment that remains with you once the play has long closed the curtains.

However, when the curtains do close, you may feel a sense of longing. Longing to see more of the man and his dashing new duds. Perhaps this is the result of second-act pacing that was just a little too quick, especially compared with the much more deliberate first act. Or perhaps *The Overcoat* is just so good that you didn't want it to end.