

Reopening a dark conversation

December Man remembers the aftermath of Canada's first school shooting

theatrepreview

The December Man

Runs until 23 March
Written by Colleen Murphy
Directed Micheline Chevrier
Starring Brian Dooley, Jeff Irving, and Nicola Lipman
Citadel Theatre

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On 6 December, 1989, Marc Lépine walked into l'École Polytechnique in Montreal and shot 28 people. Lépine killed 14 women and injured four men and ten women, before he reportedly exclaimed, "Oh shit," and killed himself.

This was before Columbine, before Virginia Tech, and before Dawson College. At a time when nothing like this had ever before happened in Canada, the country was in shock and in mourning. In a now familiar way, news of what some called an "anti-feminist" shooting saturated the media for an entire week and then, just as quickly, disappeared.

Nearly 20 years later, playwright Colleen Murphy re-opens this dark chapter in Canadian history with her Governor-General-Award-winning play *The December Man*. However, instead of focusing on the incident itself, this co-production between Toronto's Canadian Stage Company and Edmonton's Citadel Theatre intends to shed light where the media didn't. As director Micheline Chevrier explains, the play examines

what happened to the survivors of the shooting years after the fact.

"It's about a young man and his parents. The young man is a student at l'École Polytechnique, in 1989, when the massacre occurred. And it's about the impact of that event on that family. Not only the son, but the parents as well."

The young man's name is Jean, and according to the play, he was one of the men ordered out of a classroom before Lépine shot nine women. His parents, Kathleen and Benoît, are low-income, working-class citizens.

"It was the first one of its kind in Canada. People were confused because it [was] not something that we live with here."

MICHELINE CHEVRIER
THE DECEMBER MAN DIRECTOR

"[Jean's their] only son," Chevrier says. "He's the first one to go to university. He's the promise. It's all going according to plan. And then something happens that is not according to plan and is really outside anybody's capacity for understanding—especially for this family."

Because Lépine targeted what he called "feminists" in his attack, the feminist movement at that time claimed the event as belonging to them in many ways, Chevrier notes. However, that's not entirely the case.

"It's much more complicated than that. And part of that is because the event hurt a lot of people beyond the women [that] were killed. And that's what [the playwright is] exploring."

In many ways, the Montreal shootings hurt the whole nation by shattering assumptions many Canadians had about their country.

"It was the first one of its kind in Canada," Chevrier says. "There was no template. People were confused because it [was] not something that we live with here. It really came out of the blue. You could see that through people's responses to it and in how we tried to explain it. You can never imagine that something of that nature can happen where you are. It's just outside our imaginations, our expectations."

Coming to grips with the unimaginable is at the very core of this play, she explains.

"[E]ven though things happen across the border, we keep saying, 'That doesn't happen here.' But it did. That's the conversation."

And it's the conversation that's important, she stresses.

"We [tell people to 'move on'] all the time," Chevrier remarks, "But I hope people understand that it's okay to live with what we've experienced instead of putting it behind you or pretending it never happened. It deepens your understanding of humanity. And that's my hope for theatre generally, is that it creates awareness and understanding so that compassion can come of that, so that the world is a bit more accepting, tolerant, and aware."



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albumreview

Karina Zorn
Through These Eyes
Fritzi Records

MARIA KOTOVYCH
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Vegas lounge singers. Smoky bars. Sinatra. In the last few years, singers such as Michael Bublé have revived an interest in the musical style of this time period. Similarly, Karina Zorn's jazzy *Through These Eyes* tries to recall this time of crooners and jazz.

While Zorn has a lovely voice, her somewhat cheerful tone doesn't always

match the jazzy, bluesy lyrics she's singing. Her sweet voice would be appropriate for singing tunes from *The Sound of Music*; however, songs such as "Willow Weep for Me" require a sadder expression than what Zorn provides. Interesting instrumental backgrounds or solos frequently contribute to the music, but they don't really compensate for Zorn's vocal

incongruities with the lyrics.

Bublé and Sinatra both offer diversity in their music, offering both slower and quicker songs. In contrast, Zorn's *Through These Eyes* doesn't really provide any variety in tempo. Most of the songs range from very slow to snail's pace. The first sight of any musical speed doesn't occur till the sixth track, with the spirited tangos of "I Love Paris." It's a fun song, but it's also too little, too late. "Dindi" shakes things up a bit as well, but not enough to wake up listeners from a deep sleep.

Zorn, while a talented singer, channels some of the musical energy from 1960s jazz singers. Unfortunately, this album is considerably less exciting than what one might expect from a typical visit to Vegas.



featuredalbum

Cadence Weapon
Afterparty Babies
Epitaph

PAUL BLINOV
Arts & Entertainment Editor

It all starts with an "mmm-bop."

The solitary vocal melody becomes two; then, the dual-layered acapella morphs into a full-blown musical landscape as Cadence Weapon (Rollie Pemberton) begins to ponder current and ex-girlfriends, the touring musician stereotype, and throwing down in the good ol' days. There are no instruments: everything from the main riff to the drum sounds come from his windpipe.

The song is "Do I Miss My Friends?" the opening track on *Afterparty Babies*, and it's the first stroke in Pemberton's masterful second album. He declares

that this one "goes out to all the accidents out there / Keep making mistakes." An album with so few faults shows that he's learned a lot from his own missteps.

"In Search of Youth Crew" is a pulsing, sample-powered highlight: Pemberton's stream-of-consciousness vocal cartwheels hit a dartboard's share of declare "The youth crew's back!" before abruptly halting to finish with an anecdotal story from Pemberton's youth.

His flow is incredible: there's no basic template for a Cadence Weapon song—just a waterfall of words,

cascading over catchy samples and beats as Weapon waxes eclectic about Fleetwood Mac, closing real estate deals, and *Megaman 4*.

His collects his samples and beats from all over the musical map: Nintendo blips prop up "Limited Edition OJ Slammer," while an almost militaristic drum line guides "True Story." Most of these backdrops wouldn't sound out of place on a dance floor, but none of them sacrifice lyrical prowess for body-moving beats.

It all ends with a clap—the last sound on "We Move Away," which closes *Afterparty Babies*—but that's not the only applause Cadence Weapon will be getting from this album. If this is what afterparty babies are capable of, we should all start partying a little harder a few more nights a week.

Listen to tracks from *Afterparty Babies* on the Editor's Playlist at www.thegatewayonline.ca