

Ocean epic

>> **Novecento** tells the gripping tale of a whole life spent at sea

by [AMY BARRATT](#)

"You're never really fucked if you've got a good story and someone to tell it to."

Words to live by for theatre practitioners and artists in general, the above is the philosophy of famous between-the-wars jazz pianist Danny

Boodman T.D. Lemon Novecento. So says his friend, Tim Tooney, the narrator of Alessandro Baricco's *Novecento*, currently on stage at Usine C in a Théâtre de Quat'Sous production.



Let's talk about decks: McCamus

In this one-man play, actors Tom McCamus (in English) and Pierre Lebeau (in French) regale the audience with the fictional tale of a child born and raised aboard *Novecento*, an ocean liner named after the year of his birth, 1900. The man spent his whole life travelling back and forth between Europe and America but never set foot on dry land. The play was adapted into the film *1900*, but whereas the movie realistically recreated the period, the play relies on simpler tools: lighting, ambient sound and the actor's voice to evoke a character, a time and a place in the spectator's imagination.

Director François Girard first created this production in French in April 2001 for Théâtre de Quat'Sous, starring Lebeau. When they decided to take the show to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that summer, they wanted to create a parallel English version. That's where McCamus came in.

"When François approached me about it, I hadn't read the play," McCamus recalled recently in an interview from his farm near Brighton, Ontario. "I took the script and read it on a plane to Toronto, and just fell in love with it.

"As an actor you do so many things but you always come back to 'What's the story I'm trying to tell?'" In *Novecento* the story is everything.

"To sit in a box for 90 minutes and talk is a fabulous thing for an actor," McCamus says. "Every night that's my job - by telling the story, to transform the theatre into another setting."

The company last performed the show over a year ago, but is reviving it now at the request of Usine C, a house that is increasingly reaching out to the non-francophone community. Although the look of the piece remains constant in the two languages, those who have seen both agree that the two actors bring different qualities to the piece. Montreal audiences have the unique opportunity over the next 10 days to see both versions.

Gym dandy

Imago Theatre may have had some rocky times with its mainstage productions these last few years, but an initiative of theirs that everyone consistently raves about is their annual Theatre Gym (formerly known as Directors' Gym). This year they have chosen scenes from several pieces on a common theme. Scenes of War features excerpts from Wedding Day at the Cro-Magnons by Wajdi Mouawad (translated from French by Shelley Tepperman), The Designated Mourner by Wallace Shawn, and Far Away by Caryl Churchill. The emerging directors involved are Sarah Galea-Davis, Carla B. Guttmann and Virginia Preston, mentored by Stacey Christodoulou.

***Novecento*, English version continues through Dec. 7, 8pm, at Usine C (1345 Lalonde); version française Dec. 9-13, 8pm, 845-7277**

***Theatre Gym* runs Dec. 4-6, 8pm, at the Mai (3680 Jeanne-Mance), Admission is by donation but reservations are required, 274-3222**

[>> Stage Listings](#)

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