

## Dangerous Liaisons, The Segal Centre, September 7-28, 2008

By: Christina on: Sun 14 of Sep, 2008 [14:22] (160 reads)



The Leonor and Alvin Segal Theatre  
and BMO FINANCIAL GROUP  
Present

## Dangerous Liaisons

By Christopher Hampton  
Directed by Alexandre Marine  
September 7-28, 2008

*As overheard in various salons and bedrooms... Valmont:* "I want the excitement of watching her betray everything that's most important to her. I thought betrayal was your favourite word." *Merteuil:* "No, no, cruelty. I always think that has a nobler ring to it."

The Leonor and Alvin Segal Theatre kicks off a sizzling season of passion and seduction with *Dangerous Liaisons*, Christopher Hampton's adaptation of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' 1782 French novel about lust, greed, deception and romance. Don't miss what promises to be an exciting production, led by award-winning director, Alexandre Marine and featuring a handpicked, mostly Montreal cast of 16...*From Left: Catherine de Sève (as La Marquise de Merteuil) and Brett Christopher (as Le Vicomte de Valmont) sizzle in Dangerous Liaisons. The photographer is Randy Cole.*

The battle of the sexes; love and war: such age-old clichés take on a rapier-sharp glitter in Segal Centre's debut theatre piece of the season: *Dangerous Liaisons*. It's a dramatization of a novel by ex-soldier, Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, first published seven years before the French revolution...

The literary sophistication of the dialogue is paramount; whereas, as a theatrical Period piece, it unfurls like a battle flag, a sort of 'cold war' battleground in which tactical, if not romantic seduction lies in ambush and purloined love letters do triple duty as bribe, blackmail and weaponry in the hands of those with cynical intent.

And within this rarefied microcosm of the old French aristocracy, particularly among the idle rich, even the most innocent (Cécile de Volanges, Gemma James-Smith) and the most noble-minded (Madame de Tourvel, Jillian Niedoba) don't stand a chance against the treacherous machinations of a couple of bored and decadent ex-lovers (Marquise de Merteuil, Catherine de Sève) and (Le Vicomte de Valmont, Brett Christopher) having both ice-cold revenge and sizzling seduction on their minds.

These two conspirators are manic in their mutual determination to corrupt one another, as well as their selected victims.

For the Marquise de Merteuil, love does not exist 'except as that capacity men and women have to enslave one another.' For Valmont, there isn't a woman alive who won't inevitably succumb to his powers of seduction once he sets his mind to it, including the independent, 'liberated' power-wielding Marquise. They're a pair of strange bedfellows in any sense of the term.

From the looks of things, Russian theatre director, Alexandre Marine, has applied the choreographed timing and artistry of a grand ballet to this highly stylized production. The rather marvelous 'sound track' composed by his son, Dmitri Marine, creates the atmosphere, sets the pace, and punctuates the fluidity of each scene.

Scenes involving complex espionage, betrayals and strategic war-time alliances.

And although the Marquise and Valmont appear to dominate the field, each of these characters is at the same time waging an interior battle: her debilitating possessiveness of her lovers, past and present; his unsuspected vulnerability to genuinely falling in love.

Although, honestly, in the case of Valmont, that seems way too sentimental in the traditional 'feel-good' simplistic 'Hollywood' sense. In fact, a perpetual and dangerous ambiguity exists on stage, as it does in life. Christopher, as Valmont, acts out his character's supposed obsessive 'love' as an emotional cocktail of self-inflicted contagion, spawned from the 'shock and awe' of being rejected by his would-be victim, Madame de Tourvel. He himself falls prey to his own vanity under siege, the flip side of Narcissism, backfiring like a jinxed rebounding spell!

Throughout the many devious twists and turns of this perennial psychological drama, the spotlight remains fixed on love, lust, sex, greed and need as being among the most powerful human arsenal there is. Unstable and volatile, like massed up supplies of saltpetre.

Catherine de Sève realistically portrays the Marquise as prime mover and chief strategist of the catastrophe. With her cool precise diction and iron-controlled emotion, witty self-analysis and worldly-wise commentary, she is more than a match for Valmont, who as he 'sickens' into love, transforms more and more into her puppet, executing her orders, even as he trains his self-indulgent cross-sights on a squad of nubile ladies at once.

Speaking of which, kudos to designer, Jessica Poirier-Chang, for her fanciful and lavish costumery, as well as the swish and atmospheric set design created by Yannik Larivée.

This 18th century drama, brought up to 21st century speed, feels ironically modern too: witness the victimized female versus the free-wheeling domination of the self-sufficient, 'liberated' woman; traditional religion and morality pitted against hedonistic cynicism; the ever complex relations between the sexes, the restless push and pull between desire and possession, power and submission, hegemony and revolt.

Don't miss this classy, sumptuous and sophisticated, 'retro' speed-trip in time.

Theatre Review by Christina Manolescu © 2008 Invisible Cities Network

# Dangerous Liaisons

**By Christopher Hampton**  
**Directed by Alexandre Marine**  
**September 7-28, 2008**

The Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont are a pair of schemers (and former lovers) who take pleasure in coolly manipulating and seducing those around them, leaving scandal, dishonour and outrage in their wake. The Marquise challenges the Vicomte to seduce the virtuous Madame de Tourvel, but when the latter breaks the rules and finds himself genuinely falling in love with his intended prey, the game quickly turns fatal--with devastating consequences for everyone involved. Here, sex is a game and death is but a means of keeping score.

Director Marine's previous production at the Segal, the Prix de la Critique award winning *Amadeus*, was an unqualified success and demonstrated his unique creativity in staging large scale period plays, particularly the decadent period of the late eighteenth century. *Dangerous Liaisons* will offer audiences another opportunity to experience Marine's directorial talent. Bryna Wasserman, the Segal Centre's Artistic and Executive Director, was never in doubt as to who should direct this opening play of the Segal's 08-09 season. "I couldn't be more confident in having Sasha leading this production, she said. It's a large scale, challenging play, but with his innovative eye and mastery of the physical aspect of the theatre, I'm certain his perspective will bring it to life in the most distinct and imaginative ways."

"This play and its themes of sex, power and manipulation are universal, we're still playing by the same rules as two centuries ago," said Marine in expressing the timelessness of the play. "You need look no further than today's news, at how little time is taken up by actual news versus tabloid sex scandals." As well, this late twentieth century stage adaptation of a late eighteenth century novel will astonish today's audience with how powerful and liberated the women are in the play. Madame de Merteuil matches her adversary Valmont move for move in this game of love, passion and domination.

As part of a truly international cast, Brett Christopher (a one man tour-de-force in the Segal's *I Am My Own Wife*) stars as the Vicomte de Valmont. Catherine de Sevè (hugely popular for *L'auberge du chien noir* on SRC, here in her first English stage role) enthalls as the Marquise de Merteuil. The highly respected cast also includes Jake Epstein (*De Grassi: The Next Generation*, Gemini Award), Anthousa Harris (*Centaur's Romeo and Juliet*), Gemma James-Smith (*Sidmart's The Haunted Hillbilly*), Vitali Makarov (*Théâtre Deuxième Réalité's Hamlet*), Tara Nicodemo (*The Segal's The Diary of Anne Frank*), Jillian Niedoba (*Not Wanted on the Voyage*), Igor Ovadis (*Minuit le soir*) and Moira Wylie (*The Segal's Hedda Gabler*). Rounding out the company is Maud Desbois, Adam Driscoll, Alexandre Gorchkov, Lauren Roy, Kristina Sandev and David Sklar.

The design team has conceived a stage where reality reflects fantasy, desire and dreams - a space mirroring brooding narcissism. Mastermind creators include Yannik Larivée, set and props; Spike Lyne, lighting; Jessica Poirier-Chang, costumes and Dmitri Marine, sound and original music. Elaine Normandeau is the stage manager and Merissa Tordjman completes the team as assistant stage manager. Expect this to be the flagship show of the season.

"Le Vicomte de Valmont is conspicuously charming and never opens his mouth without first calculating what damage he can do." - Mme. De Volanges

Monday Night Talkbacks presented by Pratt and Whitney Canada  
As usual following the play, some of the actors and/or designers will remain on stage to take questions from the audience. Monday Night Talkbacks provides an intimate opportunity for audiences to engage up close and personal with the personalities bringing first class professional English language theatre to Montreal.

Building audiences for the future

Everyone in this field knows that what matters most is the creation and fostering of new audiences. To this extent, the Segal Centre is offering fantastic savings for those under 30. The hope is to see full advantage of this taken, from full-time college and university students to young professionals just starting out.

-=

TICKETS AND MEDIA INFORMATION=-

**September 7-28, 2008**

#### Performances:

Monday - Thursday, 8:00 pm

Saturday 8:30 pm

Sunday 7:00 pm

#### Matinées:

Wednesdays 1:00 pm

Sundays 2:00 pm

#### Box Office:

(514) 739-7944

#### Admission

(514) 790-1245

<http://www.admission.com>

**Segal Centre for the Performing Arts at the Saidye  
5170 Cote St. Catherine Rd.**

#### Alexandre Marine - Director

Mr. Marine is a founding member of the Tabakov Theatre in Moscow, founding artistic director of his company, Théâtre Deuxième Réalité (T2R) and a faculty member at the Institute of Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University. He has directed over 60 shows in Moscow, Montreal, Boston, New York and Tokyo. His 1997 production of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* at Centaur Theatre was rewarded at the Soirée des Masques, while T2R's *Hamlet* was awarded the critics' prize (AQCT) for best Montreal show in 1999. The Segal production of *Amadeus*, which he directed, was also noted by the AQCT prize for best English-language production, as well as a MECCA for best director.

#### Brett Christopher - *Le Vicomte de Valmont*

Brett is known to Segal audiences for his performance in the solo show *I Am My Own Wife* (Masques Award: Best English Production, Mecca Award: Best Actor.) Other notable theatre credits include: *The Gladstone Variations*; *Autoshow* (Convergence Theatre); *Antony & Cleopatra* (Shakespeare in the Rough); *Much Ado About Nothing* (CanStage); *Family Stories: Belgrade, The Sea* (ARC); *Romeo & Juliet*; *As You Like It* (Theatre by the Bay); *Mary's Wedding* (Theatre & Co.) Brett is also the General Manager of Theatre Kingston and a graduate of the George Brown Theatre School.

#### Catherine de Seve - *La Marquise de Merteuil*

Catherine De Sève shares her time and versatile talent between theatre and television. On stage: *La Marea* (FTA), *Le Silence* (Omnibus), *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* and *Scaramouche* (Théâtre Denise-Pelletier). She also took part in Brigitte Haentjens's creation *Tout comme elle* (Usine C). She made a name for herself on Quebec television in *Sketch Show* (Gémeaux nomination for Best Actress in comedy). Since 2003, she has been a part of the prime-time program *L'auberge du chien noir*, broadcast on the SRC.

#### Christopher Hampton - Playwright

*Dangerous Liaisons* is Mr. Hampton's 1985 Royal Shakespeare Company adaptation of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos 1782 French epistolary novel. Other plays include *The Talking Cure*,

White Chameleon, Tales from Hollywood, Treats, Savages, The Philanthropist and Total Eclipse. He co-wrote the book and lyrics for the musicals *Sunset Boulevard* and *Dracula* and the libretto for the Philip Glass operas *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Appomattox*. He has translated extensively from Chekhov, Ibsen, Moliere, Odon von Horvath and Yasmina Reza. Screenplays include *The Quiet American*, *Dangerous Liaisons* (for which he won an Oscar), *Carrington*, *Atonement* and most recently *Cheri*.

#### Pierre Choderlos de Laclos - Novelist

Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, (1741-1803), was a French soldier and novelist. His masterpiece *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is one of the earliest examples of the psychological novel. Written in epistolary form, it explores the amorous intrigues of French aristocracy. It combines searching psychological analysis in the manner of 17th-century drama, the assumptions of 18th-century philosophical sensationalism and suggestions of demonic Romantic revolt. The novel has inspired a large number of critical and analytic commentaries, plays and films.