

## ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

### Portrait of Victoria effective, affecting

**PAT DONNELLY**  
*Gazette Theatre Critic*

When Dulcinea Langfelder's *Victoria* premiered in French last year at the Agora de la Danse, it was filed under dance. Now it's premiering in English at Centaur Theatre and we're calling it theatre.

Dance, theatre – neither label is precise. What Langfelder does on stage in this witty, heartrending piece is closer to clowning, within a multimedia context.

Her character, Victoria, is based on Angèle Petrilli, a 90-year-old woman Langfelder met while doing volunteer work with the aged. Anyone who has spent time on an Alzheimer's ward is sure to be struck with the accuracy of her portrayal.

Victoria has the irresistible, child-like charm of those who can't quite place you any more but are glad to see you anyway. She begins sentences only to lose their drift before ending them. When she finally remembers a word she has been searching for, she can't remember why.

She first appears from behind one of the many hospital curtains that break up the stage, her face covered in strings of tangled yarn, mumbling things like, "Imagination is silly." Ever the wheelchair-bound damsel in distress, she awaits the attentions of a grouchy hulk of an orderly (Réal Bossé), who's secretly quite fond of his exasperating charge. Together, they add up to a new twist on Beauty and the Beast.

The narrative of Charles Fariola's text is anything but linear. It may not have structure, but it has shape and style. The translation is smooth as silk.

While Langfelder's Chaplinesque portrayal of Victoria doesn't exactly deny the tragedy of her situation, it certainly downplays it in favour of the gently absurd.

At first, one wonders how a dancer is going to express herself from a wheelchair. But fantasy sequences take care of that. A hospital gown is twisted into a mini-dress and Victoria is off and running in her mind. One of Langfelder's most delightful numbers is a loopy tap dance done in a man's over-sized shoes. Another is a pas de deux to the music of *Dancing Queen* to the music of *Dancing Queen*, with Langfelder turning into a rag-doll as Bossé makes her moves for her.

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Audience interaction is very much a part of the show. Victoria likes to chat with people, saying things like, "And you've got all your teeth. Isn't that wonderful." At one point, she ventures down the aisle with a tray, offering "tea" and "cookies" to members of the audience.

The use of shadow puppetry in *Victoria* is highly sophisticated, wonderfully evocative and sometimes hilarious. After scolding Victoria for talking to her shadow, the orderly walks away, leaving his independently operated shadow behind, shaking its head.

Although it's initially jarring to see a wheelchair used as an acrobatic prop, Langfelder soon leads us to ponder the lyrical potential of this completely utilitarian object.

Victoria should not be missed. It heals the soul.

✦ *Victoria*, based on texts by Charles Fariola, continues at Centaur Theatre, 453 St. François Xavier St. in Old Montreal, until June 4. Tickets range from \$20 to \$35. Call (514) 288-3161.



COURTESY OF CENTAUR THEATRE  
Réal Bossé as the grouchy orderly and Dulcinea Langfelder as his aged charge in the English premiere of *Victoria* at the Centaur Theatre.

The role of Réal Bossé is now played by Éric Gingras