

## Dreams in a digital age

When technology takes up every moment of your waking life, what happens when you're sleeping?

BY PAT DONNELLY, GAZETTE THEATRE CRITIC NOVEMBER 2, 2013



Jeremy Segal, left, and co-creators, Guillaume Lévesque and Michel Lefebvre on the set of *Dreaming Now*. The show is interactive, so no two performances are exactly alike.

**Photograph by:** Vincenzo D'Alto, The Gazette

MONTREAL — We live in a distracted world, hounded by text messages, voice mail and images that arrive through various devices.

How are we coping with it all? Or more important, how is it affecting the minds of the next generation?

During his 20 years of running Youtheatre, Montreal's oldest professional English-language theatre company specializing in theatre for young people, artistic director Michel Lefebvre has witnessed major changes.

"I've been very aware that the audiences in the world we live in are being transformed," Lefebvre said in an interview this week. "And a lot of that transformation is technology driven. So the world we live in and grew up in is not the world that kids who are 6 or 7 or 8 grew up in now. There's an awareness and an integration of technology into every moment of their waking lives."

And it doesn't stop there. It also seeps into their dreams.

With *Dreaming Now*, which began Friday at the Segal Centre, Lefebvre feels he's embarking in new territory with a show that addresses the omnipresence of technology.

"This show is called *Dreaming Now*," he said. "And I'm asking the question, with my fabulous co-creator Guillaume Lévesque, if virtual reality takes up all of that space, what happens when you're sleeping? So we're proposing a series of dreams where a young boy is integrating and playing with technology and then discovering that there is no way out of it. That's the genesis of the show."

Lévesque, 30, a rising young digital media artist, was recently hired by Montreal's Moment Factory, the special events company that helped Madonna make a splash at the Super Bowl last year. This is his third project with Youtheatre but first as co-creator.

Lefebvre likes to think of himself as a progressive. And Youtheatre's mandate has always embraced new works and socially relevant theatre, as opposed to quaint, escapist renderings of fairy tales by the brothers Grimm.

"I look at a lot of theatre now, more traditional theatre, and for me, all of the codes are firmly anchored in the 19th century — in the forms, the structure, the way that the narration is revealed," he said. "And for me, there is a huge problem with that, which is that we are in the 21st century. That problem is exacerbated because my audience is a young audience that has only known the 21st century. So they have none of these codes. For them, looking at a puppet is like looking at a medieval artifact."

Actor Jeremy Segal (co-founder of Title 66 Productions) will work alone on stage for the duration of *Dreaming Now*, backed up by technology.

"It's a show that stems from an interaction between Kinect cameras, a computer and a performer," Lefebvre explained. "So all of the imagery that you see on stage — and the show is without words — is triggered live by the performer. Then he manipulates these images. He places the images and transforms them live on stage."

Thus no two shows will be exactly alike.

"There is a similarity," he said. "But there are moments where an algorithm will be driving the sequence. Our joke in the rehearsal hall has been the algorithm learns. So this algorithm is a living, breathing kind of computer entity that does what it's going to do."

During one climactic sequence, which involves the character known only as The Boy drifting away in a vast, overloaded universe, each audience will see something different.

Lefebvre has not, however, completely forsaken words. He has hedged his high-tech bets by commissioning a text-rich new play by Greg MacArthur called *Horror Story*, about two young sleuths who attempt to solve a 20-year-old murder mystery. That one, opening in March, will be aimed at age 13 and up.

Also this season, Youtheatre will take its previous hit, *The Pencil Project*, based on electroacoustic performance, to the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, in January. The versatile Levesque plays one of the two musicians in that show.

***Dreaming Now***, for ages 7 to 12, has a public performance Sunday at 10:30 a.m. at the Segal Centre Studio, 5170 Côte Ste-Catherine Rd. Tickets \$22.50 adult, \$14 children. School shows until Nov. 8 at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Call 514-739-7944 or visit [www.segalcentre.org](http://www.segalcentre.org).

**Not many adult English-language theatre shows** are brought back for a second run within the same year. But Kafka's *Ape*, adapted and directed by Guy Sprung, was so well-received when it played last January/February, that Infinitheatre has decided to give it another go beginning Thursday.

Howard Rosenstein will repeat his excellent performance as the self-taught ape named Redpeter who gives a lecture to shareholders of a multinational military security company called Greywater. In this revised and updated version, the cameo role of Mrs. Redpeter, a less-educated ape, has been expanded, allowing actor Alexandra Montagnese more scope.

Kafka's ape is based on Franz Kafka's 1917 short story titled *A Report to an Academy*.

***Kafka's Ape*** returns to *Bain Saint-Michel*, 5300 St-Dominique St., Nov. 7 to 24, Tues. to Sat. 8 p.m., Sunday 2 p.m. Tickets \$25, student/senior \$20. Cash only at the door. Call 514-987-1774 or visit [www.infinitheatre.com](http://www.infinitheatre.com).

[pdonnell@montrealgazette.com](mailto:pdonnell@montrealgazette.com)

Twitter: [patstagepage](#)

© Copyright (c) The Montreal Gazette

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)



Jeremy Segal works alone for the duration of Dreaming Now, backed up by technology.

**Photograph by:** Vincenzo D'Alto, The Gazette

