

LOUIS RIEL: A COMIC-STRIP STAGE PLAY

PRESS PACK

Based on the acclaimed graphic novel by

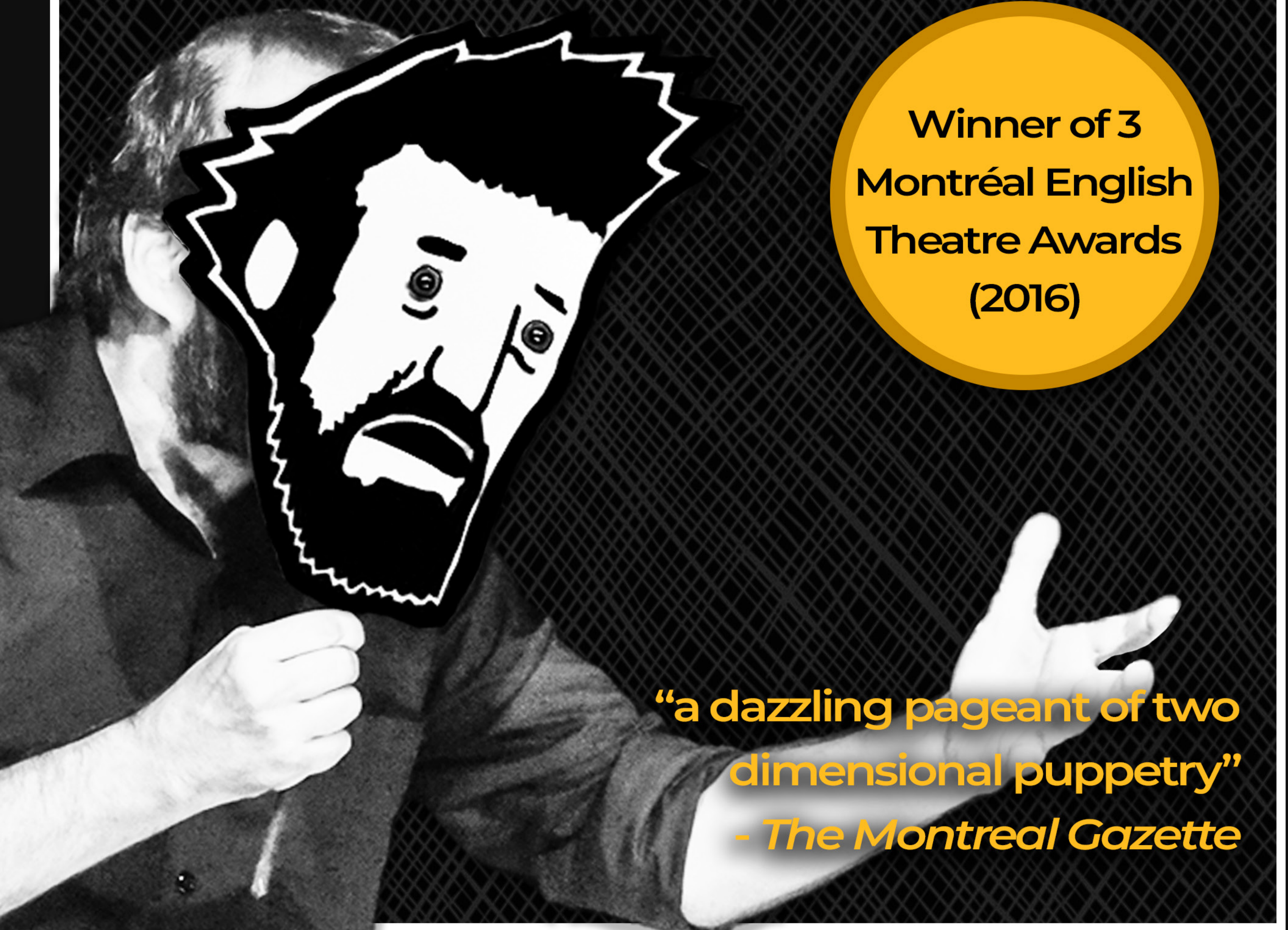
Chester Brown

Adapted and directed by

Zach Fraser

Winner of 3
Montréal English
Theatre Awards
(2016)

*“a dazzling pageant of two
dimensional puppetry”
- The Montreal Gazette*





ABOUT THE PLAY

Controversial Historical Figure
Acclaimed Graphic Novel
Life-Sized Puppets

Infinithéâtre brings audiences a live-action puppet version of Chester Brown's seminal work, ***Louis Riel : A Comic-Strip Biography***. A salute to Brown's artistry, the puppets are right off the page – eerily naïve but remarkably evocative. This epic tale steams through early Canadian history, revealing a rugged and treacherous landscape both in life and politics. In this intrepid and irreverent look at some of our nation's founders, ***Louis Riel : A Comic-Strip Stage Play*** is part adventure story, part history lesson, and a completely fascinating theatrical event.



“...Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Stage Play is a haunting yet funny look at a man whose life continues to defy lazy hagiography, popping out of our country's history with colour and passion in the 130 years since he walked to the gallows.”

— Sarah Deshaies, *Cult Montreal*



SYNOPSIS

Riel sits in a courtroom; a judge stands ready to sentence him to death by hanging. He must plead his case as we get to witness an important piece of Canadian history. *Louis Riel : A Comic-Strip Stage Play*, is a bold portrayal of a young Canada going through some of the most difficult growing pains ever.

Surveyors measure up the Red River Settlement and the settlers are worried that their land will be taken away by the English from the East. A call is made and a leader summoned. Louis Riel is thrust into leading the Métis people; bilingual, part Aboriginal, a devout Catholic and educated, he is born of all aspects of the Canadian frontier.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald is busy worrying about a potential threat from the United States who want to annex the 'untamed' western lands that have not yet been fully settled by Europeans. He wants to see his dream of an expanded Canada and railroad all the way to the western frontier realized and the Métis are proving to be a real obstacle.

Over several years, negotiations continue between the settlers and Ottawa. The Métis begin to organize themselves around Louis Riel and form their own provisional government. Pretty soon, as tempers flare, each side feels either betrayed, ignored or bothered by the other, and battle lines are drawn. Louis Riel and his Métis followers arm themselves and the Royal Canadian Mounties are sent to the settlement to suppress a rebellion. Macdonald's railway becomes the Mounties' vehicle for pushing west and eventually blood is spilled.

Several battles leave Métis and Mounties dead and eventually the embattled Riel is brought to trial. Despite having been elected to parliament multiple times by his people, despite his efforts to find a politically negotiated agreement, despite all that Riel believes as a devout Catholic, he is met with serious accusations and is eventually tried for treason. His punishment – death by hanging.

Jump to today and Riel's legacy is still a conflicted one. Considered by many as a father of Manitoba, complete with a statue in front of the legislature, for others he is still a rebel. As conflicted as this story is, it speaks to a uniquely Canadian dilemma; where a hero to some stands as a threat to others. In the end we are left with a compelling Canadian tale.

"This innovation works."

— Byron Toben, *Westmount Mag*

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE TRAILER](#)



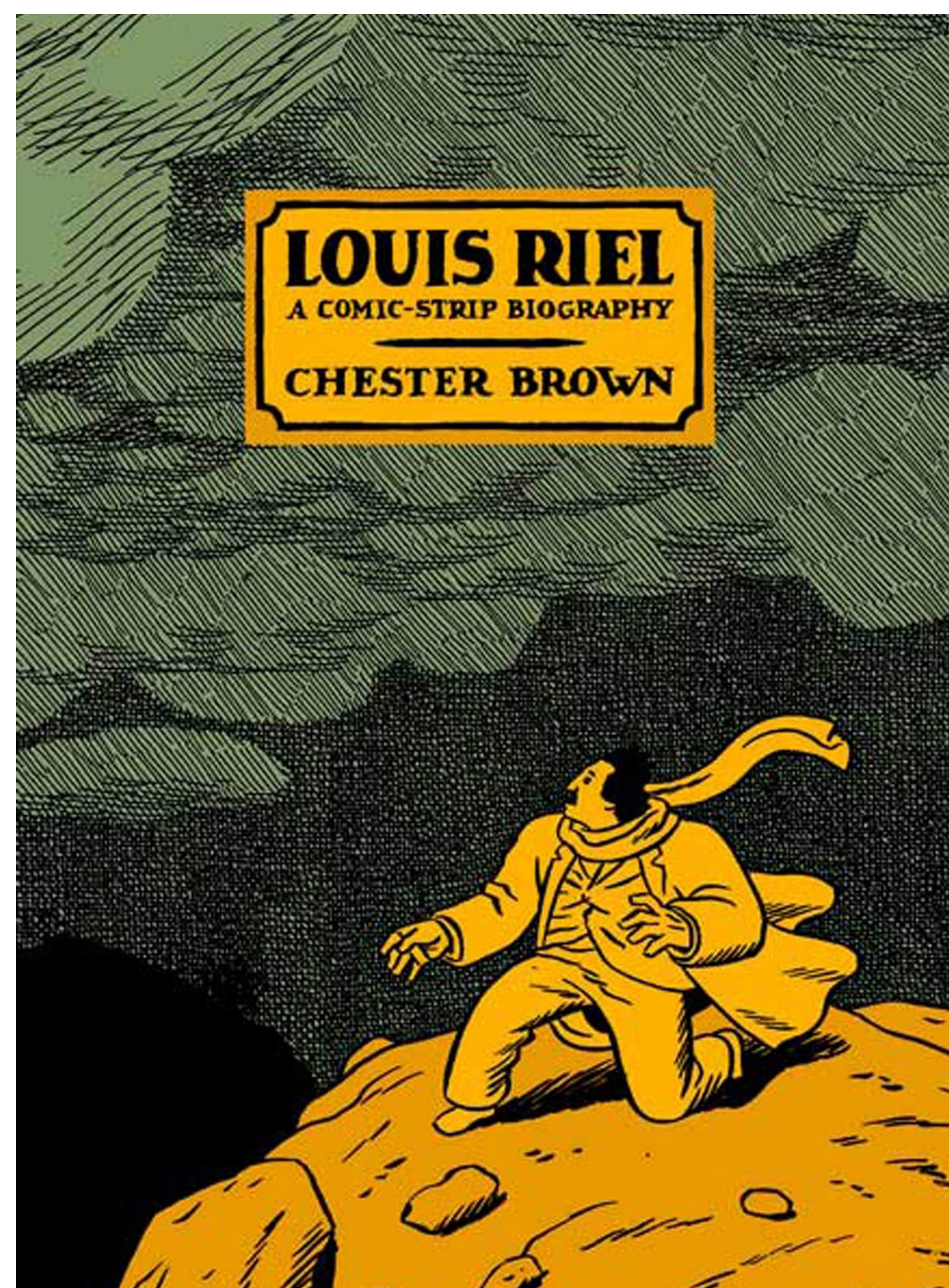
BIOGRAPHIES

The Graphic Novel

Louis Riel : A Comic-Strip Biography won Harvey Awards for Best Writer and Best Graphic Album for its compelling, meticulous, and dispassionate retelling of the charismatic, and perhaps mad, nineteenth-century Métis leader. Louis Riel was also nominated for Eisner, Ignatz, and Libris Awards; featured on the Globe and Mail's list of the 100 best books of the year, and Quill and Quire's list of the five best Canadian non-fiction books of the year; and excerpted in the comics issue of McSweeney's Quarterly Concern.

Chester Brown (Graphic Novelist)

Chester Brown was born in Montreal and grew up in the nearby suburb of Chateauquay. Brown has gone through several periods in his comics work. In the 1980s, he gained notice in alternative comics circles for the improvised, surreal, scatological *Ed the Happy Clown*. He followed this with revealing, confessional autobiographical comics in the early 1990s. In 1991, he signed on with Drawn & Quarterly, which has since come to be recognized as an internationally renowned publishing house of literary graphic novels and art books from around the globe. Brown's historical-biographical graphic novel of rebel Métis leader Louis Riel was a surprise mainstream success in the early 2000s. In 2011, he released his controversial pro-prostitution polemic, *Paying For It*, and in 2016, *Mary Wept Over the Feet of Jesus*, the retelling in comics form of nine biblical stories that present Chester Brown's fascinating and startling thesis about biblical representations of prostitution.



Zach Fraser (Stage Adaptation/Direction/Puppet Design)

Zach is a Montreal-based director, producer, actor, puppeteer, puppet maker, teacher, and artistic director of Infinithéâtre. Directing credits include META-winning *The Sighlence of Sky*, *Omi Mouna* and *King of Canada* (Infinithéâtre), *Okay Boomer* and *Perry and the Ferry* (Theatre Ouest End), *Indra's Web* and *Au Nez et à la Barbe* (NTS), *Fifteen Dogs* and *Blindness* (John Abbott College). Puppet designs include *Stars: Together* (Crow's Theatre), *B-612* (La Roulotte), *MacBeth – Walking Shadows* (Shakespeare in the Ruff), *The Nisei & the Narnauks* (Persephone Productions), *The Aeneid* (Talisman Theatre) and *The Heretics of Bohemia* (Scapegoat Carnivale / Segal Centre). Zach teaches in the Theatre Department at John Abbott College, in the specialized puppetry program at UQÀM, and at the National Theatre School of Canada. Zach was recently elected president of the board of directors for the Association québécoise des marionnettistes.



CURRENT CAST



Photo by Ashe Lang

L-R: Henry Beasley, Maddison Schmitt, Anne-Marie Saheb

Henry Beasley

Henry is a multidisciplinary artist hailing from New Westminster, BC. A recent graduate of the Acting Program at the National Theatre School of Canada, he is also a graduate of Capilano University's Musical Theatre Program. Favourite recent credits include Jacob Mercer in *Salt-Water Moon* (Rising Tide), Cliff Bradshaw in *Cabaret* (NTS), and Syd in *there's nothing you can do* (NTS). Cooking is Henry's one true love, but theatre is cool too.

Anne-Marie Saheb

A graduate of the Dawson College Professional Theatre Program, Anne-Marie works in both English and French in theatre, film and television. She is French-Canadian - Egyptian and learned Spanish while living in Honduras. She has performed in over 60 productions, was part of Black Theatre Workshop's Artist Mentorship Program, and is returning for a 2nd year as mentor with Artista. Anne-Marie was most recently seen in Imago Theatre's *Foxfinder* by Dawn King, directed by Cristina Cugliandro; Hudson Village Theatre's *Strawberries In January* by Evelyne de la Chenelière, translated by Morwyn Brebner and directed by Dean Fleming; Repercussion Theatre's Shakespeare-In-The-Park production of *Measure for Measure*, directed by Amanda Kellock; and *The Last Wife* by Kate Hennig, directed by Eda Holmes, for which Anne-Marie received a 2019 META nomination for Outstanding Supporting Performance.

Maddison Schmitt

Grateful to have grown up in Quw'utsun (Cowichan) unceded territory on what is currently known as Vancouver Island, Maddison now calls Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) home. They are a 2-spirit Red River Métis citizen and interdisciplinary performing artist/theatre creator. Maddison has completed a 3-year Diploma in Musical Theatre as well as a BPA in Interdisciplinary Collaborative Performance Production at Capilano University. They are currently completing a BFA in Performance Creation at Concordia University and as a mature student are blessed to be able to learn from their younger peers. Favourite performance credits include Man #1 in *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* (Presentation House); Ralph in *Reefer Madness: the Musical!* (Point B); Aaron in *Legally Blonde* (TUTS); Ensemble in *Hello, Dolly!*, *Follies*, *Oklahoma!* (RCMT); Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (bard@brentwood); Angerbird in *Ashgirl* (Exit 22).



PRODUCTION HISTORY

Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Stage Play had its full-length world premiere at Théâtre La Chapelle in Montréal, Québec from February 25th to March 5th, 2016. Performed both in English and in French, the play also went by the title **Louis Riel: Une bande-dessinée théâtrale**. The production was presented in partnership with Festival de Casteliers, Montréal en Lumière, and Infinithéâtre. The original production was made possible by the generous support of The Cole Foundation and The Canada Council for the Arts with developmental support from Playwright's Workshop Montreal. In 2017, Manon St-Jules created a French-language version of the text, and Blayne Macleod contributed select Cringlish translations. Minor script revisions were also made following consultations with the Société historique de la Saskatchewan. In 2023, Métis performer Maddison Schmitt joined our cast in the role of Riel. A direct descendant of Moïse and Joseph Ouillette, notable figures in the lead-up to the North-West Resistance and the Battle of Batoche, Maddison's family connection to the story has brought us yet another level of resonance as we tell this important story.



Creative Team:

Adaptation, Direction & Puppet Design — Zach Fraser

French Translations — Manon St-Jules

Plains Cree Translations — Blayne McLeod

Dramaturge & Collaborator — Attila Clemann

Performers — Henry Beasley,
Anne-Marie Saheb, Maddison Schmitt

Set Design — Romain Fabre

Original Lighting Design — Luc Prairie

Touring Lighting Design — Jon Cleveland

Original Music — Tristan Capacchione

Production Manager — Tristynn Duheme

Stage Manager — Claude Lemelin

CONTACT : Zach Fraser / 514-987-1774 / zach@infinitheatre.com



PRODUCTION HISTORY

Photo by Maxine Côté



Outings include:

Théâtre La Chappelle / Montréal, QC - Feb 2016

- Bilingual version, 90 minutes, cast of 5 (11 performances)

Hudson Village Theatre / Hudson, QC - Sept 2017

- Bilingual version, 90 minutes, cast of 5 (8 performances)

Batoche National Historic Site / Batoche, SK - Sept 2017

- French TYA version, 45 minutes, cast of 3 (8 performances)

Théâtre Uiviit / Iqaluit, NU - Oct 2017

- French TYA version, 45 minutes, cast of 3 (3 performances)

École Secondaire Louis Riel / Montréal, QC - Feb 2018

- French TYA version, 45 minutes, cast of 3 (5 performances)

Puppets in the Green Mountains Festival / Brattleboro/Putney, VT - Sept 2018

- English version, 70 minutes, cast of 3 (3 performances)

Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts / Richmond Hill, ON - Jan 2023

- English version, 70 minutes, cast of 3 (1 performance)



AWARDS

Montreal English Theatre Awards (METAs) 2015/16
Nominated for 7 awards, winning 3



Photo by Maxine Côté

OUTSTANDING INDEPENDENT PRODUCTION (WINNER)

RustWerk ReFinery

OUTSTANDING ENSEMBLE (WINNER)

Charles Bender, Cat Lemieux, Anne Lalancette,
Jimmy Blais, Jon Lachlan Stewart

OUTSTANDING NEW TEXT - Original or Adaptation (WINNER)

Zach Fraser

OUTSTANDING DIRECTION (NOMINEE)

Zach Fraser

OUTSTANDING LIGHTING DESIGN (NOMINEE)

Luc Prairie

OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL COMPOSITION (NOMINEE)

Tristan Capacchione

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO THEATRE (NOMINEE)

Zach Fraser (Puppet Design)



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