



ENTERTAINMENT LOCAL

TNO's Quand La Mer theme of lost culture rings true for many ethnic groups

LAURA STRADIOTTO, FOR THE SUDBURY STAR
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Photo supplied by Nicola-F Vachon Sudbury native Celeste Dube performs in Quand La Mer.

One of our planet's worst environmental disasters provides the backdrop to Theatre du Nouvel Ontario's first staged production of the season.

Quand La Mer is the story of the people who inhabit a fishing village near the Aral Sea, the changes that face them, and the traditions and a way of life threatened with extinction.

Although she never indicates where the story takes place, playwright Esther Beauchemin invents a culture, rituals and even a language that belongs to the villagers of her play Quand La Mer, which plays at TNO starting tonight until Oct. 26.

"She has managed to create a certain tradition around these characters and the believability of a culture that's not ours but still relatable," says Celeste Dube, an actor in Quand La Mer.

Central Asia's Aral Sea was once the world's fourth largest lake and supplied nearby villages with bountiful catches. But in the past 30 years, 60% of the lake and the Amu Darya, the river that feeds into the lake, have been diverted to irrigate cotton crops. At the current rate of decline, experts predict the Aral Sea could disappear completely by 2020.

"The most emotional part of this story is not as an actor, but as a individual to see what (playwright Beauchemin) has touched on," says Dube from her home in Montreal.

Dube is originally from Sudbury and a graduate of Laurentian University's francophone theatre program; in fact she was part of the first graduating class.

Dube performed with TNO before leaving her hometown and then moved onto other projects in Ottawa. She spent time working in film and television as an assistant director before returning to her first love, theatre.

She plays two characters in *Quand La Mer*: One of the town gossipers and Norouz, a gypsy woman and newcomer to the community who falls in love with a young villager.

"The environment is sort of the catalysis to why these characters are the way they are," says Dube, "and forces them to do certain things because the environment around them is changing."

The theme of the loss of culture "reins true" for many ethnic groups, says Dube, particularly the aboriginal and francophone communities that have fought "very hard for everything they have to a certain extent."

Quand la Mer is a co-production between Theatre Sortie de Secours, where Spanish-born director Philippe Soldevila is artistic director, and Ottawabased Theatre de la Vieille 17, where the playwright is artistic director.

The play opened to great reviews when it premiered at Zones Theatrales in Ottawa and at the Theatre Periscope in Quebec.

Quand La Mer is Beauchemin's fifth play and will be published by the Sudbury-based francophone publishing house, *Prise de parole*. The book will be launched as part of tonight's premiere performance at the TNO.

MORE INFO

When

Oct. 17 to 26

Supertitles available Oct. 19 at 2 p.m., Oct. 23 and Oct. 24 at 8 p.m.

Tickets

\$32 adults, \$23 seniors and \$18 post-secondary students. Call the TNO box office at 705-525-5606, ext. 4 or www.letno.ca