

**INFRAROUGE**

# THE GLASS EYE



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Une création de Louis Negin et Marie Brassard  
inspirée d'un texte de Louis Negin, *Polo's Fantasy* /  
A creation by Louis Negin and Marie Brassard,  
inspired by *Polo's Fantasy*, a play by Louis Negin

Une production INFRAROUGE en co-production avec /  
An INFRAROUGE production in co-production with  
Luminato Festival, Usine C



# PRESSE PRESS



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## The Glass Eye

*Laissez-moi vous dire que Broadway était plus grand que je ne l'avais rêvé, Marilyn plus belle qu'on ne m'avait dit, les Swinging 60<sup>s</sup> à Londres, c'était la plus grande fête à laquelle je suis jamais allé. Du tramway de College Street où je me réchauffais près du poêle, au train Super Chief direction Hollywood accompagné de mes cinquante valises, le monde de mon imagination m'a toujours protégé du quotidien banal. Mes idoles étaient Carmen Miranda et Steve Reeves et mon hobby, de découper et coller des images de magazine de l'Hollywood d'antan — mes rêves étaient en Technicolor.*

— LOUIS NEGIN

Collision de cultures, de styles et d'époques, la réalité et la fiction s'entrelacent dans ce spectacle hybride. *The Glass Eye* est une pièce étrange inspirée de la vie mi-rêvée et mi-réelle d'un homme. Cet homme est Louis Negin, qui a travaillé au théâtre et au cinéma depuis plus de quarante ans. *The Glass Eye* est un spectacle dans un spectacle, construit de réflexions sur la célébrité, le théâtre, le cinéma, le sexe et l'amour ; un excitant voyage dans le passé et le présent d'un rêveur extravagant, témoin privilégié des années d'or du cinéma et du théâtre.

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## The Glass Eye

*Let me tell you — Broadway was bigger than I dreamt, Marilyn was more beautiful than I'd heard, the Swinging 60<sup>s</sup> in London became the biggest party I've gone to. From warming myself beside the stove on College St. street car to traveling on the Super Chief to Hollywood accompanied by sixty pieces of luggage, my world of imagination always rescued me from the mundane. Role models were Carmen Miranda and Steve Reeves, hobbies were cutting and pasting collages of early Hollywood — my dreams were in Technicolor.*

— LOUIS NEGIN

A clash of cultures, styles and times, reality and fiction are intertwined in this hybrid performance. *The Glass Eye* is an odd piece that draws its inspiration from a man's life, both dreamt and real. The man is Louis Negin, an actor who's been active for more than forty years in the cinema and theatre world.

*The Glass Eye* is a play within a play made up of reflections about celebrity, theatre, movies, sex and love; an exciting journey into the present and past of an extravagant dreamer, a privileged witness of the Golden Years of cinema and theatre.



## **The Glass Eye**

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et Marie Brassard,  
inspirée d'un texte de Louis Negin,  
*Polo's Fantasy*.

Une production INFRAROUGE  
en co-production avec Luminato  
Festival (Toronto) et Usine C  
(Montréal)

—  
Mise en scène  
**Marie Brassard**

Interprétation  
**Louis Negin**

Dramaturge  
**Daniel Canty**

Scénographie  
**Antonin Sorel**

Assistance à la mise en scène  
et costumes  
**Catherine Chagnon**

Son et musique  
**Alexander MacSween**

Lumière et régie lumière  
**Christian Gagnon**

Vidéo  
**Sophie Deraspe**

Direction technique  
et régie vidéo  
**Richard Desrochers**

Régie son  
**Steve Marsh**

—  
Remerciements  
**Karl Lemieux, Pedro Pires, Anne  
Plamondon, Espace Libre  
et Tom Dean Ocularists Inc.**

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—  
Directed by  
**Marie Brassard**

Performed by  
**Louis Negin**

Dramaturg  
**Daniel Canty**

Stage Design  
**Antonin Sorel**

Assistant to the Director  
and costumes  
**Catherine Chagnon**

Music and Sound  
**Alexander MacSween**

Lighting Design and Light Operator  
**J. Christian Gagnon**

Video  
**Sophie Deraspe**

Technical Director  
and Video Operator  
**Richard Desrochers**

Sound Operator  
**Steve Marsh**

—  
Acknowledgments  
**Karl Lemieux, Pedro Pires, Anne  
Plamondon, Espace Libre  
and Tom Dean Ocularists Inc.**

## Théâtre - La vie rêvée de Louis N.

HERVÉ GUAY

Édition du jeudi 25 octobre 2007

Mots clés : Usine C, Louis Negin, The Glass Eye, Théâtre, Montréal

Le culte voué aux vedettes s'impose comme un des thèmes dominants de la présente saison. Il apparaît en filigrane de plusieurs productions montréalaises. Mais deux spectacles l'abordent de front. À la Licorne, Olivier Choinière (Félicité) mord à belles dents dans cette matière tandis que Marie Brassard l'évoque par petites touches mesurées à l'Usine C. The Glass Eye examine plus particulièrement les effets et les causes de cet amour du glamour chez un acteur homosexuel vieillissant.

Dans le programme, l'acteur du Canada anglais au centre de ce spectacle écrit: «Ce spectacle est un collage de souvenirs, de rêves, de fantasmes et de vérité.» Louis Negin ne croit pas si bien dire. Il est guidé sur ce terrain par la main experte de Marie Brassard. Dans cette oeuvre en chantier, l'acteur revient sur sa fascination pour les stars, fait remonter à la surface une enfance torontoise misérable, verse dans l'exagération la plus éhontée et apparaît tel qu'il est à l'heure actuelle, sans costume ni fla-fla.

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De telles réminiscences auraient pu sombrer dans la nostalgie, voire les paillettes et le strass, si Marie Brassard n'avait su organiser avec doigté le matériau fourni par Louis Negin. Au départ, il s'agissait d'une pièce intitulée Polo's Fantasy, A Faux Memoir. Or, plutôt qu'à des scènes, nous avons droit ici à des bribes, à des fragments, assortis de brèves pauses et d'images en noir et blanc parfois un peu floues. Car ici, le temps décante bien les choses, les ramène à de plus justes proportions, loin des illusions coûteuses et de la nostalgie bon marché. En fait, seule la métaphore de l'oeil de verre gagnerait à être maniée avec un peu plus d'économie. La chose tombera certainement en place à une étape ultérieure du travail.

Cela étant, ce portrait d'un adolescent juif consolé d'une vie minable par les feux de la gloire, en particulier celle des années d'or de Hollywood, se déroule dans une sorte de cinéma. Au moins, un tapis et des murs rouges qui convergent vers un écran rappellent-ils l'endroit que meublent aussi un micro et un fauteuil. Le public et le privé ainsi que le présent et le passé sont appelés à se croiser dans le secret de cette salle obscure au gré d'un récit qui mêle habilement vie rêvée et parcelles de réalité.

Bien qu'épris de glamour, Louis Negin apparaît dans The Glass Eye dans un dépouillement et une intimité aux antipodes des rêves dans lesquels il s'est toujours réfugié. Du jeune homme qui se décrit comme doté des jambes de Betty Grable mais d'une gueule à la Peter Lorre, on devine d'abord la tristesse sous le maquillage, la solitude que font oublier les pétillants airs de Broadway. En sa compagnie, on comprend en outre qu'un flot de célébrités et de champagne procure un vertige qui efface souvent les déceptions que le reste de la vie ne manque pas de lui réserver. Il est doux, en effet, de se bercer d'illusions, ce qui donne lieu à plusieurs instants exquis de cette autobiographie à deux mains, notamment celui où le héros danse sur des billets de cent dollars. Un jour vient cependant -- et c'est là que Marie Brassard intervient avec finesse -- où l'éblouissement cesse et où l'âge nous rattrape. Mais entre-temps, que de cabarets, de premières et de films savourés! En un mot, que d'ivresse!

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## What is, what was, what might have been

**JAMES BRADSHAW**  
THURSDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL  
JUNE 12, 2008

### THE GLASS EYE

Created by Louis Negin

and Marie Brassard

Directed by Marie Brassard

Starring Louis Negin

At the Enwave Theatre

in Toronto

Whether or not one is enamoured with the partly true, partly fictional mixture of memories and dreams recounted in *The Glass Eye*, this is a show that triumphs in its ability to induce self-reflection.

Louis Negin and Marie Brassard's 75-minute offering was born out of a one-man show Negin wrote in 2005 entitled *Polo's Fantasy: A Faux Memoir*, a semi-autobiographical work that followed the adventures of a young gay man escaping a suffocating life in 1940s Toronto by inventing an alter ego and moving to Montreal.

Brassard, a fixture of the Quebec theatre scene, saw an opportunity to build around the earlier work and delve into the mind of Negin, a 40-year theatre veteran. The result is a touching and often absurd play. Brassard doubles as director and an offstage narrative voice that provides another perspective to balance that of Negin's character.

And while both the tale and tellers are often compelling, it is the impetus the play creates to examine one's own life that leaves the most lasting impression.

Like *Polo's Fantasy*, the play glances back on a young boy's lonely, insecure, mundane existence in Toronto and subsequent love affair with the wonders of Montreal, which offer a taste of the idealized Hollywood life. *The Glass Eye* seeks to delve deeper into what Brassard has called "the documentary aspect" of Negin's story.

The work is filled with humour and drew raucous laughter through much of the performance, but it's most often derived from the absurdity of the events and characters Negin depicts, rather than a true wellspring of mirth. And though he is masterful at inducing the laughs, they seep quickly away, overpowered by the character's tortured insecurity, which permeates the show.

The set design is well conceived, hard to place in past or present. The sparse living room, consisting of a chair, small table and lampstand, works equally well as the site of Negin's youthful revels in Montreal and as a place for him to sit and reflect decades later.

Negin appropriately appears at once stylish and unkempt, and adds to this mix by singing in a capable yet haunting voice.

Brassard adds her characteristic flair for film and sound with a screen that accentuates the genesis of the boy's fantasies in the local movie theatre.

At times, however, the show struggles to depict Montreal as an intoxicating, exciting locale. The city's charming portrayals are fleeting, as scenes of espresso cafés and walks on Mount Royal are supplanted by the excessive vanity of the city's nightlife. For much of the show, Montreal fails to sustain its idyllic quality and instead takes on the characteristics of Negin's fantasy Hollywood, a place of superficial glamour.

It is strongest in its mix of sadness and hope that comes of Negin examining the past and present against his future prospects. The most striking moment is his solemn declaration that "you see what you could be, but you know what you are."

His self-awareness is magnified by a gradual and painful realization of the impermanence of beauty and glamour. His once-idolized companion, referred to only as Captain Marvel for his bodybuilder's frame and playboy appearance, eventually spirals into despair, decay and death. He leaves only his glass eye behind, a reminder that what was once the great flaw in this near-perfect being now represents substance and permanence.

This examination of a life both lived and un-lived is a catalyst for the audience, who are urged to reimagine their own aspirations and the blurred line between reality and dreams. That alone makes this show worth seeing.

*The Glass Eye repeats tonight at 8 and tomorrow at 9 p.m. (<http://www.luminato.com>).*



# Nostalgic look at memories

BY JON KAPLAN ON JUNE 12, 2008

**THE GLASS EYE** by Louis Negin and Marie Brassard, directed by Brassard (Negin/Harbourfront/Luminato). At Enwave Theatre (231 Queens Quay West). To June 13. \$35. 416-872-1111. Rating: NNN

**Louis Negin** is one of those rare actors who's a true raconteur, a performer who turns personal anecdotes into a magnet, drawing an audience irresistibly into his world.

In **The Glass Eye**, created by Negin and director **Marie Brassard**, bits of fictionalized biography, film and a love of Hollywood glamour -- along with such props as a red-carpet runway, an awards-style microphone and a martini glass -- conjure up the story of a young gay man whose life around the globe is funny, sad and ultimately a bittersweet blend of the two.

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It begins with the boy lost in the darkness of a movie house, dreaming of being a showgirl. He then launches into a series of Hebrew prayers sprinkled with the names of Hollywood legends, and we're off on a tale of self-discovery, from a Toronto hotel room to a gay time in Montreal with a bodybuilder daddy nicknamed Captain Marvel and performances at theatre centres around the world.

Sometimes tentative, sometimes brimming over with pride and surprises, Negin is a charming performer. His live work is complemented by film projections behind him, at times from the films he loves and at times documentary-style episodes featuring Negin; there's the fascinating juxtaposition of watching Negin (in the flesh) watching Negin (on the screen). Some of the most suggestive of the clips are a kind of rolling inventory of objects he mentions in the tales -- part history, part fantasy.

Entertaining, occasionally ironic, adding bits of torch songs to his narrative, Negin offers a loving look at youth and age and the frequent discrepancies between those two contrasted periods of life.

And the glass eye of the title? It's a motif, an object and a metaphor woven through the story. No spoilers here.

## Mooney on Theatre...

### The Glass Eye at LuminaTO

Review by Erin Klee



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I met Louis Negin, co-creator and solo performer of [The Glass Eye](#) (which played at this year's LuminaTO festival), in a coffee house a couple months ago.

We discovered each other under the best of circumstances; I knew nothing of him, and he knew nothing of me. We had each glanced up from our morning coffees and noticed the other. (He had disheveled white hair, inquisitive eyes, and a newspaper; I extricated myself from a backpack heavy with books and an ever-present laptop computer.) We both smiled. I can't recall who spoke first.

That conversation was the beginning of my deep respect for Louis. (I think he also liked me – but I'm still not entirely sure.) Like many prominent artists, Louis seemed acutely aware of his public persona, unsure if he should trust. In that dialogue (and others that followed), moments of intimacy were tempered by theatricality.

Louis can be maddeningly evasive. But he can also be disarmingly warm.

He's a man to be savoured. And his show at Harbourfront – co-created with the brilliant Marie Brassard – is an apt incarnation: enigmatic... mercurial... engrossing... unforgettable.

As the performance begins, Louis stands on a long red carpet behind a classic silver microphone. He sings in Hebrew; one hand covers his head, holding an absent yarmulke. It feels like a serious ritual – but then the prayer transforms into a Hollywood litany: Carmen Miranda... Vivian Leigh... Greta Garbo... Paul Schofield... Marlon Brando. It's an exhaustive list of women and men who have become icons, embodying the fame Louis desired.

## Mooney on Theatre

Toronto, June 15, 2008

SUITE

[The Glass Eye](#) is an encapsulation of a life. Precisely whose life – and which moments are fact or fiction – is difficult to say.

Episodic in nature, the play is a series of shifting stories. Some stories are culled from Louis' work in theatre and film; some are inspired by moments he shared with others – mostly lovers – in the four decades he lived and worked with the entertainment elite.

As a solo performer, Louis transforms like quicksilver, embodying the voices of men he once loved. He also regresses (evocatively) into younger versions of himself.

It isn't always clear which character Louis is embodying in a specific moment – but the ambiguity feels right. The evening has the flavor of a dream (or a film). Characters shift like aging memories, grafting art and artifice.

The quality of Louis' performance is matched by the attention to detail in the production's design; the set, video, sound, and lights are constructed with great care.

Antonin Sorel's elegant set evokes the best iconography of cinema, theatre, and vaudeville. Red velvet curtains – strangely sensual – frame a white video screen. The long red carpet and classic microphone (where Louis first appeared) remain in place on one side of the stage; on the other side is a black leather chair, silver floor lamp, and a low table (cluttered with stacks of paper, a glass of water, and a martini). The stage is theatrical but comfortable: a place where a man accustomed to the spotlight can relax – and revel.

The video (designed by Sophie Deraspe) is often literal... sometimes abstract... and compelling throughout. Even her most simple images are deeply affecting. (A close-up of a man's hands cutting bathing-suit-clad figures from a catalogue becomes an expression of a young man's nascent sexuality. A man studying his nose in a mirror becomes a powerful critique of racism – as Louis looks for the Jewish "defect" he was cruelly told he has...)

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In moments like these, Louis truly radiates.

His radiance – more than any other element of [The Glass Eye](#) – is what I find most compelling. I have rarely seen a character take on such life; on more than one occasion, Louis' performance brought me to tears.

Veiled by his fiction, his truth resonates.

*The show has finished its run with LuminaTO, but keep your eyes open for a remount. It's well worth seeing.*

*Image by Catherine Chagnon*