Mathieu Gosselin talks about seeing his play PROVINCE translated and brought to the stage by Talisman/Other Theatre *(translation by Nadine Desrochers)*

Mathieu is a writer and actor making big splashes across Montreal stages. He took some time out of his busy schedule to sit with me and talk about his play PROVINCE, translated and coming to the English theatre for the first time.

Can you tell me where the play was first inspired?

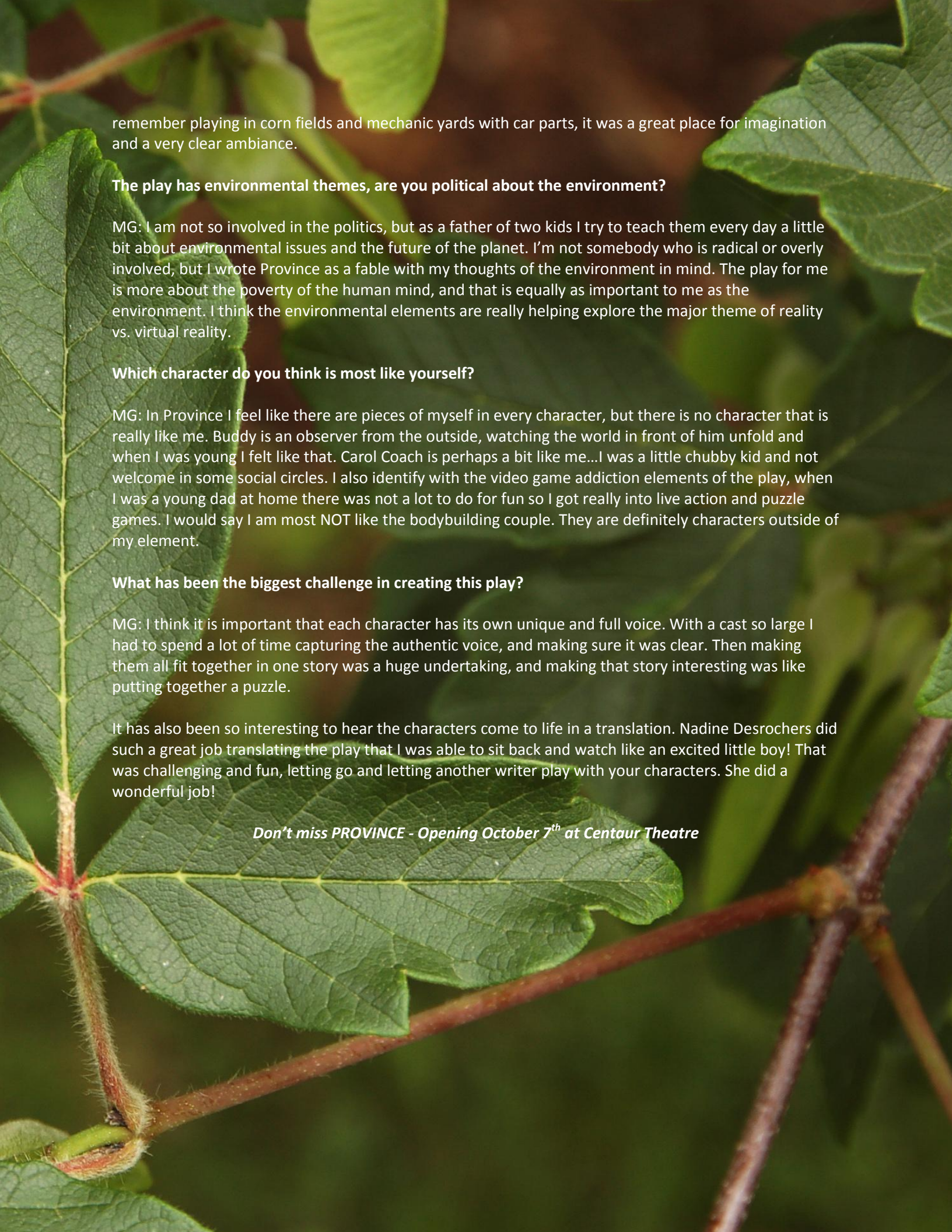
MG: I remember very well; I was at a lecture and reading by Hervé Bouchard, and I was struck by the way he played with language. His work was mythological and inspired, he used Quebec archetypes and characters, I was really moved and returned home that night and started writing what would become Province. I follow and read everything he writes; I would say he is a big inspiration.

A lot of the actors talk about your subtext/minimalist style…

MG: Yes I really believe writing is not about the words but what is in between them. I want to leave room for actors to have fun and play with my words, it is so much more important to find what is underneath. Some characters in Province are all talk, others are more silent; I put a lot of energy into finding what is essential. The play was actually two and a half hours long in early drafts so I have cut a lot. That is my style and preference, put in everything you want and then sculpt it.

In what ways do you put yourself into the work you do?

MG: I feel like my childhood is in a lot of the work I do. The neighbourhood I grew up in *(Saint Jean de Richelieu)* is always a point of inspiration; I like to name characters after real names from people that have played a part in my life. I am very anchored in my memories of childhood, it was really amazing…I



remember playing in corn fields and mechanic yards with car parts, it was a great place for imagination and a very clear ambiance.

The play has environmental themes, are you political about the environment?

MG: I am not so involved in the politics, but as a father of two kids I try to teach them every day a little bit about environmental issues and the future of the planet. I'm not somebody who is radical or overly involved, but I wrote Province as a fable with my thoughts of the environment in mind. The play for me is more about the poverty of the human mind, and that is equally as important to me as the environment. I think the environmental elements are really helping explore the major theme of reality vs. virtual reality.

Which character do you think is most like yourself?

MG: In Province I feel like there are pieces of myself in every character, but there is no character that is really like me. Buddy is an observer from the outside, watching the world in front of him unfold and when I was young I felt like that. Carol Coach is perhaps a bit like me…I was a little chubby kid and not welcome in some social circles. I also identify with the video game addiction elements of the play, when I was a young dad at home there was not a lot to do for fun so I got really into live action and puzzle games. I would say I am most NOT like the bodybuilding couple. They are definitely characters outside of my element.

What has been the biggest challenge in creating this play?

MG: I think it is important that each character has its own unique and full voice. With a cast so large I had to spend a lot of time capturing the authentic voice, and making sure it was clear. Then making them all fit together in one story was a huge undertaking, and making that story interesting was like putting together a puzzle.

It has also been so interesting to hear the characters come to life in a translation. Nadine Desrochers did such a great job translating the play that I was able to sit back and watch like an excited little boy! That was challenging and fun, letting go and letting another writer play with your characters. She did a wonderful job!

Don't miss PROVINCE - Opening October 7th at Centaur Theatre