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LES RENDEZ-VOUS  
DU CINÉMA QUÉBÉCOIS  
**SÉLECTION 2017**

**DOCUMENTARY**  
20TH SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
2017

纪录片



A film by  
**ANNABEL LOYOLA**

# THE LAST BREATH

## AT THE HEART OF THE HÔTEL-DIEU DE MONTRÉAL

PRODUCED BY AMAZONE FILM PRODUCERS JEANNINE GAGNÉ, ANNABEL LOYOLA RESEARCHED, WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ANNABEL LOYOLA CAMERA TOMI GRGICEVIC, ANNABEL LOYOLA  
PICTURE EDITING EMMA BERTIN, ANNABEL LOYOLA SOUND DESIGN MÉLANIE GAUTHIER ORIGINAL MUSIC FABRIENNE LUCET MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION ARABESQUE FILMS

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CALO HÔTEL-DIEU DE MONTRÉAL ACIC Québec soqec FONDATION CANADIENNE DE LA VIDÉO RELIGIEUSE Canada prim SOCIÉTÉ D'HISTOIRE DU PATRIMOINE MONTRÉAL

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POSTER DESIGNER MARINE SIMARD

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Photo : Annabel Loyola

## Synopsis

Founded by Jeanne Mance in 1642 at the same time as the city, the Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal is about to disappear, to be replaced by the new CHUM. **The Last Breath** immerses us in an enclosed world where life, death, love and friendship coexist in close proximity. This film is above all a tale of courage and resilience, the story of its final occupants. Like a story-within-a-story filled with humanity, a series of events both large and small unfold within the walls of the hospital during its final two years. For afterwards, nothing will ever be the same.

## Technical information

Feature documentary | 2017  
DCP | HD 1920x1080 | 16/9, 1.77, 23.976  
72 minutes  
Colour  
Original French version | English subtitles

Producers

JEANNINE GAGNÉ  
ANNABEL LOYOLA

Researched, Written & Directed by

ANNABEL LOYOLA

Camera

TOMI GRGICEVIC  
ANNABEL LOYOLA

Editing

EMMA BERTIN  
ANNABEL LOYOLA

Sound Design & Editing

MÉLANIE GAUTHIER

Sound Editing

CLAUDE LANGLOIS

Sound Recording

CATHERINE VAN DER DONCKT  
MARCO FANIA  
MÉLANIE GAUTHIER

Original Music

FABIENNE LUCET

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## Director's note

*L'Hôtel-Dieu sera vendu, [Hôtel-Dieu to be sold]* read the headlines in **La Presse** on March 28, 2013. This announcement seemed unthinkable to me. Hôtel-Dieu is the only institution in Montréal that is exactly the same age as the city. Jeanne Mance came to Montréal to found a hospital, and ended up founding a city with money intended for the hospital. To my mind, Hôtel-Dieu is the very spirit of Montréal.



Photo : Denis-Carl Robidoux

In my first film **A Mad Venture, In the Footsteps of Jeanne Mance**, I revisited and explored this Montréal adventure, seeking to dust off old memories through a portrait of a daring and determined woman, with whom I identified for the duration of the documentary. In **The Last Breath**, I wanted to commit to memory the final days of one of the oldest hospitals in the Americas through the eyes of those who are still living and working there. Two years before it was scheduled to close, I felt compelled to capture its living memory and its soul before they were no more. The place and the people who inhabit it are at the heart of my film.

I visited the Hôtel-Dieu almost every day during those two years. Time was on my side. I met and filmed the doctors, nurses, volunteers, orderlies, nurses' aides, hygiene and sanitation staff, building technicians, patients, artists hired by the Volunteer Auxiliaries Association, the Sisters. I followed them, I studied them. I even became a volunteer myself in order to better understand the work involved in caring for the sick. Over time, strong bonds of trust developed. **The Last Breath** captures this daily life with its sights, sounds, colours, music and voices: those of the Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal.

I sought to recreate, in all humility, the distinctive universe of the Hôtel-Dieu, in which the stories of its final occupants take on special meaning after the announcement of its imminent closure. For their part, the Hospitallers pursue their task as guardians of memory and heritage. They have no one to take over once they are gone. The last nun took her vows in 1967. For the time being, they continue to transmit to the Hôtel-Dieu community their traditions of caring for the sick and of respect for the past.

Beginning in May 2014, with my double role as a participant and an observer, I gathered material while simultaneously writing the film. The writing was followed by ten months of film editing. Finally, special attention was paid to the sound design and music, which was custom scored to evoke the life and breath of this 375-year-old institution.

- Annabel Loyola

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## Biography

### ANNABEL LOYOLA

Director, screenwriter, researcher, producer, cinematographer, editor, narrator



Photo : Julie D'Amour-Léger

Annabel Loyola worked for nearly twenty years in the cinema and television industry in Paris and Montréal before deciding to turn her hand to directing and producing her own projects.

During her early career in Paris she worked as production assistant for **La Géode** Imax/Omnimax theatre and on the production and international marketing of more than 50 **Hachette Video/DVD Guides**. In the early 2000s, Loyola became acquisitions and co-productions manager for **Pathé TV channels Voyage** and **Télé Monte-Carlo** (TMC).

In Montréal, she worked as production assistant for the **Cirque du Soleil**, director of sales and acquisitions for **La Fête/FRV Media International** production and distribution group, and head of the 2007 Canadian Tour of **Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois**.

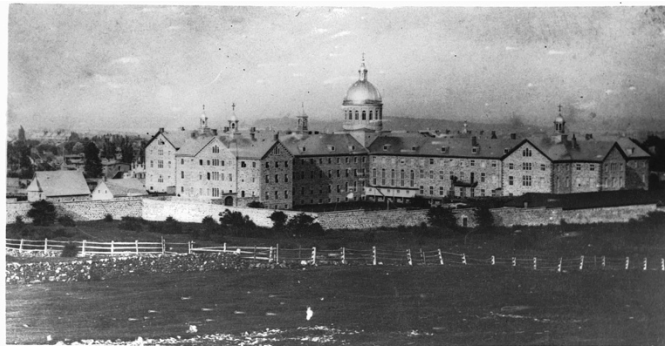
A graduate of Université du Québec à Montréal in screenwriting, she has produced, written, filmed and directed several short films.

In 2010, her first feature documentary and the first film made about Jeanne Mance, **A Mad Venture, In the Footsteps of Jeanne Mance**, earned her the **Médaille de la Société historique de Montréal**. The film received national and international recognition and was selected for a number of festivals. In addition to public screenings and DVDs, Loyola gives conferences and workshops on Jeanne Mance and on the creative process of documentary filmmaking (in schools and universities, adult education centres, cultural organizations, libraries, museums, prisons, religious communities, seniors' homes, historical societies, etc.). The film has also played on **Canal Savoir**.

**The Last Breath, at the Heart of the Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal** is her second feature documentary. Produced by Amazone Film and distributed by Arabesque Films, it will be released in Québec in the spring of 2017.

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*Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal, around 1865. Photo : © McCord Museum, Montréal*

## A brief history of the Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal

After starting out as a small wooden dispensary within Fort Ville-Marie in 1642, in 1645 the **Hôtel-Dieu** was the first house to be built outside the palisades. Known as “the house of Mademoiselle Mance”, it became the hub of the nascent colony, its parish and its refuge, and Montréal grew up around it. In 1651, Jeanne Mance protected the settlement from the Iroquois threat by using money intended for the Hôtel-Dieu to recruit a hundred new settlers (the *Grande Recrue*), saving not only Montréal but all of French Canada in 1653. In 1659, she travelled to La Flèche, France, to recruit three Sisters of the order of Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph to help her with her work in the hospital. When Jeanne Mance died in 1673, the administration of the hospital was entrusted to the Sulpicians for an interim period of three years before being transferred to the Hospitallers, who became the guardians of the memory of Montréal’s beginnings and of the Hôtel-Dieu and its mission to provide aid and to tend to the sick.

The Hôtel-Dieu burned down three times between 1695 and 1734, destroying written records and vestiges of Montréal’s past. Each time it burned, the Hospitallers rebuilt it with their own money. For more than two hundred years, the Hôtel-Dieu was the only hospital in Montréal. After the conquest of 1760, the hospital continued to care for the sick under British rule, with French- and English-speaking surgeons working side by side until the opening of the city’s second hospital, the **Montreal General Hospital**, in 1821. In 1861, a lack of space led the Hospitallers to build a new establishment in the country where the “fresh mountain air” would be beneficial for recovering patients, on land that was given to them in exchange for medical care. During this monumental move, the remains of Jeanne Mance and the first Hospitallers were exhumed and buried on the new site, in the crypt underneath the present-day chapel. Since that time, the Hospitallers have lived at the base of the mountain, the present site of the Hôtel-Dieu.

The teaching of medicine at the Hôtel-Dieu began in 1850 when the Sisters agreed to allow students and professors from the Montreal School of Medicine and Surgery into their halls. In 1901, they founded L’École des infirmières de l’Hôtel-Dieu nursing school, which trained more than 3,000 nurses before closing its doors in 1970 following nursing education reforms. Finally, in 1953, the Sisters created a department of clinical research under the direction of Dr. Jacques Genest, which would become one of Canada’s best world-class research facilities.

This hospital was born out of the generosity of both lay people and nuns. Jeanne Mance, founder of Montréal and the Hôtel-Dieu; Madame de Bullion, her benefactor; and Jérôme Le Royer, originator of the Montréal project and founder of the Congregation of the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph; were all lay people. They brought the Daughters Hospitallers of St. Joseph to Montréal in 1659 to help Jeanne Mance at the Hôtel-Dieu seventeen years after its construction. This secular-religious collaboration has continued to this day. Like the swing of a pendulum, in the 1960s the Hospitallers set up the Hôtel-Dieu Volunteer Auxiliary Association, which was made up of lay people, to assist them

in their mission to provide high quality patient services. At that time, the Hôtel-Dieu was at its peak, with no less than 750 beds. With the introduction of the hospital insurance plan in 1961 and the adoption of the Hospitals Act by the government of Québec, hospital management became increasingly secularized. It was the quiet revolution. The Hospitallers formed a corporation entitled “Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal”. The number of beds decreased to 400. In 1973, a lay man (Yves André) was appointed as Administrator of the Hôtel-Dieu, replacing the last RHSJ Administrator, Sister Thérèse Trottier. The Sisters remained on the board of directors until 1996.

In 1992, Sister Thérèse Payer founded the **Musée des Hospitalières de l’Hôtel-Dieu**, the only museum in Montréal that traces the history of the origins of the city and its first hospital. In fact, there is not a floor or a corner of the Hôtel-Dieu that does not contain some reference to its history and its origins. Thanks to the Sisters, medallions, crests, statues and stained-glass windows can be found in public spaces and reserved staff areas, and in the pavilions that bear the names of the founders of the Hôtel-Dieu and Montréal.

In 1996, the Hôtel-Dieu, Hôpital Saint-Luc and Hôpital Notre-Dame merged to become the **Centre hospitalier de l’Université de Montréal (CHUM)**. With health care being distributed among the three hospitals and a shift to ambulatory care, the number of beds was reduced to 250. Since that time, the Sisters began sharing their living quarters with the CHUM, whose administrative offices were relocated in the Olier Pavilion, one of the oldest of the Hôtel-Dieu buildings.

In 2010, the CHUM began construction of the first buildings of the new CHUM in the south of the city. The entire medical staff of the Hôtel-Dieu began to prepare for an imminent move. The research centre and CHUM administrative offices were the first to leave, moving into the new downtown location in 2013.

*L’Hôtel-Dieu sera vendu, [Hôtel-Dieu to be sold]* read the headlines in **La Presse** on March 28, 2013. Indeed, to help fund the construction of the new hospital, the government asked the CHUM to draw up an inventory of the buildings deemed to be surplus. An interdepartmental committee was created to look into the future of these buildings. Citizens’ committees have been created to preserve its vocation and keep it in the community. For its part, the CHUM employees union, looking to the future of health care and services, has been vocal in its support for saving the Hôtel-Dieu. It may still be possible for the hospital to pursue its original vocation, given the critical needs in the healthcare sector. For the moment, it was announced that health services should continue until 2021.

Finally, in the spirit of preserving tangible and intangible heritage, many are defending the building’s unique historical and heritage nature and vocation in connection with the origins of Montréal. A statement of the heritage importance of the Hôtel-Dieu site was published by the City of Montréal in May 2016.



*Mont-Royal view, around 1900.*  
Photo : © Collection des Hospitalières de Saint-Joseph de Montréal

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## Main characters

### At Hôtel-Dieu



**Dr. FADI BASILE & Dr. IGNACIO PRIETO**  
Cardiac Surgeons



**ALEXANDRA BEAUDRY** Patient



**SYLVAIN CARON & SYLVAIN GRENON**  
Building Technicians

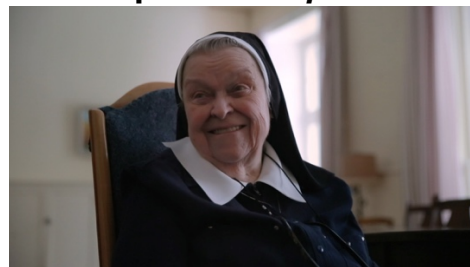


**JEAN-LAURIER GINGRAS** Patient



**ANNABELLE RENZO** Harpist  
**MICHAËL PLAMONDON** Massage Therapist

### In the Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph community



**SISTER ELLEN DAVIS** RHSJ



**FERNAND HUARD** Patient



**SISTER MARIE-BLANCHE LEBLANC** RHSJ

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## ABOUT...

### THE PRODUCTION COMPANY, AMAZONE FILM

From Benoit Pilon's acclaimed **Roger Toupin, épicier variété** to **Ma vie réelle** by the late Magnus Isacsson, Amazone Film stands out for the great diversity of auteur films that have won prestigious awards and have reached wide audiences across the globe.

### THE DISTRIBUTION COMPANY, ARABESQUE FILMS

Founded in Montréal by Annabel Loyola, Arabesque Films is a production and distribution company for auteur films whose artistic mission is to build bridges between different eras and generations.

## CONTACTS

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Trailer | French original version

<https://vimeo.com/194770182>

Trailer | English subtitles

<https://vimeo.com/194771709>

Facebook

[www.facebook.com/hoteldieufilm/](http://www.facebook.com/hoteldieufilm/)

Website

[www.hoteldieufilm.com](http://www.hoteldieufilm.com)

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