

GOODSPEED MUSICALS

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS



# MY PARIS

A NEW MUSICAL

THE STORY OF TOULOUSE-LAUTREC

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**MY PARIS**  
The Norma Terris Theatre  
July 23 - Aug 16, 2015

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# CHARACTER SUMMARY



Bobby Steggert as Toulouse-Lautrec with Tari Kelly, Cameron Adams, Kate Marilley and Wendi Bergamini. ©EMMA

**HENRI-MARIE-RAYMONDE DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC-MANFA:** A talented painter and the only son of the Comte and Comtesse Lautrec. He is a talented artist and embraces the bohemian lifestyle to the fullest despite his father's objections.

**ARISTIDE BRUANT:** Owner of Le Mirliton, a nightclub in Montmartre, and a friend of Toulouse-Lautrec. In order to boost attendance at his nightclub Bruant gives his friend Toulouse-Lautrec permission to create posters for the club and its performers.

**ANQUETIN, RACHOU, AND GRENIER:** Students of Leon Bonnat, artists and friends of Toulouse-Lautrec.

**MAY MILTON:** An English dancer and performer at Le Mirliton.

**JANE AVRIL:** A French can-can dancer at Le Mirliton and a frequent model for Toulouse-Lautrec.

**VALENTIN, CHA-U-KAO, LE CHOCOLAT AND LA GOULOUE:** Performers at Le Mirliton.

**COMTE LAUTREC:** The father of Toulouse-Lautrec and member of the French aristocracy. The Comte was a devoted hunter and severely disapproved of his son's bohemian lifestyle.

**COMTESSE LAUTREC:** The mother of Toulouse-Lautrec and his devoted caretaker.

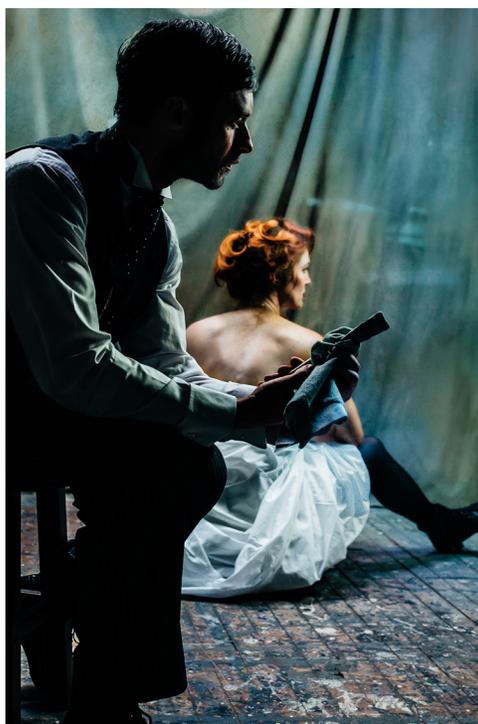
**LEON BONNAT:** A Parisian art instructor and Toulouse-Lautrec's first teacher in Paris. Bonnat also instructed Anquetin, Rachou and Grenier.

**SUZANNE VALADON:** An aspiring artist and a figure model for Toulouse-Lautrec. She quickly becomes friends with the artist and enters into a relationship with the lonely Toulouse-Lautrec.

**YVETTE GUILBERT:** a French cabaret singer and performer.

## SHOW SYNOPSIS

Toulouse-Lautrec is preparing to leave Paris and retire to the country to focus on his rapidly deteriorating health. He reminisces about his time in Paris and flashes back to significant moments in his past including his childhood, his doomed romance with Suzanne Valadon and advancements in his career. Toulouse-Lautrec reflects on his debauched final nights in Montmartre with his friends; as the revelry winds down he bids a final bittersweet farewell to his rowdy friends and the city of Paris.



Bobby Stegaert as Toulouse-Lautrec and Mara Davi as Suzanne Valadon. ©EMMA







**JASON ROBERT BROWN** (*English Lyrics and Musical Adaptation*) was born on June 20, 1970 in Ossining, New York, to Deborah and Stuart Brown. He studied composition at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and spent summers at the French Woods Festival of the Performing Arts.

Brown began his career as a pianist, conductor and arranger in New York City in the 1990s and played in various nightclubs as well as piano bars around the city to support himself. He also played piano for off-Broadway shows like William Finn's *A New Brain*. The first show that featured a complete score by Brown was *Songs for a New World*; this was an off-Broadway song cycle directed by Daisy Prince, daughter of legendary director and producer Hal Prince. The pop-rock-influenced music made the show a hit with musical theatre enthusiasts and many of the songs soon became cabaret standards.

Brown was brought to the attention of Harold Prince through his daughter Daisy and was hired to write the music for *Parade* in 1998. The show ran for 84 performances and received six Drama Desk Awards along with nine Tony Award nominations. Out of the show's nine total Tony nominations it won the awards for Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Musical Score.

Daisy Prince and Brown teamed up once again on his third show, *The Last Five Years*, for which he was the librettist, composer and lyricist. *The Last Five Years* was not a commercial success and received mixed reviews from the critics. The show ran off-Broadway for two months, though Brown won two Drama Desk Awards for the music and lyrics. A film version of *The Last Five Years* was released in 2014 starring Anna Kendrick and Jeremy Jordan.

In 2003, Brown was one of 30 songwriters who contributed to the score of *Urban Cowboy* that was directed by Phillip Oesterman. Though the show itself was a flop, it was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Original Musical Score in 2003. In 2005 Brown released his first solo album through Sh-k-Boom/Ghostlight Records entitled *Wearing Someone Else's Clothes* featuring previously unreleased music. Also in 2005, Brown debuted a piece entitled *Chanukah Suite* at the Walt Disney Music Hall in Los Angeles.

The musical *13*, with music and lyrics by Brown, premiered on Broadway in 2009 after previous runs at the Mark Tauber Forum in Los Angeles and at Goodspeed's Norma Terris Theatre. Following *13*, Brown penned the music and lyrics for the musical adaptation of *The Bridges of Madison County*, which premiered on Broadway in 2014 and earned him two more Tony Awards for Best Score and Best Orchestration, and the musical adaptation of *Honeymoon in Vegas*, which also opened on Broadway in 2014.

Throughout his career Brown has been hailed "one of Broadway's smartest and most sophisticated songwriters" and "a leading member of a new generation of composers who embody high hopes for the American musical." He is often compared to Stephen Sondheim for his rhythmically challenging music and use of complex harmonies.



Brown accepting the 2014 Tony Award for Best Orchestrations





Kathleen Marshall at the first read-through of Goodspeed's *My Paris*. ©Diane Sobolewski.

The first production of a new musical is a thing both thrilling and terrifying. Most musicals these days have a rather protracted gestation period and the development process often goes on for several years. Along the way, you do readings and workshops for small groups of invited audiences—audiences made up of some friends and family, but mostly consisting of other theatre professionals. But the fact of the matter is that you don't really know what you have until you do your first production, until you put your show up in front of real people.

jointly have a plethora of Tony Awards and nominations. Add to that our wonderful music team of David Chase and David Gardos, my right hand man David Eggers, and all the folks here at Goodspeed and in New York City who have worked diligently to bring this show to life. And bringing the colorful world of Toulouse-Lautrec to life is a spectacular company of actors, each uniquely talented and creative, and collectively, a formidable group of fearless artists.

It truly does take a village to put together a show, and we are delighted that the town of Chester is hosting our creative village for the world premiere of *My Paris*.

We are thrilled that our first production of *My Paris* is happening here at Goodspeed's Norma Terris Theatre. Goodspeed has a long and distinguished history of developing new work and we are honored to be a part of that storied tradition. We thank you for being our first audience, for helping us to learn more about what we have created and for playing a crucial role in the development of a new show.

And now just a minute to talk about the "we" behind this new project. My amazingly brilliant colleagues have enough hardware between them to fill a museum. First of all, there's the legendary, world-famous and dapper Charles Aznavour, composer, lyricist and performer extraordinaire, whose many honors include his induction into the Songwriters Hall of Fame and an Honorary César Award, basically the French equivalent of an Oscar. Oh yeah, and M. Aznavour is also the Armenian Ambassador to Switzerland. The remarkably ingenious and charming Alfred Uhry's crowded shelves include an Oscar, the Pulitzer Prize and two Tony Awards. Speaking of Tonys, the astonishing Jason Robert Brown, who adapted M. Aznavour's French lyrics into English, has three Tonys of his own. Our incredible design team includes Derek McLane, Paul Tazewell and Don Holder, who



Alfred Uhry at the first read-through of Goodspeed's *My Paris*. ©Diane Sobolewski.

*My Paris* was not mine to begin with. The idea came from Charles Aznavour, the renowned French songwriter/performer. He wrote songs for a proposed stage musical about the life of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec back in the nineties. The songs reached Kathleen Marshall, Broadway director/choreographer and winner of three Tony Awards. She was delighted with what she heard and brought the idea to me. Wow! A show about Toulouse-Lautrec with songs by Aznavour! An internationally famous French writer creating songs about the life of the most famous French artist of all? And to be

celebrated director/choreographers in the business? Who wouldn't want to join that team? I said yes right away and got to work.

We all agreed that we wanted the show to express the *joie de vivre* of Toulouse-Lautrec's work as well as the pathos underneath. He was born a titled aristocrat, a duke three times over, but he was also born with a physical disability that caused people to regard him as a freak. He could never fully participate in the raucous, earthy world of Montmartre that he depicted so vividly in his art. He could drink the wine, hear the music, watch the cancan dancers, but he was always set apart. He lived only thirty-six years, but in this short span of time, he managed to bring to life the colorful Parisian world to which he could never quite belong.

My research revealed that Lautrec was obsessed with women—all kinds of women. His physicality denied him relationships with most of them. But there was a one, a beautiful, spirited model named Suzanne Valadon, who provided the things he was starved for and a few surprises in the bargain. He also had to contend with his aristocratic, disapproving Papa and his loving, but smothering, Maman.

Shortly after I became a part of the show, a bulky manila envelope arrived from France. It contained tapes of dozens of songs M. Aznavour had written for the show. The music was exactly right—jaunty, soaring, tender, sad, as the situation demanded. And it didn't sound French. It WAS French! No worries about authenticity here. All the lyrics were, of course, in French. I had two years of high school French, but there was no way I could understand, much less translate, what I was hearing.

Direct translations into English proved to be accurate, but lifeless. What I heard Aznavour singing on the tapes didn't sound like that at all. Clearly an English-speaking lyric writer was needed. And, preferably, one who understood Broadway musicals. There was only one choice—Jason Robert Brown. Jason and I had collaborated before on *Parade*. We worked well together, and we both won Tonys for that show, so we were anxious to work together again. Luckily, Jason came on board. I'm not sure that he knows more French than I do. He says he does and he does a good Maurice Chevalier imitation, but—more to the point—he understood the spirit of Aznavour's words and his adaptations fit both the music and the situations exquisitely.

And now Goodspeed comes into the picture. It's time to get the show up on its feet and see what we have wrought. The Norma Terris Theatre is the ideal place to do it. We believe the audience will experience the world of Toulouse-Lautrec with all its joy and heartbreak and life and vitality. We are excited and hopeful and more than a little edgy. Come and give us a look-see.

## Excerpt from *The Day*: “Goodspeed to produce Toulouse-Lautrec musical by Driving Miss Daisy writer Uhry and songwriter Aznavour”

By Kristina Dorsey  
Published January 17, 2015

It's truth in advertising: Goodspeed's Festival of New Musicals does, indeed, focus on new musicals — not only staged readings of fresh works but, on Saturday, an announcement of a trio of new pieces to be produced later this year at Goodspeed's Norma Terris Theatre in Chester.



Alfred Uhry at Goodspeed's 2015 Festival of New Musicals. ©Diane Sobolewski.

One of those Norma Terris-bound musicals boasts a book by Alfred Uhry, who also wrote *Driving Miss Daisy*. He was at the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam Saturday and spoke of his in-development musical, *My Paris*, about famed French painter Toulouse-Lautrec. It features songs by French songwriter Charles Aznavour, with English lyrics by Jason Robert Brown. Directing the production, which will run July 23 through Aug. 16, will be choreographer and director Kathleen Marshall, who has won three Tony awards, most recently for 2011's revival of *Anything Goes*.

Marshall is a Goodspeed alum, having choreographed *Swinging on a Star* here. Uhry, too, has worked at Goodspeed in the

past, recalling on Saturday such shows as *Little Johnny Jones*, *Funny Face* and, as he phrased it, “one about golfing.”

“I learned a lot up here,” Uhry said. “I’m really excited to come back.”

Bob Alwine, Goodspeed associate producer, told the crowd assembled at the Opera House for the new musical preview, “We talk about triple threats in the theater. This man (Uhry) is truly a triple threat, in that he’s won an Oscar, two Tonys and a Pulitzer.” Uhry said that Marshall and her husband, producer Scott Landis, asked if he’d be interested in working on a Toulouse-Lautrec show with them.

“The idea of working with Kathleen was tempting, and also the score was written by Charles Aznavour,” he said.

Clearly, the story of Toulouse-Lautrec held an appeal, too. Uhry explained the artist’s tortured background.

“His parents were first cousins, which is probably not a really good idea, and his bone structure was all messed up. He broke his legs a lot when he was a little boy. After he was 9, his legs never grew, but the rest of him did,” Uhry said.

He was raised an aristocrat. It was when he moved to Paris, though, that he found the place he felt he belonged.

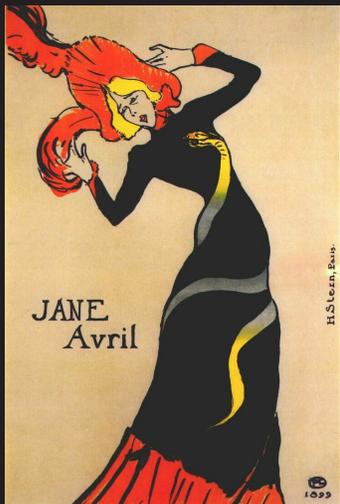
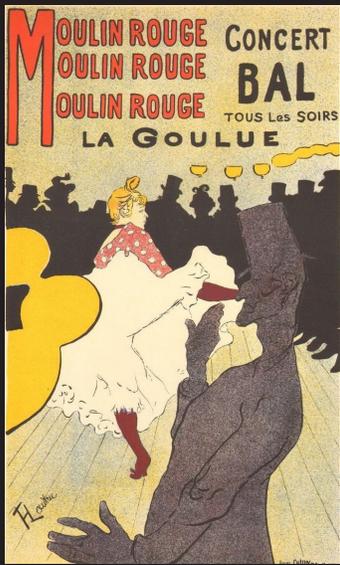
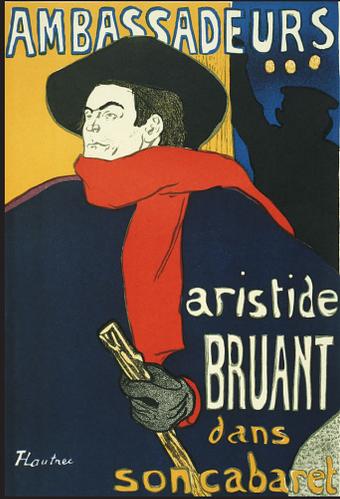
Uhry said Toulouse-Lautrec was “a man who was never really able to be accepted in the world he wanted to be accepted in because he was so odd-looking. He was a very sensitive man and a man who saw beauty in places most people don’t see beauty ... in rough, raw street people and prostitutes and street dancers and thieves.”

He noted there was both joy and heartbreak in the painter’s life.

“I can’t wait to wallow inside this show,” Uhry said.



Toulouse-Lautrec's Posters



As seen in *My Paris*, Toulouse-Lautrec began to produce advertisements for the local cabarets based on the encouragement of his friend and customer Aristide Bruant. He combined commercial advertising techniques with avant-garde designs characterized by sharp angles, silhouettes and flat areas of color drawing attention to the clubs and cabarets that filled Montmartre. His first poster was created in 1891 and featured La Goulue (The Glutton), one of the infamous cabaret dancers of the time and a character in *My Paris*. The work entitled, *Moulin Rouge: La Goulue* showed the young dancer in the middle of a can-can with her partner Valentin le désossé or No Bones Valentin, also a character in *My Paris*, in front of an anonymous audience identifiable as upper-class men by their top hats. The image utilized the simplicity of Japanese art that was popular at the time and a minimalist approach that immediately set it apart from the traditional text-heavy ads of the period. In addition to its simplicity, the poster was sexually suggestive, something allowed as a direct result of the loosening of censorship laws, and created a public uproar due to its challenge to bourgeois morals and its depiction of Montmartre's performers that subsequently turned them into exotic overnight celebrities.

By switching his focus from the traditional artistic medium of oil on canvas to lithographs, Toulouse-Lautrec was able to present his art to a far broader audience than most of his contemporaries. He also took the time to use the actual cabaret performers as the models for his prints rather than a generic form or artist's model. Though his work mortified his traditional father, Toulouse-Lautrec took pride in his mass-produced lithographs and they, as Comte Toulouse-Lautrec stated in *My Paris*, made him infamous. Faced with his family's continued disapproval, Bruant, Valentin le désossé, La Goulue and others became a surrogate family to Toulouse-Lautrec as well as the subjects of his art. Described as a "sensitive, deeply affectionate man conscious of his infirmity but wearing a mask of joviality and irony" by his acquaintances, Toulouse-Lautrec seemed to find a home amidst the radical politicians and artists that popularized Montmartre.

At the dawn of 1899, Toulouse-Lautrec was at the high point of his career artistically; however, his demanding and debauched lifestyle with the characters of Paris had taken their toll. During his time in Paris he had contracted syphilis. This disease, coupled with alcoholism and preexisting physical handicaps, led to a mental collapse. His family committed him to a sanatorium to avoid shame and gossip. Toulouse-Lautrec remained in the sanatorium until May of 1899. Unfortunately, though, he relapsed into alcoholism in the spring of 1900 and died three months shy of his 37th birthday.

Despite the mass popularity of his work, Toulouse-Lautrec was not well regarded by the larger art community at the time of his death. In fact, his family had to pay a museum to take one of his pieces shortly after his death. Nevertheless, he managed to be an influence in art well beyond his lifetime and his work has been heralded as a direct predecessor to the schools of Fauvism and Cubism. In addition to becoming a lasting icon in the art world, he provided future generations with a kaleidoscopic view of Montmartre and its inhabitants during the late 19th century. His artistic ability and penchant for depicting scenes throbbing with life made him the unofficial record keeper of his generation. His unique social standing allowed him to straddle the worlds of aristocracy and bohemian freedom while depicting them both with equal honesty though he apparently never truly belonged or felt comfortable in either sphere.



A painting of Boulevard Montmartre by Camille Pissarro, 1890

*"In this bizarre land swarmed a host of colorful artists, writers, painters, musicians, sculptors, architects, a few with their own places but most in furnished lodgings, surrounded by the workers of Montmartre, the starchy ladies of the rue Bréda, the retired folk of Batignolles, sprouting up all over the place, like weeds. Montmartre was home to every kind of artist."*

The French novelist Félicien Champsaur used these words to describe the varied audience members that would attend the Chat Noir nightclub in 1882. Although, he may very well have been describing Montmartre as a whole. Creative personalities flocked to the streets of Montmartre in droves to absorb the neighborhood's bold entertainment and irreverent attitude.

Originally a rural village perched on a hilltop outside of Paris, Montmartre was popular with artists for its picturesque and rustic views. When the quaint village was annexed into Paris's city limits around 1860, its inexpensive lodging and removed location transformed it into a working class neighborhood. Despite the area's urbanization, it retained much of its charm in the old buildings, twisting streets and bucolic windmills. The unique scenery of the neighborhood coupled with its remoteness and growing reputation for radical politics and subversive culture began to attract writers, poets, artists and students to the area in the late 1880s. By congregating at the very top of the village known as the "butte," the artists of the day were able to rent inexpensive studio space and the area quickly became home to avant-garde artists like Toulouse-Lautrec, Vincent van Gogh and Émile Bernard.

With crowds attracted to Montmartre's increasingly salacious reputation, it swiftly became the center of the city's artistic

and intellectual community. Montmartre possessed a flourishing bohemian culture that was fueled by a disapproval of high society and its boisterous cafés, concerts and cabarets often featured satires and subversive performances that mocked the bourgeois morality and distorted politics.

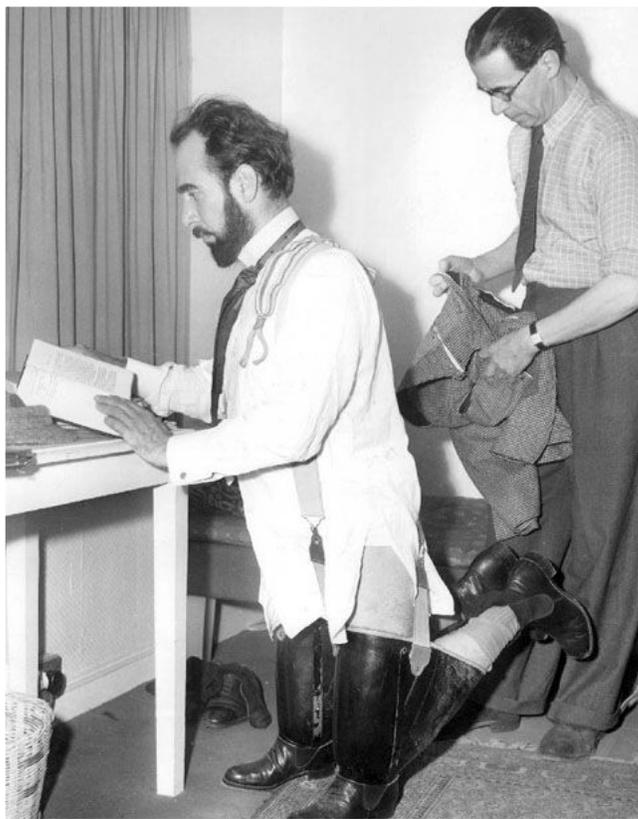
In addition to providing the disenfranchised a place to congregate freely, Montmartre offered the social classes an opportunity to mix in the cabarets and dance halls of the area. Toulouse-Lautrec was particularly interested in the diversity of the dance hall's audience and frequently used the dancers and bourgeois men found in Montmartre to convey sexual autonomy and the excess associated with the district. He also used the adventurous and exotic atmosphere of the area as a selling point in his advertisements for the local cabarets and cafes. Toulouse-Lautrec's interest in the atmosphere of Montmartre was not limited to advertising and he became one of the first artists to immortalize the seedier aspects of Parisian nightlife through art. He was fascinated by the mixing of the social classes and attempted to expose the disingenuousness and tension that characterized turn of the century Parisian society.

Montmartre's reputation and the widely-seen posters and lithographs of Toulouse-Lautrec augmented the area's popularity during the 1880s and '90s making it the premiere destination to see and be seen. The quaint village had transformed into a mecca of entertainment and featured over 40 different entertainment venues ranging from the glamorous Moulin Rouge to the theatre. However, by 1900, the once-underground bohemian culture had been appropriated by the bourgeois and become part of mainstream entertainment. The commercialization of the once-exotic venues and performers caused the avant-garde successors of Toulouse-Lautrec to lose interest in Montmartre, and the counterculture that had begun as a critique of decadent society became a symbol of decadence itself.

Toulouse-Lautrec is a noted Impressionist painter of the late 19th and early 20th century. His iconic works depicting the performers and patrons of Montmartre, Paris, have come to define the bohemian lifestyle to modern viewers. Not only does Toulouse-Lautrec's work continue to fascinate modern audiences, but Toulouse-Lautrec himself has become the object of public fascination.

Since his death in 1900, Toulouse-Lautrec has been featured in dozens of films, television shows, books, plays and documentaries. Actors ranging from John

Leguizamo to José Ferrer have portrayed Toulouse-Lautrec. He has been a character in such films as *Frida*, *Midnight in Paris*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *Modigliani*, and *Moulin Rouge*. Toulouse-Lautrec has also had several theatrical works based on his life including *Times and Appetites of Toulouse-Lautrec* by Jeff Wanshel, *Toulouse: a New Musical* by Josh Walker and John David Nelson, *The Body Lautrec* by Heath Allen, a one-man show by Japanese writer Jun Sawaki entitled *Toulouse-Lautrec: The Musical*, and Alfred Uhry and Charles Aznavour's *My Paris*.



José Ferrer transforms into Toulouse-Lautrec for the 1952 film *Moulin Rouge*.



Aaron Cromie as Toulouse-Lautrec in Heath Allen's *The Body Lautrec*.



John Leguizamo as Toulouse-Lautrec in the 2001 film *Moulin Rouge*.

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