

AND...

SHOWS

with the students of the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique

We'll have everything, Christiane Taubira and Anne-Laure Liégeois, July 8-23,
Jardin Ceccano

Impromptu 1663, Clément Hervieu-Léger, July 17-19,

Gymnase du lycée Saint-Joseph

Juliet begins, Grégoire Aubin and Marceau Deschamps-Ségura,
July 23-25, Gymnase du lycée Saint-Joseph

CLAIRE, ANTON AND THEM

A snowy morning, a war-torn landscape, the parquet of a ballroom... Bedrooms, hallways, streets, gardens, trains... Heavy coats, light dresses, aprons... Frenchmen, Spaniards, Moroccans, Algerians, Syrians, Hungarians... Endless lists of men and women, of places and situations that François Cervantes asked the fourteen young actors of the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique to make, based on their personal history. Thanks to a specific work on body memory, each of them summoned the people who made their lives, blood relations and poetic families alike. All come back from their century, be it the 16th or the 20th... and the stage is their multitude. "The job of the actor is to offer hospitality," the director likes to say, defending the necessity and the responsibility of his trade: to always give stories the place that is rightfully theirs, to fulfill that urgent need we have to talk to one another. *Claire, Anton, and them* is the mischievous title François Cervantes gave to this initiatory play, which is also an homage to a school whose role is to teach, to understand, to welcome, even maybe to take care of its students. A nod to Chekhov, who was also a doctor...

FRANÇOIS CERVANTES

After training as an engineer, François Cervantes studied theatre at Espace Acteur in Paris, then in Montréal with Eugène Lyon. He started writing for the theatre in 1981, and founded the company L'entreprise in 1986, trying as its artistic director to create a dramatic language that would allow him to talk about the world of today. His international tours led to exchanges with many artists and to research into the relationship between tradition and creation which deeply influenced his company's shows. It led him at once to go back to the origins of theatre, to clowns and masks, and to a kind of contemporary writing constantly grappling with the world, looking for the place where real and imaginary meet. François Cervantes has worked with numerous artists (Didier Mouturat, Catherine Germain) and companies (Cirque Plume, Compagnie de l'Oiseau mouche)... In 2004, his company settled in the Fallow in Marseille to begin a new adventure as a troupe working with a repertoire and building a long and regular relationship with its audience. François Cervantes also leads training workshops in France and abroad. He is a member of the Bande d'artistes du Merlan in Marseille, and works as a writer with the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique.

THE CONSERVATOIRE NATIONAL SUPÉRIEUR D'ART DRAMATIQUE (CNSAD)

The Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique is a higher education institution that offers a three-year programme open to diverse artistic and aesthetic disciplines. Claire Lasne Darcueil, its director since 2014, refocused the Conservatoire's teachings on a progressive educational project that invites the students to explore the fundamentals of acting (interpretation, dance, masks, clown, dramaturgy) and to focus on the text. Second-year classes focus more on performance while taking different forms (master classes, exchanges with other schools abroad), while third-year students work with professional directors on creations over seven-week cycles. The 71st edition of the Festival d'Avignon will present shows performed by third-year students directed by François Cervantes, Yann-Joël Collin, and Clément Hervieu-Léger and, for the first time, the work of a student, selected by a jury of professionals: *Juliet, the Beginning*, written by Grégoire Aubin and directed by Marceau Deschamps-Ségura.

71st
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,750 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tirelessly and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.



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INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS CERVANTES

Can you tell us about the origins of the project?

François Cervantes: I wanted to start with the actors, their present. We started working on the way they work together, on what they share, before “summoning” people they see as important. When I say important people, I mean people who live through them, who are part of their history. Children, immediate family, brothers and sisters... A long lineage that led us all the way to the 16th century. Pulling on that thread to go back in time, we arrived at a place that’s no longer that of memory, but rather that of fiction. Then, we had to order all those individual trajectories to form a mosaic and led us on a journey through history and time. It allowed us to go on one hell of a world tour, through languages and cultures that echo one another. Some of the students are interested in writing, others in directing. We asked ourselves the question of the dramaturgy together, of “How to create a story?” This work, and the burning memory that arose from it, helped us ask fundamental questions. “What’s a performing actor?” “What do you invest of yourself in theatre?” “How to express your mixed heritage?” “What does it mean today to enter a world where one can think the time for art is past?”

What is the through line of this story, its dramaturgy?

The dramaturgy is extremely simple. You have fourteen people who come meet the audience and, in the process, multiply, until we realise that we started with fifteen characters and now have eighty! A people appears, fictions unfold. We are in a face-off between a group of actors and their audience. So there isn’t “one” linear story but a constellation of moments responding to each other. It wasn’t really an intentional choice for us to find ourselves in Iran, Armenia, or Syria... Because it’s all about blood types and interbreeding, an existing reality we had to face. But with the question of transmission, of school, of the passage from one generation to the next and of blood family, you quickly end up tackling the question of the poetic family. Questions become essential again and weave together the personal and the political.

This might be a personal question, but since you ask it of your students: did you have masters?

Masters, not so much, but two encounters turned out to be real shocks during my formative years. First there was Michel Bernardy, from the Comédie-Française, who introduced me to the structure of the French language, its musicality, the poetic continent and magic of language. And then there was Eugène Lion, who directed American actors and helped me discover some of the ways the human body functions, the focalisation of energy, a theatre of acts instead of a theatre of states. Both of them showed me the way towards an invisible continent I’d been looking for.

Is there therefore a link between your usual work as a clown, which has a lot to do with states of being, with transformation?

There is indeed a link, and that’s the work on presence for the actor, and the mystery of the instant, which requires a different type of focus. To summon a character from a past century among one’s classmates, with an economy of

means, it requires a specific energy, and it’s an opening towards fantasy. The clown, for me, is that being who lives inside of us, with his oversized desires, and who aspires to become flesh, to live. Here, the actors become characters who are part of their lives, who have moved them, who have helped make them who they are. When I say “I’m very moved, my memories of my grandfather are always present,” it’s a way to say that my grandfather is in me, even though he never left Andalusia, never saw a play, and worked his fields all his life... Through me, this ancestor can discover France and a theatre stage. My body welcomes him, and my grandfather appears through me. He’s going to be surprised to find himself in another body and to be traveling thanks to the power of thought to come to Paris. In *Claire, Anton and them*, we clearly talk about “those who inhabit us,” or at least some of them. They come open our door to learn about the future.

You are fine with “things happening,” with the notion of apparition being at the heart of your work on the stage.

Yes, I like the theatre of apparition: many people nowadays feel that they have been excluded from history, from the history of the human condition, and wonder what their place could be. This feeling of exclusion is a very modern one: hundreds and hundreds of characters, but what’s the story? Peter Handke, describing a plaza in Berlin, wrote: “Hundreds of people, hundreds of characters, and no one knows what the plot is.” It’s a very modern feeling, this idea of having to find your place in the human chain, but also of feeling excluded.

Does theatre play a part in those questions, and play with this feeling of rebellion?

Yes. It’s about refusing to become slave to a story, rejecting the existence of the fourth wall, and becoming a citizen of the theatre. I believe that fiction is like a spotlight that serves to shine a light on the actors, from within, so that they can be seen down to their deepest impulses. Actors are the MCs of the theatre, they determine the rhythm and the colour of the evening they will spend with the audience, they have to be welcoming and open. They must be able to welcome bodies and thoughts. It requires for the actors to come not only hidden behind their characters, but also to welcome the community of the spectators and the community of the characters.

Is that why you added “them” in the title, as a reference to the actors, or maybe even to the audience?

Claire Lasne Darcueil shares a very unique relationship with Chekov, who was also a doctor, and school and theatre can be seen also as places of healing, where human beings can build themselves. This title is also a way to say that we’re bringing together a community made up of people who are there, and people who aren’t. That’s what makes the school such an extraordinary place and such a unique moment in the life of a student; they spend a few years surrounded by people who are present and by people who are absent and lived at different times, and with whom they have an ongoing conversation.

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Interview conducted by Marion Guilloux and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach