

## AND...

## PRESS CONFERENCE

with Jean-Pierre Vincent, July 12 at 11:00, cour du Cloître Saint-Louis

## THOUGHT WORKSHOPS

with Jean-Pierre Vincent

*Encounter Research and creation - Crossing worlds*

*Civilisations and imagination*, July 9 at 9:30, Cloître Saint-Louis

*Discussions artists-spectators*, July 17 at 16:30,

site Louis Pasteur Supramuros - Avignon Université

## FAITH AND CULTURE ENCOUNTER

with Jean-Pierre Vincent, July 16 at 11:00, Chapelle de l'Oratoire

## ORESTEIA

A whole world in a single poem. Our source and origin, both in terms of theatre and of politics, and our point of reference "in times of danger," as Jean-Pierre Vincent likes to define it: the *Oresteia*. With this great Greek tragic trilogy the director, a regular at the Festival d'Avignon, decided to embark on a three-year adventure with the Groupe 44 of the École supérieure d'art dramatique du Théâtre national de Strasbourg. A long-term project to understand and experience an epic which never feels as relevant as when the wind of history blows through it, a once-in-a-lifetime adventure for twelve student actors and twelve other studying stage management, scenography, costume design, dramaturgy, etc. Together, they make theirs the words of Aeschylus and play *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*. No thought of the future is possible without that ancient memory. Let's listen to this young generation tell us this free, modern poem.

## JEAN-PIERRE VINCENT

A director who played three times in the Cour d'honneur and who has headed prestigious institutions (Théâtre national de Strasbourg, Comédie-Française, Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers) as well as an experimenter (Théâtre Ouvert in Avignon), **Jean-Pierre Vincent** has dedicated his life to teaching and to sharing his experience with new generations.

ÉCOLE SUPÉRIEURE D'ART DRAMATIQUE  
DU THÉÂTRE NATIONAL DE STRASBOURG

As the only drama school part of a national theatre in France, the **École supérieure d'art dramatique** follows the rhythm of the **Théâtre national de Strasbourg**. Since its creation in 1954, it has provided groups of student actors, stage managers, scenographers, costume designers, directors, and playwrights with a multidisciplinary three-year degree.

## AESCHYLUS

**Aeschylus** (525-456 BC) is the oldest of the three major Greek tragic authors. Among his surviving plays is the *Oresteia*, a trilogy focusing on the cursed family of the Atreidae to describe the three moments of crime, vengeance, and expiation. Aeschylus is at once the chronicler, the poet, and the promoter of Athenian democracy.

73<sup>rd</sup>

EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,700 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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JULY 12 | 14 15 16  
GYMNASÉ DU LYCÉE SAINT-JOSEPH

## INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS GREMAUD

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**For Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, you spent three years working with students at the Théâtre national de Strasbourg. You're used to such long-term projects. Why spend such a long time on a single show?**

**Jean-Pierre Vincent** : Since the 1970s, teaching has always been a part of my life. In French drama schools, all too often you have a succession of directors and tutors with no regard for consistency. At the school of the Théâtre national de Strasbourg, like at the École régionale d'acteurs de Cannes et Marseille and the ENSATT, I wanted to do more than just pass through. We do in-depth work to guarantee a continuity, leading to the creation of a show. The multidisciplinary nature of the school of the Théâtre national de Strasbourg is very interesting. I like the fact that actors, technicians, and designers work alongside each other during their training.

**How did you work with the groupe 44, made up not only of twelve actors, but also of twelve costume, sound, and set designers?**

The first year, we did table reads without casting the roles. At the end of every scene we stopped to talk about the meaning and movement of the scene. Listening to the students gave me casting ideas. We tried those out during the second year, and confirmed our choices during the third. We didn't work on Aeschylus's *Oresteia* every year, but we were always thinking about it. At the Théâtre national de Strasbourg, I see the students outside of the project we're working on together. I see their bodies, their faces, their gaze change. I wanted to work towards an aesthetics of simplicity, with as little affectation as possible. The audience should see only the actors and the world of the text. Theo Angelopoulos's great film *The Travelling Players* served as a guide. In postwar Greece, a small troupe of actors travels from village to village to perform a pastoral *Agamemnon*. The characters are shepherds performing in front of a painted sheet. They move through a mist-soaked Greece. But the most extraordinary thing about it is that the tragedy of the Atreidae also unfolds within the family of actors! The film allows us to explore the 20th century as experienced by the parents and grandparents of the actors.

**The *Oresteia* is a sprawling tale. It tells of the painful transition between ancient times and an early moment of "modernity." How did this new generation of actors react to this monument of literature?**

I've adapted several of Aeschylus's plays: *The Seven Against Thebes* at the Teatro Greco in Syracuse and *The Suppliants* with thirty amateur actors at the Théâtre du Gymnase in Marseille. The *Oresteia* is special. Aeschylus is the fairy godmother of western theatre. He's the greatest writer, the first, unforgettable. And the *Oresteia* is the only complete Athenian trilogy that remains. With the students, we worked on coming together around this dramatic poem, which is incredibly powerful.

The three plays that make up the *Oresteia* are all masterpieces. They're our source, our origins, both in terms of theatre and politics, a point of reference "in times of danger." We cannot think about the future without this memory of the past. Unless we accept (or want) a collective suicide of what we still call mankind. This is the raw material of theatre we have to work on, one way or another, if we don't want theatre to become stagnant. And with it, curiously or not, mankind. Edward Bond said: "*We're the species of theatre. Theatre exists deep within us...*" And it is easier to come together around a masterpiece than around a mediocre work! Every time one feels lost in the history of theatre, one has to come back to the original matrix, to the raw material of theatre. It saves you. Young actors and audiences remember it "in times of danger." The job of those of us who work in theatre, and actors in particular, is to read the text, that is, the world, then to teach the audience to read it, to open up their minds.

**The choice of translation is therefore crucial...**

We had to choose between several existing translations. There were outmoded academic translations or very difficult versions, stylish and complex. Then, a friend from Berlin reminded us of the version Peter Stein had used for his amazing adaptation with the Schaubühne actors. That translation has two things going for it: first, its great philological faithfulness; second, word choices that help modern audiences follow and understand the text. Bernard Chartreux therefore started working on a translation of the "Stein version."

**This is your fifteenth time at the Festival d'Avignon. You've performed three times in the Cour d'honneur, and put on three shows with students.**

Yes, and sometimes in epic meteorological conditions! For the premiere of *Scapin the Schemer* with Daniel Auteuil, the wind blew at over 130 km/hour. And for the premiere of *Macbeth*, still in the Cour d'honneur, both the mistral and tramontane blew at the same time! In 1980, when the Festival invited a school for the first time in its history, I presented William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* with the students of the Théâtre national de Strasbourg. It was an extraordinary adventure. In 2002, I came with the students of the École régionale d'acteurs de Cannes et Marseille, who performed a play by Botho Strauss. For young actors to be at the Festival d'Avignon is a huge step up for their career. They can go see shows, meet other people, and immerse themselves in a place of debates and discussion. Today, it is the turn of the groupe 44 from the Théâtre national de Strasbourg to present the *Oresteia*.

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Interview conducted by Aurélie Noailly  
and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach