

AND...

SPECTACLES JEUNE PUBLIC

Love Triumphant by par Olivier Py,
July 5 to 13, gymnase du lycée Mistral

Snow White, story of a Prince by Michel Raskine,
July 6 to 12, Chapelle des Pénitents blancs

Republic of the bees, by Céline Schaeffer,
July 16 to 22, Chapelle des Pénitents blancs

CINEMATIC TERRITORIES

July 6 to 22, cinéma Utopia-Manutention

VISITS FOR THE FAMILIES

July 7 to 22, departure place du Palais des papes
informations and booking at visitejeunesse@festival-avignon.com

YOUNG SPECTATOR'S GUIDE

available in all Festival venues

THOUGHT WORKSHOPS with Yacouba Konaté,
site Louis Pasteur Supramuros - Avignon Université
A time to change our outlook, le 13 at 14:00
Discussions artists-spectators, July 13 at 16:30

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- October 12, 2019, Théâtre du Montfort, Paris, Festival La Grande Echelle
- December 14, Centre culturel Paul Eluard, Stains, Festival Africolor

YOUNG YACOU

"Back there, everything was extreme, life was incredibly hard. You were never just cold, but dying of cold. You were never hungry, but starving (...). I dreamt about song lyrics and in the morning, I wrote them down as if they'd been dictated to me." Yacouba Konaté was studying engineering when the rebels entered Daola (Ivory Coast). Forced to flee, the young man found in singing the strength to survive the inhumanity of his situation. *"What I learnt in prison is that the more you give others, the more likely you are to make it out alive. It's no longer a question of physical strength, but of mental resilience and patience. Patience in hope."* A terrible and eye-opening initiatory journey which he managed to tell through the body of young Yacou. Accompanied by Wally Saho on percussions, *Young Yacou* is a brutal exploration of contemporary crises, a time of truth during which two men come onstage, surrounded by children and adults, to share and transmit their stories, and to heal. *"Young Yacou speaks for me. That's what I call my 'natural destiny' (...). There are things I couldn't say before, and which are coming out now, at the same time as my tears. Sometimes the children cry with me, sometimes we dance, sometimes we laugh."*

YACOUBA KONATÉ

Born in Ivory Coast, **Yacouba Konaté** had to flee his country and experienced cruelty, camps, and slavery... After years in exile, he arrived in France, and he says that it is in singing that he found the strength to always get back up and keep going. Here, he performed the music for Djibril Diallo and Sophie Bachelier's film *Choucha* (in which he also appears), and was welcome by the Agency of artists in exile (a unique French structure which supports exiled artists and provides them with a place where they can work). This protective space gave him the opportunity to write and sing about his journey and to perform live. In 2017, he founded the band Wary, alongside others like Wally Saho.

73rd
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,700 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tireless and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.

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FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON 73RD

JULY 13 14 15 16 17
COLLÈGE JOSEPH VERNET

INTERVIEW WITH YACOUBA KONATÉ

The show *Young Yacou* is intimately tied to your own life.

Yacouba Konaté : When the rebels entered Ivory Coast in 2002, I lost touch with my mother. This event led to others, until I had to admit that it wasn't safe for me there anymore. I had to leave. I travelled through Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Cameroon. A Cameroonian who managed a phone booth told me about Lybia. So I went to Niger and crossed the desert to Lybia. Very few of us survived the crossing. When the crisis in Lybia broke out, we had to flee. But it was too late. We ended up in the Choucha refugee camp. That's where it all began. Everything was extreme there; life was incredibly difficult. You weren't just cold, but freezing. You weren't just hungry, but starving. Singing came to me at night. I dreamt of lyrics and in the morning I wrote them down, as if they'd been dictated to me. I worked up the courage to go up the little stand we'd put up in the middle of the camp and to sing to motivate people. And it worked! I then moved to Tunisia, where I was able to take part in important festivals and release an album. But the sorrow of Choucha stayed with me. I had no future in Tunisia, especially since I was waiting to move to Canada with the help of the UN. It never happened, which left me with only one option: go back to Lybia and try to find a boat to Europe. As soon as I set foot in a Lybian village, I was arrested. That was in late 2015. I was moved from prison to prison. I was bought and sold, treated as a slave, tortured... I can't bring myself to speak of everything yet. But once again, singing saved me. There were 80 of us in a 12-square-metre cell. It was unbearable. But when the soldiers drifted away to get high, the others asked me to sing. That's how we made it. What I learnt in prison is that the more you give others, the better your chances of surviving are. It's no longer about physical strength, but about your mind, and about patience. Patience in hope. There were days I couldn't find hope and I was sure I'd die in prison. At that point, it didn't matter anymore. When I made it to France and Judith Depaule, the director of the Agency of artists in exile, asked me to tell her my story, I said "Not a chance." Then she asked me to write songs for children. In Choucha, I took care of the children. I feel more comfortable around them, there's no hypocrisy. If they don't like you, they don't like you.

How did you decide to talk and sing about your experience, especially to children? How do you make people hear the horror of it?

With fragments; I started telling my story to Judith and she asked me if I could write it for children. This time, I said yes. Interacting with children eases my sorrow, and they learn some things. We can't always hide the truth from children. Of course, I tone down the question of suffering and torture in my show a little, I adapt it to the audience. The goal is to soften the shock it could cause.

But they have to hear certain things, so that they can understand them later. They have to hear that slavery still exists in the world, that there are men who are willing to sell other men, men who share their skin colour. It's not an easy story to tell, but I'm there to make them experience it. I want to show them my journey, all while talking about love and forgiveness. To speak about hope, too, which helped me through it all. When I begin the show, little by little, it's no longer me but young Yacou who speaks. That's what I call my "natural destiny." His story is a bittersweet one. I have this journey in my head, and I adapt it to each show. There used to be things I couldn't say before and which manage to come out now, along with my tears. Sometimes the children cry with me, sometimes we dance, sometimes we laugh. That's the humanity in us, you can't contain it, and I'm a very emotional person. But I think emotions are a strength. Every story ends with a song, with Wally Saho to accompany me on the drums. Some of them are in Arabic, others in French, others yet in Bambara. For instance, "*Destin*" ("*Destiny*") and "*Réfugiés*" ("*Refugees*") were written in Tunisia in 2014. I wrote "*Lampa Lampa*" right after I arrived in France. I used to perform them in concert to talk about my exile, but it seems to me that young Yacou has now come to the forefront. It's him people want to hear.

You've been in France for three years now. Do you still feel like an exile, or have you found a new home?

What I want to tell children who come to the show is to never forget where they're from and how lucky they are to be raised in France, to have access to free schooling, to have a loving family. Of course, the show is a way for me to pay homage to the country that welcomed me, to the French who offered me a helping hand. The agency of artists in exile, my work, my partner, my 4-month-old daughter, all that is essential. I don't have much time for useless words now, for false problems. I don't wonder whether there might be somewhere else for me after France. This is where I am, it's the end point of my journey. The life I lead, sometimes in dreams, I think I've lived it before. When I was in prison, we would watch TV, and the images I saw seemed unthinkable, inaccessible; today, they look like my life. I can't even explain how come I'm still alive today. Since I believe in God, I can say it was God's will. I'm an artist, I make people dance. When I start singing, I become a performer, I live the song. It's been like this since Choucha. When I'm in the studio, time stops moving. It's my world, my holy land, where no one can get to me. Music eases my pain. What I wonder is whether pain ever stops. And I don't know.

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