

AND...

PRESS CONFERENCE with François Gremaud,
July 12 at 11:00, cour du Cloître Saint-Louis

THOUGHT WORKSHOPS

Discussions artists-spectators with François Gremaud,
July 15 at 16:30, site Louis Pasteur Supramuros - Avignon Université

AT THE COLLECTION LAMBERT

Patrice Chéreau : Intimacies with ARTE, July 8 to 14
Sleep isn't a safe place, exhibition by Miryam Haddad

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- November 20 to 23, 2019, MA Scène nationale Pays de Montbéliard
- November 26 and 27, L'Avant-Scène, Cognac
- December 3 to 6, Le Carré-Les Colonnes, Saint-Médard-en-Jalles
- December 9 to 13, Le Reflet Théâtre de Vevey (Switzerland)
- January 14 to 17, 2020, L'Avant Seine Théâtre de Colombes
- January 21, Theater Winterthur (Switzerland)
- January 22 to 24, Théâtre du Passage, Neuchâtel (Switzerland)
- January 28 to 30, Théâtre de l'Archipel Scène nationale de Perpignan
- February 4 to 7, Théâtre de Poche, Hédé-Bazouges
- February 10 to 13, Scènes Vosges, Épinal
- February 17 to 21, Le 140, Bruxelles (Belgium)
- March 2 to 4, Théâtre Fontblanche, Vitrolles
- March 5 and 6, Théâtre de l'Olivier Scènes et Cinés, Istres
- March 9 to 13, TU-Nantes
- March 16 to 18, Le Manège Scène nationale de Maubeuge
- March 24, Théâtre de Chelles
- March 26 and 27, Espace 1789, Saint-Ouen
- March 30 to April 3, Tandem Scène nationale d'Arras-Douai
- April 6 to 9, La Passerelle Scène nationale de Saint-Brieuc
- April 15 to 17, Imagiscène Centre culturel de Terrasson
- June 4 mai to 6, Théâtre de la Bastille, Paris

PHÈDRE !

This version of Racine's *Phèdre* could be subtitled "a mischievous and unusual conference." The theatre becomes classroom, and as Romain Daroles turns into a passionate young professor trying to communicate his burning passion for *Phèdre*, we can't help but laugh. Alone on the stage and armed only with a book, the actor plays all the characters and gives us to see once again the power of the passions at work in the play. With his infectious enthusiasm for classic French, he recalls with panache the mythological lineage of the characters, untangles the complex plot, deciphers the wondrous beauty of the Alexandrines... The exclamation point—or "admiration" point, as it was then called—added to the title highlights the astonishment of the director and his performer and their love for a theatre that still feels just as alive today as it did back then. With great humour, François Gremaud attacks evil at its "Racine" and turns this great classic tragedy into a modern and joyful odyssey. The drama that unfolds here turns out to be an ode to life and joy.

FRANÇOIS GREMAUD

Born in 1975, **François Gremaud** is a Swiss writer, director, and actor who lives and works in Lausanne. After training as a director at the INSAS in Brussels, he founded in 2005 the 2b company, a production structure for his own creations such as *Re* (2012) or *Conférence de choses* (2013) [*Conference of things*], but also for those of the Gremaud/Gurtner/Bovay collective like *Chorale* (2013) [*Choir*] or *Western dramedies* (2014). He creates unique, poetic, and hilarious worlds to amaze his audience. François Gremaud likes to say that searching for joy is as much a poetic as a political act.

JEAN RACINE

Created in 1677 and since then performed by many of the greatest actors, *Phèdre* is Racine's most famous tragedy. In this flagship work of the classic era, the author tackles ancient themes and tells of the devastating effects of passion and impossible love, between fatality and divine malediction, in order to inspire horror and pity.

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COLLECTION LAMBERT

INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS GREMAUD

A classic author, Racine, and a great play, *Phèdre*. Why did you choose this unique form for the show?

François Gremaud : Before the *Phèdre!* I'm presenting at the Festival d'Avignon, there was the *Phèdre!* I presented in classes. It was born of the proposal by the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne to imagine a work based on a classic text studied by secondary school students combined with a modern, lively form. I chose *Phèdre* because I've been fascinated by this play ever since I studied it in school. Back then, I was going through a doomed love story. I recognised my torment and my pain so much in Racine's words that I wanted to share them with teenagers today. This proposal happened just after I'd finished the show *Conférence de choses* (*Conference of Things*), which features a "sort of" speaker, in the "here and now" of the theatre, in a very direct relationship to the audience. I chose to reuse the same form to present Racine's work. After many performances in secondary schools, Romain Daroles, who plays the strange orator, and I decided to create a version of the play for all audiences, to experience it differently. Thus was born a second *Phèdre!*, aimed at everyone. It can satisfy both classic theatre aficionados and people interested by more contemporary forms of expression. Romain Daroles played a big part in that. I deeply admire this actor who was once one of my students at the Manufacture, the drama school in Lausanne. He is willing to put himself at risk every night, but is also deeply empathetic. During the show, there is a real dialogue with the audience, a real sense of complicity. The audience becomes a partner, an interlocutor. They become an integral part of the theatre, a key protagonist: without them, theatre couldn't exist.

The exclamation mark at the end of the title reminds us of what used to be called an "admiration" mark back in Racine's days. At whom is this admiration directed?

First of all at Racine himself. He managed to solve this question which forever plagues artists: how to match style and content? There is in *Phèdre* in particular a perfect match between the two. He found the perfect words to express what he had to say. He described the agony of this impossible passion in such a unique and authentic way. It's absolutely rigorous on an intellectual level, and pitch perfect on an emotional level. When *Phèdre* discovers that Hyppolite loves Aricie and expresses her jealousy, she says "They love each other!", and we hear her whole world toppling down. Because they are precisely the most fitting words, said at the exact right time. I admire what I call the economy of his writing. I also feel a lot of empathy for *Phèdre*, who is so violently carried away by this fire. She knows this is an impossible love, and yet she can't face reality.

My admiration is also directed at mythology, which is still everywhere in our world today. I find it very enlightening to be able to go back to what the Greeks and the Romans invented to explain the world. And lastly, this exclamation mark is also an expression of my wonder at theatre in general. It's an art form that allows us to come together, on either side of the stage, in a moment we're all experiencing together, and to go through the same emotions and build a reasoning. Theatre has this amazing ability to bring together people, to move them, to overwhelm them sometimes. The idea was to approach the text not as a sacred object—to do so too "caut-i-ously," as *Phèdre* would say, and thus lose its essence—but to do so with joy, that is, with life. Because that's what the play is about: life, and living.

Humour is the thread that runs through your theatre. It brings tenderness and compassion for characters who, in Racine's text, are but "horror and pity." Here we move from tragedy to comedy, from drama to joy...

Yes, and from joy to drama. Because we always return to it. I owe it to a philosopher I love, Clément Rosset, who says that "joy is the greatest power" because it can contain all that is tragic in the world. The opposite isn't necessarily true. We can be joyful while being aware of the tragedy of existence. It's harder to feel this joy when we're melancholy or sad. It's a vision of the world I understand intimately. What I like about the idea of *Phèdre!* being a comedy is that the humour doesn't mask the tragedy at all. It's a way of accepting it. Joy is our life force, which allows us to experience tragedy without letting it overwhelm us. In my work, I also use what Clément Rosset calls "foolishness," this quest for what is different and unique, a way of embracing reality for what it is. I'd rather call myself an idiot than a sage. It's a way for me to desacralise things a little, to see the world like someone who still has everything to learn and to see. Humour is a very effective way to bring down barriers and to invite the audience to be surprised. Surprise, in philosophy, is the very basis of thought. I wouldn't claim to be a philosopher, but I hope that sharing my surprise is a way to make people think a little, very modestly, and without any obligation. Humour also helps to create distance. Puns (which I love, especially when they're really bad) are excusable because we are in the present. They can make us think of something else entirely and allow us to enter the play from a different angle. Quotes from popular music are also a way of playing down Racine's learned language. I've been said to make apolitical theatre. I deeply believe that the opposite is true, because I think that bringing people together for a moment of life, of laughter, of joy, and of sharing, is a political act, however small it may be.

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Interview conducted by Malika Baaziz and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach