



COUP FATAL

INTERVIEW WITH ALAIN PLATEL

Coup Fatal (Fatal Blow) is the result of a long process. What was the genesis of the project?

Alain Platel: This adventure started in 2008, when Fabrizio Cassol discovered, in Kinshasa, Serge Kakudji, a seventeen-year-old countertenor. He was taken by his talent and energy. We offered Serge to join the cast of *pitié !* (*mercy!*). Several members of the cast encouraged him to continue his training and, in 2010, the KVS—the Royal Flemish Theatre in Brussels—scheduled him as part of an exchange with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Paul Kerstens, the coordinator of the project, gathered a number of musicians from Kinshasa, all from different fields (popular dance, jazz, traditional music), while Serge Kakudji picked arias, and guitarist Rodriguez Vangama served as musical director for this young band. The show first opened in Kinshasa, and the reception was so enthusiastic that new members soon joined the team, including Fabrizio Cassol as musical adviser. Fabrizio showed me what they were working on, and that's when we started thinking about *Coup Fatal*.

The team is entirely made up of musicians. How did you work with them?

This project is the continuation of *vsprs* and *pitié !*, on which I worked with Fabrizio Cassol. People who have seen the purely musical versions—without dancers—of those two shows will likely see the link between them. But unlike those two plays, *Coup Fatal* is first and foremost a concert. I was therefore careful not to make the whole thing too “Platelian,” even though dancer Romain Guion worked with me on choreography. My role is that of a collaborator working on questions of scenography and dramaturgy, not that of an artistic director. The first thing we asked the thirteen musicians to do was simply to stand up. They were used to playing while sitting, and I could tell they were struggling with this lack of movement. Once they stood up, they immediately started moving. That allowed me to identify a form of energy, certain movements, that were a starting point. Likewise, I suggested that, for the show's setting, we ask the help of Freddy Tsimba, a Congolese sculptor and installation artist. He created a great curtain made of bullet casings, in front of which the musicians stand. Being able to combine the universe of this brilliant and politically engaged artist with the music of this Kinshasan band makes me very happy. The *sapeurs*, with their characteristic dandy elegance, are also a big influence. The movement has very original roots, even if it has also led to some very commercial developments. At this point in the creative process, I don't know yet what we will do with this aesthetics.

This curtain of bullet casings could lend a political meaning to the show. Was that dimension always there?

No, not at all, but the proposition was positively received by everyone. The setting obviously has political connotations, but I don't want it to be a message. What matters in this project is the unique interpretation the musicians give of the baroque repertoire and the energy they give it. As someone who loves this music, I now feel that I will no longer be able to hear it any other way! In addition to the music, you also have those symbols... The curtain designed by Freddy Tsimba, the clothes, the blue plastic chairs. Those are familiar to most Kinshasans. During the celebrations organised for the fiftieth anniversary of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the government had made those chairs available to the public. People just took them home. They considered it a gift from Kabila. The goal is to allow for multiple interpretations, not to limit ourselves to a political discourse about Congo. I'm more interested in association of ideas, in poetry.

If your project isn't to present a show about Kinshasa, what is it?

I have regularly denounced and highlighted things that revolt me in the world. What I am looking for today, through both theatre and dance, might just be a new way for me to rebel. I believe today that one can rebel, and be subversive, not by explaining why one is rebelling, but by expressing a love of life that resists poverty and which we seem to be lacking here, in Europe. The joy that Serge and the musicians show as they appropriate the baroque repertoire seems to me a political message that is much more powerful than would be a report on poverty or on the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That idea was also at the heart of my last play, *tauerbach*, in which you could find a similar appetite for life. Koen Augustijnen and Rosalba Torres Guerrero, former members of the ballets C de la B, and the playwright Hildegard de Vuyst recently produced the show *Badke* with Palestinian dancers. They show an unexpected joy, a beautiful explosion of dance, based on a traditional Palestinian dance, the *dabkeh*. Instead of showing their pain and sorrow, those Palestinian dancers share with the audience their lust for life. My stays in Kinshasa gave me the same impression. The joy of life Kinshasans exhibit, even in circumstances that are sometimes horrible, tells us more about who they are than their hardships. I want to share this energy with people here, where bitterness seems to always be gaining ground, in spite of the extreme comfort we live in. We can doubtless learn something from that joy Palestinians and Kinshasans express, regardless of their circumstances.



Is that ambition shared by the play's performers?

Projects like *Coup Fatal* and *Badke* are the results of long processes. I started visiting the occupied Palestinian territories in 2001; I go back almost every year. Other artists were with me, and continue to exchange with the people they met there. *Badke*, for instance, was the result of the relationship Koen Augustijnen built with artists from Ramallah, over the course of ten years. Something similar happened in Kinshasa; I first went there in 2009. Fabrizio and the KVS have an even deeper, older relationship to this city. In both cases, the desire to create something together, with the Palestinians or the Kinshasans, was there right from the start. But for a while I resisted it, as I wanted to be fair. The artists you meet there often want to use the stage to talk about the hardships they face. This desire to create art about their experience is of course completely legitimate, and I understand it. But I think that has to be a project of their own, not the object of a collaborative work.

Poverty, disability, and anomie are recurring themes in your plays. Where does that interest for the fringes, differences, and outcasts come from?

Disability and poverty interest me first and foremost as metaphors. I think we are all poor or disabled, to diverse degrees. If the performers on stage move in a unique or unusual way, that doesn't mean I have to see them as disabled. They are simply looking, the same way we all are, for a unique, powerful way to express themselves. One of the main inspirations for *tauerbach* was Marcos Prado's documentary *Estamira*, which follows a schizophrenic woman living in a landfill near Rio de Janeiro. It isn't poverty itself that interested me in this film, or the landfill, but the fact that she decided to live there, to look for truth there. In the end, most lives look similar and follow a relatively simple cycle: get up, try to understand how to love, sleep, drink, eat, make love, and die. What interests me is the way each of us, rich or poor, tall or small, lives and survives. I think that sums up my artistic process quite well. It always starts with an encounter, that's always what motivates me to agree to a project. I've always worked with very different people. Professionals, amateurs, dancers, actors, singers, children, adults, old transvestites, deaf people, etc. For *Coup Fatal*, I met fourteen wonderful musicians, and I can't wait to work with them. My goal isn't necessarily to allow outcasts to claim their place back or to put people who are otherwise invisible in the spotlight. Yet if my shows are an opportunity for the audience to think about the fringes of society and about exclusion, I'm glad of it.

Interview conducted by Renan Benyamina.

68^e
ÉDITION

Tout le Festival sur festival-avignon.com



#FDA14



Pour vous présenter cette édition, plus de 1 750 personnes, artistes, techniciens et équipes d'organisation ont uni leurs efforts, leur enthousiasme pendant plusieurs mois. Plus de la moitié relève du régime spécifique d'intermittent du spectacle. Ce carré rouge est le symbole de notre unité.