



# THE BANK IN THE DARK

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## INTERVIEW WITH PASCAL QUIGNARD AND MARIE VIALLE

**You've been working together for a long time now. Whose idea was this show?**

**Marie Vialle:** I think it was Pascal who called me to tell me he'd developed a taste for the anxiety being onstage causes, and wanted to do it with me.

**Pascal Quignard:** That's right. It's the first time I'll be onstage with Marie. A few years ago, I created a show with Carlotta Ikeda, a butoh dancer. We were together onstage, along with musician Alain Mahé. But in 2014, Carlotta passed away. I thought, "it's over now, no one could replace Carlotta Ikeda anyway." And then, rather than replace her, I had the idea of coming up with a new project. And it was at Marie's, while we were working on *Princesse vieille reine* (*Princess Old Queen*), that the idea of a "performance of darkness" came to me. "Ankoku butoh," in Japanese, means "dance of darkness." I created one with choreographer Luc Petton and a buzzard, last autumn in Saint-Riquier, for the burial of the remains of Nithard, the first man ever to speak French. And now, for *The in the Dark*, with Marie, we've decided to work with a raven and a barn owl.

**Is the passing of Carlotta Ikeda like a secret between the two of you, or does the show aim to show it, to tell about it?**

**M.V.:** How to put it? I'm not a stand-in for Carlotta. I'm not trying to imitate her or to play her part, but her name is the first word of the show. She's there right from the beginning. So from then, everything we do is *for* her, and *from* her. The show is like a bridge for and towards her.

**P.Q.:** We like to make a gesture unique by giving it to someone else. And I mean give, because dedicate doesn't seem strong enough a word. It's a beautiful prelude to pay tribute to the dead to open a show. It's a theatrical gesture, and a humbling one, too; it makes us disappear in front of what we're saying. It also creates an atmosphere, it casts a pall over the whole thing... Which is good! I think one of the aims of the theatre is always to summon revenants. Masks, ever since ancient Greece, have always depicted dead people coming back.

**What did you start with? The text?**

**P.Q.:** No, I just asked Marie what she thought of this idea of a dance of darkness. And we immediately thought of the birds.

**M.V.:** It's something we've been thinking about forever.

**P.Q.:** Ever since we met, Marie's regularly given me CDs filled with bird cries, with the sounds of nature...

**M.V.:** The first time was for *Triumph of Time*. Pascal had asked me, before starting to write, to give him a list of scenes with dialogue, and another of silent ones. I'd given him a bag with all the books from which I'd taken those scenes, and then there was a CD, an anthology of voices from around the world, with human and animal screams.

**P.Q.:** But back then, Marie didn't dare use them, didn't dare scream and make noises... She was shy. You'll see what she does in *The Bank in the Dark*, it's unbelievable!

**M.V.:** I think that if I dare do that sort of thing now, it's because we've done all that research. What's paradoxical is that it's Pascal's writing that gives me both the right and the space necessary to explore things outside of words. It was Pascal and his words that made me want to direct, but weirdly, as if it were a space that belonged only to me and allowed me to go somewhere else, and especially where there is no language.

**Without a preexisting text or a fixed story, how did you build the show?**

**P.Q.:** Here I have to express my admiration for Olivier Py and Agnès Trolly; they never asked us for anything. We're completely free. If I'd given them a text, it would have created expectations. But we were allowed to work on the show however we wanted. I can remove things, add others, make adjustments.

**M.V.:** It allows us to be in the moment of creation. It's rare and wonderful to be able to preserve this time of astonishment at what arises. The way we work, there's not one director who makes all the decisions; creation arises from breathing together. The first version of the text had very specific images which unfolded and transformed as we worked. We've ended up with elements on which we improvise, with the help of our

accomplices. Chantal de la Coste, our scenographer and costume designer, and Jean-Claude Fonkenel, our electrician, create the space of the show just as Pascal continues to write and I research gestures, voices, etc. What matters to me is to listen to what I really feel. For instance, I've sometimes said to Pascal, "right here, we're missing something that allows me to come back," or, "I know how I'm supposed to appear, but not how I disappear." Within the show itself, the roles aren't fixed, we keep trading places and switching parts. Pascal is sometimes an assistant, sometimes a monk, sometimes a writer...

**P.Q.:** In shamanistic rites, someone always stays behind while the shaman flies away. He's called the linguist, the perch, the bearer, or the assistant. We use a similar system: one of us talks while the other goes through extremely diverse roles. It's very close to dance, in that the rhythm is different from one scene to the next and within a single scene, and yet the general movement, from beginning to end, is perfectly continuous. Without any explanation being given.

**You've used the words "dance," "performance," and "butoh." Which one would best define the show?**

**P.Q.:** The show mixes singing, talking, music, dance, choreography, birds... I can't say exactly what it is. In Avignon, we'll perform it six times, so maybe the idea of a performance isn't quite accurate. But it's not butoh, either. It might be closer to noh, which has songs and dances and in which the actors use tambourines and flutes to bring back the ancient dead and appease them. It's kind of what we're doing. But we don't have to define it precisely. The show is like a baroque suite; a succession of very different movements united by a single key. Our key is the darkness.

**M.V.:** It's the only permanent link, even if there are nuances within it.

**P.Q.:** Of course, light is very important when you're working with darkness. In any case, we have two birds with us, one nocturnal, and one diurnal. If it's too bright, the owl sleeps; if it's too dark, the raven sleeps. We therefore have to find a way to play with both of them!

**You're bringing together many different elements and disciplines, but it seems that you're aiming for a sort of simplicity.**

**M.V.:** We're aiming for several different things. It's at once very, very complex and simple, almost archaic. When things are at their purest, anything can happen. Since the text is infinitely rich, like a piano score with thousands of harmonies, my performance has to be as simple and clear as possible, so that everything can then resonate. Otherwise, people won't be able to hear everything. They need to be able to experience what's going on.

**P.Q.:** As for me, what I'm trying to do is still to make people cry. The idea remains the same: you have to be accurate and above all not pompous, as would be children. What we're playing with are just images that we embody and animate, as if we were playing games.

**M.V.:** Which brings us back to the freedom Pascal's texts gave me. It's the freedom of children. Children give themselves the right to play whatever they want, to interpret any layer of meaning, without wondering about what they're doing.

**P.Q.:** The piano helps a lot, too. It brings back sadnesses, in tiny sequences. There always needs to be a "minimum piano," as Marguerite Duras would put it.

**Pascal Quignard, you've written that "one can write what one isn't able to say." What can one feel at the theatre that one "wouldn't be able" to feel when reading a book?**

**P.Q.:** We can turn all the lights off. Darkness puts dreams into our heads. Dreams are the only actions that can exist without articulated language. It's impossible for a book to properly feel like a dream. That's what we're aiming for onstage. And then there's the music! You can't have music in a book, not like that.

**M.V.:** In this show, we exist outside of time. That's also why the wild plays such an important part.

**P.Q.:** The dream is both a means and an end for us. The show feels like a dream, and is built like a dream is built. As Freud would say, "by condensation."

Interview conducted by Marion Canelas  
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