

AND...

PRESS CONFERENCE

with Olivier Py and Enzo Verdet,
July 16 at 11:00, cour du Cloître Saint-Louis

SPECTACLE

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

THOUGHT WORKSHOPS

with Olivier Py, Cloître Saint-Louis
Encounter Research and creation - Crossing worlds
Civilisations et imagination, July 9 at 9:30
Cultural intelligence Forum, July 11 at 9:30
Culture and social economy: a third way, July 12 at 14:00

MACBETH PHILOSOPHER

After *King Lear* in 2015 and *Hamlet* in 2016, Olivier Py returns to Shakespeare with one of his darkest plays. *Macbeth* is a play haunted by the thirst for power, a symbol of the destruction of humanist values, and features the most terrible crimes. Adapted by the director as if it were an opera libretto, the play is a relentless machine performed by eight inmates from the Avignon-Le Pontet prison who put their bodies to the test of the words. Olivier Py shines a black light on Shakespeare's highly poetic language. Revelling in their supreme power, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth begin a journey from which there is no coming back. His madness now left unchecked, the tyrant questions the world and becomes a poet. A poet in love with evil. An essential, violent, and wild work, which explores the concept of fate, the fulfillment of desires, the squashing of any resistance.

OLIVIER PY

A director for the theatre, the opera, and cinema, but also an actor and writer, **Olivier Py** anchors his work in the preoccupations of his contemporaries in order to open a poetic and political dialogue. Theatre is his culture and instrument: with it, the word becomes action, without ever losing sight of the fact that this gesture—a poem—could one day be the basis of new democratic forms. Olivier Py regularly writes about cultural policy in France and Europe to denounce all forms of social and humanitarian injustice.

AVIGNON-LE PONTET PRISON

As part of its policy to make culture accessible to everyone, the Festival d'Avignon has since 2004 worked in collaboration with the **Avignon-Le Pontet prison**. In 2014, at Olivier Py's request, this partnership intensified with a workshop he directs with Enzo Verdet. They offer the actors, with the help of the prison's staff, the opportunity to perform outside the walls of the prison.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

If Ancient history was his source, **William Shakespeare** knew how to find inspiration in his contemporaries and brought dramatic language to such intensity that his tragedies and comedies take shape through it. No author has, since the 17th century, met with such universal acclaim. *Macbeth* is thought to have been created in 1611.

73rd

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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FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON 73RD

JULY 17 18 19
LA CHARTREUSE-CNES DE VILLENEUVE LEZ AVIGNON

INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER PY

Can you talk a little about your collaboration with the Avignon-Le Pontet prison?

Olivier Py : We've worked together for five years now. We put on *Prometheus Unbound*, then *The Persians*, *Hamlet*, and *Antigone*. We came back to Shakespeare at the inmates' request. Our projects have to be flexible to adapt to potential departures, to whether some inmates can go on leave or not, or can later be granted that right. But anyone who wants to take part in our workshop is welcome to do so. Over five years, we've worked with about sixty inmates. We work mostly with the detention centre, which means people with longer sentences than in remand centres. We had to earn the trust of both the administration and the inmates themselves; things happen slowly in prison, and nothing can ever be taken for granted. With Enzo Verdet, my partner on this adventure, we've experienced everything: small victories, tragedies, moments of elation but also of despondency. In the end, we achieved the administrative miracle of performing *Antigone* outside the walls of the prison at the Festival d'Avignon and at the Théâtre Paris-Villette.

What vision do the inmates have of Shakespeare's theatre?

They're fascinated by it. Shakespeare gives them a lot of freedom when it comes to performing. When you're working on classical tragedy, you have to find restraint, inwardness, a solemn style. With Shakespeare, all is permitted. A scene of madness or of violence can be played like a comedy scene, and vice versa. *Macbeth* and *King Lear* are probably his darkest plays. I translated and adapted the play for them. In a quick, concrete French, to remain faithful to the original text. The themes of destiny, *dell'arte libre*, and of guilt are at the centre of the adaptation. In *Macbeth*, there are many decorative scenes that can easily be cut to delve into the heart of the tragedy, into the mystical interiority of the crime. What struck me in the original text is the extent to which Macbeth is a philosopher and a poet. Film adaptations deprive him of a Platonic introspection which isn't enough to save him. He is, in spite of or thanks to his crime, "clairvoyant". And little by little he becomes detached from himself, from what he's done, what he could do; he becomes a stranger to himself. And he comments this descent into hell just like Dante would.

Your adaptation is meant to be performed outside, in public, and inside, within the prison: can you tell us more about this "private" location?

In the prison, the performances are meant for the inmates. The audience of the Festival d'Avignon isn't there. It's interesting for two reasons. First, because it's an audience which, for the most part, has never been to the theatre. If they've seen shows, it wasn't from the classical repertoire. Then there's the fact that the inmates themselves become actors of cultural democratisation for the others. The solidarity of those who come listen to them is deeply moving. They listen in absolute silence. The audience of the prison, between a hundred and two hundred people per show, knows how difficult it is to expose oneself this way.

Over the years, there's been a shift from curious interest to admiring respect for the work of the inmates as actors. The pioneers, who performed in the first show, *Prometheus Unbound*, were very brave. It wasn't easy within the prison community. As for me, it's always been very clear that I'm not engaging in a social action, but in artistic research. With those actors, I try on an aesthetics of performance in which the word is essential and feelings are heightened.

How do you see your actors?

Theirs is an aesthetics of the fight. They perform with their full voice. As if, for each sentence, their lives hung in the balance. The inmates pin their text to the walls of their cells, they live with it daily (and it's not easy to learn everything by heart). Over a year of their lives, they question this text, each in their own way: by reading other versions, by watching films. They reach a level of intimacy with it that changes all criteria of psychological credibility.

Your adaptation of *Macbeth* can be called operatic in its linearity and efficiency, and highlights the powerful stakes of the play...

While translating *Macbeth*, I tried to remain as close as possible to regular verse, more or less in dodecasyllable. A few Alexandrines can be found here and there; they give an air of authority to the verse. It allowed me to tighten the language. I wanted first and foremost to explore the question of fate: "*Do I make my own destiny? Does my destiny make me?*" *Macbeth* and *King Lear* are filled with the violence of the world. Shakespeare is intoxicated by the idea that something no longer works. That from metaphysics to the destiny of the man on the street, something has changed. Man lives in this darkness of the soul, this pessimism. Those are plays about anxiety.

***Macbeth* is also Lady Macbeth. She forces the hand of fate. Do you see them as similar, or interacting with each other?**

Of course, two men play those roles. Lady Macbeth doesn't appear as a character. It's not a romantic or sexual relationship. In my direction, she's an inner voice. The Macbeths are a powerful force of destruction. In *King Lear*, fathers are killed. In *Macbeth*, children are. It goes much further, to the point that names are killed. Macbeth asks a metaphysical question. The fewer answers he gets, the further he goes on his horrible adventure. Shakespeare had to deal with pedants who saw themselves as poets. To them he says: it's lovers and madmen who are the true poets. He also says, strangely enough: he who does evil deeds is also a poet. Macbeth, drunk on his own crime and on the freedom he experiences, becomes a poet. He questions the world... which answers him, or rather, the silence of the world answers him. At some point, he ponders the silence of the earth under his feet. The silence of his steps tells him something... He's a highly poetic being. And let's not forget about the political aspect of it all! The actors are particularly aware of it: they're dealing with a power "materialised" in their everyday lives. But the last sentence of the play calls on "the grace of Grace". Shakespeare ends his play with a question mark.

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Interview conducted by Marc Blanchet and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach