

THE FARAWAY COUNTRY (AN ARRANGEMENT)

For this unique project, created for 14 young actors, Christophe Rauck has chosen to ask two young authors from the École du Nord to direct it. Under Christophe Pellet's watchful eye, and with the help of François Berreur, they have created a montage bringing together *The Faraway Country* and excerpts from three other texts by Jean-Luc Lagarce: *J'étais dans ma maison et j'attendais que la pluie vienne* (*I was in my house waiting for the rain*), *Nous les héros* (*We the heroes*), and *Journal 1 et 2*.

The writing, narrative, and performances combine to present the audience with an idea of the collective, if not of theatre itself: a teeming ensemble of interdependent parts. With *The Faraway Country (An Arrangement)*, Lagarce tells us in the present tense stories of lives consumed by nostalgia for a long-gone past. His writing is all about urgency and doubt, reflecting the situation of those young artists brought together onstage for one last time before they graduate. *The Faraway Country* is that of their past, of the three years they spent together learning and acquiring tools for the future, but it is also the one lying in front of them, which they don't know yet, and into which they will have to venture...

CHRISTOPHE RAUCK

Christophe Rauck began his career as an actor under the direction of Ariane Mnouchkine. In 1996, he directed Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* with actors from the Théâtre du soleil. He has also directed *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Comédie-Française (2007), Marivaux's *Careless Vows*, Racine's *Phèdre* (2014), Horvath's *Figaro Gets a Divorce* (2016), as well as two operas by Monteverdi. After heading the Théâtre du Peuple in Bussang and the TGP-CDN in Saint-Denis, he became director of the Théâtre du Nord in Lille and of its École in 2014.

JEAN-LUC LAGARCE

Jean-Luc Lagarce was a director, actor, playwright, and essayist. His work is among the most played in France, and has been met with popular and critical acclaim. Family, disappearance, unveiling, and revelation are at the heart of his work. He died of AIDS aged 38 after writing his final play, *The Faraway Country*.

THE ÉCOLE DU NORD

Created by Stuart Seide and formerly known as the EPSAD, the École du Nord changed its name when Christophe Rauck became its director in 2014. Every class is made up of about fifteen student-actors, who follow a three-year course. The school is open to all aesthetic practices and specialises in bringing actors and playwrights to work together.

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INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHE RAUCK AND CHRISTOPHE PELLET

For your creation *The Faraway Country (An Arrangement)*, you've added three characters to the text by Jean-Luc Lagarce. By changing the play, aren't you afraid of drifting away from Lagarce's writing, from what he had to say?

Christophe Pellet: *The Faraway Country (An Arrangement)* is a project created within the framework of a school which brings together fourteen actors and two writers for three years of training. As is often the case for shows with a large cast, we had to adapt the play in the interest of fairness, and added three roles: a second sister based on the character of the older sister in another of Jean-Luc Lagarce's plays, *J'étais dans ma maison et j'attendais que la pluie vienne* (*I was in my house waiting for the rain*); the character of Madame Tschissik from *Nous les Héros* (*We the Heroes*), who watches and comments on all that happens, like the ancient coryphaeus; and the role of the introspective narrator, whose text is made up of excerpts from the playwright's *Journal*. Christophe Rauck's goal is to add writers to a group of actors to allow for a different approach to writing, to have it be based on actual interactions on the stage. And I had the pleasure of accompanying the student-writers of the École du Nord for three years. In *The Faraway Country*, Lagarce's writing has a homogeneous style, it is so coherent and recognisable that you can manipulate it without breaking it apart. His language moves in circles, and this convolution of the writing creates the additional challenge of not creating any redundant parts. It's true that adding new scenes could be a betrayal of the play as a finished object... But what we added won't disrupt the linearity and themes of *The Faraway Country*. The whole process of adaptation was signed on by François Berreur, who's in charge of Jean-Luc Lagarce's estate, and he trusted us fully. By the way, he'll be the sponsor of the next class of writers at the École du Nord, starting in the fall of 2018.

A class of fourteen actors and many characters: the audience will be faced with a packed, swarming stage...

Christophe Rauck: The show gives each of them the opportunity to be seen, heard, and looked at in unique aspects of their performance as actors. The baroque aesthetics, the almost Shakespearean writing, with all those friends and dead lovers, offers many acting possibilities, a great theatricality and poetry. I particularly like to think of the stage as the place of the actor. The question of the real is one I like, but only if it's properly explored. I'd rather think about how I can give life to the tragic aspect of the work, to its poetry. There are two journeys here, that of this class of young people whose journey at school is coming to an end and whose career is about to begin, and that of the play, with its tragic depth and moments of humour.

Christophe Pellet: Lagarce's writing lends itself to that parallel, because it's built on doubt, just like youth is. It's young in that sense. Lagarce is someone who never grew old, who always questioned the present, who always came back to the memory of yesterday. His is a blurry thought. Creating new roles allowed us to create a polished show, which doesn't look like a school play, but truly like a creation that pays homage to actors.

What choices did you make to present those young artists in terms of the space of the stage? What about the economy of the stage, the question of realism and drama?

Christophe Rauck: The lights, costumes, and sound were designed by the artists I usually work with on my shows. For the scenography, we had the idea of collaborating with a recent graduate of the École du Fresno, in Tourcoing, a young video maker who trained in the region. I like the idea of helping artists of the same generation but of different fields meet. Video images have their place on the stage without being overbearing, it's a work in its own right but also a support for the actors' performance; the text is powerful enough to create images on its own. You stage a text because you want to make theatre, it's not enough in and of itself, however dense its narration and complex its writing. With this *Faraway Country (An Arrangement)*, I want to talk about a work in a particular place: the North of France, with its powerful cultural policy, and a possible encounter between young artists from different schools who lived in the region of Lille and Tourcoing at the same time. The play begins with the actors at work, on the stage, after a read-through. They enter the space and the physical material, they try to build relationships head-on, with concrete performance elements, like the furniture in the dining room, the back of the chair on which the brother is sitting... There are different temporalities to understand in Lagarce's work, the time of dream, the time which doesn't exist or is long gone, the pure present. You have to play with those differences: with the apparition, between the real and pure poetry, and the way today exists so that yesterday can curl up inside it. With this creation, Jean-Luc Lagarce's *The Faraway Country* becomes a unique, reinvented object, through the introduction of additional voices and characters come from other plays to comment on the story itself and the characters who meet there for the last time. Adding (*An Arrangement*) to the title is a way to tell the audience that it is an adaptation to a different situation, at once very complex and very simple: the creation of a community of artists and the end of a cycle (for the class performing that arrangement). Lagarce's writing is very musical, which allows us to look at the whole thing as at a score, even a symphony, in which each instrument is part of a whole at the same time as you can listen to it independently. That's how you read the story of a group, and in particular that of this class of the École du Nord, the principle of the orchestra being to bring together a group to speak with one voice.

Interview conducted by Moïra Dalant and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach