

## FUGUE

The South Pole is the setting for this story about, as usual, love and death. There will be singing when words are lost or no longer suffice. This story is intrinsically musical, maybe even operatic, but the point of departure is none other than Pythagorus' theories of harmony and temper. Its paradox: the cycle of fifths it is based on cannot be closed, as a comma is missing from the last one. The mathematical relationship is perfect in theory, and yet in practice the cycle it produces is a spiral. To embody this question, have fun with it, and maybe solve its impossible harmony, the musician-actor-singers brought together by Samuel Achache combine their voices, like the subjects and countersubjects of a fugue, and delve into the ideas of being in tune and of misunderstanding.

Show premiered on 29 May, 2015 within the Ambivalence(s) Festival at the Comédie de Valence.

## SAMUEL ACHACHE

Reconciling music and theatre, Samuel Achache feels a very strong attachment towards both disciplines. After graduating from the French National Academy of Dramatic Arts in 2006, he worked as an actor with Sylvain Creuzevault and Vincent Macaigne. The lack of music he experiences in his own work leads him in 2013 to create with Jeanne Candel *Le Crocodile trompeur / Didon et Enée*, an absurd opera which already called on the harmony of the spheres and on ancient music. He then joined the Collectif artistique de La Comédie de Valence. As a director, Samuel Achache wants to continue questioning the essential interdependence between the theatre and live music. Pulling them towards each other, he puts to the test the tension that exists between those disciplines, but also between registers and tones.

## INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL ACHACHE

### What was the theme you gave your team?

Samuel Achache: The question of musical temperament, of the tuning and composition of a scale. Pythagoras is said to have been the first to establish a scale since he came up with the idea of intervals, the relationships between notes. Music was at the time considered part of mathematics, along with astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry. Pythagoras found a way to tune notes relative to each other using only natural, or “pure,” intervals, based on simple numerical relationships, creating harmony. In ancient cosmologies, those relationships would correspond to the movements of the planets, to the organisation of the cosmos; this is what the ancient Greeks used to call the harmony of the spheres. It was the music of the cosmos, in a way. It has therefore to do with a sort of natural truth. Throughout the Middle Ages, this way of thinking was passed down. There was something sacred about it, you couldn’t just innovate. But this temperament doesn’t allow you to play polyphonic and harmonic music, since some of its intervals (or relationships between the notes) are wrong. There is indeed an incredible paradox at the heart of Pythagorean tuning: the cycle of fifths it is based on cannot be closed. A comma is missing from the last one. The mathematical relationship is perfect in theory, and yet in practice the cycle it produces is a spiral. So for music to evolve, to move from the monodic music of the Middle Ages to polyphonic music, this cosmological and philosophical model must be opened up. Rethinking the temperament meant spreading out this tiny gap over the entirety of the scale. In the “equal” temperament we know today, which was invented in the 19th century, only the octaves are in tune, all the other intervals are slightly out-of-tune, but we are used to it. Everything is out of tune in the same way, so to speak. The field of expression is much bigger, but the specific character of each tone has been lost.

### How did the actors react?

It’s a question they are familiar with, since they are all musicians. They all have, at some point, looked at the question of musical temperament. But when I told them about it, they pointed out just how theoretical it was. So I offered a twist: the idea would be to start with this almost mathematical question and then to think by analogy, to jump from one idea to another, to think about all the possible relationships while keeping in mind how to act them out on the stage. It was a starting point, a common reflection we’re now leaving behind together to confront it to the work we do on the stage, the idea being to find, or rather to put together, forms where the theatre and music come together and complete each other.

### Can you describe for us how you work?

We explore the imaginary and relational fields those theoretical reflections open. Starting from those discussions and ramblings, we eventually identify concrete ideas, around which we improvise. For instance, we’ve been looking closely at Gustave Flaubert’s *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. It’s the story of a hermit. Does one retire from the world of men in order to watch them, to analyse their relationships? Or is it a way not to have to deal with it anymore, not to compromise one’s principles? Interest in hermits led us to

other figures of solitude, like those embodied by great travellers and we read explorer's notebooks and other stories, watched films, read articles, tried to understand scientific articles, and uncovered strange news items... but the principal reference, the film which would become the common landscape of our collective imaginings, was Werner Herzog's documentary *Encounters at the end of the world*. The story we started with, this musical temperament, is nothing but a story of compromise. In the mathematical conception of the scale, the question is, what can I give up to win? At this point I should probably say that our way of making theatre is nowhere near as austere as our subject matter, as the apparent dryness of those questions. One gesture on the stage is sometimes much more eloquent than half an hour spent trying to agree on what we're going to do. Above all, playing music brings joy. This joy is the first step towards all of us getting in tune with one another.

### **What instruments will you be using? What pieces have you chosen to play?**

We'll have a cello, a clarinet, a prepared piano, voices, a guitar, a drum kit, and a trumpet. The pieces we picked date from the end of the Middle Ages to the end of the baroque period, up to Bach. We play them with those contemporary instruments, unplugged, if the circumstances allow it. Those pieces mistreat us just as much as we mistreat them. We are not supposed to play them. For our musical point of view to be interesting, we have to find a way to operate a shift, to reinvent it, rewrite it, to turn it into a kind of raw material, in order to create a music that would serve to develop what we have to say and be the basis of a scenic language. In general, the raw material we have, whether it's music, text, or images, is a basis for improvisation. Our questions are similar to those that composers and musicians of the time might have been asking, who also improvised in order to write. If we are to be baroque, it will be in this gesture.

### **Why did you pick *Fugue* as your title?**

The basic principle of a fugue is the cohabitation of independent voices which, in counterpoint to one another, form a whole. The voices try to imitate one another, each one trying to catch the one that came before. I liked the idea of using a form of musical composition as the basis of the show's dramaturgy. I also chose this title because beyond its form, the fugue can become a theme, in all its various meanings. Fuguer, it's leaving without planning one's departure. The hermit's gesture is also a fugue [Translator's note: "fuguer" means "to run away"], a journey, a withdrawal from the world.

"I died in the tumultuous goings-on of the world, and now lie in a tranquil spot. I live blissfully alone in my sky, in my love and in my song."

Friedrich Rückert

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Interview conducted by Marion Canelas / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

*Dialogue artists-audience* with Samuel Achache and the team of *Fugue*, encounter hosted by the Ceméa / 19 July at 05:30 pm, Site Louis Pasteur de l'Université, free admittance

ÇA VA, ÇA VA LE MONDE ! - RFI

*Pièce de printemps - Pays natal (Spring Play - Native Country)* by Pedro Kadivar / Reading by Samuel Achache, Vladislav Galard, Florent Hubert, Léo-Antonin Lutinier / With Festival des Francophonies en Limousin 21 July at 11:30 am, Jardin du gymnase du lycée Saint-Joseph, free admittance

TOUR DATES FOR *FUGUE* AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

– from 5 to 24 January 2016: Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris  
– 29 and 30 January: Romans Scènes, Romans-sur-Isère  
– from 2 to 6 February: Théâtre de la Croix-Rousse, co-hosted by the Théâtre de la Renaissance, Lyon  
– 9 February: Espace des Arts, Scène nationale, Chalon-sur-Saône

– from 12 to 20 February: Théâtre Garonne, Scène européenne, Toulouse  
– from 23 to 25 February: Le Trident, Scène nationale, Cherbourg-Octeville  
– from 14 to 16 March: La Comédie de Valence, Centre dramatique national Drôme-Ardèche

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