



THE LINE IS A CURVE

INTERVIEW WITH KAE TEMPEST

What will you be presenting on the stage of the Cour d'honneur?

I'd say it's a recital more than a show. It's a rather conceptual musical project. Like most of my works, it is a project in its own right. It is based both on my latest album *The Line is a Curve*, which came out in April and for which I will be touring, and on the unique location that is the Cour d'honneur. I also have in mind the context of the Festival d'Avignon, this theatre festival where texts and writers have place of honour. I'm opening the recital with texts written before my last album, a few poems from *Hold Your Own* in particular, as well as excerpts from my previous album, *The Book of Traps and Lessons*. It places the new texts and the musical performance within a larger narrative; in a way, it gives new meaning to the work by creating echoes between older writings and this new album. The scope of the texts grows or changes once placed alongside others.

You highlighted the importance of writing. Do you think of your poems and your musical texts in the same way?

When it comes to *The Line is a Curve*, I wrote the words and the music at the same time, their identities and existence are entirely interwoven. I see music as a sort of accompanying scenography, it is a camera which provides a point of view on the text, which helps build the narrative and enters in a dialogue with the words. The score adds a sensory possibility, an opening onto the emotions of the audience receiving the text. Performing texts with no musical accompaniment, like in a spoken word or slam show, is a pretty different project. The poem is then the main, if not the only object of the performance. Since we had the opportunity to create a form without any length constraint, I chose for the Cour d'honneur to move from one form to another, to slowly move from a reading to a concert. I like the idea of performing this album in a theatrical context because it allows the project to take on a different dimension, especially within the walls of the Palais des papes, which can create an unexpected resonance. It's something I particularly like because I work "across the form," through several disciplines and artistic forms. Questioning the conflicts that can arise between the intentions of an artist (or a work) and the expectations of an audience and a place is a creative tension I find particularly motivating. The various contexts in which I present my work allow me every time to start afresh, to question what is expected (concert, reading, play), and to make palpable various modes of reception and energies. It's exhilarating.

With you, the audience will discover multi-instrumentalist Hinako Omori, as well as the work of scenographer Rae Smith...

Yes, I don't want to work on my own. Rae Smith created an element of scenography to accompany my texts and the music played live by Hinako Omori. Rae Smith had already designed the scenography for my play *Paradise*, which played at the National Theatre in London in 2021. For this tour, a great veil rises behind us, not to close off the stage but on the contrary to open it onto a new space, different and poetic, which accompanies the narrative. I'd say it's a silk sculpture shaped like a giant tree bending down towards our two bodies, in a dialogue with the music and text. Through a rather complex work with light, the scenography completes the narrative by creating the feeling of a place, at times a dreamed and fantasised landscape, at others a very real space all the more comforting for its familiarity. Between this element of scenography and the work with light, the musician and myself are given a place where we can create our own world. But the main character—or the coryphaeus, to use the words of the theatre—remains the text itself, the music being a sort of chorus which accompanies it. Together, we go on a journey to give life to a story; it's an intense process that requires deep concentration, we support each other on this poetic journey. We rehearsed the route beforehand and we know all the stages of the concert, but we remain flexible and available, always listening to one another and to the narrative unfolding little by little.

Can you tell us more about this idea of availability, about this state of awareness that can be tied to the main motif of your album: the notion of cycle?

Like my previous album, *The Line is a Curve* tells of a journey from one emotional state to another. It's the story of a person under pressure and affected by their city, the relationships they have there, and certain lifestyles, and of how, by becoming aware of the pressures they are under, they are able to express their needs and change their emotional state. Beauty resides in this realisation. The more pressures there are, the more space there is to find one's freedom. The story ends with the acceptance of the cyclical nature of our behaviours and of the sway of our emotions. The goal, or the ideal outcome, would be to find peace in our understanding of the world. The album is cyclical, it ends like it begins, and vice versa. The intensity of those repetitions, the infinite return of night and day, can create stressful and painful motifs, but becoming aware of it allows us to end on a hopeful note. Of course, you always have to begin again at some point...

Interview conducted by Moïra Dalant