

AND

SHOW LIVE BROADCAST on Culturebox,
and in the Irish Cultural Center - Festival Paris l'Été (Paris)

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- December 18, 2018, Théâtre Molière, Sète
- December 20, Le Train-Théâtre, Portes-lès-Valence
- January 18, 2019, Scène nationale La Garance, Cavaillon
- February 6 and 7, Le Centquatre, Paris
- April 18, Théâtre du Garde-Chasse, Les Lilas
- April 27, Le Quai Centre dramatique national, Angers
- May 7, La Coursive Scène nationale, La Rochelle
- June 4, L'Estive Scène nationale, Foix

An album will be released by Sony Classical on November 2, 2018

HERE ON EARTH - GABRIEL FAURÉ'S MELODIES

When voices create feelings, when melancholy and desire echo more than they ever did... *Ici-bas* has contemporary artists performing Gabriel Fauré's melodies outside of a classical context. By giving those often little-known tunes to fifteen singers from diverse backgrounds, from jazz to pop, guitarist and composer Olivier Mellano and show creator Sonia Bester, along with musicians Simon Dalmais (piano), Anne Gouverneur (violin), and Maëva Le Berre (cello), open up a whole new world to those subtle compositions from the 19th century. The show *Ici-bas* is at once a unique evening with fifteen singers to close the Festival d'Avignon and an ambitious project born of a desire to break away from classical singing, whose power often comes as a detriment to the subtlety of this repertoire. A dreamlike evening out of time which will bring together spoken words and music, poetry and the night. Between two guitar sonic arches, each performer will come give his or her voice to those "songs" that are ancestors to ours, and which will be revelations for many of us, thanks to those artists.

BAUM

BAUM is a musical ensemble composed of Simon Dalmais, Anne Gouverneur, Maëva Le Berre and Olivier Mellano, four musicians with atypical careers oscillating between classical or contemporary music, song, pop and experimental music, all gathered by Sonia Bester during the last ten years of creation.

SONIA BESTER

Sonia Bester, also known as Madamelune, creates unexpected shows. She founded her company in 2017 after writing and directing the shows *La Tragédie du Belge (The Belgian's Tragedy, 2014)* and *On a dit on fait un spectacle (We said we'd put on a show, 2015)*.

72th
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,750 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tireless and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.

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FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON 72°

JULY 24 | COUR D'HONNEUR DU PALAIS DES PAPES

INTERVIEW WITH SONIA BESTER AND OLIVIER MELLANO

How did you discover Gabriel Fauré’s melodies, and how was this show born, with its clear desire to change the angle with which we approach that music?

Olivier Mellano: I’m more familiar with baroque and modern music than with 19th-century music, but I’ve always considered Fauré to be apart; he has a harmonic sophistication which I find very moving. But I’ve always been left cold by the classical interpretations of his melodies. A short while ago, I worked as a musician with Sonia on *On a dit on fait un spectacle* (*We said we’d put on a show*). The song “Après un rêve” (“After a Dream”) was sung by Rosemary Standley. Sandra Nkaké also sang. Their voices weren’t at all that of classical singers. Right then, it all made sense! It became obvious: we had to build a collection of melodies and give them to singers capable of making people hear them in all their simplicity and clarity. I think that the aesthetic screen of classical singing prevents a lot of people from truly listening to those compositions. This project was born of the desire to let people hear the beauty of those melodies and the diversity of the harmonies in a more peaceful, gentler way than they are used to.

Sonia Bester: I’d worked on a show with Laurence Équibey in which Rosemary Standley sang “Après un rêve” with a choir. For *On a dit on fait un spectacle*, which is a musical and poetic reverie, that melody worked perfectly, but we had to rearrange it for piano and strings. The result was just as hypnotising. Olivier, who was supposed to play one of his own compositions after that melody, was so mesmerised that he sometimes forgot to do it. We were all hanging onto Simon, Anne, and Maëva’s every note, to Rosemary’s every word. I guess we could say that was the beginning of the adventure of *Here on Earth*...

The melodies by Gabriel Fauré are performed by modern singers, and not in a classical way. One could say that you’re letting people hear those melodies in a brand new way...

Olivier Mellano: When I read a score, I hear the melodies in a sort of peaceful purity, not “classical” at all, something closer to a song or to baroque voices, straighter and less technically skilled. Classical singing used to be justified by the acoustics of concert halls. Today, we have other ways to make sure everyone hears the voices. You can sing a melody more softly, as if for yourself. There’s a form of beauty there. The listener can grasp the essence of the composition. The depth of the harmonies is no longer flattened. The instrumentation comes back to the forefront.

Sonia Bester: Thanks to those arrangements, the melody becomes visible again. And the singing is no longer all about vocal power. It’s about emotion. We rediscover the texts and the music, which echo inside us.

Gabriel Fauré’s melodies are musical accompaniments for texts by Paul Verlaine, Charles Baudelaire, Victor Hugo, or Théophile Gautier, but also for so-called “minor” poets: Catulle Mendès, Albert Samain, Jean de la Ville de Mirmont, or Sully Prudhomme...

Sonia Bester: At first I thought we’d pick the melodies that go with the most famous poets. But out of the nineteen we chose, only Verlaine and Théophile Gautier are really well-known. Some are sometimes-forgotten Parnassians like Sully Prudhomme or Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, others are poets like Romain

Bussine (“Après un rêve”), Armand Silvestre, or Charles Van Lerberghe. Thanks to those melodies, we’ve discovered beautiful, timeless texts.

Olivier Mellano: We picked the melodies partly based on the quality and power of the texts. We realised afterwards that there were three main themes: first spleen, melancholy—poems that move us because of the deep existential anxiety they express—then love; and then the night.

How did you choose the singers?

Olivier Mellano: We went to singers whose vocal capacities can carry the music. We’d decided to pick each singer for a specific melody. For instance, for Dominique A, I hear echoes of the melody of “Automne” in his music. We’ve put those intuitions to the test time after time. Étienne Daho will sing “Ici-bas” on the album. There’s something of the bossa nova in the way he sings. The melody is perfect for him. That was our goal: a specific tone of voice for each melody. Fauré’s music is linked to pure beauty, which has led to his being perceived as an easy charmer when compared with more cerebral composers. What is simply beautiful, what triggers emotions in us, can seem easy. The strength of Fauré’s writing is that its complexity aims towards beauty and always serves emotion.

Sonia Bester: Which requires the singers to project themselves. And their rendition of the songs reveals a little of who they are and of the emotions they awaken in them. They are all enthusiastic, but they’re taking risks; they find themselves in a unique position.

There’s a shift both in the poems you’ve chosen, which are often called simple, even naive, but also in the choice of the performers, who aren’t “classical” singers: it’s an unusual choice...

Olivier Mellano: The choice of the singers is a manifesto about what singing could be today. All those different kinds of voices, from John Greaves to Philippe Katerine, people who come from modern jazz, Jeanne Added who moved from jazz towards pop, Judith Chemla who gave an ideal rendition of *La traviata*, all of them have different profiles and very strong vocal identities. That’s what you’ll get to see and hear... We chose them for who they are and, one could say, for the integrity of their careers.

Many classical singers or musicians think that the French melody is the “ancestor” of French songs...

Sonia Bester: That’s the whole project! It can seem so far away from us, but it echoes today in a very moving way. We still love, we still suffer, we’re melancholy! With this music and those texts, we dive into a faraway world that’s never been so close.

Olivier Mellano: We want to show that the French melody can be sophisticated but also very easy to listen to. And ask the question of a drop in quality when it comes to modern composition. I think it’s interesting to let people hear how demanding composition was at the beginning of the 20th century, it’s vital! Fauré’s writing is remarkably clear. Every stanza of the poems chosen by Fauré is incredibly deep. A few words from Sully Prudhomme’s “Au bord de l’eau” (“By the water”) are enough to touch to the essential light of things.

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