

## HACIA LA ALEGRÍA

An inner marathon. Built like a god of foundries, Pedro Casablanc turns out to be a long-distance runner, taking on the introspective and yet dazzling test of endurance to which Olivier Py challenges him. A race towards oblivion, which begins inside an apartment and ends among the rubbish that litters the periphery of the city. The man thus running, an architect at the height of his career, wanders the streets, questions his own professional success, lets go of what both makes and impedes him. If his trajectory is that of an exile or of a fall, his journey ends up being more of a recovery, an ascent. The political questioning about the social segregation of the city, the various forms recognition takes, and the place of art in the public space lead to a mystical and existential experience, the discovery of a primitive and rough energy. Olivier Py has found in Pedro Casablanc the manly and earthly strength necessary to anchor the first chapter of his novel *Excelsior* in the materiality of the stage. This opening chapter was translated for the stage into Spanish, a language whose percussive offers a concrete rhythm, accompanied by a string quartet, for the poetic race of a man towards joy.

Show premiered on November, 2014 at the Teatro de La Abadía, Madrid.

## OLIVIER PY

Actor, poet, director, and man playing an active part in the life of the city, Olivier Py's research has led him down all possible political and poetic paths to meet the present and try to give it meaning. In this adventure that takes him from trestles to stages, the living word plays a key part. It is at once the question and the answer that haunts his entire body of work. He calls on the words of Aeschylus, of Claudel, of Shakespeare, but also on his own, in long and daring plays. As the director of the Centre dramatique national d'Orléans, of the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe, then of the Festival d'Avignon, he's never ceased to demonstrate his faithfulness to public theatre and to the concept of decentralisation. *King Lear* and *Hacia la alegría* are two plays where what is most intimate meets the most universal questions.

*Excelsior* by Olivier Py is published by éditions Actes Sud.

## PIERRE-ANDRÉ WEITZ

From the glitter of *Miss Knife*, shimmering in cabarets, to the monumental convent of the *Dialogues of the Carmelites* for the opera, Pierre-André Weitz works on different scales but with the same care on the costumes and sets he designs. Trained at the Strasbourg conservatory, where he specialised in lyrical arts, and at architecture school, he soon falls in love with scenography. He has worked with Olivier Py since 1993. Like the architect of *Hacia la alegría*, he refuses and challenges the immobility of matter, creating moving devices that play with space and height. Floors to inhabit, stairs to climb, facades to graffit: Pierre-André Weitz's scenographies often allow both the actors and the audience's gaze to rise.

## INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER PY

***Hacia la alegría* is the latest in a series of creations for the European project *Villes en Scènes/Cities on Stage*. You have played an active part in it since its inception; can you tell us more about it?**

*Olivier Py:* The project that would become *Villes en Scènes/Cities on Stage* was conceived when I was director of the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe. The aim was to bring together different theatres and festivals in order to put on shows, with the help of European funds. We collectively chose the artists and a theme: the city. When I joined the Festival d'Avignon, it took over from the Odéon, and in 2014 we were able to present shows by Gianina Cărbunariu, Emma Dante, and Antônio Araújo. At first, I wasn't supposed to create a show for this project, but I was given the opportunity to do it by the Teatro de La Abadía in Madrid. I wanted to do something that would correspond exactly to the project's criteria, and I realised that a year earlier, I'd written a novel, *Excelsior*, whose opening chapter is a walk through a city. *Hacia la alegría* is an adaptation of that text.

**Did you have a particular city in mind when you wrote that text?**

The city my character walks through is a European city, but one that, due to globalisation, has lost all sense of identity. It could be any city. This frightening banality is what makes it interesting. Then again, even though the centre of the city I describe looks little like Avignon, the walk my character goes on could take place there, especially outside of the battlements. The character, an architect, walks through the southern neighbourhoods of the city and comes across a theatre, whose plans he himself drew, and which has since been abandoned. Of course, that isn't the case of the FabricA, but its presence in the neighbourhood of Monclar asks similar political questions. The city of the play is probably a composite of all the cities and neighbourhoods I've ever walked through, as a performer. Artists and performers are often familiar with popular areas, since theatres are often located on the periphery.

**This walk through the city raises political questions for your character, but it is also a sort of inner progression...**

To work on the theme of the city almost requires you to tackle the question of how we live together, that is, the question of politics. Paradoxically, the city is also a place of nature, because it is a place of struggle, of violence. Cities attract forces, energies. And nature is energy. Charles Péguy used to say: "Everything begins in mysticism and ends in politics"; in this text, it's almost exactly the opposite. It all begins in politics, with a critical look at the world of commerce, at spaces changed by globalisation, at social divides. Then, through this sort of inner progression, of upward fall, this character gets closer and closer to a space that would be that of a sort of raw energy, to the origin of things, a kind of original chaos.

**It isn't so much a walk as a race. What is your character running after and why?**

This text is what in poetry is called a katabasis, a trip to the underworld. The character ends up literally diving into rubbish to find the light. The fact that this man is constantly running made me want to turn it into a play. That's two

things that are impossible to depict in the theatre: the totality of a city, and an actor running. The use of Spanish amplifies this kind of poetic energy. I couldn't imagine it in French. Spanish has its own energy, of a very concrete kind. French, on the other hand, is a metaphysical language, a language that keeps a distance between things and their names. In French, everything is mysterious, magic, beautiful, perfect. Everything is kept afar, too, as if exiled. In Spanish, everything is material, mortal, sexual, masculine. Spanish is a percussion instrument, while French is a harp.

***Hacia la alegría* is a monologue, carried by Pedro Casablanc, who is alone on the stage. What impact does he have on the play?**

Pedro Casablanc quickly attracted and inspired me because he is at once lyrical and prosaic. He is also very masculine, monumental in his proportions; as a result, when he breaks and topples over, it's particularly powerful.

The show was built for him. He threw himself completely into this very difficult adventure, which requires virtuosity to experience extreme feelings.

*Hacia la alegría* is a very physical play: Pedro Casablanc is alone on the stage, with coming out of his mouth a text that has to carry the impressions and feelings of an entire city. He is struggling with the city, in a way. He has to re-erotise it; the rubbish tip at the end allows him to see the sky. He is like Saint Theresa, climbing through stages in his own conscience. He gets farther and farther down, physically-speaking, but in reality, he ends up further and further up.

**Pedro Casablanc isn't actually alone on the stage, though. He is accompanied by musicians. What role does music play in the show?**

The music, composed by the Spanish composer Fernando Velázquez, truly is the aural manifestation of what Pedro is performing. The musicians are all virtuosos, the quartet is a real partner for Pedro. The play looks like what used to be called a melodrama back in the 19th century, that is, a spoken opera, with one actor, and a music that is omnipresent.

**The path of the architect looks like a race towards oblivion. Does he see it as an end to his torments?**

The novel is by and about a fifty-year-old artist. He has accomplished things, which might reasonably lead him to think that his legacy is assured... Yet he starts to doubt. My first novel, *Paradis de tristesse* (*Paradise of Sadness*), was a novel of youth, about creation, about the beginning of inspiration.

*Excelsior* is a novel of deconstruction. That's the autobiographical part of it, of course. You spend thirty years building something, and the next thirty trying to tear it down. I'm not sure that falling is always a source of mystical exaltation, but I'm almost certain that power, that professional and social accomplishments cause a sort of inner degradation. This novel was a way of rebelling against that. I always wonder about the deflagration that is caused within me by my current situation as someone occupying a position of power, having a public function, dialoguing with politicians... Those are questions I've asked myself in the most intimate and painful way I could. Which, in turn, led to the creation of this novel.

## MOVING CITIES

Before and after performances of *Hacia la alegría*, a video installation in the hall of L'Autre Scène will show the influence of the city on its inhabitants, the city of our dreams and that of our nightmares.

Directed by Alex Pachón, with the participation of the public of the Teatro de La Abadía in Madrid

Duration 12 minutes / In partnership with *Villes en Scène/Cities on Stage*

## AND...

### SHOWS

- *Lear miniature* d'Olivier Py, from 4 to 13 July at 09:00 pm, Place du Palais des papes, free admittance

- *Le Roi Lear* by William Shakespeare, direction Olivier Py, from 4 to 13 July at 10:00 pm, Cour d'honneur du Palais des papes

### THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur, free admittance

- 12 July at 03:00 pm, *Absence after war*, with Olivier Py, organised with ARTE and Mediapart

- 14 July at 11:00 am, *Are art and culture subjects of controversy?* with Olivier Py, organised with the magazine *Nectart*

- 23 July at 11:00 am, *The Mediterranean as a "single soul"*, with Olivier Py, organised with Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

Cloître Saint-Louis, free admittance, please sign up on [recherche-creation-avignon.fr](http://recherche-creation-avignon.fr):

- 9 July at 10:00 am, Encounter Research and creation: *Power, morals and seduction* with, among others, Olivier Py, organised with the Agence nationale de la recherche

### FICTIONS FRANCE CULTURE

*The Suppliants* by Aeschylus, adaptation Olivier Py / 14 July at 08:00 pm, Musée Calvet, free admittance

AND ON ARTE *Orlando ou l'Impatience* by Olivier Py, 5 July at midnight

## TOUR DATES OF HACIA LA ALEGRÍA AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

– from 6 to 10 October 2015: Théâtre National de la Communauté française, Brussels (Belgium)

– 14 November: III International Theater Festival World Place of Truth–Season of Masters–, Wrocław (Poland)

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