

"Sooner or later, you will all have to look at me." With 20 November, Lars Norén gives us the opportunity to watch and listen for an hour to an 18-year-old man about to shoot up his school in Emsdetten, Westphalia. The Swedish playwright researched the 2006 massacre extensively, reading the young man's diary and his posts on social networks, watching the video he made before his shooting spree, etc. In a painfully honest and unrelenting monologue, he speaks of his bullying, his hatred of school and institutions, his feeling of being trapped. In a text halfway between the manifesto and the soliloquy, he develops a political theory to justify what he's about to do, while revealing his most intimate wounds. This teenager looks like so many others; why him? Why now? Sofia Jupither wants us to hear a young man, not a monster. Is he a product of his time? The victim of a delusion? A fighter on the front lines of upcoming civil wars? He bares all but remains inscrutable. With his raw sensitivity and solidity, David Fukamachi Regnfors faces the audience and becomes this frightening mystery. A violence that can't erase his humanity.

SOFIA JUPITHER

Sofia Jupither isn't afraid to seem naive: the goal of her theatre is to understand people and what motivates their actions, even the strangest and cruelest of them, without judgment. Since 2001 in Sweden and 2005 in Norway, she has met with great acclaim, especially when directing Scandinavian playwrights, be they classic – Ibsen and Strindberg – or modern – Jon Fosse and Lars Norén, a fellow Swede. In Norén's work, she particularly enjoys the empathy that transpires in his attempt to clinically describe the modern world. As part of the project *Villes en scène/Cities on stage*, his text *Fragmente* was directed by Sofia Jupither in Gothenburg in 2012. It is through that project that she met Romanian playwright Gianina Cărbunariu. With *The Tigress*, she has chosen to venture into a new dramatic genre: a composite form of theatre, characterised by its distance and its direct address to the audience. A new experience that shares with her previous creations the desire to show that everything in man is human.

LARS NORÉN

Whether in the family circle or on the margins of society, Lars Norén always plumbs the human soul with bluntness and tenderness. Seen as the heir to Ibsen, Strindberg, and Bergman, he focuses on family relationships (*Demons*, *Bobby Fischer is Alive* and *Lives in Pasadena*) as well as on historical and recent tragedies (*Cold*, *War*, *20 November*). At the heart of his vision always remains this tormented human he likes to dissect and describe. From 1999 to 2007, he has been the director of Riks Drama, an itinerant national theatre, and then the Artistic Director at Folkteatern in Gothenburg from 2009 to 2011.

INTERVIEW WITH SOFIA JUPITHER

What is it that interests you in Lars Norén's writing?

Sofia Jupither: I find the way he writes about the modern world and about human beings very moving; his grasp of our times and of our society shows his extreme sensibility, and applies not only to Sweden but to the whole world. I think that he truly loves people, he describes them with empathy and tenderness, without judgment, even in their meanest and cruelest actions. In 2006, when Lars Norén wrote this play, not long after Sebastian Bosse went on a shooting spree in the small German town of Emsdetten, I don't think the Swedes felt really affected by this kind of phenomenon. It's different today, since two similar attacks have happened in Finland over the past few years, and in Sweden in 2015. People are starting to discuss how and why those events happen.

You recently directed another one of Lars Norén's plays, *Fragments*, which features 30 characters. If *20 November* is a monologue, it does use many registers and voices. Would you call this play fragmentary or polyphonic as well?

20 November guides us through the mind and thoughts of a clearly defined young man. But through that personal portrait, it confronts us to all the young men and women who struggle to find their place in life and in society. The questions that haunt Sebastian and the feelings that he experiences are ones we can all easily recognise and relate to. In that sense, it seems to me that the play is indeed much more than just a monologue, or the portrait of one man.

How did Lars Norén, how did you, approach the figure of this murderous teenager?

The way Lars Norén dives into the psyche of his character is typical of Nordic drama. It's one of his favourite subjects. He conducted very detailed documentary research for this play; as it happens, Sebastian Bosse published a host of documents on the internet before going on his shooting spree, including his diary. Trying to understand the reasons that led him to do what he did causes a very troubling feeling. Any teenager could indeed say the things he said. He built an entire political theory to justify his actions, revolving around the pressure to fit in in society. Part of it is political rationality, but it's mostly deep emotional distress that motivates him, caused by all the violence and humiliations he was subjected to. There are successive stages in the play. He starts playing ever more violent games. His language becomes ever coarser. Yet what he says remains in many ways typical of teenagers: he speaks of his dog, of playing video games, etc. What's actually frightening is that every single one of us can understand what he describes, the way he feels. Millions of teenagers feel the same way. Why him and not someone else? There's no true explanation. His feeling of inferiority, the way he feels, all that is terribly widespread.

It can be a very hard play to sit through. How did you deal with its violence?

The text can indeed be hard to bear and violent. One of the tools of the theatre is identification; in a play like *Tigern*, even if we're shocked by the way the characters behave, we can see ourselves in them. It's much harder when faced with a murderer. My goal is precisely to re-humanise him, not to treat him like a monster. We're talking about a 19-year-old boy. And that's how I want the audience to see him. The violence of the text has to do with our knowledge of the events that will follow his monologue. If we didn't know about that, we might

see him as a fragile boy, touching in spite of his violence, whom you might want to hold to try to comfort him. If you watch the film he made an hour before shooting up his school, you can see how his whole body expresses his unease.

How did you tackle the monologue with your actor, David Fukamachi Regnfors?

I've wanted to work on this play for years, but it's only after meeting David Fukamachi Regnfors that I decided to launch this project. It's a little like how you have to meet the actor you know will make a good Hamlet before you can even think of directing Shakespeare's play. I discovered David in a play in which he played the part of an autistic 12-year-old boy. I knew right away that I wanted to work with him, and after casting him in *Tigern*, I decided to start working with him on *20 November*. There's a beautiful vulnerability and interiority to him, as well as a perfect technical rigour, and a great intelligence. It's a rare combination, which seemed necessary to play this monologue. If you focus only on the hypersensitive and fragile side of the character, it becomes a melodrama. You have to be very solid, technically speaking, while being able to bare yourself to the audience at the same time.

In what environment do you place the character of *20 November*?

The audience faces Sebastian in his own home. We enter his privacy, and can thus share his doubts and thoughts, but also watch as he gets ready. He invites us into his home and forces us to follow his emotional evolution. That's exactly what he did when he recorded himself, in his home, an hour before shooting up his school.

The violence of this teenage boy may be seen as an echo of another type of violence, that of terrorist attacks. Did that influence your work at all?

I didn't draw a parallel between the two, but I think similar mechanisms are at play. Loners who shoot up their schools and young jihadists have one thing in common, they're outsiders.

I may be naïve, but I think that if young people feel like they fit in better, the probabilities that some of them will go on to commit those massacres are going to plummet. It's marginality and exclusion that make those things possible. I think it's a key aspect of the play.

Do the two plays you're presenting at the Festival d'Avignon, *20 November* and *Tigern*, have anything in common?

I think those two plays are about a choice we all have to make today: either we see our neighbours and fellow citizens as violent and senseless people, and we don't try to understand them, or we try to be empathetic, even when faced with the most irrational and reprehensible of behaviours. I consider that the theatre allows me to share this desire for understanding, this demand in my relationship to the other. We live in a time that can easily fall into civil war. One way to avoid it, or so I think, is to look into origins and causalities. Lars Norén loves the people he makes his subjects; he sees the chasms in them, tries to understand the reasons that make them do what they do; and by doing so, in a way, he forgives them.

JULY 14 15 16 17
THÉÂTRE BENOÎT-XII

FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON 70^e

AND...

SHOW

Tigern by Sofia Jupither, from July 13 to 17 at 18:00, Théâtre Benoît-XII

20 November by Lars Norén, translation Katrin Ahlgren is published by éditions de L'Arche.

Books of Lars Norén are available at the Festival bookshop at the église des Célestins and at the Chartreuse bookshop in Villeneuve lez Avignon

TOUR DATES OF 20 NOVEMBER AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- September 7 to 29, 2016 at Uppsala City Theatre (Sweden)
- November 3 to 8 at Royal Dramatic Theatre Stockholm (Sweden)

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