

AND...

YOUNG AUDIENCE SHOWS

It's a legend, Raphaël Cottin, July 23 to 26, CDCN-Les Hivernales

CINEMATIC TERRITORIES

Cycle of films for children and animation workshops, July 10 to 23, Utopia-Manutention

THE YOUNG SPECTATOR'S GUIDE AND VISITS FOR THE FAMILIES

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PEDAGOGICAL FILE

Pièce (dé)montée by Canopé, available on festival-avignon.com

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- January 10-11, 2018, Le Moulin du Roc Scène nationale à Niort
- January 16-18, La Comédie de Saint-Étienne
Centre dramatique national
- January 23, Théâtre du Vésinet
- January 25, Théâtre Alexandre-Dumas, Saint-Germain-en-Laye
- January 30- February 3, Théâtre de Sartrouville et des Yvelines
Centre dramatique national
- February 9-10, La Lanterne Pôle culturel de Rambouillet
- February 13-14, La Nacelle, Aubergenville
- February 22-24, Le Grand Bleu, Lille
- March 16-17, La Ferme de Bel Ébat, Théâtre de Guyancourt

THE IMPERFECT

Victor is 7 going on 8, an only child who lives in the perfect world of the indivisible trinity "daddymommyvictor." But one day, he stops playing along and dares to say "I." With that one word, the child embraces the possibility of language and learns about dissociation, and the audience watches as he goes through a new stage in his life. From one age to another, from one group to another, from an emotional way of seeing the world to a rational one and back again. With his usual playfulness, writer and director Olivier Balazuc bases his work on the indispensable and salutary stages in the life of a man-cub, in order to propose a situation we are all familiar with: glorious Victor, in addition to bravely saying "I," decides to start colouring outside the lines. This triggers a response that is as immediate as it is violent and normative. Disorder threatens the microcosm of the family and unbalances its tidy system. It is a world in crisis as seen by a child that *The Imperfect* describes, a world in which the triangle of the family is questioned and in which archaic, even Judeo-Christian, models crumble against the son's underlying creativity and independence. "*Little Victor disalienates his parents' imagination, and the world doesn't end. Something breaks free and a future of possibilities is reopened.*"

OLIVIER BALAZUC

A writer, actor, and director for the theatre and the opera, Olivier Balazuc trained at the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique before working with Olivier Py as an actor and assistant director on Claudel's *The Satin Slipper* (2003), *Les Vainqueurs* (*The Victors*, 2004), and *Illusions Comiques* (*Comic Illusions*, 2006). He has worked with many directors such as Clément Porée, Christian Schiaretti, Laurent Hatat, Richard Brunel... His directions often put the spotlight on contemporary texts by Levin, Walser, or the anthropologist Eric Chauvier, but also on his own plays. As a writer and director, he turned to a younger audience, considering children's literature not as a starting point but as "*a point of arrival for a writer.*" He wrote and directed the play *L'Ombre amoureuse* (*The Shadow in Love*, 2011), as well as the operas *L'Enfant et la Nuit* (*The Child and the Night*, 2012), with music by Franck Villard, and *Little Nemo* (with Arnaud Delalande), with music by David Chaillou (2017). He published his first novel, *Le Labyrinthe du traducteur* (*The Labyrinth of the Translator*) in 2010.

***L'Imparfait* by Olivier Balazuc is published by Actes-Sud-Papiers, in the collection Heyoka Jeunesse, march 2016.**

71st
EDITION

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INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER BALAZUC

***The Imperfect* is a text for a younger audience full of symbols. Can you tell us a little about how you wrote it?**

Olivier Balazuc: *The Imperfect* is part of a reflection about identity, about today's widespread feeling of uneasiness, about significant models. If, over the past few years, I've finally had the courage to write for children, it's because I've become a father myself, and because I've always loved so-called children's literature. It's almost a point of arrival for a writer, as long as you understand that childhood doesn't mean childishness. My daughter is 8, it's an age where you start to internalise prescriptive models. Children suffer from the dichotomy between their aspirations and energies on the one hand, and what is expected of them on the other. The codes and rules that had been so far perceived as part of a game change when children become aware of themselves and first experience dissociation. Children understand the difficult times and crises their parents go through, their taboos. *The Imperfect* is of course not a lesson about the economic crisis, but the play nevertheless tries to question, from the point of view of children, a society that tries to ward off its own fear of the future through the cult of performance and standard models of success. We already expect children aged 7 or 8 to be efficient, and school can be extremely normative. In the play, young Victor expresses his "I" by exploring the margins. The first of those is that of his destiny. He breaks away from the frame. That's the beginning of the crisis. The writing of the play follows the endless liturgy of family life, with the parents' expectations and the child's good or bad answers. Victor tries to introduce changes in that ceremony, first as a game, then as a symbol of his revolt. Subconsciously, if you fail to achieve success as it is defined by society, you don't deserve the love of your parents. In *The Imperfect*, this idea is pushed past its breaking point. The parents themselves conform to a desire for perfection that isn't theirs, but that of the system. They're modern parents, loving and energetic, for whom even leisure and health are about performance.

***The Imperfect* strives to be more poetic than educational. Should we read it as a humanist way of thinking, reminiscent of Rousseau, who opposed the perfectible being to the idea of a perfect one?**

Yes, if it gives teachers or parents material on an educational level, great, but what I'm first and foremost interested in as a poet is the dramatic and salutary crisis of the system, the ticking time bomb aspect of it. Maybe *The Imperfect* is a punk play told from the point of view of a child, it rejects all masters. To come back to this idea of perfection and perfectibility—I didn't think about Rousseau at first—the play on the words "*parfait*" and "*imparfait*" ["perfect" and "imperfect"] in the show is poetic in nature. I see all educational and cultural formulas as endlessly renewable hypotheses, never as solutions. What's interesting is the burgeoning personalities of the children. The image of the family conveyed by the media and advertising has become more and more restrictive, coming closer and closer to the sort of "control family"—think of an Ikea catalogue—that served as inspiration for the play's scenography. You face a stereotypical family

sitting in front of you in a living room, with its big table, its sofa, its wall with family photos, and absolutely no convergence line. Depth appears gradually throughout the play, with the shattering of normative models.

There's the father, the mother, the child, even the king, the queen, and the prince... it's a classic monotheistic representation of family.

That's the difference between writing for adults and writing for children. I agree that you have a monotheistic representation, pretty close by the way to the psychoanalytical triangle which the adults might see in it, but those are deliberate references. The figures that will speak to children are those they'll recognise from fairy tales: the king, the queen, and the prince. Here we have a modern couple that claims to be egalitarian, which doesn't stop them from being reactionary when it comes to models. The costumes are contemporary, and then there's a crown. Baby Jesus isn't too far away. I like the story of the *galette des rois* [king cake], because it's about the transition from infancy to self-awareness. Up until 7 or so, the child always gets the *fève* [trinket], he sees it as natural, the adults cheat to make sure he'll get it because everyone delights in his pleasure at being crowned king. The child sees the world as magical. Then, all of a sudden, he no longer systematically gets the *fève*, and is made to understand that he's all grown up now. I've always considered the theatre troupe to be a great metaphor for society: we build something in a limited time, having chosen one another, people from all sorts of backgrounds, with different sensibilities and skills. We become like children again when learning about art. You learn about the great models, you build up your confidence, you let go of your fears. But you have to learn to break away from norms, too. *The Imperfect* takes place against a backdrop of crisis, everything is scary right away, models are particularly strong, individuality and revolt are erased. Normativity kills creativity, the role of art is thus to make us appreciate crises: love, language, and encounters are salutary crises.

Victor is also the name of Truffaut's *Wild Child*, about the transition from nature to culture. Here, with the mention of "Victor 2" the robot-child, aren't we entering the realm of "superculture," even of augmented reality?

I spent a long time wondering what to do with Victor 2. In the story, he's a robot, and in the drawings that come with the text as it was published, it's the same child but piloted, controlled. That scene is about rivalry. That's why I chose to leave the metaphor open. There are several possible interpretations: the rivalry between men and robots, the ideas of transhumanism... but also the rivalry that exists within the family, between siblings, or between one and one's own fantasies. On the stage, Victor 2 will be played by a second actor, because I like the idea of a human-sized struggle better. Victor 2 is a child tamed by the normative desire of his parents and of society in general, a dead child who would have been denied the possibility of Oedipal desire. The parents themselves have lost sight of each other. The triangle explodes in the final scene, making the salutary "*once upon a time, there was a wonderfully imperfect kingdom*" possible at last.

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Interview conducted by Moïra Daland and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach