

AND...

SHOW

Hamlet - Centre pénitentiaire Avignon-Le Pontet, Olivier Py and Enzo Verdet, July 21-22, Maison Jean Vilar

CYCLE OF SACRED MUSIC

Poems by Sony Labou Tansi with Céline Chéenne and Moustafa Benaïbout on July 11 and 12 respectively, Collégiale Saint-Agricol

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Publishers, smugglers of scenes with in particular Olivier Py
L'Écho des planches, July 9 at 14:30, Site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

Dialogue artists-audience with Olivier Py, July 11 at 16:30, Site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

NAVE OF IMAGES (screenings)

Orlando ou L'Impatience – Olivier Py (2014), July 15 at 14:30, Église des Célestins

Histoires d'espaces - 360°, Au cœur du chaos, based on *The Parisians*

ENCOUNTER FOI ET CULTURE with Olivier Py, July 20 at 11:00, Chapelle de l'Oratoire

LA SACD AU CONSERVATOIRE

Olivier Py et son double with in particular Olivier Py, July 11 at 14:30, Conservatoire du Grand Avignon

Les Parisiens by Olivier Py is published by Editions Actes Sud.

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- September 2-3, 2017, Théâtre de Liège (Belgium)
- May 26-27, 2018, Théâtre du Gymnase, Marseille
- June 1-3, Théâtre de la Ville, Espace Pierre Cardin, Paris

THE PARISIANS

Aurélien is handsome, young, smart, arrogant, and fascinating. As a writer and director, he wants to conquer the world through theatre, starting with Paris. Moving from cocktail party to brothel, he intrigues everyone. A host of characters with influence in the world of culture and no regard for actual art flock to his side... Tormented by their insatiable need for power, they succumb to the fads that govern the city of lights. Beyond this microcosm that believes it can be Everything in plain sight, another much more disreputable milieu attracts Aurélien. There, he meets people and names who quickly come to fill his orgiastic nights, dreaming of reinventing society through love and sex: Iris, Serena, Kamel, Gilda... In this carnival, a metaphor for the collapse of politics, only Lucas, a dark and tormented poet who could be his complete opposite, seems to share his desire for absolutes. "One of them thought that by losing everything he would save the light, the other that by winning everything he would anger the heavens," writes Olivier Py. With this whirlwind of a show, which drags its characters through a vibrant city that devours everyone and everything, the director returns to the great themes that come back time and again in his work: theatre, God, sex, death, freedom, and power... A human comedy at once epic, lyrical, and funny.

OLIVIER PY

Born in Grasse in 1965, Olivier Py moved to Paris after graduating high school. After his khâgne at the lycée Fénelon, he joined the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique in 1987 and began studying theology. The following year, he directed his first play, *Des Oranges et des Ongles (Of Oranges and Nails)*, and founded the company L'inconvénient des boutures. In 1995, he made a splash at the Festival d'Avignon with his direction of his own text *La Servante (The Servant)*, a cycle of plays lasting twenty-four hours. In 1997, he was appointed director of the Centre dramatique national in Orléans, which he left in 2007 to become director of the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe. In 2013, he became the first theatre director to be named director of the Festival d'Avignon since Jean Vilar. Director for the theatre and the opera, dramatist, film director, but also actor and poet, Olivier Py is a prolific author. His political engagement has translated into adaptations of plays in which politics take centre stage: Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes*, *The Suppliants*, and *The Persians*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, or his own texts, such as *Orlanda, or, the Impatience* or *Die Sonne...* Since *Le Cahier noir (The Black Notebook)*, a novel written when he was 17 (published in 2015), he has written countless texts in various genres: plays, young adult books, essays, prefaces, translations, scenarios... With *The Parisians (2016)*, the director adapts one of his own novels for the stage for the second time, after *Hacia la alegría* in 2015.

PIERRE-ANDRÉ WEITZ

Pierre-André Weitz studied music at the Conservatoire in Strasbourg, while studying architecture. As an assistant set designer, he created the scenography and costumes for his first show at age 18. Since 1993, he has often worked with Olivier Py. Created for the theatre or the opera, his moving scenographies, which he himself describes as anachronistic and poetic, create movements that resemble a choreography. His conception of space multiplies vertical and horizontal lines to add depth to the stage, giving the actors complex dramatic locations to inhabit and to the audience the opportunity to go through a complete sensory experience.

71st
EDITION

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



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#OLIVIERPY
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INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER PY

When you were 17, you wrote *Le Cahier noir* [*The Black Notebook*], a fake diary, written and illustrated, the story of a young man on a quest for the absolute. In 2016, you published *The Parisians*, an epic novel about a city to conquer. The main characters of both those texts—which you have adapted and directed—both left the provinces for Paris. Are there any other similarities between them?

Olivier Py: It's pretty funny. Although there are 35 years between those texts, I adapted both of them for the theatre the same year. What could bring them together? Let's say questions about literature, and a certain humour. There's almost a chronological link between them: the former is about adolescence, the latter about youth. The provinces, Paris. *The Parisians* is a novel it took me two years to write. I'd never worked on such a big story, very romantic and narrative, with many characters and situations. In a way, it's a 19th-century story, at once a Bildungsroman and the portrait of a society. A saga. In this novel, I focused a lot on factual elements, everyday occurrences, a sort of chronicle, whereas my dramatic writing tends towards abstraction. It's a different language. In the end, I didn't rewrite the text, I just adapted it by sometimes using direct speech, almost like monologues. It changed during rehearsals as well, especially at the beginning, but it follows the structure and composition of the novel. It's necessary, even though some passages weren't treated the same way and don't necessarily carry the same weight. Some of them are shorter, quicker than others. The temporality has to be different.

Just like the novel, there's something epic about the play. How did you work on the rhythm, the dynamic of this show?

The length of such a show grants you some freedom, it makes you daring. It forces you to use different aesthetics, to mix genres, because you can't play the same note throughout. You need different scenes, philosophical dialogues, chase scenes, scenes that are more dreamlike or poetic, a little bit of farce, some lyrical scenes as well. It had been a while since I'd last tackled a huge story like that of this novel, a real monster in the number of characters, situations, and actions it covers! A monster in the madness of the characters, too, in their outbursts. I love these monsters, and so does the audience! The audience is extremely curious, open, looking to be confronted to worlds they don't know.

About forty roles are performed by ten actors. The actors who play Aurélien and Lucas are the only ones not to play more than one role. How would you describe the many characters of this play?

I first thought of Aurélien and Lucas. Their duality is a little like a reflection of mine. Lucas wants nothing but absolutes. Aurélien is a hedonist. One is luminous, the other dark. It's not the first of my plays in which you'll find a twirling and very attractive young man like Aurélien. He's like a dancing peacock, comfortable with sexuality, fascinating. Aurélien wants the things of the world, material things I'd never written a character like Lucas, though, a character that painful. His struggle takes place within, he strives for spiritual joy. Aurélien

and Lucas aren't afraid to put what they're living through into words. They're both very smart, with strokes of poetic genius, they're daring and incredibly energetic. Their spiritual standards are very high, and they can't be content with what they're given. The characters they encounter all have a certain dignity, a way with words. They believe in the word, in the power of poetry. They fight for something, like the hookers who are trying to create a place where society could be rebuilt, a place of utopia. I really wanted the world of the prostitutes to have a strong political dimension while the world of politics no longer does. You've got Serena and Iris, two noble characters. Often in my work, the characters who are noble and just are women. Moral conscience is embodied in women. All those characters demand freedom, they reject norms and standards. From that point of view, *The Parisians* is a queer novel and play, where everything is possible and nothing is taboo. Queer, that means that even sexuality is political, that it carries within itself a desire to reinvent love, and to reinvent everything else through it. With this adaptation, I wanted to produce a sort of carnival. A revolution without illusion. A great comedy, dark, grating, but a comedy mainly about the collapse of the political.

How do you work with the actors? Do they know their text before they come in, for instance?

No, rarely. Some of them like to know the text before we start rehearsing. Others prefer to wait a little. I spend almost no time at my writing desk, I get onstage right away. I like it when the stage ask questions, when it creates the hermeneutics, when it offers meaning and interpretations. Very quickly, I start drawing my ideas for the direction. I like to be able to see the scenes quickly, right away. It sometimes surprises the youngest actors, but I draw my ideas freehand, very fast. That being said, it takes time to accept that unusual gesture. What makes "theatre" is mysterious, what produces theatre. It's hard to predict. Everything must come from the stage. You have to play right away, turn everything into theatre. However, I very often work with a complete set. We rehearsed at the FabricA, and the set was already there when we arrived. It was waiting for us, it had already come alive and taken shape within that huge black box. It's a very different sensation for a troupe of actors to find themselves in a landscape that has already been shaped. For *The Parisians*, Pierre-André Weitz, who did the scenography but also the costumes and make-up, imagined giant boards and a chequerboard floor on which rest Haussmann-style houses. The set is mobile and lets us create different spaces, even though they aren't realistic. It gives the impression of a moving city, of a machine city. The boards are first and foremost a symbol of opposition to the realism of bourgeois theatre, though. *The Parisians* is the kind of theatre you perform on boards. A great comedy.

And then there's Paris... How would you describe the personality of the city, which in your play becomes a character?

Paris was my city for 30 years. I liked writing about a city where people from all walks of life live side by side: whores, politicians, artists, clergymen... You understand very quickly that Paris is a dangerous monster, a poison, a machine that kills the soul. Paris only works through imperious fads, which take precedence over everything: thought, legitimacy, justice, innocence.

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Interview conducted by Francis Cossu and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach