

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Encounters *Research and creation in Avignon* with Didier Galas and Alain Badiou, National Agency of Research, July 10 at 14:30, cloître Saint-Louis

Philoscene, Philosophy and the stage with Alain Badiou, *Alternatives théâtrales* and *L'Écho des planches*, July 15 at 14:30, site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

PEDAGOGICAL FILE

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

WEB-TV

A web documentary about the show is produced by the Young Culture Reporters and will be available on festival-avignon.tv

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- November 26 to 30, 2018, La Passerelle, Saint-Brieuc
- March 12 to 21, 2019, Théâtre Jacques Brel, Pantin
- March 28 and 29, Théâtre de Rungis
- April 2 to 5, La Comédie de Reims

AHMED'S COMEBACK

Born under Alain Badiou's pen to denounce the tragedies of racism, this modern farce character makes his return here. Wearing his original mask, created by Erhard Stiefel, and inhabiting the body and voice of Didier Galas, he is reunited with those who gave him his humanity for the first time, over a generation ago... As a worthy heir to Scapin, this flamboyant modern servant rejects the models of understanding of this world, our world, which he finds stupefyingly changed by our constant exposure to media. He isn't quite the same himself. He has to learn to reconstruct himself in space, to juggle with modern ideas and with the understanding men and women have of their own time. Nothing can escape the wild flow of his words, full of traps for intelligence, and he seems to be able to find the fun in everything, as comfortable with the idea of transcendence as with his cousin Fatima. Echoing the idea of a play made for an itinerant theatre that addresses its audience directly and with little means, his director says of him: "*Ahmed is subversive, he says things as if they were true and laughs at the consequences they have on thought.*"

DIDIER GALAS

Didier Galas's interest in masks and in the way bodies reveal themselves onstage developed early. For over thirty years, his passion has led him on a journey from the West to the East. A proponent of theatre as an integral part of public life, his approach has found a poetic and political expression in the character of Ahmed. The audience of the Festival d'Avignon will once again be able to experience the complicity between Didier Galas and Alain Badiou in the Ceccano garden with the dramatic series *Plato's Republic*, performed by non-professional actors from Avignon

ALAIN BADIOU

After studying philosophy, Alain Badiou taught at the secondary school and university levels. A political activist with a passion for theatre, he worked with Antoine Vitez before writing a series of plays, including *Ahmed the subtle* (1984) and *Ahmed philosopher* (1995). Badiou also writes novels and essays, and his engagement has led him to take an active part in the field. An avowed disciple of Plato, he published in 2012 *Plato's Republic*, the product of several years' worth of quasi-daily re-reading and rewriting.

Ahmed revient by Alain Badiou, published by éditions Actes Sud, is on sale at the bookshop in the Maison Jean Vilar.

72th
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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ITINERANT SHOW

INTERVIEW WITH DIDIER GALAS

In 1994, you performed Alain Badiou's *Ahmed the Subtle* at the Festival d'Avignon, directed by Christian Schiaretti. Two years later, at the Comédie de Reims, you appeared in *Ahmed the Philosopher*, then in *Ahmed Gets Angry*. What does that journey mean to you, not only with this philosopher, but also with this character?

Didier Galas: Alain Badiou's intellectual personality is fundamental to this project. Aged 81 today, he is one of the last great philosophers on the level of a Gilles Deleuze or a Michel Foucault. His joy at thinking carries us forward and gives us courage. In 1984, after project youths were shot at while they were doing nothing more than having fun, he wrote *Ahmed the Subtle*, a savage satire against racism. That same year, Antoine Vitez read the text at the Théâtre national de Chaillot, which met with huge success. Later, Jean-Pierre Jourdain, who often worked with Vitez and, like me, with Christian Schiaretti, asked Schiaretti to do another reading, secretly hoping to finally stage the play. I read the play and, through Ahmed, immediately saw Scapin, a character who's fascinated me since my years at the conservatory for his ability to invent stories. With him, nothing becomes everything. I asked Christian Schiaretti to let me play the role. That's how it all started.

Ahmed is Scapin, but he's also a clown, a jester. He echoes many theatrical traditions. What kind of character is he?

Ahmed is a combination of several theatrical servants, like clumsy Arlequin and wily Scapin. He echoes a fundamental question about the structure of comedy: should we make people laugh with wit or with a succession of farcical situations? There's also something of Rabelais in Ahmed. Like him, he thinks that a lunatic can teach a wise man. It makes him likeable, easy to accept. He also reminds me of Ariane Mnouchkine's Abdallah, a sort of modern Arlequin. But Ahmed in this play is also a kind of synthesis of what he was in earlier plays: subtle, philosopher, mad! What's new is that he's now someone who can lose it, who forgets things, who has weaknesses and can admit it. For instance, he says that he's forgotten how to string scenes together. In that sense, he also reminds me of Charlie Chaplin's Tramp, a clown who encourages people to laugh at him. It's a dimension that makes Ahmed more human. He's no longer just a theatrical force, be it comical or philosophical.

Even if he's inspired by *commedia dell'arte* and is the product of Alain Badiou's philosophical thought, Ahmed is an Arab, which isn't insignificant. Right from the start of the show, there's an urgency, a desire to speak again. What does he have to tell us today?

He's an Arab, and he's tired of hearing about it. At some point, he talks about the history of Arab identity – *arabicity* – in the Western world. When did it really begin? What does it mean in France and in Europe today? Those are fundamental questions we should all have answered a while ago, when *Ahmed the Subtle* was created to denounce racism, a problem which has yet to be solved. If it had been, I think Ahmed wouldn't be standing on a stage today... He also makes his comeback in a world saturated by information, in which time has sped up and space is no longer the same. We hear everything, we see everything, but we don't think for ourselves, we think "sideways," as he says at the beginning of the show. Ahmed is an anarchist, a subversive: he proclaims things as truths and laughs at their consequences on thought. He likes nothing more than philosophising and monologuing. His complexity as a character encourages the audience to think for themselves and to feel joy at doing so. Ahmed's urgency is but a tool which allows him to force the audience to take a stance; he causes a sort of awakening of consciousness. Let's not forget that Alain Badiou's theatre is deeply political! In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, he writes: "*What is theatre about, if not the state of the State, the state of society, the state of revolution, the state of consciousness relative to the State, to society, to revolution, to politics? (...) Theatre: the art of the declaration of the state (of things).*"

You're alone on the stage, and literally wearing a mask...

It's important to note that Ahmed couldn't exist without Erhard Stiefel, the artist who created the mask we've been using since the first show. It's at once so noble and so easy to inhabit that it probably helped write the other four plays. This mask is a strength. Like the thought of the philosopher, it reveals things. Performing with a mask on puts the body in play in a very different manner than in traditional French theatre, in which the body is secondary to the meaning of the words. The mask forces your body to have meaning. As a director, I try to use the body to reveal all the ideas of the text, without obscuring them. I show the work of the actor, with all its humility, as if it were the product of an inner ritual. It's very demanding and difficult, from the point of view of diction, of how you express thoughts through the body. I would like the audience to be able to enjoy this moment lightly.

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