

A utopia in the strictest sense of the word, the 99 is a French department that doesn't actually exist. The last entry in the list the French administration uses to determine where people are from, it includes everyone, French citizens or not, who was born abroad. The natives of the 99 would therefore be beings without a country, brought together by a term that leaves them nothing in common but the idea that they're from somewhere else, different. Since neither of those things scare him, Marc Nammour questions the political and poetic meanings of the number 99: the impossible inventory of what makes an identity and the certainty of being in movement, of having come or left or travelled through a land or a sea, through different cultures and traditions. With them, the chords played by Lorenzo Bianchi-Hoesch, Jérôme Boivin, Amir ElSaffar and Rishab Prasanna, the products of never-ending exchange, give us a glimpse of the political harmony that could arise from the acceptance of the complex nature of each and every one of us. No need for a passport here, no need to be afraid of what's different: the instruments and voices find inspiration in times, languages, and regions of the world in which borders, even those made of barbed wire, will never be able to prevent the meeting of influences and the mutual enrichment that ensues.

MARC NAMMOUR

Born in Beirut in 1978, Marc Nammour came to France in 1986, settling with in family in Jura to escape to war tearing Lebanon apart. A firm believer in the link between his work as a poet and his political engagement, the rapper got the name of his group La Canaille, which he founded in 2003 with Jérôme Boivin, Valentin Durup, and Alexis Bossard, from a revolutionary song of the Paris Commune. With his deep mistrust of social and musical labels, Marc Nammour has taken part in many projects, notably with Serge Teyssot-Gay (Zone libre, Debout dans les cordages), that see openness as the keystone of creativity.

RISHAB PRASANNA

One half of the Prasana Brothers, Rishab Prassana has played with his father on international festival stages, mixing the sound of his bansuri flute to jazz and other musical languages. He has worked, among other collaborations, with oud player Issa Murad and his group Joussour, with the collective Drifting Orchestra, or with percussionist Davy Sur and Singer David Amar (One Million Faces).

LORENZO BIANCHI-HOESCH

Composer and singer Lorenzo Bianchi-Hoesch bases his work on electronic experimentation and improvisation, which he then incorporates into many different forms of performing art throughout the world.

JÉRÔME BOIVIN

Jérôme Boivin, who plays the double bass, the bass, and keyboards, is a member of the bands La Canaille and Java, and a co-founder of the studio Music Unit. He has also worked in the theatre, notably with director Gildas Milin.

AMIR ELSAFFAR

A virtuoso on the trumpet and the santur, Amir ElSaffar likes to draw on classical and contemporary forms to compose harmonies that reinvent and mix jazz and Iraqi maqam.

INTERVIEW WITH MARC NAMMOUR

What does the number 99 mean?

Marc Nammour: The first time I encountered that number, I was eight, filling out a registration form for school that asked for my name, date of birth, and department of origin. That day, I learnt that, according to the French administration, my department of origin was the 99. I looked around me and realised I was the only "99." I felt a little marginalised. Afterwards, when I started looking for that department, I realised it didn't actually exist. It's a catch-all creation: no one knows where it begins or ends. It covers everyone born outside of France, whether they are French citizens or not, who work on French territory.

Many see it only as a convenient means of classification. What does that number evoke for you?

It's a question that's always been there, although it wasn't at the heart of my reflection. I think that the place you were born doesn't define you, whereas the idea of social origin, which is very present in my work and in my writing, seemed more interesting. But for the past four or five years, the often-nauseating debates about identity that have shaken our society have forced us to pick a side, to define our position. It's only after hearing question after question about this so-called national identity that I started wondering again what I represent for France. That question became even more pressing recently, when the idea of depriving people of their nationality took centre stage in those debates. I was trying to have my nine-year-old daughter be granted my dual citizenship. I meant it as a transmission of cultural wealth, but I started wondering if it was really a gift I was giving her. It is to question what society says on that subject that I wanted to work on that number, 99, which doesn't refer to anything in particular, neither a place nor a culture, but is only a sign that those it covers are "not from here." If I have to decide for myself, if I have to claim something for myself, it is that I'm both from here and from elsewhere.

Of all the department numbers, wouldn't the 99 be the least offensive of all, the least reductive, as it doesn't box people in?

Indeed, I am from "department 99," whose inhabitants are of all colours, all cultures, speak all languages. I'm very happy about it. My identity is complex, and I fail to see how that would be a danger. Explaining in the show the complexity and richness of that identity, which shifts and evolves with every new encounter or journey, tends to show that we are all 99. It's also the name of a movement that has nothing to do with nationality and highlights a feeling of community shared by people from all over the world: we're the 99%, faced with the 1% who rule the world "through" finance. There's an echo of that in the status of 99: it's based on the same idea of recognising a shared strength in a multitude of individualities. If we're all "99," we can hope to overcome the consanguinity of a boxed-in society. Finally, faced with the rise of the National Front, I want dearly to talk about the human aspect of things: behind a number, there are destinies, lives, exiles, and an enrichment of the country that welcomes those people.

Isn't the existence of borders between countries, musical genres, and languages necessary for people to play with them?

It's not borders that allow this kind of play. I hate classifications and boxes. I refuse to slap a label on my creations: rap, slam, poetry... The future belongs to fusion. Borders, in all domains, are never drawn by the ones affected by them. They're always fixed by those in power. They don't say anything about identities. Why should welcoming someone be seen as a threat to a country's identity? The identity of a territory is made up of the identities of people who are there, who live, and therefore change. It's obvious. I bear no slogan or vision; all I want is to remind people that *it's not a big deal*. The phrase "citizen of the world" may seem naive or romantic, but it's one in which I recognise myself. Today, I live in France, but who's to say I'm not going to spend the next twenty years in Argentina? If I did, Argentina would also be part of

my identity. Who would have a problem with that? My hope is for laws to correspond to reality. It's time to bring down walls. To stubbornly rely on outdated notions of identity is to refuse to move, to travel, to ever live somewhere else or meet someone different. It's terrifying.

You've invited four artists to come mix their music and poetry to yours. Is your unease about that question what brought you together?

Yes, and above all the desire to overcome it, along with the people who'll come listen to us. The ghost department "99" is a free territory where we can invent a beautiful story. We share a certain humanism, a healthy anger, and a need to shout our refusal to wear the uniform some would want us to. Together, we talk about what it means to be a foreigner, about integration—a word that's been used so much that it now means the opposite of what it once did—and so about disintegration, which are deemed necessary to fit in. Of course, his presence also has something to do with the artistic pleasure there is to create a form at the junction of western and eastern music. We've therefore surrounded ourselves with Lorenzo Bianchi-Hoesch, with whom I created an "operap," *Ici le bout de la chaîne (Here the end of the chain)*. He'll create an electro-acoustic base, will treat the music live, and conceive the diffusion system. Amir ElSaffar, whose identity straddles both Iraq and the United States, will bring his trumpet and santur. His virtuosity owes as much to jazz as it does to Iraqi maqams, which he both studied at a very high level. Rishab Prasanna, Indian and son of one of the jazz and Iraqi maqams master, brings back the warmth and mind-blowing flights of Nay Bansouri. Finally, Jérôme Boivin will play the bass, double bass, and keyboard. Combining oriental scales and occidental rhythms with ease, he also likes to play with and between codes. This formation is therefore a "99" in and of itself.

How was your show built?

I asked Lorenzo Bianchi-Hoesch to compose for the show. He created atmospheres on which I wrote the frame of the story. I never write without music. I always need a rhythm or an atmosphere to develop my imagination. Then, during our artistic residency in Royaumont, we shared this dawning universe with the three others musicians so that they could add their own touch and know-hows to it. The songs were built through successive improvisations from which we extracted the best bits after a number of rehearsal sessions. I didn't want to close off this shared world, or the individual ones each of us brought to the project. I trusted in the meeting of these people, I knew their individual talent, I knew they could come together. But I wanted us to find the way to that harmony freely. Amir and Rishab also sing with me. Sometimes, our voices come together, sometimes they follow each other, sometimes they grow quiet to give way to the music... There won't be any system—it should be obvious by now that I'm not a fan! As for the instrumental side of things,

Can't the convening of this group and the way you work together be seen as a proposition to recognise our multiple nature?

What I'm afraid of has nothing to do with those threats of terrorist attacks, of invasions... What scares me is the fear of the other. I want to fight it through words and artistic associations that show that meeting the other leads to mutual enrichment. It's essential for poetry to be political. In times as dark as ours, cultural projects must have meaning. The word "poetry" is often linked to silly, hollow things that claim to speak to everyone but end up saying nothing. In the noble sense of the word, though, poetry is a language that can rise against the words of politics, of institutions, of the media. It provides a salutary shift in perspective, frees us from the blinders imposed by standardised speeches, and leads to an enlargement of the small place society assigns us. It is proof that another form of expression is possible. Poetry is the most beautiful, but also the most powerful thing.

AND...

FOCUS ON THE MIDDLE EAST

While I was waiting by Omar Abusaada, from July 8 to 14 at 18:30,
gymnase Paul Giéra

Yitzhak Rabin: Chronicle of an Assassination Foretold by Amos Gitai, July 10
at 22:00 at the Cour d'honneur du Palais des papes

Fatmeh and *Leila's Death* by Ali Chahrouh, July 16 to 18 at 22:00 and July 21
to 23 at 22:00, cloître des Célestins

Hearing by Amir Reza Koohestani, July 21 to 23, Théâtre Benoît-XII

A Share of the orient, read by the Comédiens-Français, July 11, 12, 13 at 11:30,
Maison Jean Vilar

CINEMATOGRAPHIC TERRITORIES

Focus on the Middle East / Utopia-Manutention, July 6 to 24

A separation by Asghar Farhadi, meet Amir Reza Koohestani, July 23 at 11:00,
Utopia-Manutention

CONCERTS

Survival Kit by Serge Teysnot-Gay, July 19 to 21 at 22:00, Musée Calvet

Pone Live and Général Elektrijs celebrate the 70th Festival d'Avignon, July 23
at 21:00, jardins de l'Université d'Avignon

ÇA VA, ÇA VA LE MONDE ! – RFI

July 15 to 20 at 11:30, jardin de la rue de mons

TOUR DATES OF 99 AFTER THE FESTIVAL

– September 17, 2016 at Fondation
Royaumont in Asnières sur Oise

– October 14, at Festival
Haizebegi in Bayonne

#MARCNAMMOUR
#99
#MUSEECALVET

70th
EDITION

All the Festival on :
festival-avignon.com



#FDA16

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.