CASSANDRE

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“With this story I go to my death.” Cassandra of Troy knows what’s coming. Defeated by fate, she has but an hour left to live. She knows that Apollo’s curse will prevent her from being heard. She’s learnt that words die, too. No matter, she will keep talking. But she will not try to convince men of the despair that awaits them anymore. The time for predictions is past. So she tells her own story, with absolute freedom, hiding nothing of the pain she suffered as a child, as a lover, as a prisoner, as a woman. She doesn’t want to become a heroine. To say no is the only refuge she has left. For a long time Michael Jarrell has tried to adapt this novel by Christa Wolf, which retells Cassandra’s myth and challenges the triumphant vision of Homer the Greek. It didn’t work as an opera: “There’s no reason left to sing,” he thought. The composer instead decided to call on Schönberg’s idea to say, act, and sing all at once, and challenges Cassandra’s suspended present by multiplying musical temporalities, by adding instrumental and electronic textures one on top of the other. A score Fanny Ardant makes hers while at once surrendering herself and resisting. Because for director Hervé Loichemol, rejecting deception doesn’t make Cassandra free, but rather gives her the opportunity to conquer her freedom. A state that, here, can only lead to war.

The show will premiere on 22 July 2015 at Opéra Grand Avignon, Avignon.

Cassandre by Christa Wolf, Alain Lance’s and Renate Lance-Otterbein’s French translation is published by éditions Stock, collection La Cosmopolite.

CASSANDRE AFTER THE FESTIVAL D’AVIGNON

– from 21 to 27 September 2015: Comédie de Genève (Switzerland)

INTERVIEW WITH HERVÉ LOICHEMOL

Lessing, Büchner, Müller, Kleist, Brecht: you have directed a large number of texts by German writers. How did you approach Christa Wolf's, and its adaptation as a monodrama by composer Michael Jarrell?

Hervé Loichemol: My relationship to German theatre probably comes from the influence it had on French theatre in the 1960s and '70s. Bertolt Brecht, of course, but also the model of the Schaubühne, of Peter Klein, of Klaus Michael Grüber, which I encountered at the TNS, first as a student, then as a teacher. Jean Jourdheuil also played an important part, in particular by introducing me to Heiner Müller, on whose texts I worked a lot. Concerning Christa Wolf, it isn't her text I'm directing, but its adaptation by Michael Jarrell. He kept about one tenth of the original version, and organised it by creating intimate links with the music. It is therefore Michael's interpretation of the text, his music, that guides us, that tell us how to read and say the text. The contexts in which those two texts were written and composed are different, even if there are similarities. When Christa Wolf writes *Cassandra*, she lives in East Germany, where her family has been displaced by the USSR, in a Europe where the perspective of nuclear war plays a central role. When Michael writes his adaptation, the USSR and East Germany are no more. What triggered his writing, his historical reference, is the first Iraq War, and the war in Bosnia. In both cases, you have this desire to denounce the lies that are at the heart of war. Because the pretext behind every war is always a lie. Helen isn't in Troy when the Greeks attack the city to get her back. It is those lies that lead to disaster. That is what Cassandra sees, feels, and continues to say, in spite of Apollo's curse, which prevents her from being heard. It reminds me of a passage from the original text: "The old song, it isn't the crime that makes men turn pale, or even drives them mad, it is the act of telling about it (…), and we would rather punish he who speaks the name of the crime than he who commits it." It's an echo of our times. Cassandra isn't a whistleblower, but still, the text finds a resonance when you look at the bleak future that seems to be looming at the political, ecological, and democratic levels. And what about those who risk their lives by revealing to the public the flaws of democracy? This text was written in the 1980s and adapted by Michael Jarrell in the early '90s, at key moments in history. Two very different moments, but which both talk of the same kind of violence, that of the political lie.

The last part of this monodrama takes place towards the end of the battle of Troy, when Aeneas leaves Cassandra to go found a new civilisation, along with a few survivors. What does this romantic and political ending inspire you?

The beautiful romantic relationship between Cassandra and Aeneas, and their subsequent break-up, echoes the reflection about betrayal and heroism that runs throughout the show, and through some of Michael's work as well. At the end of the story, Aeneas decides to leave to found another city, and he argues with Cassandra, who refuses to follow him. Michael Jarrell has Cassandra say: "It isn't for the Trojans that I have to stay, as they don't need me. It is for us. For you and me. It was obvious: the new masters were going to rule all the survivors. The Earth wasn't big enough for us to escape them. You, Aeneas,

you had no choice: you had to snatch a few hundred men away from the jaws of death. You were their leader. Soon, very soon, you will have to be a hero. (…) I cannot love a hero. I won't see you turn into a statue. Against a time in need of heroes, there is nothing we can do (…)." Cassandra's conception of betrayal is archaic: she refuses to leave because she is committed to the community to which she belongs. But she's not a heroine, and she doesn't want to be one. It is, indirectly, a hint as to how to direct the text. And that is how Fanny Ardant sees the part: she doesn't see Cassandra as a hero, but as a woman who resists, who says no. Our discussions revolve a lot around how to say this *no*, how to embody it. I think it's important to show how this no can be a great political and philosophical gesture, without turning the one who says it into a hero. Heroism is what others project onto an individual, a surfeit of being that freezes his or her humanity in a specific posture.

There have been several concertant versions of this play, which integrated Cassandra's voice into the orchestra, like an instrument. You say of Cassandra that she is "neither here nor there, neither inside nor outside, that she is somewhere else." In what symbolic space are you going to place her?

We don't see the eighteen musicians of the orchestra and Cassandra as belonging to the exact same physical space. In fact, in both Christa Wolf's and Michael's texts, Cassandra is a stranger to herself, to the world in which she lives: she is trapped by Apollo's curse, within this knowledge she cannot share, trapped because she says no, trapped by her father who thinks she's crazy, trapped by Agamemnon who condemns her to death. Here is a king's daughter, who belongs to the most intimate circle of power, but who is at the same time outside of it. That is why I say she is at once inside and outside. I want the audience to feel just how strange that situation is. With Fanny, we pay extremely close attention to that quality of the music, to the poetry of the text, and to its surprising combination with the score. My work as a director is at once made simpler and more complicated. You have to listen closely to the score, because if the time it establishes is like suspended, like fate, Cassandra tells us exactly how to say the text. You cannot slow things down or speed them up, like you might at the theatre, with the music and language of a writer. It's only within those constraints that you can then find a margin of interpretation. We like that constraint a lot, because it guarantees our freedom. It's a reminder that freedom isn't a state, but a conquest.

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Interview conducted by / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

MICHAEL JARRELL

Michael Jarrell studied visual art before dedicating himself to music, training with Swiss composers Éric Gaudibert, whose work is notable for its electronic influences, and Klaus Huber, for whom music is a form of societal reflection. From 1986 to 1989, he worked at the Cité des Arts, at the Ircam, and at the Villa Médicis. Composer-in-residence for the Orchestre de Lyon (1991-1993) and for the Festival de Lucerne (1996), the 2000 edition of Musica Nova Helsinki is entirely dedicated to his work. In 2001, after the commission of a piano concerto by the Salzburg Festival, he is made Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters, the final distinction in a career that saw him receive numerous awards. After teaching in Vienna, he is appointed professor of composition at the Geneva University of Music in 2004. Inspired by the post-serialist breakthroughs of the 1950s and by Giacometti and Edgar Varèse, his conception of musical time uses recurrence to play with tone on the organisation of the score. *Cassandra*, which adds electronic sounds to a traditional orchestra to widen the field of music and of the dramaturgy, is a major work in his repertoire.

HERVÉ LOICHEMOL

The current director of the Comédie de Genève, Hervé Loichemol began his career in Besançon, before joining the TNS in 1972. His encounter with Jean Jourdheuil led him to direct a large number of German-speaking playwrights, such as Lessing, Büchner, Kleist, Brecht, and above all Müller, whose work he directed in Sarajevo when he went there along with Swiss personalities to shine a light on the horrors of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A specialist of the 18th century, his theatre of philosophical action is marked by a deep political reflection.

FANNY ARDANT

The story of Fanny Ardant's relationship with her public might very well begin at Sciences Po, where she wrote a thesis called *Anarchisme et Surréalisme* (*Anarchism and Surrealism*), a reflection about freedom influenced by the poets who would later play a part in her career. At the theatre, she lends her voice to texts by Claudel, Racine, Duras, Pirandello, Lagarce, etc. She's worked with many of the greatest film directors, among them Truffaut, Lelouch, Varda, Resnais, Antonioni, Gavras, Zeffirelli, Scola, von Trotta, Ozon... Long before she made her first comedy, she built her fame by multiplying the roles of women who draw their strength from passion, whatever the cost.

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