

AND...

SHOWS

In the ruins of Athens broadcast in live on Culturebox, July 15 and available during six months.

Memories of Sarajevo – Le Birgit Ensemble, July 9 to 15 at 17:00, Gymnase Paul Giéra

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Encounters Research and creation in Avignon, *Le désordre du monde* – ANR, with in particular Julie Bertin and Jade Herbulot, on July 10 at 9:30 and on July 11 at 14:00, Cloître Saint-Louis

Towards an awakening of consciences : from cultural engagement to civic engagement Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region and CDJSFA, with Julie Bertin and Jade Herbulot, July 12 at 16:30, Site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

Theatre and power – Théâtre/Public, with in particular Julie Bertin and Jade Herbulot, July 15 at 14:30, Site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

PEDAGOGICAL FILE

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

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- November 9-19, 2017, Théâtre des Quartiers d'Ivry CDN du Val-de-Marne
- November 25, POC, Alfortville
- December 2, Théâtre de Châtillon
- December 12, Scène nationale d'Aubusson
- February 16-18, 2018, Le Grand T Théâtre de Loire-Atlantique, in partnership with the TU-Nantes
- March 3-4, MC2 : Grenoble

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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#FDA17

IN THE RUINS OF ATHENS

Two levels of speech and a multiplicity of viewpoints. On a stage made to resemble a Corinthian temple, *In the ruins of Athens* plays with the situation in Greece and establishes right away the fake and the illusion as alternatives to reality. Buried under what we might call the rubble of the talks with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, a handful of Athenian citizens lock themselves up in a reality TV studio, hoping to come out as winners of the programme and thus see their personal debt forgiven. Halfway between satire and ancient tragedy, those characters, who bear the names of tragic heroes, question politics and economics, but also their own lineage and the universal need for catharsis and thirst for blood. The claustrophobic “Parthenon Story” is shot offstage and broadcast live on screens while historical events are recreated by the European institutions. In this show that brings together mythological fiction and news stories, the audience is invited not only to watch but to take a more active role via a vote. Spectator, television viewer, actor, citizen, performer... What are our roles? A question that aims to rewrite definitions and asks each of us to be more aware of our responsibilities, if not to become personally engaged.

JULIE BERTIN AND JADE HERBULOT

After studies of philosophy at the University Paris I-Sorbonne for Julie Bertin and studies of literature at the École normale supérieure in Lyon for Jade Herbulot, both joined the Studio Théâtre in Asnières in 2009, before joining the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique two years later. Jade Herbulot meeting with Clara Hédouin led to their adapting and directing *The Three Musketeers – The series*, based on Alexandre Dumas's novel, as a series of shows performed in public places and Julie Bertin adapts Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, before they created together *Berliner Mauer: vestiges*. After finishing their studies, and founding the Birgit Ensemble in 2013, they decided to ignore the fourth wall and the contemplative aspect of theatre to create a more direct relationship with the audience and make their active participation an entire aspect of their direction. Their company is made up of artists born between 1986 and 1990, who share an understanding of the world and of the place current topics can have in their work. This allows them to create shows that question and recount the story of Europe since 1945. They created their second show, *Pour un Prélude (For a Prelude)* in 2015, and are finishing a tetralogy called *Europe, My Love* with *Memories of Sarajevo* and *In the ruins of Athens*, both created for the 71st edition of the Festival d'Avignon. As actresses, Jade Herbulot has appeared notably in Marivaux's *Infidelities* at the Théâtre des Quartiers d'Ivry, directed by Adel Hakim (2015), and Julie Bertin in an adaptation of *The Iliad* by director Pauline Bayle (2016) in *Le Dilemme du poisson-chat (The Catfish's Dilemma)*, written and directed by Kevin Garnichat at the Studio Théâtre in Asnières, and in *L'Héritier de village (The Heir of the Village)*, directed by Sandrine Anglade, created at the centre Georges Simenon in Rosny-sous-Bois, and which toured France in 2016 and 2017.

INTERVIEW WITH THE BIRGIT ENSEMBLE

Memories of Sarajevo and In the ruins of Athens are both part of a tetralogy called Europe, My Love, which tells of the foundation of Europe and of its early stumbles. You talk of collective memory, and of the idea of a political generation.

Julie Bertin and Jade Herbulot: With this work, we're hoping to strongly anchor ourselves in today's world thanks to a political subject, and to defend our radical point of view without joining a specific ideology or party. We share our disappointment in Europe with a lot of people, and we've wondered how to react to the financial and refugee crises. The tetralogy begins in 1945 with the story of the Berlin Wall in *Berliner Mauer: vestiges* (created in 2013) and ends with the Athenian crisis, in 2017. This relatively short time span has forced us to be committed and proactive, to think and question the early suspicions towards Europe, in order to have a global and subtle understanding of the situation. We want to reinvent the individual within the collective, by working with fourteen actors, all from the same class at the Conservatoire national supérieur d'art dramatique, a homogeneous group, all of the same age. It's the sum of the contradictions, failures, and successes within that group that nourishes our relationship to the world. All while being aware that we live in the "6th power in the world," and that we're artists who come, for the most part, from privileged backgrounds. It's this very specific prism that we're trying to widen, in spite of the social and economic restrictions that make us who we are as individuals. We play and write with those limits and particularities, with their advantages and drawbacks. And so, the work started in a rather pragmatic way, by asking who we are, what our constraints are, the things we've lived through and those that have remained blurry in our memory. The 1990s that seem to have been the end of a bipolar world, the economic and political system that is being recreated on the European, but also international, stage: that's the starting point of this work.

Both shows include references to mythology: are those references vestiges of the past that are superimposed on the hyper-modern?

If this effect of temporal superposition does happen onstage, in particular in *In the ruins of Athens*, the mythological figure of Europa haunts both shows. The myth about her abduction and rape by Zeus-as-a-bull interested us because several stories about the creation of Europe's borders are based on it. The geographical limits of Europe would have been created by Europa's brothers as they were racing after her, and in another version, it's Europa herself who drew those borders from the back of the bull. There are even two ways to understand those mythological references: a reading that looks to the past, that of an archeologist, who would dig through the layers of history to understand the facts and better look towards the future; and another that questions the way in which the origin of Europe was built in myths in order to question its identity, if not the notion of identity itself. We felt the need to use myth, that is, fiction, to talk about the links between institutions and people. The myth lets us adopt a point of view distanced from the political, bring in poetic images, and imagine a different way to talk. The mythological references have a larger presence in

In the ruins of Athens, in which the characters are trapped within a reality TV show called "Parthenon Story" and have names inspired by Greek mythology: Orestes, Cassandra, Iphigenia. They're modern Athenians with ancient names, and they carry within themselves an ancient lineage that will be revealed during that reality TV show. Without turning it into full-on satire, we wanted to stick as close as possible to the codes of reality TV, in order to better distance ourselves from it and to let the audience see in this microcosm a group of Athenians trapped in a terrible economic and social situation. The winner of the game will have his debt forgiven, but the figure of Europa troubles the contestants, giving them visions and revelations that disturb the show's proceedings. "Parthenon Story" takes place in a closed environment, offstage, and is broadcast live on screens, while onstage historical events play out in the highest European institutions. Those two spheres become more and more porous as time goes on, and end up meeting. We're not aiming for a consensus, but instead hoping for debate, by creating a system that has much to do with the ancient agora, in which every spectator is invited to give his or her opinion by voting for his or her favourite character in "Parthenon Story." Throughout the show, we invite them to find their place within a specific historical time and political action, to take their responsibilities. What does it mean to vote in a democracy? We've tried, ever since *Berliner Mauer*, to create dramatic devices within which members of the audience are able to build their own point of view. We're not interested in a contemplative relationship, and we've noticed that political satire seems to speak to our generation.

Did your trip to Greece change your understanding of Athens and of the crisis?

Going to Athens, we wanted to understand the part of fantasy us Westerners have in our understanding of our origins. What struck us there was the strength of the fabric of society, people aren't afraid to talk about politics at length in bars. The relationship to the public space is very different from the one we know in France. The outlook of Greece on refugees and on population movements has led to more action than here, for instance. And they're not afraid to talk about the failure of the political and economic model of Europe. There's no melancholy in our shows, but questions that aim to help us find foundations that would correspond to what we currently want. The understanding of the events happens in layers: first with gestures that are transmitted, then with movements of cultural, social, and historical thought. We understand what's going on around us through fiction, in order to develop the optimistic and lucid vision that's necessary to act towards a shared future. It's a deep topic we've decided to treat with some levity as well: between satire and humour, to question substance as much as style. Athens takes the form of a tragedy, with a Prologue and an Exode. Both shows include moments of collective performance, like a chorus that would sing or talk, since the fourteen actors are almost always all onstage. We play at once with the ideas of group and individuals, in order for a shared energy to appear and allow for a powerful emotional impact.

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