

RIQUET

Three actors on a stage, getting ready to play a game of princes and princesses. But the prince was born ugly, and of the two princesses living in the nearby kingdom, one is beautiful and stupid, the other ugly and incredibly smart. Quite the dilemma indeed! How to go about adapting Charles Perrault's fairy tale, *Riquet with the Tuft*, today? The text, written by Antoine Hérnotte, plays with the stigmatisations and misadventures of the figures of the scapegoat, the head of the class, and the beauty queen. Their successive encounters force them to face the difference between the appearance and the essence of things. For love to blossom, they will have to understand the other, not as he or she is, but as he or she has the potential to be, because everything is projection. See for instance the white paper wall that serves as a canvas for the painting, live, of an ever-changing set. *Riquet* remains at its core a fairy tale, but a modern one, meant for all audiences, a tale whose three central figures have to master their fate to choose their own future. Its resonance in our society so influenced by more-than-ever normative media is particularly welcome.

Show premiered on 20 April, 2015 at the Théâtre de Dole-Les Scènes du Jura Scène nationale.

Riquet à la houppie (*Riquet with the Tuft*) by Charles Perrault is published in French by éditions Gallimard, collection Folio Junior.

Riquet is subject to a *Pièce (dé)montée*, pedagogical file created by Canopé.

LAURENT BRETHOME

Nicknamed “the jeep” at the Comédie de Saint-Étienne, where he began before assisting François Rancillac, Laurent Brethome is an all-terrain director. Proudly hyperactive, the 34-year-old has directed about thirty shows, moving from one genre to the next with the same energy and generosity. Georges Feydeau and Hanokh Levin both played an important part in his artistic development—he brought them together in *Court Carnage* (*Short Carnage*) in 2012—along with Copi, Jean Racine, Philippe Minyana or, more recently, Molière (*Les Fourberies de Scapin*). Every one of his creations is accompanied and fed by shorter shows, workshops, and encounters, so many opportunities to be as close as possible to a new audience, or one that has already been won over. Originally from Vendée, where his company Le menteur volontaire organises a festival each summer, Laurent Brethome seems nonetheless to be from everywhere he goes, as an artist-in-residence or on tour. In the suburbs of Paris or the Jura mountains, he leads, with his many partners-in-crime, an artistic and militant experiment for a popular theatre which he defines, quoting Jean Dasté, as “playful, festive, and challenging.”

INTERVIEW WITH LAURENT BRETHOME

How did you come up with the idea to adapt this fairy tale, *Riquet with the Tuft*?

Laurent Brethome: The story of this creation is a very personal one. It goes back all the way to my first encounter with the theatre. When I was eight, I was hospitalised with what French doctors didn't yet call tics but "movements." A pediatrician helped me get over it by working with me on a text inspired by the Charles Perrault's tale, *Riquet with the Tuft*. As soon as I started performing, my movements stopped. My approach to the theatre is very visceral. I'm always rushing along, I can't slow down. I can't stop. I think *Riquet* is the thirty-sixth play I direct. I discovered the theatre with *Riquet*, and I knew right away that breathing was for me synonymous with making theatre. For the past few years, several directors have also encouraged me to create a show for younger audiences, thinking maybe that my very visual approach to the theatre and my childlike sensibilities would be a good fit.

What are you trying to do with *Riquet*? Is it supposed to be an illustration of the fairy tale? An adaptation? A variation?

Along with Antoine Hérnotte, who wrote the text, we decided to make the tale ours. To question it and look at it through the prism of our modern society. There were a few things that bothered us in the original tale: the fact that the man picked which princess to marry, for instance—we'd rather have the opposite happen—and the way the question of beauty and ugliness is treated. We wanted the audience, teenagers and adults alike, to wonder about what it means to be beautiful, or to be dumb. In Antoine Hérnotte's text, the two female figures are named Sublima Amantae Venerae and Mimi Pédia. The former doesn't understand why everyone calls her "Stupida," while the latter, as her name indicates, is thought to be highly intelligent. So of course, one assumes that Mimi Pédia is hideous, that Sublima is stupid. We didn't want things to be so simple. Our goal is to show the contingent character of beauty: no one can quite agree on what is or isn't beautiful, and aesthetic canons differ between civilisations, countries, origins, cultures, etc. We want the audience to feel free to wonder about their own perception of beauty. We're not asking the question of physical beauty, of physical ugliness. Hence the game the characters play with those paper bags, which are like so many masks they wear over their heads.

While working on the play, you visited several schools to talk with children. What place do mediation and cultural engagement play in your work?

I don't consider mediation and field work to be extra-curricular activities, so to speak; in fact, they are the basis of our work. I think we have to go to people in order to make them want to come to us. This isn't just the motto of my company, Le menteur volontaire (The Willful Liar), but a reality that has confronted us positively for years now. Almost all of my creations have been accompanied by projects created with the public. It's something that has its roots in my personal history as well: I grew up in the countryside, I'm a Vendée peasant. My grandfather was an accordionist, my grandmother a drummer, they played in balls and dances. They used to take me with them. I am a

product of this particular form of popular culture. Jean Dasté used to say that popular theatre should be above all festive, playful, and challenging.

Images and sound are very important in your shows. What about this one?

Along with my collaborators, I seek to create a powerful visual and aural world. For this particular project, we chose to work with Louis Lavedan, who specialises in live painting. On large white canvases, he creates pictures that arise, evolve, and fade as the story unfolds. It's a way to continually stimulate the audience's imagination. Several motifs or characters only appear on the screen, like the princesses' suitors. The lack of any prop, of anything resembling a naturalistic setting, allows the audience to dream up a lot of different things. As for the aural landscape of the play, it was created by Antoine Hérnotte, who mixes it live. I offered him to do it right away; as the writer of the text, his relationship to its musicality is obvious. This aural landscape is fundamental in *Riquet*. If glitter were a musical instrument, I'd want the audience to feel as though we were playing it in their ears.

You say that *Riquet* is aimed at an inexperienced audience rather than young audience. What does this difference mean for you?

What defines our age as spectators is how used we are to being part of an audience. The audience of tomorrow isn't exclusively made up of 15-year-old teenagers. If we manage to make a 50-year-old person come to the theatre, he becomes part of this audience of tomorrow, too. Recently, a farmer friend of mine told me he'd never been to the theatre, that he didn't think it was made for him. I convinced him to come to the festival I'm organising in July in Vendée. This 38-year-old man will be part of this "young audience," because it will be the first time he ever attends a play. I think that entering a theatre is a civil act. We should thank every teacher who's ever brought his or her students to the theatre. It is so much easier nowadays to be a consumer of what I would call cathodic art rather than to be willing to be shaken up and made to think. Works of art that leave us with answers are much less challenging than those that leave us with questions.

***Riquet* is shown at the Chapelle des Pénitents blancs. What is the significance of this place for you?**

There's yet another link to my personal history here. I like the idea that this project, which began all the way back when I was an eight-year-old boy lying in a hospital bed in what they'd called the Smurf room, is about to open up, like a clam if you will, in a chapel in Avignon. I'm not what you'd call a believer, but I do have a spiritual side, and I believe there's something spiritual about this trip. Besides, this play is about something that exists halfway between heaven and earth. *Riquet* is a fantasy, of course, but it's also very grounded. It asks social, political, religious, and philosophical questions. Question of civil imports, too. And then, there's the character of the king, who remains unseen but whose voice can be heard. Who's talking, then? Is it the king? Is it God? I began this trip in a hospital, I'm about to end it in a chapel, which you'll have to admit feels a lot like the way a life would go.

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur de l'Université, free admittance

- 5 July at 05:30 pm, *Dialogue artists-audience*, with Laurent Brethome and the team of *Riquet*, encounter hosted by the Ceméa
- 8 July at 01:00 pm, Radio creation week: *Riquet ou « le théâtre, c'est soit pour les enfants, soit pour les vieux »*, with Radio Campus
- 15 July at 03:00 pm, Encounter: *Making art to make a society* with, among others, Laurent Brethome, organised with the Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

SUJET À VIF

Est by Justine Berthillot and Pauline Peyrade / Sound by Antoine Herniotte from 5 to 11 July at 06:00 pm, Jardin de la Vierge du lycée Saint-Joseph

YOUNG AUDIENCES AT THE PÉNITENTS BLANCS

notallhowanderarelost by Benjamin Verdonck from 12 to 16 July
Dark Circus by STEREOPTIK from 19 to 23 July

CINEMATOGRAPHIC TERRITORIES YOUNG AUDIENCES

- 7-25 July at 10:30 am / Utopia-Manutention
- Workshops: first steps in cinema animation (7-12 years old), at the Conservatoire du Grand Avignon, from 8 to 23 July at 02:00 pm

FICTIONS FRANCE CULTURE YOUNG AUDIENCES

Friday, or The Other Island by Michel Tournier
17 July at 08:00 pm, Musée Calvet, free admittance

TOUR DATES OF *RIQUET* AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

- 2 and 3 November 2015:
Le Toboggan, Décines
- 6 November: Théâtre de Roanne
- from 17 to 20 November: Le Grand R,
La-Roche-sur-Yon
- 27 November: Théâtre Jean Arp,
Clamart
- from 8 to 11 December: Théâtre de
Chemillé-Melay, Scènes de Pays
dans les Mauges
- 15 and 16 December: Théâtre de
Lunéville

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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.