
structure



© Jean-Louis Fernandez

Actress FRANCE - THEATRE

Text, conception, direction Pascal Rambert

Creation at the Bouffes du Nord Theater, Paris - the 12th of december 2017

Actress

Credits

Playing time : 2h15

Text, conception, direction **Pascal Rambert**

With

Eugenia actress **Marina Hands**

Ksenia her sister **Audrey Bonnet**

Galina Eugenia and Ksenia's mother **Ruth Nüesch**

Eugeni Eugenia and Ksenia's father **Emmanuel Cuchet**

Pavel Eugenia's husband **Jakob Öhrman**

Igor Ksenia's husband **Elmer Bäck**

Ivan male nurse **Yuming Hey**

Alexander actor **Luc Bataïni**

Sergeuï actor **Jean Guizerix**

Stanislav priest **Rasmus Slätis**

Artem actor **Sifan Shao**

Svetlana actress **Laetitia Somé**

Roman actor **Hayat Amiri**

Yulia Eugenia's daughter **Lyna Khoudri**

Dimitri Eugenia and Pavel's son **Anas Abidar** or **Nathan Aznar** or **Samuel Kircher**

Light design **Yves Godin**

Costume design **Anaïs Romand**

Set design **Pascal Rambert**

Direction assistant **Pauline Roussille**

Stage manager **Alessandra Calabi**

Light production **Thierry Morin**

Stage technician **Camille Jamin**

Production director **Pauline Roussille**

Creation at the Bouffes du Nord Theater, Paris the 12th of december 2017

Executive production structure production and C.I.C.T. - Bouffes du Nord Theater

Coproduction Théâtre National de Strasbourg, TNB Théâtre National de Bretagne à Rennes, Célestins Théâtre de Lyon, le phénix scène nationale Valenciennes pôle européen de création, Bonlieu scène nationale Annecy, Théâtre de Gennevilliers CDN, Le Parvis Scène Nationale Tarbes-Pyrénées, L'Apostrophe - Scène nationale Cergy-Pontoise & Val d'Oise

With the support of the Berlin French Institut and the French Institut of Finland.

The text is published at Les Solitaires Intempestifs.

Actress

Statement of intent

One always wants to say to a young actor or actress: "take a seat and speak". Then one of them sits and speaks, and there is life. That is the art of theater. So now I am back to something very classical and modest: writing theater. I am taking on dramatic writing. It is difficult to write theater today, because one could argue that everything has been done. And yet, everything has to be done over again.

I love writing for actresses. Maybe that's my job: giving work to actresses, Giving them big roles. I do this very consciously. I try to give actresses parts they can really get their teeth into and not just to appear in a scene to look pretty. Actress was written for the actors of the Moscow Art Theater in 2015. The play tells the story of an eminent actress's last days. Over the period of a few weeks, she said goodbye to those she loved. All her family are there, as well as her theater colleagues, right up to the end, when, she is surrounded by hundreds of bouquets from her admirers at her resting place.

Pascal Rambert

Actress

Interview by Pascal Rambert

How was the idea for the project born?

In 2012 I created *Clôture de l'amour* at the Moscow Art Theater. This was the first foreign version I made of the play following the french version at the Avignon Festival in 2011. The russian version of *Clôture de l'amour* is still playing in Moscow since it's creation in 2012. Following its success there, I was asked to think of a new show for the Art Theater. So, as always, I proposed to write for the actors. I made several visits to the Art Theater and watched plays every evening, met with the actors, saw the stage production and the state of the Russian theater. I became very familiar with the artists on an artistic level. The thing that left the biggest impression was, when walking home at night after rehearsals, the only places that were open at night and shining in the snow were the flower shops. Flower shops are open all night in Moscow. They are kiosks full of flowers, with a lot of mist inside, because it is hot, whilst outside it is minus fifteen. So there are these small booths, often with neon lighting and it's almost a world of light: a white Moscow with flowers in a glass cube, white and neon. It really is a universe that caught my eye and what's more, one which is mine. All my plays are like that. I went to all the premieres at the Art Theater. On the garden side, outside the stage, next to the so called "*Garderoba*" where one removes ones coat before entering the room, there's a place where people come with bouquets of flowers. Because, in Russia, it is the actors people come to see at the theater. Above all, one comes to see the actors performing. Directors are quite secondary. People bring flowers to the actors through the central aisle.

They collect their flowers and give them to the actors, during the applause. This lasts for several minutes. I found this marvelous. It's one of the things I love about the art of theater. The flowers and the love of actors mixed together to give a departure point for a project.

In Russia, there is a cult of great Russian actors and actresses or the dancers of the Bolchoi, like the great Maïa Plissetskaïa. At the time, I was working on *Argument*, which was also born from the reading of *La Dame aux camélias*, which was about women who die on these flowers. The plays I write are often intertwined: I write one which contains the next, or a kind of satellite of another play. So, I was into these stories, and thought about writing one about a great Russian actress who dies over a few weeks and is visited by her colleagues, knowing it is the end, a bit like the Comedie-Francaise or big theater companies such as the Moscow Art Theater. It was born from both this world and a very plastic one: the play truly comes from this vision in the night, of flower shops and the flowers one buys for the people they love or, for the theater.

You worked with Eugenia Dobrovolskaia for the Russian version of *Clôture de l'amour*. Is it the desire to work with her again that prompted you to write for the actors of the Moscow Art Theater?

Yes. I thought of her to write the play. I had been to Moscow several times and had met sixty actors from the Art Theater. We met, we spoke and I wrote for them. I spoke with each of them, for hours, about the art of theater, about their stories and the stories of their country.

Some of them were 80 years old, and told me how they had played in front of Stalin. It was powerful and feeds the whole play. It was also a moment of great tension between Russia and the Ukraine over Crimea. All this led to the creation of *Actrice*. The play was translated into Russian for the Art Theater of Moscow and I am now working on the French version.

How will the French Version be distributed?

It's going to be played at the Bouffes du Nord with Marina Hans in the starring role (the role of the *Actrice*) and Audrey Bonnet as her sister. I am still working on its distribution. I wanted to work with Marina Hands after seeing her in *Ivanov*, directed by Luc Bondy. It was a major artistic encounter. I hadn't seen Marina play for some time and after having seen her, I stopped her in the street and told her who I was and that her work was extraordinary.

Through Audrey Bonnet, I knew she liked *Clôture de l'amour* a lot. We got the project to open *Clôture de l'amour* in London, with Marina and we met on this occasion. I told her that I wanted to work with her and offered her a role in *Actrice*. I think it will be distributed 'internationally', because I would like to work with people I work with all over the world: Italian, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Japanese actors etc. Diaries are hard to fix for 5 months work in France, but I hope we can manage it. After the French version, we are also talking about Italian or Chinese versions. It is a "Russian" play. We can qualify it as that. But it exceeds the idea that it is a Russian play: We are talking about a Chinese Version in Peking, so it is larger than that. Like *Clôture de l'amour*, it is, above all, a play about the love of theater, on our day to day work. I think the actors are people anchored in reality, however strange this image is. Those actors who think they have their 'heads in the clouds' are the most real. An actor is someone who exists in absolute reality.

You often talk about your fascination for actresses. Is this show a way of putting that fascination into words?

I like writing for actresses. I like giving work to actresses. Maybe that's my job: giving work to actresses. Giving them important roles. It's as if, deep down, I was noticing a kind of structural injustice. Structurally there have always been dramatic authors who have mechanically written more for men than women. I think that from certain authors onwards, such as Bernard-Marie Koltès, or Jean Luc Lagarce for example, things have changed. Which is good. In any case, I do it entirely consciously. I try to give actresses roles they can really get their teeth into, rather than just appearing in a scene. Also, an author, almost ontologically, is someone who is able to talk of what he knows best, namely, his own share of belonging to the human species which he possesses within himself.

But after a while, there is also a capacity to know how to talk about others, because we belong to this human community. As a writer I must enter the world of a child, a woman or a very old person. I have to be open to all. Today, I have widened my circle to all ages and even beyond because at the moment, my big pleasure is bringing the dead back to life on stage.

Une Vie, which I am writing for the actors of the Comédie Française et GHOSTS, that I wrote for Taiwanese actors, are plays about ghosts, plays where people return, a bit like I did with *Argument*. *Clôture de l'amour* was tautological: a couple separate and talk about theater. Then, a woman dies and at the end rises from her bed. As far as I am concerned, women live, speak and sit up. Women

die, sit up and speak. I don't believe in death, but I believe in the power of word. when I re-read *Une Saison en enfer*, I know things aren't dead. Rimbaud is still alive.

Beings don't die. They are here. You just need to say their name and they appear. GHOSTS, the play I am writing, is imbued with this idea. I have wanted to do an asian play for years. For fifteen years I have been working in Japan and it's a world I know very well. Death and spirits are omnipresent: water spirits, theater spirits, wind spirits. They are important things over there. Besides in theater, nobody rises from their bed like that.

You mention Noh Theater in the play. What is your connexion to this type of theater?

indeed, I have a passion for noh. I have seen around fifty noh plays in Japan. Every time I go to Tokyo or Kyoto, I go and see noh. For me, noh is, within the play, a sort of absolute form of the art of theater. Noh actors are the exact opposite of what we do in the west. I adore the way one disappears or dissolves inside the characters. Noh theater is incredible. It's a sense of time, of movement and the transmission of speech.

And above all, it is theater created around 1300 in Japan and what we see today is almost exactly what we saw in the XIIIth century.

From the point of view of the penetration of an object through time, it's something that is extremely impressive.

Actrice reveals strong links to La Mouette. What importance did the writings of Tchekhov have when writing Actrice?

La Mouette is the absolute play. It is the focal point. The first scene I worked on in 1982 when I was a student of Antoine Vitez at Chaillot, was a scene from *La Mouette*. I played *Treplev*. If I was to play in *La Mouette* today, I would play *Trigorine*. I invited *Arthur Nauzyciel* with his direction of *La Mouette* to the *Theatre de Gennevilliers*. The year I was in Moscow to meet the actors, I saw *La Mouette* four or five times. It's a wonderful play.

There is a wonderful scene in *La Mouette*, the theater inside the theater (which is also the matrix of Hamlet), with the beautiful line: "*Men, lions and partridges etc.*" It is a text that I love. When I was in Moscow, I asked all the actors: how do you interpret it? There was a wonderful response: a seventy year old actress told me she had played *Nina* fifty years earlier. I asked her if she could play *Nina* again. Fifty years later she got up and did it. What's more, all the meetings with the actors took place in the room that we see in the photo of *Tchekhov* reading *La Mouette*, surrounded by actors. It reminded me that the reading of *Une Vie* with the actors of the Comédie-Française will take place inside *Eric Rufs* office: we are going to read the play together and they will discover the text. So we did the interviews in this room at the *Art theater* and, it was moving to see this actress of seventy playing *Nina* again. We all had tears in our eyes when noticing the passage of time in her body. She makes the exact movements she made fifty years ago. It's wonderful. So of course, *La Mouette* is present. It's a play where *Tchekhov* has gathered our lives in the palm of our hand.

Finally, my plays often relate to what I know, such as, the art of theater and life: it's the case with *Cloture de l'amour*, *Répétition*, *L'art du Théâtre*. It could also be dance, fine arts or painting, which is

also the subject of *Une Vie*. Art traverses everything: beauty, world politics, language and love. It's my prism. Everything goes through there. It's the filter of life.

Where do you imagine the show taking place?

It takes place in a real bedroom, white, with neon lights. There is a bed, a table and a piano. An large room of an actress that works hard and has the means to live well. There is also between one hundred and two hundred and fifty bouquets of flowers from her admirers. So it is simultaneously a real space and one that is a sort of extremely colourful installation, with all the flowers that have been brought to her and continue to be brought to her during the entire play. Everyone comes with bouquets of flowers and there is a similarity to *La Dame aux Camélias*. It's repeated a lot in the text: you must open the windows, the flowers will kill her etc. We have entered a kind of sublime flower shop which is, at the same time, a resting place.

One remembers the importance of Russia in *Répétition*. Is there a link between the Russian universe found in the play and your desire to write for the actors of the Art Theater of Moscow?

Yes, but it's larger than that: I work all over the world. Whether it be in the nineties with my visits to the USA, or later in the Middle East or Asia, what hit me the most is people pain and the harshness of history. Everyone knows. It is one thing to read it, to read Primo Levi, Marguerite Duras, or what we find on Russian prisoners and on the Gulag, but one has no idea of what it is until we have spoken with people, something Svetlana Alexievitch does so well. Whether it be in ex-Yugoslavia, in Russia or in China, I am confronted with incredible stories. *Actrice* is also part of it, like GHOSTs (from continental China to Taiwan) of these plays that say: we have suffered terribly.

Actrice is directly linked to real stories that Russians told me about the Russian state and censorship. Doing *Actrice* in Russia is not that easy. Neither in China. To say "we suffered terribly" is possible in France but it's different in Russia or China. The most touching thing is what humanity shares. As a writer, when I listen to stories from across the world, I want to share them.

In the play, the characters say that in theater it is "the word is what makes humans stand". Does that correspond to your conception of theater?

I truly believe it. It's the truth: If we stop talking, we die. In the play, the actress dies of a brain tumor, even if it is not explicitly stated and she refuses to say the word. I was surprised by Mitterrand who learned he had cancer a few weeks after his election and died a few months after his second mandate. He continued to the end, then stopped. It's a subject that fascinates me. The way one can carry on until the last minute, to stay standing. That is *répétition*: they get to the end of what they have to say, then it's over. It's the same for *Cloture de l'amour*. We speak then we get down on our knees and die.

Ksenias's character critiques "the screaming of past texts" and Alexanders agrees "because you only need to pull up a chair, to sit down and speak, and that's life." Could that constitute a sort of personal art of theater?

Yes, there is some truth in that. One always wants to tell a young actor or actress: "take a chair and speak". And then one of them sits and speaks and there is life. That is the art of theater. Concerning

"the screaming of past texts", I think it has improved a great deal in thirty years. Plot writers, collectives, the arrival of video, and very precise technology have changed many things. I try to get away from what has become a sort of commonplace on stage. For years I defended a "decentralization" of texts by attacking the fact that the text is central to a play. But now I have returned to something very classical and simple: writing theater. It is very difficult to write theater in 2016 because one could say that everything has been done. And yet everything has to be done over again.

The final act in Actrice reminds me of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. Is this a conscious reference to Shakespeare's play?

I didn't think of Dream but rather of having all the actors together on stage. The rest of the play is made up of scenes where everyone visits the Actrice two by two, because I wanted to remain fairly realistic: when someone is that sick, he can't have too many people around. But they are all so out of control that there is the last scene where they appear together. They are wonderful beings: her last husband is a kind of Baal, like in Brecht's play.

As she says, nobody is well, "death makes them mad". She is the one suffering but everyone is suffering more than her. Dramatically, it is very interesting to write. I really wanted an impromptu finale. It's a kind of fake piece, an impromptu jester. They do that in front of her with all those flowers. The content doesn't need to be that strong, on the contrary, it needs to be slightly ridiculous. I love the allegorical plays of the nineteenth century or the baroque operas of the seventeenth century. I love diving into things that are the opposite of me. There's something very musical, with piano and singing. I took the structure for this impromptu from the fresco of the Grand Amphithéâtre of the Sorbonne, with all its allegorical characters. I can imagine them preparing this little scene with all these figures.

This is also what happens to Marivauxs Actors of good faith, where the main character paints a totally absurd canvas. That's what's beautiful. It is the art of theater. It is a play that makes us cry. It's a Russian play. The male roles in the play are played by the Finnish actors I used for Memento Mori, a dance piece. I try to mix Italians, Finns, and Chinese. It's a very international thing in the sense that it concerns the pain of the world, a form of historical suffering.

Interview by par H el ene Thil – Paris, november 2016.

Actress

Biography of Pascal Rambert

Pascal Rambert is a French writer, choreographer, and director for the stage and screen. He was born in 1962. In 2016 he receives the “ Grand prix de l’Académie Française pour l’ensemble de son oeuvre” / “Theater Prize from Académie Française for his entire body of work”.

From January 2017 he has been the partner artist at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris, at El Pavón Teatro Kamikaz from September 2017 and from 2014 the partner playwright at the National Theatre of Strasbourg.

For 10 years, 2007-2016, he served as the Director of TG2-Théâtre de Gennevilliers, which he has transformed into a national dramatic center for contemporary creation, exclusively devoted to living artists (theater, dance, opera, contemporary art, film, and philosophy).

Rambert’s theatre plays and choreographies have been produced by *structure*, supported by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication, and staged in Europe, North America, Asia, Russia, South America, Middle East.

His writing (theater, stories, and poetry) is published in France with the press Solitaires Intempestifs and has been translated, published, and staged in many languages: English, Russian, Italian, German, Japanese, Chinese, Croatian, Slovenian, Polish, Portuguese (From Portugal and from Brazil), Spanish (Mexican and Argentinian), Castilian, Catalan, Dutch, Czech, Thai, Dansk and Greek.

His dance pieces, including the most recent, *Memento Mori*, created in 2013 with the lighting designer Yves Godin, have been performed at major festivals and contemporary dance festivals: Montpellier, Avignon, Utrecht, Berlin, and Hamburg as well as New York, Tokyo and Los Angeles.

Pascal Rambert has directed several operas in France and in the United States. The short films he has directed have been selected and awarded at festivals in Pantin, Locarno, Miami, and Paris.

His play *Clôture de l’amour (Love’s End)*, created at the 65th Festival d’Avignon in 2011 with Audrey Bonnet and Stanislas Nordey, was an international success. The script won the prize for public theater in the Theater 2013 – Dithea competition, the prize for best new French-language play from the Syndicat de la Critique (Critics’ Union) in 2012, and the Grand Prize for dramatic literature from the Centre national du théâtre (National Theater Center) in October, 2012. In 2017, *Clôture de l’amour* was staged more than 180 times in France and much more all over the world, and translated in 23 languages. Pascal Rambert has adapted *Clôture de l’amour* into ten languages: for the Moscow Art Theatre; in New York, Zagreb, Modena, and Rome, and at Milan’s Piccolo Teatro; in Shizuoka, Osaka, and Yokohama; in Berlin and at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg; in Barcelona at the Grec Festival and in Madrid at the Festival de Otoño; and in Copenhagen, Aalborg, Aarhus, and Odense, in mandarin in China in Beijing, in arabic in Cairo in Egypt.

Rambert created *Une (micro) histoire économique du monde, dansée (A (micro) history of world economics, danced)* at T2G, Théâtre de Gennevilliers, in 2010. After its French tour, Rambert has adapted the work for further performances in Japan; in Hamburg and Karlsruhe, Germany; in the United States in New York, Los Angeles and Pittsburgh; and in Cairo, Egypt.

His play *Avignon à vie (Avignon for Life)*, read by Denis Podalydès, was first staged at the 2013 67th Festival d’Avignon in the Cour d’Honneur du Palais des Papes.

His most recent play, *Répétition (Rehearsal)*, written for Emmanuelle Béart, Audrey Bonnet, Denis Podalydès of the Comédie Française, Stanislas Nordey, and Claire Zeller, premiered December 12, 2014 at T2G, Théâtre de Gennevilliers- national dramatic center for contemporary creation as part of Festival d'Automne in Paris. It was afterward performed in Lyon and toured nationally and internationally in the fall of 2015.

At the end of 2016, he will direct the Italian version of the play, *Prova*, at the Teatro Arena del Sole de Bologna and at the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, and in 2017 *Ensayo* the Spanish version in Madrid. For *Répétition (Rehearsal)* Pascal Rambert was awarded from the French Academy with the annual prize 2015 of literature and philosophy.

In June, 2015, in the bare space of the Bouffes du Nord Theater in Paris, Rambert will present five of his plays: *Memento Mori*, *Clôture de l'amour (Love's end)*, *Avignon à vie (Avignon for life)*, *De mes propres mains (With My Own Hands)* and *Libido Sciendi*.

In January, 2016, he did premier his play *Argument*, written for Laurent Poitrenaux and Marie-Sophie Ferdane, at the CDN (National Theater Center) Orléans / Loiret / Centre, then present it at La Comédie in Reims and at T2G, Théâtre de Gennevilliers - national dramatic center for contemporary creation

He has recently written *Actrice (Actress)* which he will create on December 12nd 2017 at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris, starred for the main roles by Audrey Bonnet and Marina Hands, which will tour in France from January to March 2018..

Currently he is writing *GHOSTS* for some Taiwanese actors, he will direct it for the opening of the Performing Art Festival in Taipei in August 2017.

In May 2017 at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombiers in Paris, he will direct the text *Une vie (A life)* that he wrote for the actors of the Comédie-Française in Paris.