

AND...

SHOWS

Memories of Sarajevo broadcast in live on Culturebox, July 15 on France 2 and July 20 from 23:50 and available on Culturebox during six months.

In the ruins of Athens – Le Birgit Ensemble, July 9 to 15 at 20:30, 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

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

MEMORIES OF SARAJEVO

The siege of Sarajevo began in 1992, two months after the signature of the Maastricht Treaty, which turned the European Community into the European Union. This pact, this transformation and its consequences would affect absolutely everyone. A response to the decisions and indecisions of the European institutions, to a history that most don't know very well, *Memories of Sarajevo* is a historical epic which gives voice to the besieged. In that city lying at the bottom of a basin where the hills make for an ideal sniper perch, directors Julie Bertin and Jade Herbulot visited libraries and archives and listened to countless witness accounts, in order to try to answer this question: "How to embrace this piece of history that isn't really ours by turning it into a story we could tell?" On the stage, the façade of a building, its inhabitants in the street below. Above them, European and international leaders meet, unable to find a solution to the crisis. The Birgit Ensemble is from this generation born in the European Union who feels that the anger and frustration caused by the Union's tentativeness must be channeled to think up new forms of political, but also artistic, organisation. *Memories of Sarajevo* and *In the ruins of Athens* are the last two parts of the tetralogy *Europe, My Love*.

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.

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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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. Our shows aren't directly about that, but at the origin of our project was a feeling of anger, of frustration with the timidity of the attempts to come up with new forms of political organisation, and the impression that we're at a tipping point, without knowing how to influence things. 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.

To talk about Sarajevo, did you have to become specialists in the history of Europe?

We've gathered a lot of material, libraries and the archives of the INA [National Audiovisual Institute] were our primary sources. Then we travelled to Sarajevo and Athens to meet and talk with experts about those events, but also with locals. These two shows were based on the interviews and conversations we had. The history of Sarajevo wasn't so clear to us, we knew very few people who could tell us about it: this troubled past attracted us. We met with photographer Milomir Kovacevic, who took pictures of Sarajevo and its inhabitants during the war, and we were able to talk with people who lived through the siege, and with others who fled the city, as well as with Rémy Ourdan, who was a war correspondent for *Le Monde* in Sarajevo and made a documentary called *The Siege*. We gathered the stories of civilians, of a journalist, of people of different age and nationality... Our writing was changed by this journey, by those

encounters, by our perception of the city: to stand within its walls made the conflict and the siege very real to us. The city is in a basin surrounded by hills, from which it was very easy for a sniper to see people walking downtown, and to shoot them. How could we embrace this history, which isn't quite ours, and turn it into a story? We didn't want to take the place of the protagonists who actually lived through the siege, and we don't make documentary theatre, so we had to find the right distance in regard to the audience, in order to avoid pathos and to create a context to tell the events in a pragmatic way, but also to tell those silence, all the while keeping a material conducive to incarnation and performance. How could we give a voice to those people on the stage?

What is the link between individual stories and the collective history of Europe in *Memories of Sarajevo*?

The siege of Sarajevo began in 1992, two months after the signature of the Maastricht Treaty, which turned the European Community into the European Union. The Bosnian War thus became the first diplomatic failure of this new European Union, made up of twelve countries, in spite of their decision to follow a common foreign policy in the face of great international challenges. With this first conflict, the European Union was paralysed, because every one of its countries obviously had different relationships with the actors of the war. It led to disagreements about the dismantling of the Yugoslav federation, about the integration of its States and territories... We've chosen to tackle the subject via satire, at least at first, as a symbolic marker of our vision of Europe, through the critique of its elites. We also develop a direct relationship to the audience in this play, through testimonies and personal stories, through the words of the inhabitants of Sarajevo, in a sharing of thoughts and emotions. There's no moralising, no cerebral relationship, but a true desire for exchange. Indeed, it isn't the unity of the audience as a group that interests us, but the reactualisation of those words and events: we want what's at stake to be accessible and very clear.

How did you work on the stage design?

The scenography used for both shows, *Memories of Sarajevo* and *In the ruins of Athens*, is a two-level structure that reinforces the symbolic ratio of power between citizens (the inhabitants) and leaders (the European Union), and which can be easily modified by changes in that ratio of power. It's both a tool and a framework for the performance, at once sophisticated and simple. Although they share themes and aesthetic concerns, those are two very different shows. There is for instance the possibility of a retrospective look at Sarajevo, while the question of the debt of Greece evolves from day to day, the relationship to temporality and to the events isn't the same. In our first show, *Berliner Mauer*, everything revolved around the wall, the scenography was in a way our main character. Here, however, even though the besieged city of Sarajevo and the Greece of today are indeed the main characters of those two shows, the scenography was conceived as a space that has to adapt to the actors' performances.

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