

AND...

PRESS CONFERENCE with Sonia Wieder-Atherton,
July 19 at 11:00, cour du Cloître Saint-Louis

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

– October 5, 2019, Philharmonie de Paris, Nuit Blanche

A NIGHT OF ODYSSEYS

"What does the Mediterranean mean to me? I saw myself facing the elements: the sea, the sun, the wind, the storm. I realised how those places that inspire me so intensely are never silent. The idea for a soundtrack was born."

Alone onstage, cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton struggles against the elements: a deluge rages around her... *A Night of odysseys* is a new way of reinventing the stage by bringing together classical and traditional music and a soundtrack made of voices recorded during many encounters with groups of women, secondary school students, people living in exile, and artists. The audience is invited to a moving aural experience in which the noises of the world multiply thanks to an ingenious installation. Bach can be heard among the noise of motors; the waves of the Mediterranean smash against the stage; the audience is carried away on adventures that slowly paint the portrait of mankind as forever travelling, making each and every one of us a Ulysses looking for wonders or driven by the simple desire of coming back to his or her loved ones. In a great moment of brotherhood, the famous musician creates a new form of concert and offers a beautiful sensory experience.

SONIA WIEDER-ATHERTON

After studying at the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique de Paris, **Sonia Wieder-Atherton** joined the Moscow Conservatory. In 1986, she won the Prix Rostropovitch. Over the course of her career as a soloist, she has performed live throughout the world with the most prestigious orchestras and released many records. Curious and passionate, she started creating her own shows very early, often accompanied by different artists, including aural experiences combining soundtracks with classical and traditional music: her *Odysseys*.

73rd
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,700 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 SONIA WIEDER-ATHERTON

For the past few years, you've created shows outside of the world of classical music. What led to this desire to change things up?

Sonia Wieder-Atherton : From the beginning of my musical training, I decided I'd choose my projects based on attraction. I graduated from the Conservatoire de Paris with the burning desire to join the Moscow conservatory and work with a professor in particular. I was attracted like a magnet to the sound of Russia! Whether behind the Iron Curtain or not, it's how I've always proceeded. When I was studying in Paris, I already liked to follow contemporary music creations (George Benjamin, "young" Pascal Dusapin), all sorts of musical experiments that were happening outside of the usual institutions. After my time in the USSR, I met Chantal Akerman, which was a decisive moment. I accepted to work on Jewish liturgical music for her film *American Stories*. It's only after the fact that I understood why I'd wanted to go to and learn in Russia, rather than in Germany or the United States. Working with Sami Frey on the biblical text *L'Ecclésiaste* was an important step in my relationship to the text. This experience of the stage in a context that wasn't that of a concert led to questions about issues and codes other than that of classical music. Some questions became unavoidable, such as: what makes the act of listening possible or impossible? What's light, what's visual? Not long after, the *Odyssées* started appearing...

You've created several *Odyssées*. For the Festival d'Avignon, you'll be performing one of them *There are fifteen women around me*. How did the material for the *Odyssées* come about?

I did a show about Mitteleuropa and eastern European Jewish songs. You have to explore the notion of accents in music, just like you do when you study language. A musician looks for accents, and not only for phrasing. This long-term undertaking led me to working on the theme of the Mediterranean. At first I followed the same process as for my previous shows, but then doubt started creeping in, and I felt the need to face solitude... I couldn't find an artistic solution to my problem, so after listening and being permeated by all sorts of music, I simply asked myself: What does the Mediterranean mean to you? I saw myself facing the elements: the sea, the sun, the wind, the storm. I realised that those places that inspired me so much are never silent. Thus was born the idea of using a soundtrack.

How did you compose this soundtrack?

I started working without knowing where I was going; I followed my intuition and tried to experience as sincerely as possible the danger this put me in. I started gathering sounds, recording some of them, asking radio or cinema sound engineers for others, creating demo tapes.

Slowly, the structure of the *Odyssée* began to appear. Franck Rossi joined me to create a more elaborate soundtrack. I've always tried to find a balance between words and music, between sound and the presence of other people around me. The *Odyssées* are full of voices, they're born of encounters that serve as a basis to revisit a sort of run-through of the show, thirteen sequences I call adventures. The audience is invited on an aural journey that brings together this soundtrack and classical, contemporary, and traditional music.

What are the encounters that led to *A Night of Odysseys*?

There are fifteen women around me was born of my encounter with a group of women accompanied by writer Samira El Ayachi. During those projects, I always present everyone with the different adventures of an *Odyssée*, and ask them which passage ("the tempest", "the lullaby", "the canticle"...) they would like to call home, where they'd like to pitch their tent! Some of them tell their story then, or sing, or write... Sometimes it's just laughter, jokes, emotions... I always have a different guide for each *Odyssée*. Samira El Ayachi was one of them, and she also wrote a text for the show. The same principle also governed the second encounter, although the creative "protocols" were different, thanks to the Théâtre Gérard Philipe and secondary-school students from Saint-Denis. It also includes the words of another group, several undocumented immigrants (some of whom have since been regularised) I met in Dieppe and Paris, who told me about their lives, their aspirations, their destinies.

Are your *Odyssées* performances?

You can call them that, yes. Let's say I'm fully committed to them, that I live through this storm among the waves, this scream, all these adventures entitled "Vertigo", "Story", or "Casta Diva". I'm surrounded by these people, either alive or dead, like writer Aharon Appelfeld. The adventure called "Tempest" is representative of those shows: sometimes it overwhelms me, and sometimes I have the upper hand. There's a real struggle going on among those storms, those bolts of lightning... The sound apparatus we created for the Festival d'Avignon of course adds to this performative aspect; it includes the audience, its attention and its movement, physically invites them to listen, to welcome voices that can sometimes be heard by everyone and sometimes only by those close to the speakers. It's a way of creating a unique journey, among absence and presence, and probably among the living and the dead.

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Interview conducted by Marc Blanchet
and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach