

The Nonexistent

Reviews



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Y.L.G., Our Montreality, February 24, 2020

« [...] Yves Simard’s directing is an absolutely crucial ingredient of the play’s success. Against the background of a polished set design, Brullemans’ words have all the space needed to exist and allow audiences to imagine the crossing without graphically staging it. A simple aluminum panel serves as a wall, a landing, a camp, a door or even a swell that the actors move wherever their movements require it. The audience of some 300 teens attending the performance at Maison des Arts in Laval made it very clear that they highly appreciated every acrobatic feat during the performance. [...] »

Marie Fradette, Le Devoir, April 4, 2019

« [...] During their bows, the extras stand hand in hand. A large smile enlivens their eyes. They are glowing with pride. As if for one night they had transcended their story. [...] »

Michelle Chanonat, Jeu revue, January 2019

« [...] A highly topical play, both moving and impressive. [...] *The Nonexistent* is a magnificent journey that has audiences reconsidering the borders that separate people. [...] »

Marie-Josée Boucher, Info-culture.biz, November 2019

« [...] The creative team truly explored and took advantage of every aspect of the object: door, wall, bed, ocean and various obstacles. Its presence is both realistic and metaphorical. [...] With *The Nonexistent*, the duo of Yves Simard (ideator and director) and Pascal Brullemans (text) created a story that is very closely connected to current events: a story of survival, identity, resilience that is both upsetting and poignant. This production is not "just young-audience theatre", it is indispensable and essential theatre, regardless of one's age. [...]»

David Lefebvre, Mon(Theatre).qc.ca, November 2019

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The BIBLE URBAINE¹ webzine

Alice Côté-Dupuis

February 3, 2020

Even though we are in February, there still are a lot of first-rate theatre offers you can take advantage of this winter and spring in Montreal. In the hopes you can run out and grab tickets, collaborators Pierre-Alexandre Buisson and Alice Côté-Dupuis have come up with a list of the best to come in the 2019/20 season - unique productions, bold rereadings and promising satires. There is something for every one. All you need to do is to follow the guides!

How do you introduce children to the refugee concept? Pascal Brullemans' play provides food for thought by offering up the story of a young girl who escapes the commotion of a war zone as she leaves her homeland, goes it alone on the road and faces tons of danger. With Claude Lamothe's cello filling the space, the girl learns to yell out to the world that she genuinely exists. Under the direction of Yves Simard, the performers do not merely focus on the dramatic aspect of the work, but provide many acrobatics, combining a theatre performance and a circus-based production. (PAB)

¹ Urban Bible

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Our Montreality

Montreal culture, cooking and lifestyle discovery blog along with travel suggestions
By collaborator Y.L.G.

February 24, 2020

The Nonexistent: an identity-based trek over the seas to save your own life

From February 19 to 29, the Maison Théâtre theatre space presents The Nonexistent produced by DynamO Théâtre. The production geared for audiences between the ages of 10 and 17 offers up the story of a young girl who has to leave her homeland caught in a raging war. My 9-year-old niece came with me to attend the media premiere, which allowed us to have a discussion on the crucial issue.

The production

For each definition a young girl learns in the dictionary, she gets 5 cents from her mother: "The money you win will help make your dreams come true". Unfortunately confronted with war, the money will be used for safe passage to flee the country. Coming up short with the money for 2 passengers, the mother will send her daughter on alone. The girl will have to travel many kilometres in the desert and at sea only to end up in a camp. From one episode to the next, the girl comes across several people on her trek not ever knowing whom she could trust. There is just one single goal: to survive.

Acrobatics, multimedia and a cellist on stage

In addition, the 3 performers on stage are excellent acrobats. Using a metal sheet as a prop, they take the audience on a journey, sometimes at sea, sometimes at the immigration office and sometimes in a camp from which they are trying to escape. Several times, words pop up showing statistics on immigration. A useful tool to remind audiences that this is not just a play, but a reality that many children around the world go through. Lastly the play benefits from a rich and dramatic soundtrack performed on stage by a cellist. The musician becomes a character of sorts in the play.

Verdict

Lasting 55 minutes, the play seriously and perceptively tackles the issue of immigration. Every day, individuals whose name you will never know collapse in the silence of their own existence. Tomorrow again, a number of them will be taking to the road in the hopes of a better life. What do we do to help them? This play gives a voice to those who lose their identity, family and points of reference and those who risk their lives at every moment. A superb play to open a discussion with your teenager!

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Le Devoir

Marie Fradette

April 4, 2019

«The Nonexistent »: to exist beyond exile

Just like some 25 million children all over the planet, She lives in a war-torn environment. To protect and shield her daughter from a premature death, her hopeful mother leaves her to fate and loads her into a truck. So, at the age of 13, a young girl sets off looking for a better life but also some existence.

With the *Ceux qui n'existent pas* (*The Nonexistent*) original production featured at the Rencontre Théâtre Ados event, DynamO Théâtre has audiences going through the trials of a young migrant girl from the inside. Inside a truck speeding towards some unknown destination in a camp, a “dead end” as she mentions, in which refugees are crammed after crossing a sea that “spits them back like a lost projectile”, the girl (Andréanne Joubert) continues on a journey during which she meets people of all kinds. For instance, she crosses paths with two civil servants (Xavier Malo and Hugues Sarra-Bournet) who demand papers “to confirm that she exists”.

It is the high point of the performance, which helps to understand the sheer nonsense of state requirements. Then, come the two brothers –played with verve and spirit by Malo and Sarra-Bournet– with whom she will escape from the camp, and lastly the manipulator (Hugues Sarra-Bournet) who, with his nice-boy manners, reveals the malevolence perpetrated upon migrant children. Throughout the impossible trek, She hangs on to her dictionary and finds answers to her questions or even better, as she says, “finds words stronger than fear”.

In this production, DynamO Théâtre with its Theatre of Acrobatic Movement manages to amalgamate the impressive physical strength of actors able to move, tumble, horse around and handle the set as they deliver Pascal Brullemans’ powerful words without ever giving any impression of being tired. The acting of the

3 performers could not be as stirring were it not for the onstage presence of virtuoso cellist Claude Lamothe who, with every stroke of his bow, not only adds to the heart-rending and troubling atmosphere of the storyline and literally takes audiences into the very heart of reality.

Evoking the journey

Yves Simard's directing is an absolutely crucial ingredient of the play's success. Against the background of a polished set design, Brullemans' words have all the space needed to exist and allow audiences to imagine the crossing without graphically staging it. A simple aluminum panel serves as a wall, a landing, a camp, a door or even a swell that the actors move wherever their movements require it. The audience of some 300 teens attending the performance at Maison des Arts in Laval made it very clear that they highly appreciated every acrobatic feat during the performance.

With *Ceux qui n'existent pas* (*The Nonexistent*), Simard and Brullemans help recount the horrible reality without showing it graphically. Powerful yet subtle directing highlights the contrast between a lack of acknowledgement, a young girl's spirit and the characters who live, exist and fight for their survival. The play with its loads of hope will continue touring after the Rencontre Théâtre Ados event.

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Jeu revue

Michelle Chanonat

January, 2019

STAYING ALIVE

Wars, starvation, natural disasters, terrorism and poverty... All over the world, men, women and children are forced into exile, under very perilous conditions at times, in order to reach a country that is often not very welcoming. That is what is called a migratory crisis, dehumanizing even more this terrible reality. You casually glance over at the new feeds that provide unbearable images on a daily basis, including masses of orange lifejackets that have become useless, bodies floating on the sea or even children and babies that rescuers pass along to each other. Those are the ones who are still alive.

After *I on the sky* and *Inner Migrant*, *The Nonexistent* is the third original production on immigration developed by DynamO Théâtre. When Yves Simard, one of DynamO Théâtre's artistic directors, is asked why he is revisiting this theme, he simply answers that it is because it makes him cry and that we need to talk about it. The title of the play brings up the first African migratory wave, people crossing the ocean under terrible conditions. Many souls were lost at sea with no family to mourn and remember them. Today the Mediterranean has become a cemetery without tombstones: 33,000 people drowned between 1993 and 2017. These deaths are anonymous. They do not exist... have they ever?

Written by Pascal Brullemans, *The Nonexistent* tells the story of Paloma, a 12-year old girl forced to leave her homeland (probably because of a war) and to embark on a long trek during which she will be alone and have to fight to survive. The trip is akin to that of many refugees, punctuated by wonderful meetings and small betrayals. The text features a few brutal numbers: 25 million children living in war zones who lack care and schooling, 65 million people displaced because of conflicts, half of which are minors. Only 6% of migrants reach their destination.

NOBLE HEARTS!

At DynamO Théâtre, cultural mediation is not an empty phrase. For each of its original productions, the company works with several schools based in the Saint-Léonard or Park-Extension boroughs of Montreal that welcome kids from all over the world. For Yves Simard, the activities with the schoolchildren are essential. Around *The Nonexistent*, he imagined 2 workshops: one on voice and the other on the chorus.

In Pascal Brullemans' text, a chorus chants words, key words emphasizing the purpose. Words that are hard for children to say out loud: exile, war, bombing, attack, weapon, explosion. Words that bring to mind the terrible past of these children that come from Syria, Jordan, Nigeria and... Two school classes from Alphonse-Parent school in the north end of the city made up choruses during a performance of *The Nonexistent* presented at Tohu space in Montreal. Led by Julie and Natacha, 2 motivated and passionate teachers, the 11 and 12-year old kids worked on text, blocking and voice placement. Two workshops led by Andréanne Joubert who performs in the play and Yves Simard were held in the classroom. The children viewed a video of the play and then worked on the text with their teachers before the big day: a workshop at Tohu space followed by a dress rehearsal and a performance.

In the Tohu space, you can just sense the excitement. Several children are worried: "Monsieur Yves, will people see us?" When Yves nods, they shriek and wave their hands: "Ooh la la". This is their first bout of stage fright. Each student has a few words to say and everything needs to run perfectly. Microphone settings and movements are checked so that everything works as expected. The kids remain concentrated, no disruptions, no horsing around. They rehearse like real professionals, respecting each other, listening to the remarks from the director, fellow performers and the musician. They learn to look in each other's eyes to better work together and recognize the cues. You have to stand in your place, stay in the right position without moving, not miss the cues in the music on what the other does or says, on the lighting.

THE BIG NIGHT

There is full house at Tohu space. The audience is made up of families with children of all ages. A baby is babbling. As the performance begins, the kids are seated in the house. Then in front of the closed curtain, they step on stage in turn and move to the microphone: "My name is Karim, I was born in Algeria and my parents also. My name is Tania, I was born in Canada and my parents were born in Pakistan. My name is Batleb, I was born in Syria and my parents also. My name is Mohamed, I was born in Senegal and my parents also...". This parade of shadowed silhouettes marking a succession of first

names and names with accents from the world over is very poignant. These names are those of others who never reached the other side... and no longer exist.

“War, bombing, wall, weapons, escape, exile, migrant...” The 2 choruses, standing on either side of the stage, chant these words very befittingly. They make up a recitative, a prayer and sometimes an accusation. Every one of them or almost (as heard during the prologue) has left his or her homeland to escape war, misery, starvation or dictatorship. All these families were uprooted and chose exile to offer their children a better life. And at what price! These people should be welcomed as heroes and not like animals parked in enclosures unfit to house humans.

At the end of her trek, when Paloma calls her mother for the first time after leaving, she takes the phone that the musician hands over to her and cries out: “Mom, I am alive, alive!”

During their bows, the extras stand hand in hand. A large smile enlivens their eyes. They are glowing with pride. As if for one night they had transcended their story. Yes, they are alive! But how many others... I weep for those that do no longer exist.

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Info-culture.biz

Marie-Josée Boucher

November, 2019

Les Gros Becs young-audience venue presents DynamO Theatre's *The Nonexistent*.

By intertwining an epic narrative and acrobatic virtuosity, this production shows great sensitivity in tackling the issue of exile, refugees, borders and identity.

DynamO Theatre's moving play *The Nonexistent* performed at the young-audience venue

Presented at Les Gros Becs from November 18 to 24. By intertwining an epic narrative and acrobatic virtuosity, this production shows great sensitivity in tackling the issue of exile, refugees, borders and identity. A highly topical play, both moving and impressive.

HISTORY

Forced into exile to survive, a young migrant tells her story to the unfamiliar walls holding her captive. A long and hard road to escape prejudice as well as hope for a better life.

Will she regain the sense of security and dignity taken away from her?

The Nonexistent is a magnificent journey that has audiences reconsidering the borders that separate people. The theme offers food for thought, adding in poignant facts, voices of a children's chorus (students in a reception class at François-de-Laval school in Montreal), exciting acrobatics and the strong presence of cellist Claude Lamothe on stage. Such is what is in store for the audience.

THE PRODUCTION

Internationally-renowned and Montreal-based DynamO Théâtre produces and tours productions for young audiences. The company specializes in acrobatic movement as

well as physical theatre and clowning. Since it began, its 24 productions have reached more than 1.5 million individuals across 29 countries.

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Mon(Theatre)qc.ca

David Lefebvre

November, 2019

THE COMPLEX SUBJECT ET OF EXILE, CONVEYED POWERFULLY, COURAGEOUSLY AND DYNAMICALLY

By intertwining an epic narrative and acrobatic virtuosity, *The Nonexistent* offers up a theatrical experience that is both moving and impressive, along with cellist Claude Lamothe playing a major role for the movements. A magnificent journey that has audiences reconsidering the borders that separate people, those that have people losing their identity, those that are a source of conflict, those that you seek to cross at all costs and the ones you manage to break down.

Montreal-based DynamO Théâtre is about to celebrate its 40th anniversary. The company initiated an innovative form of theatre back in the 80s, that of acrobatic-movement theatre and clowning. *Mur-Mur (The Wall)* (1987) may have been the production that first displayed the full potential and scope of this creative approach. Several outstanding productions followed suit, including *me, me, me, me...*, *Misstart*, *Edgewalkers* and *What if Romeo & Juliet...*

Like the hit production *I on the sky* that drew on poetry to tackle the subject of exile (experienced by an adult), the new play titled *The Nonexistent* explores population displacement and the horrible conditions under which people have to leave everything and flee to survive. In this instance, the words of a young migrant girl, driven from home by bombings, tell the audience about the borders that have to be crossed. From trucks and through the desert, from beaches onto a shipwreck, from the camps into the streets, the ordeal describes a veritable trek, a dizzying descent into the daily life of a 13-year-old girl who has no family, no papers, not a penny to her name and who has to fend for herself to survive. This girl who used to flip through the pages of the dictionary to better understand the world ends up losing any sense of what is around her, of her own existence.

To make the reality of the situation even more concrete, the voices of a dozen children from all over the world occasionally spurt out synonyms of the words mentioned. Statistics are also projected on the backscreen wall; although the writing was completely unreadable on opening night, preventing the audience from accessing both relevant and overwhelming information about migration, mortality rates or survivors.

"With The Nonexistent, the duo of Yves Simard (ideator and director) and Pascal Brullemans (text) could not have come up with a more relevant narrative.

(...) This production is not "just young-audience theatre", it is indispensable, essential theatre, regardless of one's age.

Andréanne Joubert may not be as tall as her two male counterparts, yet she remains strong and proud providing exceptional stage presence. Gifted acrobats Hugues Sarra-Bournet and Mathieu Aumont display an energy that never seems to run out. They give life to the other characters the migrant girl meets along the way, be it the migrant brothers and their energetic games, the aid workers (featured in a wacky scene, which slightly contrasts with the rest of the play) and other outsiders.

The performance features only a few props. First off, there are pieces of grey clothing scattered across the stage that evoke remnants, dust, rocks and even figuratively disarray. Then, a large door frame (replaced by a metal sheet in the centre) made of aluminum or brushed metal shows up: it is handled, carried around spun, dropped, climbed on or hit. The creative team truly explored and took advantage of every aspect of the object: door, wall, bed, ocean and various obstacles. Its presence is both realistic and metaphorical. Although the succession of acrobatics-although some sequences are at times somewhat long-undeniably adds an extra layer to the storyline and even creates an image of what cannot be termed, the music of Claude Lamothe is what ties it all in, and powerfully so.

As the virtuoso musician enhances the action from behind his cello, as it is moved all over the space, he offers a rich and brimming musical framework that has the audience feel the tension in the scenes and conveys a whole range of emotions.

With *The Nonexistent*, the duo of Yves Simard (ideator and director) and Pascal Brullemans (text) created a story that is very closely connected to current events: a story of survival, identity, resilience that is both upsetting and poignant. This production is not "just young-audience theatre", it is indispensable and essential theatre, regardless of one's age.