

La Vie Brève
Théâtre^{de}
l'Aquarium

DEMI-VÉRONIQUE

Theatrical ballet inspired by Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 5



© Jean-Louis Fernandez

By and with **Jeanne Candel**, **Lionel Dray** and **Caroline Darchen**

Production-touring

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DEMI-VÉRONIQUE

Inspired by Gustav Mahler's Fifth Symphony

A collective creation by la vie brève

Written and performed by **Jeanne Candel**, **Caroline Darchen** and **Lionel Dray**

Set design **Lisa Navarro**

Stage management and technical direction at the creation **Vincent Lefèvre**

Lighting design **Maël Fabre**

Sound design **Julien Fezans**

Costumes **Pauline Kieffer**

Textile creations (organs) **Simona Grassano** assisted by **Sara Barthesaghi Gallo**

Ceramic production **Dora Stancel**

Stage direction's assistant **Carla Bouis**

Artistic collaboration **Laure Mathis**

Set building **Philippe Gauliard** and **Vincent Lefèvre**

Physical preparation **Shyne Tharappel Thankappan**

Stage management and technical direction **Vincent Perhirin**

Lighting operator **Samuel Kleinman**



Production

la vie brève - Théâtre de l'Aquarium

Coproduction

Comédie de Valence – Centre dramatique national Drôme-Ardèche,

Théâtre Garonne – Scène européenne à Toulouse,

Théâtre de Lorient – Centre dramatique national de Bretagne, Fondation Royaumont,

Théâtre de Nîmes – Scène conventionnée d'intérêt national – art et création, danse contemporaine

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and in the Théâtre du Soleil.

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ON TOUR

Creation February 2nd 2018, on tour again from June 2022

From 30th June to 3th July 2022 : Festival dei Due Mondi - Spoleto (Italy)

PREVIOUS TOUR

From February 2nd to 7 2018 : Comédie de Valence - CDN Drôme Ardèche
From February 14 to 22nd 2018 : Théâtre Garonne – scène européenne, Toulouse
April 19 and 20 2018 : Théâtre du Bois de l'Aune – Aix-en-Provence
April 29 and 30 2018 : Théâtre de Lorient
From November 6 to 17 2018 : C.I.C.T. Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris
April 1st and 2nd 2020 : Théâtre de Nîmes (COVID-19 cancellation)
April 14 2020 : L'Empreinte, scène nationale Brive-Tulle (COVID-19 cancellation)
April 29 and 30 2020 : Maison de la musique de Nanterre (COVID-19 cancellation)
May 14 and 15 2020 : Tandem scène nationale Arras-Douai (COVID-19 cancellation)
May 22nd to 24 2020 : La Criée, Théâtre national de Marseille (COVID-19 cancellation)



THE HOUSE -2012 - Black mirror © Karin Borghouts

« The house of my childhood burned down and I went in to take picture »

Karin Borghouts



© Jean-Louis Fernandez

“Il y a dans notre âme une mer intérieure, une effrayante et véritable *mare tenebrarum* où sévissent les étranges tempêtes de l’inarticulé et de l’inexprimable, et ce que nous parvenons à émettre en allume parfois quelque reflet d’étoile dans l’ébullition des vagues sombres. Je me sens attiré avant tout par les gestes inconscients de l’être, qui passent leurs mains lumineuses à travers les créneaux de cette enceinte d’artifice où nous sommes enfermés. Je voudrais étudier tout ce qui est informulé dans une existence, tout ce qui n’a pas d’expression dans la mort ou dans la vie, tout ce qui cherche une voix dans un cœur. Je voudrais me pencher sur l’instinct, en son sens de lumière, sur les pressentiments, sur les facultés et les notions inexplicables, négligées ou éteintes, sur les mobiles irraisonnés, sur les merveilles de la mort, sur les mystères du sommeil, où malgré la trop puissante influence des souvenirs diurnes, il nous est donné d’entrevoir, par moments, une lueur de l’être énigmatique, réel et primitif ; sur toutes les puissances inconnues de notre âme ; sur tous les moments où l’homme échappe à sa propre garde ; sur les secrets de l’enfance, si étrangement spiritualiste avec sa croyance au surnaturel, et si inquiétante avec ses rêves de terreur spontanée, comme si réellement nous venions d’une source d’épouvante. ”

Maurice Maeterlinck, *Confession de poète*,
in « Commentaire dramaturgique » de Claude Régy
pour *La Mort de Tintagiles*, Paris, Babel, 1997

THE TRAGIC HOME



Mahler's Fifth Symphony is the matrix of this creation.

What is striking, what captivates in the physical sense when one listens to Mahler's Fifth Symphony is this oscillation between a limitless humanity and a sweet irony.

It opens spaces within, it makes us go from a dark melancholy to a panic savagery, it carries around secret worlds which only ask to push through, to be born or reborn.

So, this is it: we put all of this music within us, into the deepest corners of our bodies and our hearts and we composed *DEMI-VÉRONIQUE*, an epic and musical performance in a burnt interior, a house destroyed by fire.

The demi-véronique in tauromachy is the name of a pass during which the torero stands his ground during the bull's charge and wait for the last second to dodge the blow, leading the bull with his cloak into a tight curve, which forces the animal to stop its charge. Just like the crotchet rest in music, this is a pause, a hanging from which anything can start again and transform itself.

There we have, among other things: a man looking for the cycle of metamorphosis, an invincible fish, a smoking kiss, temperamental ears, a melancholic fragmentation, a tragic home, a heart as heavy as the world, the tiny humiliating circus of human contradictions and a stubborn toast.

Jeanne Candel, Caroline Darchen, Lionel Dray,
June 2018

“Composing a symphony means, to me, building a new world with every available technical means.”

Gustav Mahler to the cellist Natalie Bauer-Lechner, 1896



Lionel Dray © Jean-Louis Fernandez

« Mahler’s tone has the flavor evoked by the Austrian dialect term *schmerckert* as applied to the Riesling grape. Its aroma, at once mordant and fugitive, assists spiritualization by its evanescence. This fluctuating, ambivalent tone in which, as in the popular *Freischütz*, love and grief are always apt to go hand in hand, technically presupposes a relation of major to minor that cannot be forced to a decision. (...) The disunity, the sorrow, pervading even the joyful impulse, cannot, however, be reduced, as in the cheap interpretation of Mahler, to the composer as psychological subject, but is a form of reaction to the experience of the real, an attitude toward reality comparable to gallows humor – which, incidentally, was not unknown to Mahler.

Theodor W. Adorno, Mahler, *A musical Physiognomy*,
Translated by Edmyrn Jephcott, The University of Chicago Press, 1992



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WHAT MUSIC LAYS IN US



Interview with Jeanne Candel

Your shows often have as a starting point a non-theatrical work from which you extract the material for your performances. For instance, I think of the painting the actors spend the first part of the *Goût du faux et autres chansons*'s to describe. In *Demi-Véronique*, you do this with Gustav Mahler's Fifth Symphony: the performance is like the symphony's long commentary from a distance. It's a bit as if, for you, theatre came from the outside, from foreign objects that are being forced on stage. One of the main consequences of this operation is the radical unmaking of classic dramaturgy, which rests on the text's linearity.

All these works feed my theatrical work. I draw many things from them, but this remains very intuitive. There are works that vibrate in a very singular manner, an organic one. These ones inspire me almost immediately. Other works tend to provoke me, as if they demanded a reaction, a defense, a commentary. Coming from exterior territories from theatre allows me to explore a more secret and buried field, a more unconscious one as well.

How did this exploration take place in *Demi-Véronique*?

The set has played an essential part in the process of creation. Our two starting points were: Mahler's Fifth Symphony and a bedroom (which became an interior) that had been burnt down. Images by Karin Borghouts made an impression on me. She photographed her childhood home after a fire that had destroyed everything. What is extraordinary in these images is that we can still feel the life under the soot and the ashes. It is a bit what I here in the Fifth: landscapes agitated by reminiscences, resurrections that transform themselves under the steps of the past. Mahler's music and the set inspired by Karin Borghouts' images were our playground during all the rehearsals.

In collaboration with Samuel Achache, you staged shows around Purcell (*The Deceitful Crocodile / Dido and Aeneas*) and Purcell (*Orfeo / Je suis mort en Arcadie*). *Demi-Véronique* is, except for the prologue, a non-speaking performance. It is the music itself that you stage, a "pure" music, instrumental only: it is one of the few symphonies by Mahler that do not include singing voices. There is an extraordinary challenge to this.

Each new performance must be a movement. I need to lose balance. Mahler's music accompanies me, and haunts me, since I am a teenager. There was also the desire to extend a performance that we had created with Lionel Dray in a deconsecrated church in Valence, *Dieu et sa maman*. It was a non-speaking show in which the church played the

main character. And it just happens that we were playing of Mahler's Kindertotenlieder. We were creating a world of sound, of invented words, of movements and architectural surroundings that was like a new theatrical language for us. We wanted to go back to this work by starting from music, by unraveling in another way all we had found while performing in this church.

How can we lay music inside of us?

This was our question. We started from the idea of an adults' tale but as soon as we produced narration, it became illustrative. We then started working on different fragments separated from each other, on persons who would never become characters, on figures who/which transform themselves. We deliberately chose to leave aside the topic of the meaning. Instead, we built a world. Our idea was to offer the public as much freedom as possible. Up to him to make his way through this fragmented world we present on stage.

Gustav Mahler has a specific position in Western music History, between the great symphonic tradition of the XIXth century, which he led a lot, and the splitting of the Second Viennese School. A music that was said to be haunted by its own death, but also a music that works and recomposes existing music, both cultivated and popular.

We put into his music all of our ghosts, all that haunts us, the memories, the works, the stories. This is how we created a dialogue with the music, by injecting pieces of memory, letting conscious and unconscious get mixed up. His very free relationship with the musical material, the traditional motifs and the quotations that go through him the never-ending breaks, all of this interested and inspired us. Listening to his symphonies we often feel as if it is coming from very far, like a memory that would work in a chaotic way, or like a flow that would open out and would have a buried past sprung up.

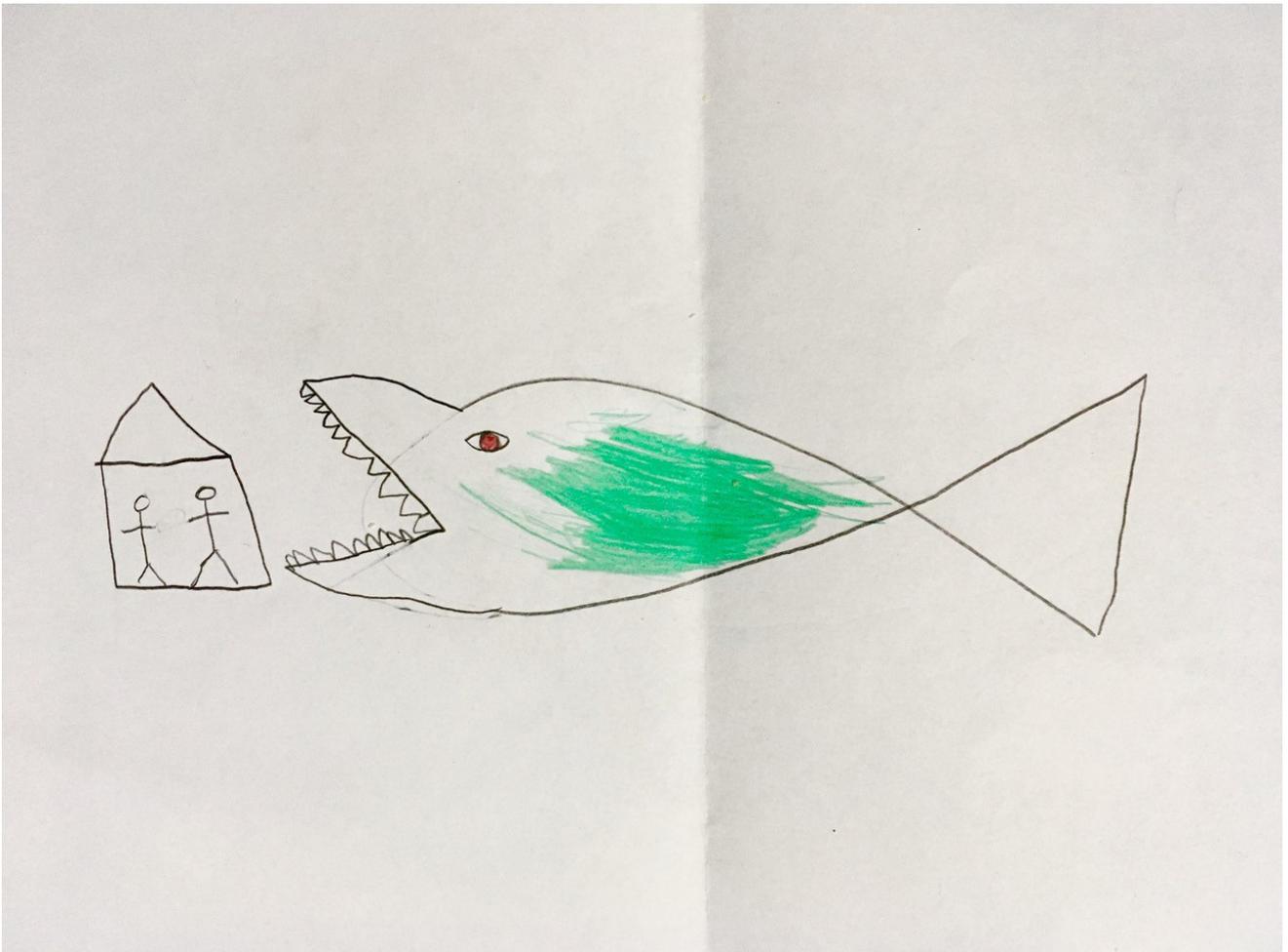
How did you choose to stage the musical structure of the symphony? Its rhythms, its themes, its harmonic breaks, its variations in sound intensity?

These elements, that falls under Mahler's musical language, gave us dynamic axes, lines for movement and action. We worked with and against the music at the same time. With when we would let us be carried by her, against when chose to intentionally ignore it. The material of the set became the echo of the musical material. We work it as Mahler works his material: we destroy, we pierce, we tear, we knock. It is a show about matter, on myth too. We outline some, especially the one/the myth of the invincible fish echoing the first movement, echoing Japanese myths of the destructive fish.

When we see the show, we feel like watching a silent and fragmented tale that would happen on a different level than the one of the music but that would sometimes be caught up and carried along by it. A work that creates a distance between music and theatre while multiplying chances.

It is a game with the music, a dialog we create in the present at every performance. It is like a ritual we repeat every night, we welcome the music in, we build something with it. One of the recurring questions was: who leads who? Is it the actor who leads the action or is it the music? The positions shift endlessly obviously. But there is always someone who leads and someone who lets himself be led. This is what Lionel Dray performs during the prologue of the show: the hidden figure of the leader. The conductor but also the alchemist who transforms matter. Matter, in the prologue, is the audience, what it does, what it says, their moving: Lionel performs again and repeats in his own way all he grasps. The stake of the show is there: what do we do with what is happening to us, with what the music lays in us?

Interview conducted by Bastien Gallet.



Sans titre © Paula Achache, 2018

« I have several villas upon the borders of [the Larian Lake], but there are two particularly in which as I take most delight, so they give me most employment. They are both situated like those a Baiæ: one of them stands upon a rock, and overlooks the lake; the other actually touches it. The first, supported, as it were by the lofty buskin, I call my tragic; the other, as resting upon a humble rock, my comic villa. (...)The former commands a wider, the latter enjoys a nearer view of the lake. One, by a gentle curve, embraces a little bay; the other, being built upon a greater height, forms two. Here you have a strait wall extending itself along the banks of the lake; there, a spacious terrace that falls by a gentle descent towards it. The former does not feel the force of the waves; the latter breaks them; from that you see the fishing-vessels; from this you may fish yourself, and throw your line out of your room, and almost from your bed, as from off a boat.

Pliny the Younger, *Letter to Romanus*,
1st century BC.



© Jean-Louis Fernandez

PRESS



A movie kiss that plays with the grandiloquence of the symphony, everyday objects which get twisted, plates changing into a hopscotch on the soil which covers a part of the stage, a woman who walks on them as if on tiptoe without sinking or breaking them, and a colored and swollen enormous beating hear, beating, beating: it is love thread we rewind after the performance, in this three-person ballet, where the actors keep on burying and digging up objects, as so many buried dreams.

— [Anne Diatkine](#), Libération - November 2018

A fascinating performance (...). The witch, the giant and the fairy with a bosom overflowing with generosity and mischiefs shape us a terrific musical theatre.

— [Jean-Pierre Thibaudat](#), Mediapart.fr – November 8, 2018

The theatre collective gets off the beaten track once again with this mimed epic tale in which the gestures and movements follow on and respond to one another. Lionel Dray, to whom falls a hilarious spoken prologue, scraps and wiggles with two partners, Jeanne Candel and Caroline Darchen, in a joyful and devastating delirium.

— [Pierre-René Serna](#), ConcertClassic.com – November 12, 2018

We swooned in front la vie brève's last show. We can find here all the craziness of the collective with an absolutely hilarious Lionel Dray.

— [Les5pièces.com](#) – November 9, 2018

la vie brève



The English word to “rehearse”, originated in Old French “rehersier”, a contraction between “re-” (again) and “herse” (to submit to the action of the harrow). To dig, to loosen, to plow.

Founded by Jeanne Candel in 2009 in Paris, la vie brève is an ensemble in which actors, musicians, stage directors, set designers, costume designers, technicians who get together regularly for periods of research and creation. If the initial nucleus originally met during their training course, la vie brève never stopped developing since its creation, it transforms itself, rephrases itself according to the necessities of the shows it proposes. Collective writing is what shapes la vie brève’s creations. The actors and/or musicians and singers are put at the center and are considered as creators and authors, not as just performers. This polyphonic writing breaks the boundaries of the functions and techniques of the people who make the performances of the company.

la vie brève is specifically interested in the relationship between music and theatre. The company makes “opera with the means of theatre” and put music on the stage: live (most of our performers are musicians, coming from jazz or classical training) or recorded, music is present in all of our shows. The main question asked during rehearsals is: how do music and theatre “weave the action” simultaneously; how do theatre and music play together, play with each other, oppose, merge and open a depth of field? This leads us to experiment with various processes of research and forms which are free from any dogma, because they are rooted in the experience of the stage and its crafting. Our creations are made of various materials that turn the boundaries of a performance flexible: pictorial, cinematographic, scientific or philosophical materials and references are so many acting bases we invoke while improvising or stage writing.

Since July 2019, la vie brève runs the Théâtre de l’Aquarium which becomes a house of creation for theatre and music intertwined. “Have people swing in each corner » is its leitmotiv. Associate artists, actors-musicians-singers, companies in residence work to have this resonator instrument vibrate. A resource center and a workshop dedicated to eco-conception contribute to the project. The public is invited twice a year, in winter and in spring to BRUIT – music and theatre festival, and from time to time to public events.

BIOGRAPHIES

JEANNE CANDEL

After studying literature, she joins the Centre National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique (CNSAD) where she works with Andrzej Seweryn, Joël Jouanneau, Muriel Mayette, Philippe Adrien, Mario Gonzalès and Arpàd Schilling. From 2006 to 2011, she regularly works with Arpàd Schilling with whom she creates four shows.

In 2009, she founds la vie brève and stages with the company: *Robert Plankett* (Artdanthé, 2010); *Le Crocodile trompeur / Didon et Enée*, co-stage directed with Samuel Achache, adapted from Purcell's opera and other materials (Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, 2013); *Le Goût du faux et autres chansons* (Festival d'Automne, 2014), *Orfeo*, co-stage directed with Samuel Achache, adapted from Monteverdi (Comédie de Valence, January 2017); *Demi-Véronique*, theatrical ballet inspired by Gustav Mahler's Fifth Symphony co-created and performed with Caroline Darchen and Lionel Dray (Comédie de Valence, February 2017); *Tarquin*, lyrical drama composed by Florent Hubert on a libretto by Aram Kebabijan (Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil – CDN, September 2019).

In February 2016, she is invited to stage *Bründibar* by Hans Krasa at the Opéra de Lyon. In the middle of the health crisis, she stages *Hippolyte et Aricie* by Jean-Philippe Rameau, conducted by Raphaël Pichon with the Ensemble Pygmalion (Opéra Comique, November 2020) and *The Rape of Lucretia* by Benjamin Britten, conducted by Léo Warynski (Opéra de Paris / Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, May 2021). She is preparing for April 2022, *La Nuit sera blanche* based on *A Gentle Creature* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky directed by Lionel González (Théâtre Gérard Philipe, Saint-Denis)

She has a passion for *in situ* creations, in which the driving force of the creation relies on extracting tales, unconscious stories from preexisting places. *In situ* creations: *Nous brûlons, une histoire cubiste*, traveling show in the recesses of the Villeréal village (July 2010); *Some kind of minster*, a creation on a tennis court (Villeréal 2012); *Dieu et sa maman*, a performance in a deconsecrated church in Valence, filled with canoes, created and performed with Lionel Dray (festival Ambivalences, May 2015); *TRAP*, a performance in the lower ground floor of the theatre of the Comédie de Valence and in the departmental archives of the city (May 2017).

Since July 2019, she manages alongside Marion Bois and Elaine Meric the Théâtre de l'Aquarium, in Paris' Cartoucherie, making it a home for creation dedicated to the intertwining of music and theatre.

CAROLINE DARCHEN

Caroline Darchen studied at the École du Studio d'Asnières with Jean-Louis Martin-Barbaz and the École Internationale de Théâtre de Jacques Lecoq. On stage, she performs in Jeanne Candel's shows (*Nous brûlons*, *Some kind of monster*, *Le Goût du faux et autres chansons*), Sylvain Creuzevault's (*Le Père tralalère*), in her own creations (*Entre chien et loup*, *Sagan*), Damien Mongin's (*A memoria perduda*), Antoine Cegarra's (*Léonce et Léna* by G. Büchner), Thomas Quillardet's (*Le Repas* by V. Novarina and *Villégiature* by Goldoni), Julie Deliquet's (*Amoprhe*, *La noce* by B. Brecht), Karine Tabet's (*Auschwitz et après... une connaissance inutile* by Charlotte Delbo, *Mort accidentelle d'un anarchiste* by Dario Fo), Lionel Gonzalez's (*Le Médecin malgré lui* by Molière, *Escorial* by Michel de Ghelderode, *Sganarelle ou le cocu imaginaire* by Molière), Laurent Rogero's (*Loki, trompeur des dieux*; *Héraclès, 12 travaux*). In the movies, she acts in *Les Bienheureux* directed by Damien Mongin and in *17 filles* by the Coulin's sisters.

LIONEL DRAY

Lionel Dray studied at the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique (2006-2009) and at the Conservatoire municipal du cinquième arrondissement in Paris with Bruno Wacrenier and Solène Fuimani. He worked on stage with Jeanne Candel (*Robert Plankett*, *Nous Brûlons*, *Dieu et sa Maman*), Sarah Le Picard (*Platonov*, *la nuit est belle*), Gabriel Dufay (*Push up* by Roland Schimmelpfennig), Sylvain Creuzevault (*Le Capital et son Singe*, *Angelus novus – Antifaust*), Yann Joël Collin (*Le Conte d'hiver* by Shakespeare), Pascal Collin (*Qu'est-ce qu'on joue?*), Frédéric Fresson (*Pessoa*), Damien Mongin (*Montlabour*), Adrien Lamande (*Le Café* by Rain Werner Fassbinder and *Prométhée*), Samuel Vittoz (*Réception* de Serge Valletti). In 2018 he creates, stages and performs in *Les Dimanches de monsieur Désert*, adapted by the work of Jean de la Ville de Mirmont. In 2021 he creates with Clémence Jeanguillaume and la vie brève *Ainsi la bagarre*.

JULIEN FEZANS

Julien Fezans shares his sound activities between radio and cinematographic documentary, sound designing for theatre and teaching at Nanterre University for the students in the 'stage directing and dramaturgy' Master's degree and the Ecole Régionale d'Acteurs in Cannes. His first documentary, directed by Nicolas Peltier, "*What a fuck am I doing on this battlefield*" was awarded the quality award of the CNC and the award for most innovating film at the Festival Vision du réel in Nyons in 2013. It has been shown in several festivals in the world (Doclisboa, Fid – Marseille, Etas généraux du film documentaire – Lussas, FAME – Gaîté Lyrique, Dok Leipzig, Flahertiana Film Festival...). For the theatre, he works alongside stage directors Clara Chabalière, Judith Depaule, Jacques Dor, Sarah Oppenheim. With Judith Depaule, Laurent Golon and Tanguy Nedelec, the manufacture, for the show *Les Siècles obscurs*, a sound machine object between installation and performance.

PAULINE KIEFFER

She creates costumes for theatre, opera, danse and current music.

She studied set designing at the Ecole Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs and has a degree from the Métiers d'Arts as "costumier réalisateur" (costume designer and maker). For the stage, she designed and made the costumes for Sylvain Creuzevault, Samuel Achache, Christophe Rauck, Frédéric Bélier-Garcia, Jeanne Candel, Chloé Dabert, Philippe Adrien, Catherine Javayolès, Ariana Mnouchkine, the Collectif Or Normes, among others, in places such as the Théâtre de l'Odéon, the Théâtre de la Colline, the Deutsches Schauspielhaus of Hamburg, the Théâtre du Soleil, the Théâtre du Quai, the Comédie de Valence, the Bouffes du Nord.

At the opera, she has created costumes for Jeanne Candel (Opéra de Lyon, Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Opéra de Paris), Sandrine Anglade (Opéra de Dijon); for dancing with company Sinequoanonart and the Kosovo National Ballet; for television (M6 series, Canal+ short programs), for music videos (Kidam Production) and for the stage (music groups, Chantier des Francofolies, Philharmonie de Paris).

In 2011, she was trained in the making and running of cultural projects at the Agence Européenne de Management Culturel (European Agency for cultural Management). She then founds the "Haleine Faïche" association and develops contemporary art projects, in connection with the news and politics.

LISA NAVARRO

Set designer, she lives and works in Paris. In 2007, she graduated in set designing at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. She collaborates with different theatrical performances, first as a student, with stage directors such as Jean-Paul Wenzel (*Les Bas-fonds* at the CNSAD), Sylvain Creuzevault (*Baal* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon), then as a set designer with Gabriel Dufay (*Push up* at the Théâtre Vidy in Lausanne), Samuel Vittoz (during the Festival of Villeréal), Benjamin Jungers at the Comédie Française for *L'Île des esclaves* by Marivaux.

In 2014 et 2016, she works with David Geselson on *En route Kaddish* and *Doreen*.

Since 2010, she regularly collaborates with la vie brève, signing the set design for *Robert Plankett*, *The Deceitful Crocodile / Dido and Aeneas*, *Le Goût du faux et autres chansons*, *Fugue* and *Orféo, je suis mort en Arcadie*.

She also works for the opera with Jean-Paul Scarpitta (*Salustia* – Opéra de Montpellier / Festival de Radio-France), Jean Lacornerie (*Roméo et Juliette* – Opéra de Lyon), Jeanne Candel (*Brundibàar* – Opéra National de Lyon, *Hippolyte et Aricie* by Rameau conducted by Raphaël Pichon – Opéra Comique, *The Rape of Lucretia* – Académie de l'Opéra de Paris), with Samuel Achache (*Hänsel, Gretel* – Opéra de Lyon) and Kevin Barz at the Opéra de Lorraine.