

THÉÂTRE



CONCEPTION ET MISE EN SCÈNE **MARCUS BORJA**

“A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, centre in the heart of chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings, hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment. There is always sonority in Ariadne’s thread. Or the song of Orpheus.” — Gilles Deleuze et Felix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus* (trans. by Brian Massumi)



Fifty actors. Thirty seven languages. No set. No costume. No lights. No stage. And an infinite number of possibilities.

Fifty voices make up the polyphonic and polyglot fresco that is Théâtre. This choral journey through time and space combines song, scores, words and improvisation. One travels through sounds and senses. The present is shared, as well as shattered into shards and sparks of different worlds and scenes that are blended or juxtaposed with each other... The audience is placed at the heart of our staging (in both the literal and the figurative sense) and plunged into darkness. Silence and listening are characters in our piece. The voices resonate and spread out into the prism of spaces.

The play first was at the Conservatoire National d'Art Dramatique (CNSAD), the French National Academy of Dramatic Arts in April 2015 in Paris.

Performances in 2016

- February 17th and 18th at the JT16 Festival (Jeune Théâtre National, Paris)
- March 4th and 5th at the Conservatoire National d'Art Dramatique (CNSAD, Paris)
- June 7th and 8th at the Festival Impatience at the Théâtre National de la Colline (Paris)

2017

- April 24th- 28th (twice a day) at the Théâtre de la Cité internationale, Paris



ACTIVE LISTENING & NOISY SILENCE

Director's note

“The basic thing in theatre is Silence.
Theatre can work without words,
but it cannot work without silence” — Heiner Muller.

The aim of my research is to both question and make manifest the similarities and complementarities between music and theatre using the actor-performer's voice. I want to explore and develop a common language for actors, singers, musicians and directors, as well as an extensive “tool-box” that would go way beyond traditional sound design for the stage.

I have been running “Poetics of the Voice and Sound Spaces”, a research laboratory since October 2014. I wished to create a choral space in which to experiment with a musical approach to the stage. We worked on the following three areas:

- the Listening (interior and exterior, individual and as a group), or the “attention” or “the awareness”. Fundamental for acting and for being solidly grounded in the present, it is also a guarantor of honest interaction with the material (song, text or sound) as well as with “the other” and with the space;
- the Voice, exploring the possibilities of the human voice through technique but also through freer forms. The composition or weaving of different sound narratives into each other, the musicality of the spoken word, vocal improvisations, polyphony, “sound effects” and body percussions all nourish a musical dramaturgy;
- the Space, an ever-changing spatial architecture created out of the sounds and music.

THE CORE OF THE DRAMA

The voice is at the heart of our piece. The tactile voice. The range of potentialities that the vocal apparatus can create, at once multiplied by numerous voices vocalising together, is a tangible and poetic material with which to make theatre. It is malleable, yielding, transformable and elastic. Whether it be the word spoken or sung, a voice declamatory or intimate or improvised, the act of screaming or laughing, classical or traditional or experimental music; all these forms make up the components of our artistic act.

It has already been accepted that the voice is concrete, its tangibility can be measured by tone, range and rhythm. Moreover, I am suggesting that the voice is a place; or different spaces that are deployed in time. “A place of absence, which within the voice becomes presence” or “the words that dress up the voice, but do not think or speak and only function to say nothing, churning out phonemes” (*Paul Zumthor, linguist and scholar of orality*). The aim is to imagine vocality as locality; the voice not only as a weaver of relationship but also as an architect of spaces, worlds and soundscapes. The voice is not only the bridge towards the other; but it can also have within itself changing journeys whose meaning goes way beyond literature.

A ‘geopoetics’ of voice. A layout of sonorous signs that are independent of all planned narrative. A delicate balance through time and space of fragments of sound, tones, rhythms, textures and harmonious sequencing that are the tools of the dramaturgy. A vocal melting pot that bubbles even without any, strictly speaking, musical notes. We must accept that which is not visible in our world, not as a worrying flaw, but as a catalyst for relating with and discovering the other. To think of sound as a river of autonomous meanings and feelings. — Marcus Borja



THÉÂTRE – CREATIVE TEAM

A play in Arabic, Armenian, Basque, Bassa, Batak, English, Filipino, Flemish, Fon, French, German, Ancient and Modern Greek, Guadeloupean Creole, Guarani, Haitian Creole, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Kabyle, Kikongo, Latin, Lingala, Mandarin, Persian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Sanskrit, Sotho, Spanish, Swedish, Tamul, Ukrainian, Xhosa, Yoruba and Zulu!

Director & Conductor
Marcus Borja

Based on an original idea by
Marcus Borja

Artistic collaboration
Tristan Rothhut

Assistant director
Raluca Vallois

Sound designer
Lucas Lelièvre

Photographers
Diego Brassani and Ye Tian

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“The sonorous (...) outweighs form. It does not dissolve it, but rather enlarges it; it gives it an amplitude, a density, and a vibration or an undulation whose outline never does anything but approach. The visual persists until its disappearance; the sonorous appears and fades away into its permanence.” — Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, (trans. by Charlotte Mandell)

CAST

(and alternating actors)

Jérôme Aubert
Astrid Bayiha
Roch Amedet Banzouzi
Sonia Belskaya
Marcus Borja
Augustin Bouchacourt
Lucie Brandsma
Sophie Canet
Antoine Cordier
Etienne Cottereau
Belén Cubilla
Mahshid Dastgheib
Alice Delagrave
Simon Dusigne
Rachelle Flores
Ayana Fuentes Uno
Michèle Frontil
François Gardeil
Haifa Gerles
Lucas Gonzalez
Louise Guillaume
Lola Gutierrez
Jean Hostache
Hypo
Magdalena Ioannidi
Miléna Kartowski-Aïach
Matilda Kime
Cyrille Laik

Malek Lamraoui
Francis Lavainne
Feng Liu
Yuanye Lu
Hounhouénou Joël Lokossou
Esther Marty Kouyaté
Laurence Masliah
Jean-Max Mayer
Romane Meutelet
Tatiana Mironov
Makeda Monnet
Rolando Octavio
Wilda Philippe
Ruchi Ranjan
Andrea Romano
Tristan Rothhut
Théo Salemhour
Charles Segard-Noirclère
Olivia Skoog
Aurore Soudieux
Tatiana Spivakova
Ye Tian
Isabelle Toros
Relebohile Tsoinyane
Raluca Vallois
Gabriel Washer
Sophie Zafari
Vahram Zaryan





Marcus Borja is an actor, director,
dramaturg, musician, professor and choirmaster.



Marcus Borja has a doctorate in Theatre Studies (Sorbonne Nouvelle/University of São Paulo) and the theatre doctorate SACRe (Paris Sciences et Lettres/French national Academy of Dramatic Arts). He teaches at the Ecole du Nord, at the Ecole Supérieure d'Art Dramatique (ESAD), at the Cours Florent, and the Ecole du Jeu and he is also Choirmaster at French National Academy of Dramatic Arts. He also teaches at the Sorbonne Nouvelle's Institut of Drama and leads numerous vocal and theatre workshops in France and abroad.

In Brazil, he worked as an actor and obtained a degree in literature from the University of Brasilia. In France he trained at the Ecole Jacques Lecoq, at the Ecole Supérieure d'Art Dramatique (ESAD) as studied directing at the French National Academy of Dramatic Arts. He also has a BA and Masters degree in Art History and Museology from the Ecole du Louvre. He works as a director and actor as well as a singer and musician. He has worked with Jacques Rebotier, Sophie Loucachevsky, Fausto Paravidino, Eric Ruf, Yoshi Oida, Meredith Monk, Christiane Jatahy, Antonio Araujo, Nada Strancar and many others.

In 2015 he was asked by the festival "Les Francophonies" (Limousin) to create a piece "Le Chant des Signes" "solo pour voix, tripes, piano et accordéon" based on Sony Labou Tansi's Poetry.

In 2015 he co-organised, at the Théâtre Gerard Phillipe de Saint Denis, an International Symposium on the Voice and the Stage (Pratiques de la voix sur scène: de l'apprentissage à la performance vocale) bringing together researchers, pedagogues and artists from the world over. He has published numerous articles and essays, chiefly "Du collectif au collaboratif: tendances et évolutions de l'écriture scénique au pluriel" ("From the Collectif to the Collaboratif: trends and changes in collective theatre writing") in the book "Les Collectifs dans les arts vivants depuis 1980", publisher. L'Entretemps, 2014; and "L'Écoute active et le silence parlant: la musicalité comme base pour la direction d'acteurs" ("Active Listening and Noisy Silence: Musicality as a Foundation for Directing Actors") published in "La Direction d'acteurs peut-elle s'apprendre?", Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2015.

His last play "Intranquillité", based on Fernando Pessoa's "The Book of Disquiet" was staged in April 2017 at the Théâtre de la Cité internationale. He is collaborating with Christiane Jatahy on her production of "La Règle du Jeu" ("The Rule of the Game") based on the Jean Renoir's film at Comédie-Française (February to June 2017). Next season he will be the musical director of Christophe Rauck's production of "As You Like It".

He is currently beginning new research on the Chorus in Ancient Greek Tragedy.

“I work ten times better with an actor who understands music. Actors must get used to music as soon as Drama School. They often appreciate it when music is used ‘for atmosphere’ but do not all understand that music is the best timekeeper on stage. If I were to use an analogy, I would say that acting is a duel with time and that music is his it’s best ally. It does not necessarily have to be heard, only to be felt.” — Vsevolod Meyerhold



TECHNICAL DETAILS

- Minimum Stage dimensions: 10 metres (width), 16 metres (height), 7 metres (length). No separation between the stage area and audience area. ONE space only, so to speak.
- 80 to 90 seats set in a circle or ellipse and looking inwards (in the round/central staging). The centre of this ellipse created by the seats must correspond with the centre of our “ stage” see photos page 1 and 2).
- Two dimmable spotlight (no other lighting needed)
- Total darkness in the space will be needed
- A well-tuned piano
- Digital console, minimum 6 in/4 out, similar to a Yamaha 01v96, and a CD player.
- Two hand-held wireless microphones and one wireless microphone
- One CD player
- A sound system fitting the space:
 - 4 speakers suspended minimum;
 - 2 at both ends “ behind” the audience lengthways
 - 2 Subwoofer at floor level at both ends (diagonally)
 - (speaker diagram available upon request).
- An attachment point on the ceiling, arches for arial silks.

The following conditions must apply:

 - must be able to support at least 400kg.
 - must be accessible so that one can attach the arial silks.
 - must be placed in the centre of our ellipse at least 2 m away from audience seats.
 - must be far enough away from anything that creates significant heat.

The company will provide the hardware necessary to attach the silks.



“Sound is the most subtle and most malleable element of the concrete world. Has it not provided, does it not still provide, the space of initial contact between the universe and intelligibility—for both humankind and the individual as they both develop?” — Paul Zumthor (trans. Katheryn Murphy-Judy)

When the lights go down on the stage in Marcus Borja's Theatre, where 80 audience members sit in a circle, a new world, entirely of sounds, opens up. It is a feeling not unlike that of being lost, or of being blind in an airport terminal where all of the conversations have been rearranged by a symphonist. Behind us, mere centimetres away from the back of my neck, but also hanging from the ceiling, the voices of 50 actors melt into the space in waves, waterfalls, gusts and surges. Juxtaposed or superimposed, with at times cinematographic close-ups or zoom effects, shreds of song and of dialogue emerge in Armenian, Hebrew, Batak, English, Portuguese, Fon or Tamul: 34 languages from all over the world galloping in the darkness. An aberrant sensory experience. – **Liberation**, Eve Bauvallet, May 2017

The Greek theatron, originally, is the place where one sees. In choosing to create his show purely with sound, Marcus Borja limits the very definition, forcing the audience and the actors into a much more internal place far from the ordinary or even the extraordinary. The tale has been destroyed, and theatre has been stripped of all its artifice and vanity. Plunged into darkness, both actors and audience slowly learn to trust enough to begin perceiving different frequencies and vibrations. Music accompanies the emotions without forcing them. Sounds and harmonies counter each other, words become just one more piece of material, along with instruments, songs, cries or noises. Languages clash and respond to each other. The sounds of this Theatre carried by voices young, old, deep or high allows us to listen to infinite world, beautiful in its diversity and carried by our imagination only. – **Theatrorama**, Dany Toubiana, April 2017

The songs that gripped us were far from 'horizontal': the deeper voices and the higher ones swirled around us in a whirlwind, from the souls of our feet to the top of our skulls. One comes out delighted and amazed, with one's hearing fine-tuned. And I ask myself secretly: what kind of social upheaval would it take for this piece of theatre to be seen by the troubled youth kicking stones in council estates? Or for not so bright prison guards in overpopulated prisons and their inmates? All sat next to each other in the dark. What to do so that this piece of theatre that heals the atrophy of the senses may be shown everywhere? – **Cassandre/Horschamps**, Colline Merlo, March 2016

Thank you for this magnificent nocturnal oratorio, these Greek Elysian Fields. I loved it and was often deeply moved. The mastery with which Marcus Borja sails his ship over a dark and moving Styx is impressive. The nudity, the composition in the dark, the lack of curtain call from the unforgettable phantom-like actors is all highly intelligent. – **Eric Ruf**, director of the Comédie Française.

The young director, Marcus Borja has sat his audience in a circle surrounded by fifty actors who are “voices of the night”. Voices of the world, of different nations, voices that resonate from afar and that are also deeply intimate, “cries and whispers”. Thanks to this nocturnal polyphony, the space becomes plastic: the proximity as well as the distance with the other, come together, alternate, fascinate and worry us. At the end of this sonorous journey, the faces of the choir that encircle us naked light up for a few seconds. In fact this is a darkness that ‘reveals’. Both us and them. – **Georges Banu**, theatre theorist and researcher

“Theatre” is a piece that will stay with me for a long time. It speaks of our humanity. The audience’s intimacy becomes intertwined with that of the actors, and together they open a shared space, as if “lit”. Through this theatrical experience, Marcus Borja manages to create a Utopia in which we all live together despite our differences. – **Marc Sussi**, director of the Jeune Théâtre National

As an audience member I do not particularly appreciate nudity, or darkness or even singing. However I was completely taken with this piece, which was undeniably, and somehow mysteriously, theatre. Theatre that you see through a microscope because it is devoid of so many structural elements such as vision, situation or interpretation. A voice emerges, a very profound voice but that is also playful; which you can only want to follow and grasp. Marcus Borja is without a doubt a “teacher-artist-researcher”. Being able to balance out these three things, allowing them to dialogue and bounce off each other is a very special thing to be. – **Claire Lasne-Darceuil**, theatre director and director of the French National Academy of Drama (Conservatoire National Supérieur d’Art Dramatique)

One rarely lives through a theatrical experience as surprising as Marcus Borja's "Théâtre". As there is great relish in the "surprise" effect, I shall limit my words. Just know that the work of these fifty invisible actors turns upside down our conceptions of vision and listening by enchanting our senses. That we are wrapped up by a new night of multiple sounds. And that we learn that theatre is in fact is not what we thought it was. – **Gilles Costaz**, theatre critic

European theatre, traditionally, uses language to provide information about the narrative or the author's philosophy. In the thirties, Antonin Artaud broke this tradition, and instead of exchanging intellectual information used the voice to try and capture the musicality and energies of humans. From the seventies onwards, Peter Brook started working with the International Research Centre and using Ancient Greek, Persian or Latin. The aim of this was not meaning or information but an attempt to capture the specific energy behind each language. Forty years later, Marcus Borja has picked up this work again. The group uses many different languages, not to transmit meaning but to piece together a symphony of words. We perceive not so much humanity's thoughts, but the sheer beauty of it. The audience discovers the existence of men and women through the material that is the voice, not through logic. A dream. – **Yoshi Oida**, actor, writer and director

Breath, lives, loves... silences. I have received many gifts from the theatre over the years, but I think what you gave me tonight has surpassed them all. One has to listen, hear and guess the invisible. We are carried away by the voices into our very depths. That is the fundamental role of the theatre, although we so often forget it. It did me, my heart and my soul, a lot of good. – **Lise Visinant**, Actress

Bravo for this very beautiful and reassuring piece in such troubled times. It's ballsy and it's art, real ART! – **Sophie Loucachevsky**, director

“Théâtre” begins by testing your relationship with the unknown. It places the audience in a vulnerable position. Accepting this is already a start in removing one’s habitual “clutches”. The darkness that envelops one’s body also undresses something much more intimate : the terrestrial power of sonority and voice timbre. It is an unbelievable experience of “ Art Brut”, rich in incandescent “naked” voices. – **Edouard Fouré Caul-Futy**, Ethnomusicologist, artistic delegate of the Orchestre de Paris

This play has been one of the most sensorially beautiful things I have ever experienced. I travelled into my own memories as well as to places that I have never been to. In a utopia of understanding and communion, I witnessed an honest sample of humanity. I wondered if this what what was left after life, or before life has even begun. Infra-human, post-human, pre-life or whichever complex term we may choose. I felt nostalgic for the unknown, as if this play was the bridge between our own experience and unexplored horizons, of joys to come and beauty yet to be discovered.

A nostalgia of anticipation. I was moved to tears by small solitudes, reassured by the joyful strength of the choir, and travelled from playful theatricality to savage wilderness. Such beauty, such joy, such emotion, such virtuosity and such simplicity.

A surge.

A new horizon.

Thank you thank you thank you.

– **Alexis Cauvin**, theatre researcher.

“Incoherent and disjointed fragments, however with associations, like dreams. Perfectly harmonious poems with perfect words; without logic or coherence, with just a few stanzas that are intelligible. These must be like shards of the most diverse things. True poetry can only have at best a larger allegorical meaning and produce, much like music, an indirect effect.” — Novalis





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