

Company Graine de Vie

present

Fishesstail

Adapted from *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen

Direction: Ilka Schönbein

Interpretation and puppets manipulation: Laurie Cannac

Puppets: Ilka Schönbein and Laurie Cannac



Photo : Marinette Delanné

Creation at the Grand Parquet

Production: Company Graine de Vie and Grand Parquet. Co-productions: Théâtre de L'Espace, Scène Nationale de Besançon, Pôle culture - Agglomération Sud Pays Basque, Le Strapontin, scène des arts de la parole, de Pont Scorff, City council of Billom, Théâtre de Villeneuve lès Maguelone, Scène Conventiionnée en Languedoc-Roussillon, Centre Culturel Pablo Picasso, City of Copenhagen (Cultural Department) and the Reflexion Theatre of Aarhus in Denmark. Support: CREAM of Dives sur mer (Centre Régional des Arts de la Marionnette de Basse-Normandie), City of Paris, DRAC Ile de France, Région Ile de France, City Council of Paris 18th district Région Franche Comté, Department Council of Doubs and City of Besançon.

KSAMKA

Production and contact : Karinne Méraud Avril
Tél. +33 (0)5 53 29 47 42 - Mobil +33 (0)6 11 71 57 06
kmeraud@sfr.fr - www.ksamka.com

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Lighting design: Sébastien Choriol

Sound creation: François Olivier

Musical creation: Alexandra Lupidi

Director’s assistant: Britta Arste

With participation of Romuald Collinet and Jo Smith

On the high seas, water is clearer than the purest crystal. But it ‘s so deep that no anchor could reach the bottom. Aimlessly a really whimsical puppeteer starts for adventure and boards a frail barque made of wicker and paper. She dives into the most depths of the oceans, where no man yet has ever set foot, and reaches the far end of legends and myths. Here was the Andersen’s Little Mermaid waiting for her. Then she’s transformed: alternatively mermaid, witch, prince or even several characters at the same time, she takes us with her in the maze of love!

In this new production of Ilka Schönbein and Laurie Cannac working together, we can recognize the ingredients that had so much appealed to us in “Wolfed Down”. The starting point is a really beautiful fairy tale, not toned-down at all in its content. It’s the story of a young mermaid ready for anything to win her Prince and she will be driven by her own determination through the elements: the amniotic universe of the bottom of waters, the fire of passion, the hard and dry earth, with the hope to fly up finally like an air bubble. Dual characters, mirrors effects, amphibian bodies and other metamorphoses and divided selves, here you will discover surprising forms of sensitive puppets, all on the music by Alexandra Lupini, who had also written the one of “The Old Lady and the Beast”.

For general audience, suitable for children 8 years old and up

The story recalls the ingenuous love of a child, capable of giving anything, of daring anything, of transforming herself totally, with the hope to be accepted by the other. But no matter how much our naïve mermaid makes use of her cleverness, no matter how many risks she runs, never will the prince recognize her as the woman he could love.

Then, after all her hopes, after all her fits of enthusiasm, anger and desire for revenge took hold of her. But she couldn’t yield to it, and she threw her knife into the sea, which became all red.

And like a naïve innocence breaking against the harshness of world, like the wave against the rock, she will become foam, tear in the ocean.

But her innocence and love, that have carried her so far, will rescue her at the end in a salutary fervour.

On an other level, the bottom of oceans represents the feminine subconscious in its young age, trying to emerge at the surface and to tame its various faces, in order to open up to the world. And here more than in many other traditional tales, it's the precarious equilibrium of feminine and masculine entities - looking for each other, racing and never getting on totally - which is at stake.

On an unadorned, plainly designed stage - a boat, lost in the waves - we'll give life to the mythical figure of the Mermaid, half freakish, half seductive, who struggles with the conflictive emotions of love, between breathes of oxygen and abyssal dives, transforms the world around her, transforms herself, for better and for worse.

Laurie Cannac

The story:

The Little Mermaid is a strange child, secretive and dreamy, who waits impatiently for the day she will be fifteen: then she will be able to discover the "world in high". She doesn't know that on this day her life is about to change dramatically.

From that moment, captivated by the charm of a prince she has rescued from drowning in a shipwreck, she will stop at nothing to win his love.

With the help of magic and evil forces of the sea, she will renounce to her own identity - her fishtail - in order to look like the image she supposes the prince is expecting from her. But the spell has a cost: She will feel knives sinking into her flesh at every step and will die, if the prince turns her away!

Once in the castle, she dances to charm the prince, she dances love, she dances the depths of her soul, she dances to communicate, she dances to exist, she dances enough to graze her feet. But the prince marries another girl and even believes the little mermaid delighted about his new happiness! Then the spell must be carried out, and the mermaid, transformed into foam, must vanish at first light.

As a last resort, she has a magic knife that she should stab through the heart of the prince if she would regain her original shape and her life. But she won't kill her love. She throws the knife away and throws herself into the ocean, into her death.

The story would have been just an inexorable tragedy, hadn't Andersen at the last minute rescued his heroine from despair and death: She takes flight at the end towards absolute and universal love.

In the swirling of the last dance, "drifting like the swan when hunted down", while she is hardly anything more but tears and dissolved foam, she won't give up. She has thrown away the knife of disillusion. She opens a new door, on the way of a life full of love.

Direction and puppets design: Ilka Schönbein

Born in Darmstadt, Ilka learned eurythmic dance of Rudolph Steiner, who used to advocate union of soul and movement rather than effort and technique. Then she studied in Stuttgart with puppeteer Albrecht Roser. Once she completed her education, she joined companies on tour for around 10 years and eventually created her own company and took the roads with her own shows.

Metamorphoses was conceived as a street show, aiming all kinds of audiences. Then, without renouncing the street, Ilka agreed to adapt for stage her initial show. She added a second character, first played by her German technician Thomas Berg, then by a French actor, Alexandre Haslé, and finally by Mô Bunte, a German puppeteer.

Each time Ilka created a new version, and with her last partner, she even did two. Masks and costumes change, certain scenes and characters vanish, others appear instead. There were successively five versions of *Metamorphoses*, later: *Metamorphoses of Metamorphoses*, all of them moving from caustic humour, so typical of Central Europe, to an intensely black vision of the world, emphasizing alternatively puppet play, mime and dance, resulting in a general balance of all means of expression. As long as she puts on a play, Ilka never considers it as perfect: She lives out it, and they live with her.

King Frog was for her an opportunity to come back to young audience. The show was created in may 1998, coproduced by the Théâtre d'Ivry- Antoine Vitez, in close cooperation with the Conseil Général du Val de Marne, the Montpellier National Theatre, the festival Mimos of Périgueux and the Théâtre National des Jeunes Spectateurs of Montreuil. There have been two versions of *King Frog*, the first one with Alexandre Haslé, the second one with Mô Bunte.

In 2005, Ilka put it back on stage under the title *King Frog III* with the actress Simone Decloedt and Britta Arste, the accordion player Rudi Meier and the countertenor Christian Hilg, then later with the countertenor Philipp Kais.

Winter Journey: Creation in autumn 2003 at the Théâtre Gérard Philippe of Frouard (Lorraine) in cooperation with the ABC of Bar-Le-Duc, the Théâtre Romain Rolland of Villejuif, the Prisme of Saint Quentin-en-Yvelines and the Conseil Général du Val de Marne. The play was showed at the World Puppet Festival of Charleville-Mézières, at the Manufacture of Nancy, at the Nouveau Théâtre of Angers CDN, at the Théâtre de la Commune d'Aubervilliers and at many other theatres. The play draws its inspiration from Frantz Schubert and Wilhelm Müller's work, and was directed by Ute Hallaschka and Ilka Schönbein, who also created masks and costumes and played the leading role. Christian Hilg interprets Schubert's *lieder* and Rudi Meier has magnificently transposed the original work for accordion. Simone Decloedt, cast as a harpy, assist him. French text was recorded - and then played on stage - successively by the actresses Paule d'Héria and Marie-Laure Crochant.

In spite of the immediate great success of the play, Ilka decided, two weeks after the opening night, to get again down to work. She theatricalised Christian Hilg's interpretation (who took very well his new part upon himself) and added interludes evoking at the same time the endless journey of the character and the atmosphere of funfair.

In 2005, with the help of the American artist Mary Sharp, Ilka involved in her play the actress Nathalie Pagnac who accompanied this long lyrical song and showed how these sorrow and perdition feelings, could be expressed by a body and a voice.

My Own Flesh and Blood was created in august 2006 at the Théâtre du Grand Parquet, in Paris, thanks to the *Métamorphoses Singulières* and ARCADY, with the support of the City of Paris, DRAC Ile de France and the Paris 18th district city council.

The play is an adaptation from a novel by Aglaja Veteranyi, *Why the Child was Cooking in Polenta*, a desperate and wonderfully poetical narration by a little girl under the big top, which evokes alternately mother and daughter relations, grief of loss, solitude, frenzy, adversity, nomadism and exile...

Ilka worked on drama with Mary Sharp and entrusted to Nathalie Pagnac the interpretation of French text. The world premiere was in Charleville-Mézières Puppet Festival. In order to intensify the funfair and circus ambience, Ilka added a third actress, Bénédicte Holvoete, for a couple of contributions in Italian. There are now four versions available, in French, Spanish, English and German. The show has been already on tour in Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and soon will go to Netherland and Germany.

In 2008, she meets Laurie Cannac on the occasion of her new creation and will, in 2009, direct **Wolfed Down**, fruit of their first work together. In 2009 as well, she creates **The Old Lady and the Beast** at the

Theatre of Vidy and at the Grand Parquet, accompanied by Alexandra Lupidi, who created the music, essential part of this show. Since the creation, she's on tour all around France and Europe.

Interpretation, puppets design and manipulation: Laurie Cannac

First trained in the art of drama, especially at the Théâtre-Ecole du Passage, directed by Nils Arestrup and Alexandre Del Perugia, she learned puppet theatre just playing in the street. In 1997 she founded her Company Graine de Vie (Live seed) and produced her first "official" show: *L'Homme de la Manche* (The Man of La Mancha), an highly personal adaptation of *Don Quixote*, directed by Alexandre Picard. Very quickly the show was discovered by the Théâtre d la Marionnette à Paris. The tale of Dulcinea, travelling from town to town and trying to bring back to life the remains of Don Quixote, became then a reality for Laurie, until today. Again in 2006 she decided to work on the play, with Romuald Collinet and Estelle Charlier, and it's still on tour. Touring gives her meeting and learning opportunities. So she worked as a puppeteer in companies as Käfig, the Pudding Théâtre, the Chercheurs d'air, La Pendue... From puppets on a city scale to miniature strings marionettes, from directing manipulation for international Hip Hop dancers, to founding a street theatre radio during Ideklic Festival, from problems with glue by monsoon weather in Korea, to the discovery of possibilities of aleatory movement in manipulation, her curiosity has never had so much fun! In 2004, she created *Petits Rêves Faits Main* (little hand-made dreams), and found in the spirit of puppet manipulation an ode to destitution. For years she travelled with her suitcase and little puppet theatre, as far as Iran, where she performed in *hedjab* and coat de rigueur! Then, in 2007, during Momix, Ilka Schönbein discovered her, while acting in this play. A clown-puppeteer was born! First meeting for *Wolfed Down!* in 2009. This show, their first work together, has already been performed more than 300 times.

Sébastien Choriol: Lighting design

Trained as a sound and multimedia technician at the IERNC of Montreuil (Research Institute on New Communication), he started in 2003 his career of lighting designer and master electrician and worked with various companies of theatre, puppet theatre and musical. He's both lighting and stage designer (European Stage, Ilka Schönbein) . He also works for festivals, like Méli'môme and the World Puppet Theatre Festival. He's the stage manager of Jonglissimo, Musique en Omois, the Festival Croix Rouge. He 's as well in charge of the floodlighting of various monument

François Olivier: Sound creation

Graduated as a video director - sound option - at the ESRA (Audiovisual Production Institute, first year, direction Robert CAPLAIN), François Olivier made soundtracks for the radio and diaporamas for France Culture, Air France, Credit Mutuel, FNSAGA and the Musée de l'ardoise.

He did as well soundtracks for the theatre: *Le Misanthrope*, by the Company Acte 2, for Beirut and Lebanon, *La Novice et la Vertu* by Jean-Louis BAUER, directed by Antoine CAMPO, *La Diva d'Auschwitz* by Jean-Louis BAUER, directed by Antoine CAMPO, *Bobby Fisher vit à Pasadena* by Lars NOREN, directed by Claude BAQUE, *Anatole* by Arthur SCHNITZLER, with Zabou BREITMAN and Carlo BRANDT, *Entre courir et voler, il n'y a qu'un pas, Papa*, written and played by Jacques GAMBLIN, *Eaux Dormantes*, by Lars NOREN, directed by Claude BAQUE, *Il était trois fois*, by Zazie HAYOUN, *Wolfed Down*, French and English versions by Ilka SCHÖNBEIN/Laurie CANNAC, *La Dame de la Mer*, by IBSEN, with Camille and Didier FLAMAND (sound engineer).

He worked in studio (sound design and recording), mixed video films for institutional and multimedia structures, recorded and mixed original pieces of music and mixed soundtracks for Studio K, a video company specialized in museography. He fitted with PA an open air Indian music festival. He made sound recording for classical music. He also works as a sound engineer on publicity events or TV sets and chief sound operator on video shoots

Alexandra Lupidi : Musical creation

Alexandra Lupidi came to light quite early in the registers of jazz, classical music and traditional from Italy and Spain. She's played in various jazz bands, from duos to big bands, with a preference for vocal improvisation (Sunset, Bilboquet, Café Universel...). She took a lyrical training with **Christiane Eda-Pierre**, then with **Christophe Le Hazif** and began on stage in a large number of opera chorus (Chatelet, Opera-Comique, Opera of Montpellier, Rennes, Angers). As a soloist, she played *the Child* in *Der Jasager* by Kurt Weil' directed by **Ludovic Lagarde**, and *Candelas* in *L'Amour Sorcier*, by Manuel de Falla, in *flamenco* version, at the operas of Rouen and Evreux, conducting **Laurence Equilbey**... When joining the quartet *a capella* **Sanacore**, which was playing all around France and abroad, **Alexandra Lupidi** took again with her Italian origins, in the field of traditional song and contemporary productions. She is in the vocal quartet *Les Lunettes* (director **Ludovic Montet**) which improvises on **Bach, Juan del Encina, Schütz**... At the same time, she composes, sings and plays in works for theatre and dance, with the companies **Arène-Théâtre, Courant d'air, Balançoire, Théâtre Itinérant de la Cabane, Retouramont**... As well as part of the group **Alessandra Lupidi** which she created with her accomplice **Frank Gervais**. As choirmaster, she conducted the choir **Pablo Neruda** in Bagnolet. Her work in *The Old Lady and the Beast*, with **Ilka Schönbein**, travels through all her vocal and musical colours.

The Company Graine de Vie

In 1997, Laurie CANNAC, a soloist puppeteer, founded The Company Graine de Vie, in Besançon, in order to support a form of puppet theatre intended for all kinds of audiences, but setting high standards. According to this ambition, the time devoted to creation was always quite long and the research periods multiple. The recent collaboration with Ilka SCHÖNBEIN, a world famous puppeteer, was an occasion for Laurie to go much deeper into her work.

The productions of the Company favour emotion and multi-level interpretation. Intended for street or theatre, the creations are technically eclectic, but they all have three features in common: the research on connexions between the puppet and the actor's body, the exploration of its animist power and a judicious combination of humour and poetry.

In 2009, *Wolfed Down!* was a significant and vivid conjunction of our approach with the young audience, because the different classes of age, the formula "general audience from..." gave suddenly to our research on multi-level interpretation its full meaning. And above that, Laurie CANNAC is very glad to play for such a spontaneous audience and marvels at its sensitivity and sharpness. The meetings with young spectators, after performance, feed her work in a quite logic way, considering the essence of puppet theatre: to address the adult-to be contained in the child and address the dormant child within the adult.

Main shows:

- *The Man of La Mancha* (1998) directed by Alexandre PICARD, inspired by Cervantes' Don Quixote - For adults - Harness puppets, glove puppets and actors - For bars and other friendly meeting places - 90 performances in France and abroad.

- *Little Handmade Dreams* (2004) directed by Laurie CANNAC, based on the question: "Is frugality a subversive notion?" - Hand puppets and actors - General audience - Street or theatre - 90 performances in France and abroad.

- *Wolfed Down!* (2009) directed by Ilka SCHÖNBEIN, inspired by *The Red Riding Hood* by Grimm, Perrault, traditional sources - Body puppets and clownish play - General audience from 8 - For theatre - More than 300 performances in France and abroad.

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Production déléguée et contact : Karinne Méraud Avril
Tél. +33 (0)5 53 29 47 42 - Portable +33 (0)6 11 71 57 06
kmeraud@sfr.fr - www.ksamka.com