



Monsieur
Somebody



www.theatraverse.com

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Monsieur Somebody

Theatraverse presents “*Monsieur Somebody*”, a bilingual (English/French) piece of absurd theatre, written by Northern Ireland’s Seamus Collins. This is a story so false it could almost be true.

Onstage, three characters incarcerated, incarnated by Lecoq-trained actors, recount their biggest cons. Fiction and reality become one as they fantasise about their transgressions.

What’s the biggest lie you’ve ever told? The biggest secret you’ve ever kept? Claude the fraud is a deliciously despicable Frenchman that we love to hate, hate to love... But who could possibly love Claude?
An absurdly comic tale of betrayal, barbiturates and a brew.

Is this his real life? Is this just treachery? Caught in a web of lies, no escape from reality.

At a time when political and humanitarian crises have become near-normal everyday horrors, Claude’s story is one of just how far a Nobody will go to become a Somebody.

One hour of dark comedy for audiences aged 12+

“One of the most important things I had learnt in Auschwitz was that one must always avoid being a nobody. All roads are closed to a person who appears useless; all are open to a person who has a function, even the most fatuous.”
Primo Levi, *The Truce*

Director’s note

“It’s better to laugh than to cry,” we frequently remind ourselves. Claude makes us laugh until we cry, cry until we laugh, and leaves us with a truly unpleasant feeling in the pit of our stomachs.

Claude creates a forced complicity with the audience; one cannot resist the draw of his repulsive charm. Claude breaks the fourth wall, sometimes with a mere glance. He constantly reminds us that he is playing a role. With false sincerity, he confesses his crimes. His contradictions and nasty tricks compel the audience to bear witness to unthinkable deeds.

What makes us so different from Claude? Or from his victims? And who do we resemble the most? In the end, is it better to be the despicable swine or the tragic dupe?

Through his bilingual writing, Collins, for a second time, presents us with word play that allows complicity with certain characters and forces a distance from, and between, others. Collins may be a linguistic master, but Claude certainly is not... Nevertheless, Claude’s boss Frank often falls prey to his employee’s trickery, and even Frank’s own wife, Madeleine, joins forces with Claude, an accomplice in his manipulation of language.

We relate to Claude, who forces his way into a society in which he has no real place. The linguistic mask is one that is useful to both actor and character. The set reflects the light and dark tone of the whole play, stark contrasts are literal and figurative.

« Nous sommes faits pour tout comprendre, nous ne comprenons que très peu, et nous ne nous comprenons pas ; nous sommes faits pour vivre ensemble et nous nous entre-déchirons »
Eugène Ionesco, *Notes et Contre-Notes*

Influences

This production draws its influences from a range of sources: novels, written accounts, documentaries, fictional films, and theatre shows. During the research phase, we were particularly interested in works by Edgar Hilsenrath, Philippe Claudel, Primo Levi, Viktor Frankl, and Claude Lanzmann. The artistic creation, both in terms of writing and staging, reflects the influences of Yorgos Lanthimos (*The Lobster*), Eugene Ionesco, Peter Brook, and Jacques Lecoq, to name just a few.

For this production we are also strongly influenced by a sense of humanitarian “malaise”, a product of the historical atrocities we researched and the massacres and political crimes that constitute our contemporary dystopia.

In a world without limits, just what liberties are there left to take?

“It is well known that humour, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds.”

Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*



Photo: Farid Chergaoui

Technical information

- *Monsieur Somebody* is a play for adults and young people over 12. It is one hour long.
- Small-scale venues most appropriate, 50-300 audience capacity.
- The set is designed to be transportable, and the lighting design is simple.
- The three actors require a minimum playing space of 5m x 5m, minimum height of 2m70.
- One half-day required for get-in, the presence of an onsite technician required to set up lighting (20 cues full rig or 3-10 cues rural basic rig) and sound cues (2). The show can be run independently by our team.
- Get-out time is under an hour, two hours for full strike and get-out (significantly less for festivals).

Monsieur Somebody was previewed at the Theatre du Voyageur, in the Paris region from the 30th May to the 3rd June, 2018, before heading to the Edinburgh Festival (Venue 13) from 4th to 18th August. The team will thereafter be available for tour dates in France, the UK, and elsewhere. Two performances are booked on 21st March (Corbie, L’Oise) and 13th April (Courbevoie, Paris region) 2019. *Theatraverse* propose bilingual theatre workshops, conferences and post-show discussions and the team are available to support venues in reaching audiences.

The Artists

Joanne Allan, Director



Joanne is a theatre director and actor who trained at *l'Ecole Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq* in Paris. She is particularly attentive to the role of language in onstage communication and specialises in Theatre of the Absurd. Joanne, originally from Aberdeenshire in Scotland, graduated in 2006 from *Queen's University, Belfast* with a joint honours degree in Drama and French. In 2005 she directed her first piece of bilingual theatre at the university: *La Leçon (The Lesson)* by Eugène Ionesco.

Joanne is one of the founding members of *Theatraverse*. Since the company's creation in 2008, Joanne has directed and accompanied three bilingual productions on tour: *Lost in Scotland*, a devised play inspired by Isabelle Gilbert's book of the same title; *Rhinocéros*, a bilingual adaptation of Ionesco's original; and *Great Artists Steal*, by Seamus Collins.

The plays she has directed have toured in the UK and France, and are accompanied by bilingual theatre workshops. Joanne creates and leads bilingual theatre workshops and training days for children, young people, and adults. She also gives talks and leads discussions about bilingual theatre in the context of interviews and conferences.

Outwith *Theatraverse*, Joanne works as an actor and director for *Cie Grain d'ArtGile* in Amiens, and *Theatre du Voyageur* in the Paris region.

Seamus Collins, Playwright



Seamus has written plays for Belfast theatre companies *Tinderbox* and *Chatterbox*. Following his participation in the *Fireworks* programme for young writers, organised by *Tinderbox*, Seamus was asked to write *Swing State Cabaret* and *Home Truths*, both of which were performed at the prestigious *MAC Theatre*, Belfast. Four of Seamus' plays have been performed at Edinburgh's Fringe Festival, including *Great Artists Steal*, performed by *Theatraverse*.

Seamus has a Masters degree in Creative Writing from *Queen's University*, Belfast, and has been closely mentored by Owen McCafferty for several years. He is currently writing a play for the *Lytic Theatre* as part of their "New Playwrights Programme". The first reading of his most recent play was directed by Des Kennedy in October 2017. Recently chosen as one of 30 playwright's for *Fishamble's* "A Play for Ireland", Seamus has also been selected for BBC NI's new "Northern Irish Voices" scheme.

Fiamma Bennett, Actor



Fiamma Bennett has been performing and devising dramatic and comic theatre for over 9 years and works in English, French, and Italian. She moved to Paris in 2008 and graduated from the *International Theatre School, Jacques Lecoq* in 2010. She stayed in Paris and continued to train, studying under Jos Houben, Paola Rizza, and Jack Waltzer.

She has played with some of her idols, including Jos Houben, Françoise Rivalland, Emily Wilson, Peter Brook and Rona Waddington, to name but a few. She has worked in some spectacular Parisian venues: Théâtre du Soleil, Lucernaire, and Les Bouffes du Nord. Her spectrum of emotions, her striking stage presence, and her comic talent have been expressed in a range of roles: Cordelia in *King Lear*, Hedda in *Hedda Gabler*, and the-girl-in-blue-tights-on-all-fours-with-coconuts-for-hoofs in *Répertoire*.

Although her heart belongs to the theatre, she is also drawn to the big screen. Since graduating, she has performed in a number of short films, and won the prize for Best Actress for the *24 hour Film Project* in 2014 for her comic role in *Kidnapping*. She also filmed *A Poem of a House* for The National Trust.

Siva Nagapattinam Kasi, Actor



Born in Amsterdam to an Indian father and a Dutch mother, Siva was brought up mainly in France, where he studied and worked in a variety of fields – including naval carpentry, IT, international commerce, and translation for NGOs – before beginning his onstage career.

After training for a number of years in the Paris region, Siva became a professional actor in 2002. With the *Théâtre du Voyageur*, he has played a wide range of roles in a dozen different plays, ranging from Shakespeare to devised plays inspired by non-theatrical texts.

As Siva's career has progressed, he has been drawn to new challenges. He performed at Aurillac's street theatre festival with *Cie Grain d'ArtGile*, and at Avignon summer festival with *Cie Naphrallytep*.

With *Theatraverse*, Siva often performs in English: he played Jean in the bilingual adaptation of *Rhinoceros*, and The Man in *Great Artists Steal*, both of which were played at Edinburgh Festival. Siva develops and leads bilingual theatre workshops for children and young people, as well as for adults with *Theatraverse*.

Guillaume Paulette, Actor



Guillaume graduated from the *International Theatre School, Jacques Lecoq* in 2008 and has trained under Christian Carrignon at *Théâtre de Cuisine*, and Michel Chiron of *CNR* in Amiens, as well as Alain Gautré. He has also trained in Commedia dell'arte, object theatre, and singing.

Guillaume has worked extensively in the Picardy region, with the *Théâtre du Lin*, *Cie Eclats d'Etats*, *Cie Car à Pattes*, and *Cie du Chahut (Oise)*. He performed recently in *Pas de Pardon* by Roger Wallet (Avignon 2015), and played Philinte in *Le Misanthrope* for *Compagnie les gOsses*.

He also works in the Paris region, notably performing in *Faisons un rêve* by Guitry, and for some televised series. He has been working with *Theatraverse* since 2011, and played Bérenger in *Rhinocéros* by Ionesco (Edinburgh 2012 – Belfast 2013).

He is the artistic director of *Cie Grain d'ArtGile*, which he cofounded in 2008; the company's notable productions include *Rhinos in the Street*. Guillaume also directs and leads workshops for schools and for adults.

Theatraverse

Theatraverse is a professional theatre company under French law 1901, founded in Paris in 2008. The company create and produce bilingual theatre productions (in French and English) as well as devising and leading bilingual theatre workshops.

We encounter bilingualism in all walks of life, and in many forms: on the television or the radio, in the cinema, on trips abroad, online...

Aware of the increasing presence of linguistic diversity in our society, the artists in *Theatraverse* have placed language at the heart of our artistic project. We are keen to explore this linguistic diversity onstage: alternating the language of dialogues, using second language(s) as a mask, playing with translation, creating linguistic mishaps, testing the role of spoken language in communication. Through these activities we invite the audience to become comfortable with limited linguistic comprehension, thereby allowing for a certain necessary distance from the spoken word, and encouraging greater attention to the myriad theatrical devices being simultaneously employed.

Most of the artists at *Theatraverse* are former students of the Jacques Lecoq theatre school in Paris, and all have several years of focused theatre training in physical and vocal expression.

Theatraverse's first play was *Lost in Scotland* (based on Isabelle Gilbert and Théodora Olivi's book « *Clichés Ecosés* ». Devised by Joanne Allan, Jenni Kallo, Sampo Kurppa and Thomas Monckton in 2009, the play toured theatres and arts venues across France and the UK in 2009 and 2010.

Following several research and rehearsal residencies in 2011, in 2012, *Theatraverse* created a bilingual adaption of Eugene Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*. The company played in the Paris region before touring in the UK and France. This show was performed for one week at Edinburgh Fringe in 2012, and went on to sell out a short run at Belfast Festival in autumn of the same year. *Rhinoceros* was performed a total of 32 times.

More recently, *Theatraverse* performed a production of *Great Artists Steal*, written specially for the company by Seamus Collins. Previews were performed at the end of Gloucester's *JOLT Festival* in 2014, where *Theatraverse* had been selected as a company in residence. During the residency, artists rehearsed and produced their show while also giving workshops to young people in the local area. The show went on to play a full run at Edinburgh Festival in August 2014.

Theatraverse's performances are always accompanied by bilingual theatre workshops, discussions, and conferences, held at local schools, universities, and theatre clubs.

Throughout our artistic endeavours, Play – in all its forms – is at the core of our work. The multicultural nature of the company offers a host of possibilities for playing together, and we invite audience members and participants alike to play an active role in our creative process.

“[...] one can see that everything is a language for something and
nothing is a language for everything.”

Peter Brook

Partners

Monsieur Somebody is supported by a team of professionals who donate their time:

Literary Advisor: Dr Manu Bragança, University College Dublin

Artistic Advisor: Vincent Perreira

Set and Lighting Designer: Mathieu Mottet

Graphic Designer: Bénédicte Perreira da Lago

Communications Officer: Hamish Davey Wright

Film Producer and Photographer: Farid Cherqaoui

The Board

President: Rémi Ducasse

Vice-President: Candace Yang

Treasurer: Arnaud Dollet

Secretary: Claire Guérin

***Monsieur Somebody* is financially supported by:**

SPEDIDAM: Aide à la création

Le Hublot Théâtre, Colombes

Le Théâtre du Voyageur, Asnières-sur-Seine (co-production)

Falaises et Plateaux, Arcueil

Catherine Margerin

La Ville de Courbevoie

***Theatraverse* is also supported by:**

The City of Courbevoie

Press reviews of *Monsieur Somebody* at Edinburgh Fringe 2018:

"This fascinating play will appeal to you if you want to see excellent acting, creative theatre, a story with intrigue, conflict, wry humour, wit, and the bonus of bilingual language. Monsieur Somebody is an intriguing new play that is provocative and entertaining – Highly Recommended!"

Fringe Review for *Monsieur Somebody*

"The French/English bilingualism of the text is nicely balanced and director Joanne Allan and designers Mathieu Mottet and Kasi have created a skilfully flowing piece"

The Scotsman for *Monsieur Somebody*

"Monsieur Somebody [is an] enjoyable and amusing play, thanks to the compelling acting and contagious enthusiasm of the three performers."

The List for *Monsieur Somebody*

"Energetic and entertaining; absurdist bilingual show about lies and blurred lines between truth and fiction. Totally accessible whether you speak French or not"

Kirsteen Neale for *Monsieur Somebody*

Press reviews of *Great Artists Steal*, by Seamus Collins at Edinburgh Fringe 2014:

BROADWAY BABY ★★★★★

"If language is a transparent window into meaning then this is a heap of broken glass, dangerous but oddly beautiful [...] The shadows of Beckett and Ionesco hang over the play."

THE STAGE ★★★★★

"[...] writer Seamus Collins must be a bit of a genius. He strips the English language back to its most basic components but keeps the French more easily recognisable, and he does this without his audience ever losing track of what is going on."



Photo: Farid Cherqaoui

MADELEINE: Are you firing Claude?

CLAUDE: Ça veut dire quoi “firing”?

FRANK: What?

MADELEINE: He wants to know what ‘firing’ means.

CLAUDE: Firing?

FRANK: It means you no longer have a job. And yes, maybe... maybe I am firing you, Claude.

CLAUDE: No job?

MADELEINE: No, no... He said new job.

CLAUDE: New job?

FRANK: What?

MADELEINE: I want to make Claude the face of “Unity and Relief.”

CLAUDE: The face? Le visage ? De votre association ?

FRANK: Are you sure, Madeleine?

MADELEINE: Yes. Like you, I have made up my mind.

CLAUDE: J’ai un visage incroyable, moi.

COST

If you wish to book *Monsieur Somebody* and outreach activities for your venue or area, please contact us to discuss prices. Because of the cost of travel and freight we prefer to work with a guaranteed fee (and box office split where appropriate).

Where possible we try to group tour dates to reduce cost of travel and expenses, which we split among all promoters. There is a team of 4 or 5 people, all travelling from Paris, happy to share accommodation and stay with willing locals. We will be as flexible as possible to keep costs to a minimum. The cost of return freight shipping is £500.

Where performance dates are booked in advance, we can request additional travel grants locally.

AVAILABILITY

Monsieur Somebody is available for tour in May, August, September and/or November 2019.

CONTACT

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