



Elise Chatauret and Thomas Pondevie presents

FATHERS



Commissioned by the Poudrerie theatre (Sevran), **FATHERS (Pères)** - created and written from interviews carried out in Sevran and Malakoff (France) - takes us plunges us into a number of households in today's France.

On the stage, personal familial stories unfold, creating a diversified, colourful genealogical tree in which the father figures - authoritarian, absent, loving - occupy a central position.

**MODULABLE "ALL-TERRAIN" SHOW FOR TWO ACTORS,
WHICH CAN BE PERFORMED AT HOME,
WITH THE FAMILY OR PRACTICALLY ANYWHERE ELSE...**



ORIGIN AND PROCESS

INTERVIEW BASED THEATER

For nearly a decade, Elise Chatauret has been developing shows based on interviews. This was the case of her first show, Babel (which the company was subsequently named after). The play was based on a series of meetings with young people in and around the area of La Courneuve where Elise had a residency from 2007 to 2014.

The starting point for Elise's investigations is always the winning combination of a topic, a location and a question. She then sets up a number of meetings during which she holds lengthy conversations with respondents. These are recorded then transcribed before they're unpicked, reorganised, cut up and reworked by firstly Elise Chatauret (writer and director) and Thomas Pondevie (dramaturg and artistic collaborator) and then by the actors.

Once the actors begin to work on a stage, the words collected are remoulded and resculptured. The actors act as both mouthpieces and performers. They magnify, extend, make up unique poetic content using the raw documentary material. Fiction and theatre allow real life to expand fully, to exist with all its power and its relevance.



THE SHOW

INTERVIEWS AND LOCATIONS

How did we “do” family in France these days?

Does the reality on the ground match the usual tropes and stereotypes?

How has the way families are organised evolved ? What new models and new family structures have emerged and are currently emerging ? What are the traditional patterns that remain and tend to be perpetuated ? And why ?

What family “types” - from traditional to blended or adoptive, from same-sex parent to single parent - exist today? What roles does the concept of family assign to its members ? How are individual stories connected to the wider institutional framework ?

What are the political and social challenges that these questions bring up ?

Throughout 2020, we conducted a series of interviews hinging on the topic of family. We spoke to individuals, professionals and institutions, from Sevrans to Malakoff. Those encounters soon began to paint a different picture to the reductive one that the notion of family first brings to mind. We discovered a variety and plurality of surprising stories that plunged us straight into the heart of the matter.

FROM OUR FIRST INTERVIEWS WITH WOMEN . . .

All of our first interviews around the theme of family led us to women : in terms of personal stories; from Francesca (a lovely Italian in her thirties, “exiled” in France to escape her overbearing family) to 80-odd-old mum Ariane, who started a new life with a woman after having been married to a man for years; and in terms of institutional stories, from a child protection services director and a social worker to a childminder and a community centre co-ordinator.

. . . TO OUR RESEARCH INTO FATHERS.

We didn’t seek out to “gender” the issues around family but we had to acknowledge the fact that only women came to speak to us spontaneously, whether on a personal basis or on behalf of an institution. Men were basically absent from that first stage of interviews.

So, we decided to work backwards and question family dynamics from the point of view of men and fathers.

Meeting fathers has allowed us to explore the incredible evolution of society in the last few decades, as they occasionally manage to free themselves from the shackles of the old model of paternal authority but often exhibit profound atavism.

This prism led us on the path of the “men of the future” (hommes du futur, as coined by the rapper and poet Casey) and the families of the future in which sexual equality raises questions around gender emancipation and a greater inventiveness in regards to the roles and positions of each member of said families.

“I understand the expectations of feminists, but for me, it’s no longer the women’s issue, it’s the men’s. Women have already said everything about their oppression, they’ll say it again and it will be beautiful, it’ll be magnificent like Black people inventing blues, gospel and jazz, who’ve said in every which way all they had to say. It’s a beautiful thing to hear, these are words that push you and carry you, but it’s no longer the problem of the minority. For a while now, it hasn’t been up to the minority groups to educate the dominant groups. They should be made to understand that it’s in their interests to shake off their innate privilege to recreate a more or less healthy equilibrium in a world poisoned by the dynamics of domination.

So what do men have to say about feminism? What will they give up? What is this man of the future? And we’ve started to come across those men of the future, those men that have reneged on their privileges without feeling castrated or psychologically or sexually impotent, that have been able to channel their libido into things other than dominating women. This is what will prove to be a game-changer. Just like with racism, what brings about change is the white man of the future, the one who’s dropped his privilege.”

CASEY



TWO MEN TALKING FAMILIES

Our show is performed by two men very much to go against the usual preconceptions of what families look like.

A FATHER'S GENEALOGY

Our two actors take it in turn to embody the various members of the families we met, reproducing the words that were told to us or fully re-enacting certain situations. Through those, they weave stories of different generations and typologies of fathers.

On stage appear in turn authoritarian fathers, those who impose strict rules and dismiss tenderness, absent fathers, runaway fathers, bullying fathers, stingy fathers. Their appearances are interspersed with those of present, dedicated fathers, those that are actively involved in their children's lives, as much as, if not more than, women; two men in a relationship who've achieved fatherhood through surrogacy in the United States and through which the play explores the possibility of alternative forms of fatherhood.

The set patterns progressively come undone. Of course, men are able to show tenderness, demonstrate mothering, capable of caregiving and love and on the ground families do find ways of overcoming preconceived models. This typology paves the way for wider discussions around very contemporary issues: parental leave in France, in Europe and around the world, the history of the de-institutionalisation of paternal power and authority and the patriarchy of course.

A GENTLE AND OPEN APPROACH TO STORYTELLING

As the two performers tell those stories of families from the point of view of men, they are actively and intimately part of the investigation and allow their own subjectivity to guide them. During the show, they seek ways of embodying, playing and telling the words with warmth and gentleness. Ways that don't seek to prove or show. They seek a way in which to surrender their weapons and free themselves from all the expectations weighing on them. Through play, they experience possible ways to free themselves from expected representations of masculinity and virility

DEPICTING THE INVESTIGATION THROUGH MULTIFORM STAGING

Within the show, various strands of material bounce off each other. On one side are personal stories, the result of previous interviews, on the other, documents retracing the investigation: interviews, audio, various theoretical texts (sociology, anthropology, philosophy, etc.), as well as tableaux, pictures and adverts.

FROM THE ORIGINAL INTERVIEWS TO THE SHOW'S SCRIPT

The multiform dramaturgy is achieved primarily through a rigorous work on language, through the

use of different levels of speech and various methods of restitution: from the most direct transposition of speech (with original accents, expressions, mannerisms etc.) to its complete rewriting.

And so we switch, from one scene to another, from the most common familiarity to moments of great poetry. This range allows us to avoid evening out the various levels of speech and language and instead really work on elements of discontinuity, contrasts and distancing

THE PICTURE BOARD

At the same time as they tell the stories of, and "play" a number of the people they have met, the two actors write, draw and pin images on a large white board that stands behind them. Through the medium of drawing, they translate the content of the interviews, comparing and confronting different models, symbolising and outlining patterns, going beyond the words shared to paint a fresco of paternity, half-way between a family tree and a typology of fathers. Through these illustrations, another history of fatherhood emerges.

THE INTERVIEW AUDIOTAPES

The actors also share with the audience interview audiotapes to shed light upon, repeat, interrupt, counteract or complete certain illustrations. These interviews are the palpable trace of the investigation at the heart of the show, injecting elements of sharp reality and anchoring the show in the present.

For example, we hear a childminder talk about the evolution and implication of fathers in childcare over her 30-year career and a family sociologist explain the role that same-sex fatherhood can play in current very strict conceptions of father figures and masculinity in general.

Later on, we hear extracts from the latest debate at the National Assembly over the issue of paternity leave (January 2021) that clearly highlight institutional reticence.

WORKS ON THE SUBJECT

The actors also display their bibliography, taking books out from a drawer and reading the titles - and occasional passages - out loud, including *Sociologie de la famille contemporaine* by François de Singly, *Le Mythe de la virilité* by Olivia Gazalé, *Des Hommes justes* by Ivan Jablonka and even *Transitions* by Serge Hefez. As the show progresses, the to and fro and dialogue between individual stories, investigation and collective history begin to trace an empirical path through the history of paternity and patriarchy helping the audience understand the way these concepts play out in society.

“It’s during the 20th century that sons’ and mothers’ need to emancipate themselves is finally given some legal backing. Masculine prerogatives disappear one after the other. In 1938, “marital power” and the legal incapacity of women are abolished. [In 1970] joint “parental authority” replaces “paternal power” in the civil code. [...]The deconsecration of paternal power is taken further by the 2005 law which abolishes the term “patronym” (derived from pater) and replaces it with “family name” (surname), which can be either that of the father or the mother or both parents.”

Olivia Gazalé, *Le Mythe de la virilité*, 2007

A LIGHT, ADAPTABLE SET

LIVING ROOM, OFFICE OR KITCHEN: A PLAYFUL AND CONVERTIBLE SPACE

The set design roughly represents an indoor home space: living room, office or living room. A white wall, a coloured floor, two tables, two chairs, a drying rack and standard lamps occupy the space. It's in this familiar room that our family histories and fatherhood trajectories unfold.

Progressively, the living room becomes an investigation room: the wall made out of Velleda boards becomes a white board on which our actors can write, draw, make notes, and which can act as a support for images. One of the tables reveals a backlit panel on which we can hang slides, on the other rests a sound system with buttons to control the intensity and colour of the lighting live, all of which is hidden behind hatches and sliding cupboards.

The space becomes a kitchen by activating a crank handle, one of the actors lifts two hot plates from one of the tables for the second half of the show and pulls out a whole range of utensils to make pancakes.

These two magical tables designed for the show and made to measure help illustrate the stories of the families in a fun and entertaining manner, whilst allowing the audience to picture various locations, situations and common representations, with which they can easily identify



FROM FLATS TO THEATRES : AN ADJUSTABLE SET

Ordered by the Poudrierie theatre to enable the show to be performed in flats and in theatres and other entertainment venues according to three configurations: 2 X 3 m, 3 X 4,5 m, et 4 X 6 m.

For each of them, the back wall and floor are extended, allowing us to just as easily set up in a flat with 20 to 30 people as a venue with a hundred or so audience members.

THE COMPAGNIE BABEL

THE COMPAGNIE BABEL was created by author and theatre director Elise Chatauret. She writes the company's shows following real-life interactions (interviews, investigations, immersion). Between 2007 and 2014, the company has had a residency at the Jean Houdremont cultural centre in the Courneuve area, where Elise worked closely with local young people.

Since 2015, dramaturg Thomas Pondevie has been closely involved with the company's productions. Babel launched a cycle of three shows with the same artistic team : *Ce qui demeure* (2016) - *Saint-Félix* (2018), *A la vie !* (2020)

From 2018 to 2020, Babel had a triennial residency at the Théâtre Roger Barat in Herblay-sur-Seine. In 2020, the company ran a workshop with the students from the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique (French national drama conservatory.)

Babel is contracted by the Drac Ile-de-France and funded by the Ile-de- France Region as part of their "aide à la permanence artistique et culturelle" (a financial support scheme that helps artists establish themselves in the region). The company now has a residency at the Scène Nationale de Malakoff, and is an associate company of La Manufacture-CDN in Nancy-Lorraine and at Théâtre des Quartiers d'Ivry-CDN Val de Marne.

ELISE CHATAURET is an author and theatre director. She trained as an actress at the Claude Mathieu school and Jacques Lecoq between 2002 and 2005 and then as a stage director between 2012 and 2015 at the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique (French national drama conservatory). In 2008, she created the Compagnie Babel, with which she staged 10 shows, 9 of which she'd written, developing a style of theatre that she describes as "documented". Her writing is based on interviews. Her shows question the potential of theatre for using and platforming the captured material and strive to blur the lines between documentary and fiction. The raw material from the interviews never disappears completely, it resurfaces on the sidelines, feeding into active research into storytelling and reported speech. The actors become intermediaries, carrying the words from the interviews and onto the stage.

THOMAS PONDEVIE is a dramaturg. Trained at the TNS (Strasbourg national theatre), he worked as a dramaturg with Éric Vigner, Julie Brochen, Jean- Yves Ruf, Amélie Enon, Nicolas Truong, Sylvain Huc... Since 2014, he has developed two key partnerships: with Mathieu Bauer and the Nouveau Théâtre in Montreuil where he is associate artist from 2016 to 2021, and with Élise Chatauret and the compagnie Babel with which he is engaged as permanent dramaturg.

In 2019, he created the outdoor show Supernova (60 performances around France and currently touring). In parallel, he takes part in teaching and training at various higher education institutions, such as the Universities of Strasbourg, Paris-Nanterre and Paris 3 and theatre schools. He also plays an active role in various contemporary theatrical writing projects and committees.

LAURENT BARBOT is an actor. Beginning his career as a drummer, he joined the K collective as an actor in 2008, performing in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Simon Falguières. He worked again under his direction on *La nef des fous* (Ship Of Fools), *Le songe du réverbère* and *La marche des enfants*. In 2016, he met La propagande asiatique and performed in the shows *J'ai dans mon cœur un*

General Motors and Le procès de Philip K, directed by Julien Villa. He subsequently took part in the 8th edition of the Villeréal festival, in Que la peste soit mis en scène by Noémie Zurletti. In 2018, he worked with the Majaz company on the show L'Incivile. In 2019, following a workshop with Dieudonné Niangouna, he performed in the show Trust Shakespeare Alléluia. In 2021, he will perform in Pères, a show directed by Élise Chatauret and Thomas Pondevie.

IANNIS HAILLET is an actor. Following a year on the preparatory academic programme hypokhâgne, Iannis joined the conservatory of Paris' 13th arrondissement. In 2011, he got into the Théâtre National de Strasbourg (Strasbourg national theatre) as part of group 41, where he trains under Cécile Garcia-Fogel, Gildas Milin, Catherine Marnas, David Lescot, tg STAN, Eric Vigner. Iannis obtained a Masters' degree in Theatre Studies from the Université Paris Ouest Nanterre in 2014. That same year, he performed in Stunt Action Show, a show created by Thomas Pondevie and Charles Chauvet. In 2017, he performed as part of the These Associations by Tino Sehgal at the Palais de Tokyo before joining the cast of Tartuffe, Nouvelle ère, staged by Eric Massé. In 2018, he performed in George Dandin, directed by Jean-Pierre Vincent. In 2019, he performed in SUPERNOVA, directed by Thomas Pondevie. That same year, he joined the team of "Scènes Sauvages" and took part in the festival's first edition. In 2021, he will perform in Pères, a show directed by Élise Chatauret and Thomas Pondevie.

CHARLES CHAUVET is a set designer and theatre director. He trained at the Théâtre National de Strasbourg (Group 41, 2014) in set design and costume for theatre. There, he worked with Jean Jourdeuil, Catherine Marnas and Eric Vigner. Most notably, he created the set design for Splendid's by Jean Genet (Vincent Thépaut), the costumes and set design for Intranquilité (2017 at the TCI) by Marcus Borja and Maison de poupée by Lorraine de Sagazan. He regularly works with Élise Chatauret (Ce qui demeure, St Félix, A la vie!), Thomas Pondevie (Supernova, 2019), Frédéric Fisbach, Convulsions, Bérénice Paysage, Vivre (Théâtre de la Colline).

In 2020, he created the set and costumes for Penthésilé.e.s (Amazonomachie) by Laëtitia Guédon (Avignon festival). His first collaboration with Clément Bondu took place in 2019 for his play Dévotion, performed at the Avignon festival. Alongside his set design work, he wrote and directed two shows: La nuit animale (Festival Impatience 2018 and tour) and Chorea Lasciva (Les plateaux sauvages, 2021). Charles has a Masters' degree in theatrical practice ("Pratiques de la scène") from Université Paris 8.

MAXIME TISSERAND is a musician (clarinet, loop pedals...) Throughout the diverse and varied courses he took as part of his musical training, (classical / jazz / traditional music / improvisation / writing, at the CNR in Nancy), Maxime decided to not choose but properly embrace music in all its forms. This is what led him to found the Nancy-based new and improvised music collective "Le Bazardier".

Although his focus is mostly on improvisation and stage work, he has also taken part in the recording of a number of albums and composes music for plays ("festival scènes sauvages"), dance and the various musical projects he has taken part in in the last 10 years ("Chapelier fou", "Orchard", "EPO", "Plan B 4tet", "Mittel orchestra", "Paul Damour"...) .

The mixing of tones, sometimes unsettling, which we can hear when he plays his acoustic instruments (clarinets and saxs) and his machines (loop pedals, synths) has come to define his music.

TEAM

Writing, dramaturgy and directing **Élise Chatauret** and **Thomas Pondevie**

With **Laurent Barbot** and **Iannis Haillet**

Set design **Charles Chauvet** and **Jori Desq**

Design and costumes **Charles Chauvet**

Lighting, sound and technical design **Jori Desq**

Sound deasign **Maxime Tisserand**

Lights **Léa Maris**

Directing and dramaturgy intern **Vladia Merlet**

Executiv manager **Maëlle Grange**

Tour Booker **Marion Souliman**

Photos : **Christophe Raynaud de Lage**

PRODUCTION

Production **Compagnie Babel-Élise Chatauret / Théâtre de la Poudrerie - Sevrans**

In coproduction with **Malakoff Scène nationale ; Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil – CDN**

Les Ateliers Médicis ; La Manufacture – CDN Nancy- Lorraine.

With the support of the **departement of Seine-Saint-Denis** and the **Théâtre de la Tempête.**

The company is contracted by the **Ile-de-France Region** and the **Ministry for Culture Drac-Ile-de-France.**

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