

DENIS PODALYDÈS

Director

As well as being an established director, Denis Podalydès is a well-known actor of both stage and screen, celebrated for the mischievous edge he brings to his often eccentric roles. He studied at the Cours Florent drama school in Paris and went on to pass the entrance exam for the French National Academy of Dramatic Arts. In 1997, his theatre teacher Jean-Pierre Miquel, who was also Director of the Comédie-Française state theatre, gave him a part in *Salle Richelieu*. A few years later, he joined the Comédie-Française and won the Molière Award for Best Male Newcomer for his performance in Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. He has had roles in comedies by filmmaker Bruno Podalydès (his brother), such as *Versailles Rive-Gauche*, *Only God Sees Me*, *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* and *Liberté-Oléron*; and supporting roles in the films *Grey Souls*, directed by Yves Angelo and *Palais Royal*, directed by Valérie Lemerrier. He has also been cast in darker roles, such as his part in *The Officers' Ward* by François Dupeyron.

As a director, he received a Molière Award in 2007 for his staging of *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Comédie-Française. Comical or touching, mercurial or naïve, Denis Podalydès is a fine example of an actor whose success is due as much to his work as to his judicious choice of roles. At the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, he directed *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* in July 2012.

FLORIANE BONANNI

Violin & concept of the show

Floriane Bonanni started playing the violin when she was eight. She went on to study violin and chamber music at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de danse de Paris under the tutorage of Boris Garlitzky and Christian Ivaldi. After obtaining her diploma, she taught at the Conservatoire Supérieur de Musique et de danse de Paris and at the music academy of the 9th arrondissement in Paris.

Since 2003, she has been a member of the Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra. She is regularly invited to festivals as a chamber musician and takes part in the chamber music season of Radio France. She has played with the musicians Georges Pludermacher, Xavier Phillips, Henri Demarquette, Elisabeth Balmas and as part of a quartet with David Grimal, Lise Berthaud and François Salque.

Floriane regularly collaborates with theatre directors. For Alain Françon she has played in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* at the Théâtre National de la Colline in Paris and for Éric Ruf she has played in *The Three Sisters* and Goldoni's *La Villégiature* at the Comédie-Française and in *Peer Gynt* at the Grand Palais. She composed the music for the readings of *The lais of Marie de France*, directed by Marie Sophie Ferdane at Comédie-Française.

She was also a music coach for René Féret's film *Mozart's Sister*, in which she also plays Marie-Jeanne Serrero's music.

In 2009, she played with the Antigone Quartet and pianist Sarah Lavaud to record the music of the French composer Charles Koechlin.

MICHEL ROBIN

Actor

Michel Robin began his theatre career with Roger Planchon's troupe and Renaud-Barrault theatre company, performing in plays by Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht. In 1994 he was appointed a pensionnaire of the Comédie-Française and he became its 495th member in 1997. His theatre credits include roles in Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* in 1996, directed by Jean-Louis Benoit; *The Forest*, *The Bacchae*, *Ophelia*, *The Misanthrope* directed by Lukas Hemleb and *Cyrano de Bergerac* directed by Denis Podalydès.

His cinema credits include roles in William Klein's *Who are you, Polly Maggoo?*, Claude Goretta's *The Invitation* in 1973, Michel Lang's *Holiday Hotel*, Francis Veber's *The Goat*, Serge Gainsbourg's *Stan the Flasher* and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *A Very Long Engagement*. His TV credits include roles in *Maigret*, the French version of *Fraggle Rock* and *Boulevard du Palais*.

In 1979, Michel Robin obtained the Grand Prix for acting from the Festival Jury in Locarno, for Yves Yersin's *Les Petites Fugues*, and a Molière for his role in Yasmina Reza's *The Winter Crossing*.



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SYDNEY FESTIVAL
2015 | 8-26 JAN

SYDNEY FESTIVAL AND SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE PRESENT

ON THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF TOBACCO CONCERT IN ONE ACT

THÉÂTRE DES BOUFFES DU NORD | FRANCE | AUSTRALIAN EXCLUSIVE
CHEKHOV, BACH, BERIO AND TCHAIKOVSKY
DIRECTED BY DENIS PODALYDÈS
CONCEPT BY FLORIANE BONANNI

SYDNEY FESTIVAL AND SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE PRESENT

ON THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF TOBACCO

CONCERT IN ONE ACT
THÉÂTRE DES BOUFFES DU NORD

DRAMA THEATRE
SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE
22–25 JANUARY
60MINS

MUSIC COMPOSED BY

Anton Chekhov
Johann Sebastian Bach
Luciano Berio
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

STAGE DIRECTION

Denis Podalydès

CONCEPT OF THE SHOW

Floriane Bonanni

SET DESIGN

Delphine Sainte-Marie

COSTUMES

Christian Lacroix

LIGHTING

Stéphanie Daniel

MAKE-UP ARTIST/HAIR STYLIST

Véronique Soulier-Nguyen

DIRECTOR'S ASSISTANT

Elodie Huber

COSTUME DESIGNER'S ASSISTANT

Jean-Philippe Pons

with

NIOUKHINE

Michel Robin

VIOLIN

Floriane Bonanni

SOPRANO

Muriel Ferraro

PIANO

Emmanuelle Swiercz

STAGE MANAGER & LIGHTING MANAGER

David Ménard

Costumes realised in the workshops of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Set realised in collaboration with the workshops of the Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg

Production C.I.C.T. / Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord; Coproduction: Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg; Financed by the Région Ile-de-France.

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FESTIVAL
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Pascal Victor / ArtComArt

Image right: Croquis filles,
Christian Lacroix.



PROGRAM

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

Sonata No. 1 in B minor for Violin and Piano, BW1014

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

Romance, Op 47, No.1

LUCIANO BERIO (1925–2003)

Sequenza VIII for Violin

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Partita No. 2 in C minor, BWV 826

THE MUSIC OF ON THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF TOBACCO

Chekhovian music – where despair, farce, poetry and the absurd come together with a poignant force – calls for Bach and Berio. These works are also bound together in a mirror reflection: Berio's VIII for Violin inspired by the chaconne in Bach's Second Partita for Solo Violin.

Performed at the play's beginning, the four movements of Bach's Sonata No. 1 in B minor for Violin and Piano gives the opening scenes a nostalgic tone that then becomes tender and mischievous. Performed at the play's end his Second Partita for Piano in d minor is more sombre and strict – almost ascetic.

In *On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco*, Nioukhine is surrounded by women; his daughters, spouse and female boarders. His monologue is accompanied by the two Bach pieces and Berio's Sequenza VIII for Violin, which disrupts the scene

and punctuates Nioukhine's anger and despair. This piece forces itself on the text with its enraged and visceral accents. The expressive intensity of this violin monologue shakes up the scene. The screams of Nioukhine's anguish and the rudeness of the language metamorphose the female musicians on stage. Making us question whether the disturbing transformation of the young woman is so different from that which the tormented Nioukhine undergoes.

Lastly, the play unveils a secret character, a page-turner who discovers a possible existence in the theatre. Is she responding to a call from Nioukhine by offering him Tchaikovsky's Romance, Op 47, No.1? Could she be offering this music to Chekhov himself, who was a friend and a fervent admirer of the composer?

FLORIANE BONANNI
VIOLIN & CONCEPT OF THE SHOW

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

In a music school, which is the theatre itself (there is no stage set apart from a few chairs, music stands and several props), two musicians and a singer play Bach. There is a man that comes and goes, somehow involved, and still a stranger to what is being performed. He looks used up, old, undecided. Why is he there? One feels like asking him, "What are you doing here, old man?", without being especially bothered by his presence.

For this man is the actor Michel Robin. He will perform *On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco* by Chekhov. Michel is a unique actor, often described as having an animal presence on stage – which is not banal. Who could have more presence than a dog or a horse? A human animal by the name of Michel Robin. The great Roger Blin directed him once in the role of Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*. He reminded him of a carriage-horse who waits munching the oats from a muzzle-bag strapped to a halter. This description marked Michel for life. The image of this rummaging horse stayed with him for a very long while. The animal presence comes from absence of psychology: what is he doing there? what state is he in? what does he want and who is he really?

Michel is Nioukhine in *On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco*. "Ladies, and, so to say, Gentlemen..." Why this conference? Why this subject? Why in a music academy? His wife asked him to do it "as an act of charity", probably to earn a few shillings for the music school, to make himself useful, a total ignoramus that he is. We will not understand who is this ambiguous person until we have listened to his conference, or rather, what he says in lieu of the conference of which we will ever only know the title: "On the

Harmful effects of Tobacco". Without ever touching on the theme of his lecture, Nioukhine outlines a detailed, ridiculous, distressing and absurd portrait of a futile existence, completely subdued to the authority of his wife. Her, we never see; we hear her. She is the main character. The one that is the reason for being of all that is: the music school, the musicians and even Nioukhine – who runs off when she arrives. And that's the end of it, curtain. A whole life, a real life, nothing less, passes before our eyes.

One day Michel came to speak to me about a project, a text he had performed in his youthful days, one of the first that he recited. He remembers it very well, translated into French by Barsacq. Having made friends with

the violin player Floriane Bonanni, they decided to work on this project together: mixing Bach, Berio, and Tchaikovsky with *On the Harmful effects of Tobacco*. They asked me to outline a mise en scène. I immediately said yes. Because of Michel. Of Michel in Chekhov. The melancholy lightness of the one in the other. Because of the mix also: the grace and the subtlety of music, in three feminine presences, and this man surrounded by women he fears, reveres and flees, a Don Juan dominated, the wrong way round, to whom Michel will bring grace of his profound indeterminateness, the poetry of his presence of an old horse, dreaming of a possible and impossible harmony.

DENIS PODALYDÈS

