

SOMEWHERE AT THE BEGINNING

GERMAINE ACOGNY / MIKAËL SERRE

Performed by Germaine Acogny
JANT-BI



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Concept & Direction : Mikael Serre
Choreography : Germaine Acogny
Assistant Choreography : Patrick Acogny
Set Design : Maciej Fiszer
Costumes : Johanna Diakhate-Rittmeyer
Music composed and performed live : Fabrice Bouillon «LaForest»
Video : Sébastien Dupouey
Lighting Design : Sébastien Michaud
Technical Director : Marco Wehrspann

Text by: Togoun Servais Acogny, Aloopho, Germaine Acogny, Euripides (Medea), adaptation by Mikael Serre

Production : JANT-BI, Senegal
Co-Production : Les Théâtres de la Ville du Luxembourg / Théâtre de la Ville, Paris / Institut Français, Paris
Residency and Co-production : La Ferme du Buisson, scène nationale de Marne-la-Vallée
Residency : Le Centquatre, Paris

A COMMENT BY THE DIRECTOR

I vividly remember a remark that Germaine Acogny made at our first encounter. “My life has often been unsettled. I come from somewhere, but when I try to distance myself I cannot escape from my past. It’s as if I go back to the beginning – the place from whence I come – back to my ancestors and those who accompany me.”

These words speak of an action: the exploration of contrary forces. It is an upward compulsion, but also a gesture of acceptance of the force of destiny.

Germaine Acogny told me her story – that of her family and its conflicts, of her host country Senegal, her time of ‘exile’ in Europe and her return to her native Africa. Before we met she told me that in her next work she wanted to think in terms of Greek tragedy. That seemed to me to be most appropriate. When I read the text of a play I hear the moments of ecstasy, doubt and desert crossing. When we met I heard Shango: the god of thunder, lightning and war. I questioned my wish to mix the daunting problems and towering figures of Greek tragedy with the history of Africa. I decided that this project would fulfil the need for a confrontation between the self and the world.

YOU KNOW WHERE YOU WERE BORN, BUT NOT WHERE YOU WILL DIE! (Tivigititi, the sage, ‘Tales of Aloopho’)



In the course of our discussions Germaine often spoke of her grandmother Aloopho, who was a priestess from Dahomey, mother of the sacred and of strength. By reading the 'Tales of Aloopho' I immediately saw the connection between these tragic, archaic and prophetic words and the suffering that suffuses the great female figures in Greek tragedy. The story of Medea is that of each member of the audience who looks inward in search of the self. It is the tragedy of truth. It is the ultimate recognition of the self - of a solitude in confrontation with the world.

ON TRAGEDY...

To take a step back, I cannot help thinking of this saying of Tivigititi in one of Germaine's grandmother's many stories. In the village only the most exceptional of men could become king. They were not born there, but had given evidence of their wisdom elsewhere. What a suggestion when we consider the crises of identity throughout Europe nowadays! Should we not say – as I recently read on a scrap of paper stuck on the wall of the Maxim Gorki Theatre – that identities are a means of transport and not the end of the line? This is also evidenced by the book written by Togoun Servais Acogny – Germaine's father – which she lent to me to help with my research. It is the moving testimony of a man who from childhood was recommended to deny his past in order to be 'civilised' by his contact with Whites.

'I remember that there were some large copper knives at home. They were there during my childhood, then they disappeared. One day when my father was old and sick I visited him in Paris. Once again I saw those knives – those of my childhood...



...HERE'S TO LIFE!

What Germaine shows through her testimony and her dance, translated into movement, breath, is as if a new start is still possible. It goes through a struggle of the mind against itself, through a revolution capable of designing the inexistent. At a time where the great ideologies no longer manage to provide an identity to the individual, it is essential to continue to offer a dialogue with the intimacy of everyone. It is a testimony on stage in the analysis of breath and movement, a face to face between a loneliness on stage and the intimacy of each spectator.

There were large copper knives at home, I remember, they were there, present at my childhood, and they had disappeared. One day when my father was old and sick and I visited him in Paris, i saw again these knives, those of my childhood ...

Theses knives are mine!

Germaine Acogny, july 2013



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HERE'S TO LIFE!

If a jump ahead were possible it would land amid spiritual turmoil. Germaine represents what almost all of us have become – human beings in transit, exiles, the converted and the recon-verted, people who lose themselves and find themselves again. Ultimately identity is not an conclusion but a process. How many Europeans (people?) do not adapt, do not wish to or cannot adapt to this continent (of Africa?) It remains to be seen how we have become what we are and what we want to be in the future.

A dialogue between the Occident and Africa is to discover the knot within the body and the sand in the eyes as we confront the narrative of the modern world.

Rehearsals began at Toubab Dialaw in Senegal. It was my first encounter with this country and continent. Germaine Acogny introduced me to its history, which I decided to tell in an intimate manner. It is perhaps the only way to avoid all manner of ideologies with their hotch-potch of simplifications.



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This passion is also a tenderness that I felt during rehearsals and as I questioned myself whether I had the right to handle Germaine's personal history, which comprises deficiency and betrayal that echoes general history. It was a journey into the interplay of memory and forgetfulness. Since family history brings back memories of images, odours, feelings and sounds it was essential to work in close collaboration with the video artist Sébastien Dupouey, the lighting specialist Sébastien Michaud and the musician Fabrice Bouillon 'LaForest', who used their art to create a dialogue between the past and the present. Naturally one speaks of wounds on the stage, but also of how we as artists to a certain extent can, each in our individual way, bring about an assuagement without erasing the past. Giving this story a materiality is to challenge the act of forgetting without acrimony and to mourn our structuring myths, whether recycled or still alive.

Mikaël Serre, May 2015



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Biography :



Biography – Germaine ACOGNY Dancer, Choreographer, Teacher Dakar/Senegal

Senegalese and French, Germaine Acogny has evolved her own technique of Modern African Dance and is considered worldwide as the “mother of Contemporary African Dance”. From 1977 to 1982, she was the Artistic Director of Mudra Afrique, created by Maurice Bejart and the President L.S. Senghor in Dakar.

She dances, choreographs and teaches all over the world and has become a forceful ambassador of African Dance and Culture. In 1997, Germaine Acogny was appointed Artistic Director of the Dance section of Afrique en Creation in Paris.

With her husband Helmut Vogt, she created in Senegal the International Centre for Traditional and Contemporary African Dance, the Ecole des Sables, inaugurated in 2004. It's a place of exchange between African dancers and dancers from all continents. Here dancers from all over Africa receive the rigorous training which guides them towards Contemporary African Dance.

Since 1988 Germaine Acogny creates regularly solo pieces for herself and since 2003/2004 she choreographs for her company Jant-Bi which tours successfully all over the world.

Germaine Acogny is « Chevalier de l'Ordre du Merite », « Officier des Arts et Lettres », « Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur », and « Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres » of the French Republic.

She is also « Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Lion » and « Officier des Arts et Lettres » of the Republic of Senegal.

In 2007, she received, jointly with the Japanese Kota Yamazaki, a BESSIE Award in New York for the choreography of their piece “Fagaala”.



Biography - Mikael SERRE
Director, Actor and Translator,
Paris / France / Germany

French-German, trained at Beaux-Arts de Saint-Etienne, Mikael Serre began as a stage photographer. He then became assistant director, travelled to Russia in 1996 before joining the International Theatre School Jacques Lecoq. He started working as an actor in Germany before returning to France for his first stage direction *Visage de feu* by Marius Von Mayenburg in 2002.

In 2009, Ludovic Lagarde asked him to join the Artistic Collective at La Comédie de Reims.

His productions are: 2002: *Visage de feu* by Marius Von Mayenburg, 2004: *Parasites* by M.von Mayenburg (*La Rose des vents / Ferme du Buisson*), 2005: *Protocole des Rêves* with Hanna Schygulla (*Ferme du Buisson / Temps d'images*), 2006: *Oh il me regarde, tu crois qu'il m'aime? Maintenant j'ai la main grasse* (*Ferme du Buisson / La Rose des vents*), 2006/2007: *L'enfant froid* by M. Von Mayenburg (*Théâtre de la Bastille / Ferme du Buisson / Rose des vents / Festival Perspectives Saarbrücken*), 2008: *HHH* Anna Nicole Smith for the festival *Labomatic Theatre*, 2008: *Cible Mouvante* by M.von Mayenburg (*La Rose des vents / Ferme du Buisson*), 2009: Scenic reading of *Le village de Kufur Schama* (*FIND festival / Schaubühne, Berlin*), 2009: *The Stranger* by Camus, Maxim Gorki Theater, Berlin

2010/2011: *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov (*Comédie de Reims / Rose des vents / Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil*). In October 2011 he was commissioned by the *Temps d'Images Festival* and out on stage, *L'Impasse, I am what I am* at *La Ferme du Buisson, scène nationale de Marne-la-vallée*. This production was taken in March 2012 at the *FIND Festival, Schaubühne Berlin*, and in November 2012, at the *Next Festival, la rose des vents de Villeneuve d'Ascq* and to the *Festival Reims Scènes d'Europe* in December 2012. 2013: *Children of The Sun* by Maxim Gorky creation for *Vidy Theatre Lausanne*. 2014: *The Rise of Glory* Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin. 2015, *The Maid of Orleans*, F.Schiller, Maxim Gorki Theater, Berlin



Biography – Patrick ACOGNY
Choreographer, Pedagogue, Dancer
France / Senegal

The path of Patrick Acogny is a little unusual in the world of dance. He began dancing at the late age of 23. He trained first in Europe (including Belgium and France) before completing his training in Africa (Mali and Senegal). Fascinated by African dances and the work of his mother Germaine Acogny, he worked as a dancer with Irène Tassembédo, a former student of *Mudra Afrique*, and other French contemporary dance companies. In 1995, he was offered the chance to become a choreographer in England where he stayed six years at the direction of one of the biggest black dance companies in the country: *Kokuma Dance Theatre*.

In 2002, he returned to France and he collaborates with many dance schools and teaches master classes in France and abroad. In 2005, Patrick began to teach at the *Ecole des Sables* of Germaine Acogny and Helmut Vogt in *Toubab Dialaw/Senegal*. He

became assistant artistic director in 2007 and co-artistic director in 2012. With Germaine, he choreographs for the two dance companies Jant-Bi (male and female), gives dance lessons, hosts seminars and coaches dancers and choreographers who were trained at the school.

In addition to being an artist, a «doer» and a «transmitter» of dance, Patrick also holds two master's degrees in arts: that of a Middlesex University in London (UK) and the second from the University Paris 8. Patrick has also a PhD of arts, sciences, technologies and aesthetic: performing arts of the University of Paris 8.



**Biography – Fabrice BOUILLON “LaForest”
Musician, Writer and Composer,
Paris / France**

Fabrice is a musician writer and composer and a long-time collaborator of Jant-Bi. Under the alias “LaForest”, he produces a unique musical mixture electronics and acoustics, experimental and traditional approaches. His signature is to compose on location, so as to be close to the production teams and local realities.

After 3 years as an accompanist for the dance classes of Lyon’s National Conservatory, and with a solid background in video games’ music, he dedicates his work to living arts entirely. He scores many pieces for Laurence Levasseur and the National Circus School of Rosny, Germaine and Patrick Acogny (Jant-Bi), Kota Yamazaki, Jawolle Willa Jo Zollar (Urban BushWomen), Nora Chipaumire & the Pittsburgh’s Dance Alloy Theatre , Sébastien Cormier (Amalgame), Aurélie et Martin Cuvelier (Virevolt), Nita Liem & Bart Deuss (Don’t Hit Mama).

In 2003 and 2009 he released two solo albums, among which The Second Birth is a mirror of his experiences in Africa.

Writing and composing naturally lead him to directing and staging, first in 2008, co-directing the young audience show Oripeaux (Atelier Bonnetaille), which is still touring. Then Hop Hop Up, a puppet performance by French company Têtempoix. In 2010, he created with the circus artist Damien Droin the company Hors Surface, combine circus and music, poetry and theatre. The duet signs in 2 productions: TETRAKTYS – a Tale of Acropoetics, and BOAT (Transpoetic), now on the road. 2014 will see the birth of his own production: Company Faun.

**Biography – Sébastien Michaud
Light Designer
Paris / France**



Sébastien Michaud graduated from the French National Theatre School in 1993. As a close collaborator of Ludovic Lagarde, he designed the lighting of his plays including Olivier Cadiot’s Colonel des Zouaves in 1999 and Un mage en été in 2010, as well as Peter Verhelst’s Richard III performed at Avignon in 2007. In 2008, he designed the lighting for Pascal Dusapin’s opera Roméo et Juliette and Wolfgang Mitterer’s Massacre, directed by Ludovic Lagarde.

He designed with Célié Pauthé the stage setting for Quartett by Heiner Müller in 2003, for L’Ignorant and Le fou by Thomas Bernhard, for La Fin du commencement by Sean O’Casey at the Comédie-Française in 2007, and for S’agit et se pavane by Bergman in 2008. He also collaborated with Lucie Berelowitsch for Juillet de Viripaev in 2009, with Aurélia Guillet for La Maison brûlée by Strindberg in 2007, and with Siegrid Alnoy for Rêve d’un homme ridicule by Dostoïevski in 2006.

In January 2011, he designed the lighting for La Mouette directed by Mikaël Serre and in January 2012 he designed the lighting for Woyzeck, Léonce et Léna and La Mort de Danton by Georg Büchner, directed by Ludovic Lagarde at the Comédie de Reims, and performed at Théâtre de la Ville

in 2013. Recently he worked on the lighting for *Rappeler Roland* by Frédéric Boyer, for Opera show *La Voix humaine* based on Jean Cocteau and for *Lear is in town* based on *Le Roi Lear* by Shakespeare, at Avignon festival.

In 2014 he collaborated with composer Frédéric Verrières and director Guillaume Vincent for *Mimi - Scènes de la vie de bohème* at Les Bouffes du Nord, and worked on other shows like *La nuit des Rois*, directed by Bérangère Jannelle at Théâtre de La Villen, *L'Avare* by Molière, directed by Ludovic Lagarde at the Comédie de Reims, *Quai Ouest* directed by Ludovic Lagarde at the Comédie de Reims. The plays he worked on in 2015 include *La bête dans la jungle - La maladie de la mort*, directed by Célie Pauthe at Théâtre de la Colline, and *Exposition, Boulez* at Philharmonie in Paris.



Biography – Sébastien DUPOUEY

Video maker

Berlin / Germany

After studying at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, Sébastien Dupouey worked as a graphic designer and musician for the French music scene.

Later, he directed music video productions for French television.

Since 2005, he designs and develops videos for theater, video installations and films. He has worked with Falk Richter for *Cabale et Amour*, with Stefan Pucher for *Platonov* at the Münchner Kammerspiele, for Lars-Ole Walburg's, *Schnee* at the Münchner Kammerspiele, *Schwartzte Jungfrauen*, Christina Paul Hofer, Burgtheater Wien.

Since a few years, he began a collaboration with Thomas Ostermeier creating videos for *Before Sunrise*, *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, *Susn*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Hamlet*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Othello*, *Les Démons* ...

In October 2011, he collaborated with Mikael Serre for *L'impasse*, *I am What I am*, for the Festival Temps d'images at La Ferme du Buisson, scène nationale de Marne-la-vallée and the FIND Festival at the Schaubühne in Berlin in 2012; *Children Of The Sun* directed by Mikael Serre in 2013. 2013, *Children of The Sun*, Maxim Gorky, directed Mikaël Serre



Biography – Johanna DIAKHATE- RITTMAYER

Stylist, Costume Designer,

Dakar / Sénégal

Johanna DIAKHATE-RITTMAYER was born on December 8th, 1945 in Zurich, Switzerland, in a family that was very open to art and literature.

In 1968 she graduated from the Ecole Cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne with a Federal Certificate of Graphic Designer.

Subsequently, in 1973 she obtained her License of Arts from the University of Lausanne, with among others, Art History.

From 1968 to 1982, she was actively involved in a collective movement for the renewal of theater and dance in Lausanne, primarily as a costume and set designer.

She began a new career in the early 1980's, mainly specializing in the production of avant-garde fashion design in the French part of Switzerland.

Johanna Diakhaté-Rittmeyer continued her career that led her to Dakar, Senegal, where she lives and works as a costume designer since 1991. Johanna Diakhaté-Rittmeyer continued her career that led her to Dakar, Senegal, where she lives and works as a costume designer since 1991.

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