

## Mark Brown's theatre: Beautiful theatre – with strings attached



**Puppet theatre sits on the margins of Scottish theatre culture. However, as Mark Brown discovers at the FIAMS festival in Quebec, puppetry offers a world of wonders.**

As the Edinburgh festivals get into full swing, the focus tends to be on the 4 big name comedians and actors. Little attention is given to puppet theatre. A relatively neglected art form throughout the UK, puppetry is more celebrated in other countries, not least in Quebec, as the wonderful, biennial programme of FIAMS (Saguenay International Festival of Puppet Arts) attests. (...)

The outstanding show of this year's FIAMS programme was, for my money, Le Cirque Orphelin, by Quebecois company Les Sages Fous. Highly original, beautifully quirky, sometimes disconcerting and, often, very funny, it creates, in a room that is the quintessence of dilapidated urbanism, a miniature circus of vagabond artists.

The Equilibrist, for example, is a puppet comprised of only a head and two arms, who performs brilliant acrobatics. He is joined by a high-octane character who zooms around in a wheelchair and a besotted, male figure who, ultimately, achieves his dream of swimming in the circus aquarium with the seductive mermaid.

The piece enjoys superb, atmospheric music and sound, excellent lighting and charmingly distinctive puppets. Most impressively, it brings all of these elements together in a memorably consistent aesthetic. (...)



## **Le Cirque Orphelin: World Class Theater in Québec**

a review by **Andrew Periale**

When I am at a puppet festival, I know that I am going to see a lot of shows in a short period of time, and I tend to get a little fussy; I wait for that one show that blows me away – a performance for which I do not need to make allowances, or equivocate in my praise. In my week at FIAMS, that show was Le Cirque Orphelin by Les Sages Fous.

FIAMS – the Festival International des Arts de la Marionnette à Saguenay – is a week-long event in which each day is filled from morn to midnight (and beyond) with puppet shows, exhibits, panel discussions, demonstrations, street performance and a great deal of feasting and merrymaking.

I was there (as I had been in 2017) representing Puppetry International magazine and, informally, UNIMA-USA, and the days were filled with wonderful work. Even performances that I felt had not quite hit the mark, or for which I was not really the intended audience, were nonetheless full of good ideas, gorgeous puppets or clever staging. A few shows, however, were thoroughly satisfying, and while these tended, for me, to be the shows designed for adult audiences (Dave Espinosa's *My Great Work*, Los Ladrones de Quinotos's *Hervé's Voyage*), family shows such as Duda Paiva's *Monsters*, and Eugenio Navarro's *Variation on the Pulcinella* theme – *Rutinas* – were also dazzling.

Le Cirque Orphelin (Orphan Circus) by Les Sages Fous was the last show of the day (10:30PM) at the Espace Côté-Cour, a tiny, dimly-lit venue that might squeeze fifty or sixty spectators onto several tiers of benches clutching the wine, beer or soft drinks on offer at its small bar.

The show begins with a mystery – two darkly-clad (human) detectives (or spies? Ne'er-do-wells?) with flashlights make their way through a landscape of old oil drums and rusted metal cast-offs. They are looking desperately for something. What they find are several odd (puppet) characters – a mermaid and a "bird-man" who seem to be refugees from some strange little carnival sideshow. Their mission is to recapture these odd beings on the orders of some mysterious "boss" – and return them to a dark little circus. Which they do. In the process of completing their task, both creatures undergo meta-morphoses that stir up fears through archetypal images normally consigned to the recesses of our "collective unconscious". The human performers accomplished this with a deftness that seemed quite magical. A good example would be one of the first actions of the birdman: As soon as he is discovered by the dark-clad humans, he attempts to escape. At that point in the show, this creature is no more than a head and two arms. We understand his fear and his instinct for flight as he attempts to climb the walls or skitter over the heads of the audience. Of course, he cannot escape the puppeteers who are manipulating him– as rational beings we understand that– yet the manipulation is so deft and the isolation of puppet and manipulator so thoroughly realized, that it seems escape is truly possible. One of the most powerful things a puppeteer can do is play that paradox. It awakens the sense of cognitive dissonance in which a thing is both impossible and possible at the same time.

Of course, the show must also have a point, and be entertaining and endlessly inventive. Le Cirque Orphelin does all that. Kudos to Les Sages Fous cast and crew South Miller (puppets), Jacob Brindamour and Olivia Faye (performers), Sylvain Longpré (mechanisms and ingenious devices), Christian Laflamme (music) and Patrice Daigneault (lighting) for their ingenious probing of puppetry's endless potential to transform and delight.



# Toute La Culture.

JULY 26, 2019 | BY MATHIEU DOCHTERMANN



**An "Orphan Circus" that we would all like to adopt: virtuosity, a little crazy tenderness and rod puppets**

Grotesque and poetic, made of scraps and kneaded with tenderness. It is difficult to imagine how these different qualifiers can be applied to the same show. However, this is the case with the show *Le cirque orphelin* by the Quebec company *Les Sages Fous*, seen at FIAMS 2019. In a very elaborate scenario made of rusty scrap metal, two puppeteers

create touching characters using the rod technique. A feat of dexterity in handling, a jewel of visual and scenic writing of great sensitivity. Extraordinary.

The Orphan Circus is a show that has already been performed many times since it was created in 2010. The show has already crossed the Atlantic several times to meet the French public, but we must not miss any opportunity to discover it.

## **A show that is successful in every way**

What impresses, from the outset, is the scenography, which depicts a scrap yard made all of metal and scrap metal, now or in a post-apocalyptic future, but in any case clearly at the margin of the society that produced it and then rejected it on its periphery.

Although profound humanity that emerges from the whole, a writing that allows room for the delicate and the tender amidst the mutants and the forgotten, is undoubtedly even more striking for the spectator.

It may be impeccably fluid handling of the puppets, or the acting full of delight and surprise, or the mastery and precision, which all must be praised with the deepest bow of reverence.

In short, we don't know which end to summarize the proposal, but the conclusion is obvious, so we'll start with that: this orphan circus is a little gem. Far from the ambition of a form of a large set, this all-terrain and very accomplished work is of the kind that sows poetry in its path, and ensures the happiness of the spectators.

## **Welcome to the Circus of depths !**

The pretext, in this show, is one of an improbable circus, a circus of the marginal and the abnormal, a circus that may be cruel but ultimately poetic, that makes a spectacle of waste, that makes a spectacle in the middle of waste.

We see acrobatic or balancing acts full of audacity.

We see, also and above all, in the manner of freaks shows, strange creatures, who fascinate us with their familiar monstrosity.

We witness strange transformations.

We witness the class struggle, between the frightening owner, his henchmen, and the artists locked in cages.

It shows that cruelty and difference cannot prevent love from being born. That the strong do not always win and that the weak can be victorious .

We discover beauty in the middle of rusty cans, laughter in the middle of poverty. For not everything that is gold shines, not all those who wander are lost...

## **And the acting, above all**

If we try to analyse the proposal, it is probably the acting that best ensures the effectiveness of the whole piece.

The two performers immediately position themselves as actors: long before the first puppet enters the scene, they explore the set, interact, stumble on the audience, bringing a physical clown dimension that directly establishes a very playful relationship with the audience.

Because it is a nice feat for the performers, almost silent - they must pronounce ten sentences in one hour - to mobilize a rich range of emotions, and to establish a complicit dialogue with the audience, without using the text. As is often the case with clowning, the first row of spectators will be satellite in the game that is unfolding, with kindness but also with a lot of malice.

A beautiful performance, therefore, of clownish physical theatre. There is accuracy but also a lot of authenticity in the way we serve both the show and the meeting with the audience.

## **Manipulation, brilliantly mastered**

There is a clear pleasure in playing that emanates from both performers, and easily draws the audience in. Pleasure that doubles in manipulation: in complicity with the spectators, the two puppeteers enjoy their creatures as well as the action they have on them, in a rather pleasant dynamic of setting them in the abyss.

The rod puppet technique is not the most popular, but it seems that the two performers, Jacob Brindamour and Olivia Faye Lathuillère, fell in love with the possibilities they discovered there.

As a result, they have pushed their research to degrees of both inventiveness and fluidity that have few equivalents. Obviously, the fact that they have performed the show hundreds of times probably helps enormously: the two puppeteers have such great freedom in their manipulation that they give the impression that they can do everything, everything they want. They achieve such finesse of movement that they are able to indicate complex emotional states with minute movements and positions, yet of brilliant clarity.

The dissociation of puppeteers from their creatures is very well done. And the opposition games, when the puppet characters resist the puppet manipulators, are strikingly realistic.

Perhaps some of the movements repeat themselves a little over the length of the show: after all, the field of discoveries, even if wide, is still limited, and the range ends up running out a little bit. The show, from this point of view, stops just at the right moment, before it gets tired.

## **A distinctive artistic signature**

The puppets are inspired by the people of the landfills, or the creatures of the margin, half-human and half-monstrous: worms rub shoulders with mermaids, the birdman is consumed by an impossible love. Even "the Boss", the owner of the circus, played by a masked humanette, nevertheless takes on a grotesque appearance.

As has been said, these marginal people are embodied by a gallery of puppets, which are duplicated in several sizes for rather well found scale effects. They are exclusively rod puppets, whose potential for movement is fully exploited.

Above all, their workmanship is very beautiful, whether they are small or large scale. The faces are extremely expressive, the mechanisms and grips well thought out to allow freedom for the acting. Both disturbing and fragile, they manage to provoke, at their very sight, an ambivalent mixture of empathy and a feeling of strangeness, which is exactly what the show is about.

The decor of rusty metals and tired cans is impressively realistic and coherent.

## **Subtlety, in addition to emotion**

From the show description, one might be tempted to deduce that this is a univocal or even moralizing performance, which, under the guise of good feelings, gets lost in the meanders of explanation.

This is not the case.

Above all, the writing respects the viewer's freedom of interpretation and imagination. The characters have their share of ambivalence, both visual and narrative. There is no black and white here, there is only grey.

On this neutrality, which is like a fertile ground for emotion, feelings are free to unfold. There is laughter, but also tears. There is revolt, and there is hope. There is compassion, and there is disgust.

A good show is like life, which is a kaleidoscope of nuances, a chaos of encounters and events, a maelstrom of sensations and feelings sometimes antagonistic, with which everyone must compose their own melody.

This is what allows this orphaned Circus to reach deep into the audience.

Les Sages Fous deserve several times the standing ovation that salutes their work at each performance. If you have never joined the crowd of applauding people, it is time to come and sit in front of the caravan of this Circus!

#### DISTRIBUTION

South Miller MASK, MASK AND Puppets

INTERPRETATION Jacob Brindamour, Olivia Faye Lathuillère

Puppet Countryman Jacob Brindamour

MECHANISMS AND PATENTAGES Sylvain Longpré

MUSIC Christian Laflamme

LIGHTS Patrice Daigneault

Visuals: © Les Sages Fous

*Translated with [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator)*

*Toute la culture/ France*

*JULY 26, 2019 | BY MATHIEU DOCHTERMANN*

*<https://toutelaculture.com/spectacles/theatre/un-cirque-orphelin-sages-fous-fiams/>*



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# HERNING



## ANMELDELSE

# Treasure in a landfill

Important guest performance at Team Teatret. Everything is finely choreographed and performed by two mimes and their strange puppet ensemble

AF DORTE KOLDING

[heming@hermingfolkeblad.dk](mailto:heming@hermingfolkeblad.dk)

"The Orphan Circus"

Guest performances : Les Sages Fous

Direction: South Miller

Music: Christian Laflamme

Design: Sylvain Longpré

Lighting design : Patrice Daigneault

Starring: Jacob Brindamour

and Catherine C. Mousseau

For adults and children (nine years)

Team Theatre last night , also plays tonight



**HERNING** "The world is full of things  
 useful things  
 knick-knacks  
 useless things  
 thrown out  
 landfills  
 eat them  
 digests them  
 push them out  
 of scrap you have come  
 scrap, you shall be  
 and the scrap will rise again."

I apologise, I'm feeling poetic. For I have just seen the most poetic, magical, mysterious, surprising, touching, brilliant , small, large, show.

It was at Team Teatret last night , and it will perform again tonight. Fortunately, there are a handful of theatergoers with their big kids who will get an unforgettable experience.

It is difficult to transfer poetry into something as mundane as a theater review. I can only say that it was a rare gift to get acquainted with the larva, the artiste, the mermaid, the Birdman, and even the fearsome Boss, in this subtle circus performance of two french performers (a man and a woman) and their expressive, strange, puppet ensemble.

It takes place in a dump, in a landfill; the atmosphere is dark and windy. There is very little light. Flashlights. The two are searching for something. An old transistor radio plays music. Before you know it, out of nowhere is conjured up a larva; a small creature that moves around, and who even goes on a high wire. You feel mystified. What is this leading to? Aha! A circus wagon! A miniature wagon will be created by junk, and who brings with it the Orphan Circus with all of the aforesaid orphans and more or less legless personalities that go straight to the heart. Everything is meticulously choreographed, and we empathise with the two performers who play with their fates and their hands. The circus tells small stories. The most significant is the Birdman, who falls in love with a mermaid. Impossible love, which will have its happy end by means of a radical change.

I will not divulge the secret. Go to Team Teatret tonight. Get the answer and feel the magic.



Sunday, November 10th, 2013

PLAYING AROUND - NEW YORK

# Orphan Circus Exceptionally Magical

by **Alix Cohen** on Playing Around

Two flashlight-wielding figures, expressively worthy of silent films, creep through an alley of old fashioned industrial discard: corrugated metal panels, rusted oil drums and multi-gallon cans, part of a broken trolley, gears...an old radio (the source of mysterious music). Wary and whispering, they pick through findings and discover a toy circus wagon lit from inside. The pair misplace, then ingeniously rebuild the wagon in much larger scale – out of junk. Voila! The Orphan Circus, run with merciless vigor, by Monsieur P.T. Issimo. (A Commedia Del Arte human head with puppet body.)

"Derelicts and misfits," the odd, despairing, wounded, and lost found hidden among debris are conscripted (kidnapped) to perform. A caterpillar like creature with wild hair, deep, black-rimmed eyes, and a white face is drawn from a rusted can. Few words are spoken. Here: "Contortionist? Acrobat!" The perhaps four inch character tries fruitlessly to escape, but ends up somersaulting on cue as commanded. Further on, as a member of the troop, despite shudder and vigorous head shaking no, the little guy does tightrope tricks on a wire suspended over the yard. Hey, HUP!

Next we meet an old, somewhat goblin-like man (about six inches) – white face, wild hair, with disproportionately big head and hands, zooming around the alley in an airborne, motorized wheelchair. Baroom! Barrrooom! He's chased and finally cornered atop a central drum. A square oil can with a picture of Sirena, the mermaid on it is used to capture his fancy. On the back of the can is written: Center of Transformations – with an arrow pointing down. Steam is emitted. The old man disappears into the drum. Process, whispers the woman tellingly. Later, a romance is played out when Sirena appears swimming in a glowing tube of cloth (tank) and the old man, now without need of his chair, jumps in to join his love. There's a lovely moment the two figures float head to tilted head before he discovers breathing is impossible and leaps out gasping for breath. Tragedy. But no – one of our overseeing pair discovers a box of small, metal legs and another transformation occurs. Watching Sirena learn to use the new limbs and eventually exult in a sensual, hoochie koochie dance replete with pole dancing on the radio antenna, is as if observing an actress.

## Woman Around Town

www.womanaroundtown.com



Photos By Theo Cote of Jacob Brindamour and Olivia Faye

Articulation (she is manipulated by four narrow rods) is amazingly eloquent. Puppeteers seem to fade into the background. One after another, the hardscrabble company of conscripted thespians perform as forced, never failing to attempt to get away. We also meet a Bird Man – first small enough to swing in a cage and delicately flap around it, then larger, whooshing around the alley, all naked, aged, lumpy limbs and grace, and a creature literally just head and arms who manages to crawl all over his masters as well as several audience members before executing vertical handstands, first on palms, then fingertips. Puppeteers Olivia Faye Lathulliere and Jacob Brindamour are fine actors. Alone, they engage with focus and unfussy, affecting charm. Working with diminutive characters, the two react as if watching for the first time. Orphan Circus is fraught with real emotion, from anger, resignation and heartbreak to hope realized in requited love. The ensemble is comprised of the captured. Are they better off here than out in the cold? Will they be treated with brutality or fairness? What happens after the wagon moves on? Accepting this fantastical premise, we never lose the sense of a larger tale in which anything might happen. The puppets are truly fine art, beautifully crafted, disquieting, and engaging. Utilizing several in different scales creates a heady, mercurial mixture keeping us off balance. The show's soundscape is evocative and original, in turn mysterious, mechanical, watery. Lighting is subtle and effective. This is an exceptional evening of theater, stirring, impressionistic, dark and dreamy. A completely original tale dramatized with great sensitivity, manifest with tattered grandeur.



### European tour of "Les Sages Fous" with the "Orphan Circus»

The Canadian group was at the UNIMA Congress in 2004 in Rijeka with a breathtaking street theater piece, "Parade Issimo". We took a photo of this presentation as the front page for our 56th Das Andere Theatre. »Les Sages Fous" defend an unconventional theater: ritual and trivial, wild and beautiful. The Ensemble invents the pieces together, their playful work process keeps their performances, that must be further developed with the audience, very much alive. Its award-winning productions without words are always an unusual experience in the world ; on the streets, in theaters or even in your own tent.

This year again they planned an extensive European tour with a performance without words. In Germany, they performed with great success in Husum, Brausweig and Lubeck.

Amidst a "romantic" scrap yard of old oil drums, rusted metal parts and other various and long lost things, "Les Sages Fous» invite us to a secret rendezvous. Two "scrap dealers" see this place as an outlet for dreams of glitter and ash ; a secret, poetic circus. In the brown canisters of recycled artistes, there is love between two forgotten vagabonds ; a stranded mermaid and a "Birdman". A strict, mysterious impresario, with the face of Jacob Brindamour, encourages this curious troupe of rejects and homeless to lift themselves up from the rubble and become great artists.

Since 2002, the percussionist and composer Christian Laflamme, fascinated by the theater - poetry has been composing mysterious, very special music for each of their productions on unusual instruments.

The sound of metal objects against drums, or canisters from sheet metal barrel-awaken the orphaned creatures to love thereby creating a touching and rather unsentimental picture. The mermaid is not able to live on the shore and thus the Birdman nearly drowns again and again. But they finally find each other in the magical circus wagon.

The sensitive and very precise acting of the two "scrap dealers", mixed with the music and sounds of old metal, is so moving and poetic, that the audience takes home with it the tragic-comic impressions of a long-lost world. A world in which masks, puppets, objects, and one man, using images and gestures, say more than any words of this world.

**Stephan Shlafke**



## Unsentimental tragedy



" Nothing shown on the V International Festival of Contemporary Plays for Children and Youth Con-Texts in Poznań performances for me was as visually captivating as the play "The Orphan Circus ». The Canadian group Les Sages Fous presented a recycled theatre, built with scraps in a dirty alley somewhere in the city. In this very place, two lowly characters imagine a circus. The troupe is composed of vagabonds, refugees from the cabinet of curiosities, and ruled by a mysterious, ominous maestro.

From the beginning, a lot of impressive set design- a scrap metal yard of oil drums, cans, filler and other found objects. The whole is very precisely selected and functional. The space in which the vagabonds live, the post-industrial landscape, on the one hand very common in the four corners of any city, on the other-alienating and unreal. This layer is completed by a musical landscape, building a convincing, specific climate in which to discover the individual performances of the circus characters.

(...) the most hostile environment can be a mine of ideas and fun. They are like children who are deprived of expensive toys, discovering that the best ones are the ones that they themselves created with matches and chestnuts.(...)

The strength of this visually stunning presentation is that it does not content itself with the ingenious set design of a scrap metal junk yard that we see in the foreground, but rather with the beauty of the puppet manipulation and the tenderness towards them. The intimate atmosphere of this performance seduces the audience, which closely tracks the fate of circus characters. It is wonderful that the creators of Les Sages Fous do not descend into the sentimental tones of tragedy. Even at the end of the world, in its darkest alleys you can find something beautiful."

Szymon Adamczak  
Nowa Siła Krytyczna  
January 10, 2012, Poland

## The Orphan Circus - Theater festival for children and young people

### Magic in the dark

Who knew that puppets can create so much magic! The Canadian Les Sages Fous breathe new life into puppet theater with "The Orphan Circus".

#### Dukketeater Orphan Circus

Regi: South Miller  
Med Catherine  
Mosseau, Jacob  
Brindamour  
Les Sages Fous  
Klokkeklang, mini  
midi maxi



●● The Mini Midi Maxi festival offers some of the best in children's and youth theatre. "The Orphan Circus" is a rich blend of puppetry and theatre.

●● The show begins with two scrap metal dealers collecting strange creatures for a circus. Suddenly, a larva skeleton, a mermaid, and a bird man come to life before our eyes. The tiny, fragile puppets seem as if they are breathing with life, all the while being as skinny and scrawny as death itself.

●● The Circus is revealed in a small, worn, lit caravan that flies right down to the audience in the first row. Squeals of delight erupt from the youngsters.



**FENGSLER:** «Orphan Circus» trekker publikum med inn i et skrudd sirkusunivers med fuglemenn og havfruer. FOTO: ARNE RISTESUND

●● The story is simple, but fascinating. It is about transformation and love, as in an 18th century curio circus world that Tim Burton would have liked. The circus is run by "the boss", who is also a surprise as he is half puppet and half human.

●● The puppeteers, being the circus director's assistants, have tremendous control over the wild, flying and acrobatic creatures. They are the circus stage hands. The effective lighting and jazz-influenced music blends into this dark world of oil barrels and scrap.

●● We are in a gothic atmosphere where anything can happen, where being different is beautiful, and where there is hope in the darkest corner. I was completely smitten with the play's mermaid. Magical.

●● If you like Circus Cirkör, you will be captivated by the miniature world of the "Orphan Circus". Vestlandske Teatersebter and Mini Midi Maxi have a flair for innovative theater which wins over its audience.

●● It did so today.

Ann Kristin Ødegård



**BERGENS TIDENDE TORS DAG 3. NOVEMBER 2011**

## Poetry and magic

### Mini Midi Maxi

Orphan Circus

with Les Sages Fous (Canada)

(For 14 years and up)

physical theater

Somewhere that resembles a junkyard, with corrugated iron and rusty oil drums, two scrap dealers in the Orphan's Circus take us into a world of dreams and magic, darkness and mystery. From all the junk and scrap they conjure up the wonderful characters, created by all kinds of residues, and present them in almost wordless expression. After bringing the audience in as close as possible to this isolated recycled world, they put together a circus wagon of this and that, and then begin to open up one wonder room after the other.

Acrobats appear, an "equilibriste", a "bird man", a mermaid, a dancer and the authoritative circus director. With exquisite puppet manipulation, the two actors infuse life into these fairytale characters, all the while taking part in the game. This is a performance at the intersection of puppetry and traditional theater.

In the gloom they create magic, a little humor and sometimes even poetry. With exquisite movements, they maneuver their puppets and bring them to us in the very front rows, lit up and amplified with hand held flashlights. In this cabaret, the soundscape sometimes creates fear, sometimes creates wonder. For in this mysterious world, no one can feel completely safe. This visiting Canadian company is a little gem of its kind.

JAN H. LANDRO



GIOVEDÌ 27 OTTOBRE 2011

# KRAPP'S LAST POST

KLP teatro

Festival Incanti, Turin, Italie

## Enchantement by the Canadian puppets of Orphan Circus

(extracts from the article

by Marcella Scopellitti KLP teatro)

"The Orphan Circus" is a clandestine meeting with the magic and madness of the Canadian company Les Sages Fous. It is a storehouse of dreams, a secret treasure trove of puppet theatre.

The performance was held at Cavallerizza Reale in Torino as part of the 2011 edition of the festival « Incanti », an initiative of "Controluce Teatro d'Ombre", who awaits its grand final with the Bread and Puppet Theatre tomorrow, October 28th with « Men of flesh and Cardboard ».

The audience of "The Orphan Circus" is hijacked in the foyer and led into the theater through a service door, into a dark hall by two comical individuals who gesticulate using flashlights with a sense of urgency.

The stage appears very small and is illuminated by a constant semi-darkness, surrounded by strange tin walls and populated by large garbage bins. Within this box of recycled materials, the actors move about almost imperceptibly, maneuvering simple devices and small puppets.

Hence the Orphan Circus opens its doors and the two gangsters are beginning to manipulate the artistic objects. In addition to the mystery and magic, Les Sages Fous seem to produce a kind of non narrative poetry of wonder, (there is no story, per say ) and the effect that this produces is that the audience , intent on not missing a single detail, follows every single little movement of these strange puppets.

The sense of wonder in the room becomes palpable when we are presented with the small-puppet artists of Orphan Circus, all "animated" by a clever game of wires and rods. The charm of the inanimate, that suddenly comes alive and able to move, is certainly a great lesson for the art of theater, where actors in the flesh, taken to "communicate" the most diverse emotions, lose sight of precisely those skills (...)

The two actors-circus barkers do not lose credibility with the absolute magic of creatures that they maneuver. They move in unison and participate in the magic of these little bodies in motion. Thus, the Caterpillar tightrope walker, The Bird Man and the Mermaid characters are not simplistic, but rather very well-rounded individuals, able to perform stunts and panic "performance" as well as falling in love.

In parallel to The Orphan Circus acts, as such, is a story of improbable and impossible love between the beautiful mermaid and the Bird Man; the first physiologically obliged to live in the water, and the other locked in a wooden cage. Every self respecting circus is the cradle of transformation, hence the mermaid will have a new pair of legs, which will allow her to launch a dance in search for her beloved.

Evocative and thought provoking, The Orphan Circus, fills us with magic and wonder. It is small and precious gift of a theater capable of helping man in his many solitudes, to see things, even the very smallest, with new eyes, amazed at last.

« The Orphan Circus » breaks the borders without falling into easy stereotypes. A praise to these Canadian 'wise fools', who revive a theater of poetry, with no special effects and taking no easy loopholes.

MARCELLA SCOPELLITI



Krapp's Last Post, 2011/10/27, Torino, Italy

Traduit de l'italien

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**Goran Cvetkovic**  
*theater director and critic*

(...) A special attraction, among many in this outstanding performance, was the one with the puppet inside a see through capsule similar to the one with the famous magician Houdini when he spectacularly frees himself from the chains and his water grave breaking the glass walls with an axe. Well, this little puppet, led by very inspired and nimble puppeteers, is inside a see-through cylinder in a special cassette that moves inside up and down this glass box all the time commenting on some injustices all the time grasping for air like great Houdini. This was, really, a subtle and highly artistic opening of the Festival. Bravo!

Traduit du serbe

## CULTURE

CIRCUS

## Winter rendez-vous

ISABELLE PARÉ

(...) Les Sages Fous  
dazzle Montreal

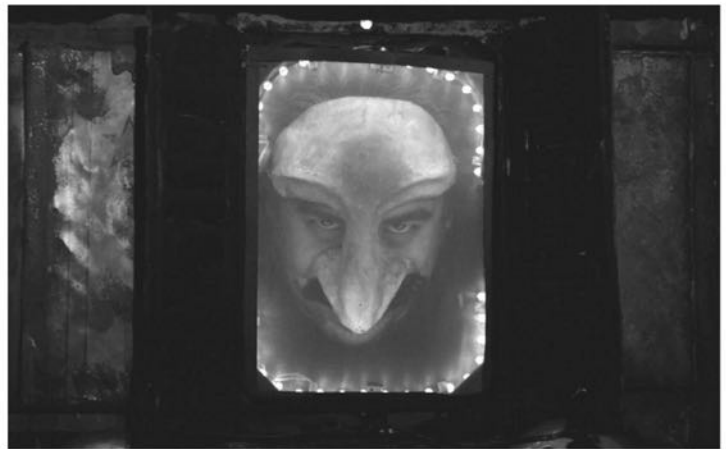
And finally, for adepts of the unusual, one must, without fail, present oneself at the festival *Les Trois-Jours de Casteliers* in Outremont. There, the unconventional tandem Les Sages Fous will make a rare visit to Montreal with their wordless circus of images, of objects lead astray, and of tall tales in which misadapted puppets hold the spotlight.

With *The Orphan Circus*, the troupe from Trois-Rivières, who has been touring in Europe since 2003, will present their third opus. The story of rusted metal and orphaned puppets will make it's home in the somber corridors of the basement of the school Paul-Gérin-Lajoie. There, these deviant puppets, well versed in strange going-ons, will be rehabilitated by two puppet tamers.

« We are sort of UFO in the circus world because we perform mostly in unconventional spaces, like abandoned warehouses and urban squats. We build a bridge between the theater and the urban architecture »

explains Jacob Brindamour, one of the founders of the troupe.

After Bizzarium and Parade Issimo, who promenaded from Croatia to Sardinia, Les Sages Fous have again slipped into delirium with *The Orphan Circus* in the company of a tail-less mermaid, a transvestite from Berlin, and a worm high on barbiturates. The troupe will perform in Trois-Rivières before attacking Montreal, first in the festival Les Trois Jours de Casteliers and afterwards in the chapel of Saint-Joseph of Rivières des Prairies.



SOURCE SAGES FOUS

translated from the article  
Virée hivernale (in french)





RADIO-CANADA

## Chez nous le matin

avec Frédéric Laflamme

En semaine de 6 h à 9 h



**RADIO**  
PREMIÈRE CHAÎNE

**Translated and transcribed from the live radio program**

**« Chez Nous le Matin » Radio Canada Mauricie, April 12th 2010, Trois-Rivières**

**Radio host Frederic Laflamme:** « Now it's time to talk about the Arts. Anne Boucher.... we see that you are floating on a cloud. You went to see Les Sages Fous this past weekend and you seem to be overjoyed at your experience »

**Radio arts columnist Anne Boucher:** « Yes, Saturday I went to Les Sages Fous and their work-in-progress of Cirque Orphelin; Small Cruel Tales. We had invited Jacob Brindamour, earlier this week, into our studios to talk about this work. It is a work in progress, a show of experimentations, of tests and observations. We had talked about the company's desire to present scenes (not necessarily in order) in order to understand their impact. Les Sages Fous want to be able to take the pulse of the audience, to see which scenes work and why, in order to construct a show that will eventually go on tour.

We were, by the way, informed at the beginning of the presentation that it was a work-in-progress...but that was not what stood out! They opened the show with a superbe lighting effect that brought us immediately into the mysterious world of the Cirque Orphelin (these small cruel tales take place within the Cirque Orphelin). We find ourselves facing a small set-up that (and I quote) reminds us of a « scrap yard » and there we discover strange and original puppets in a very unusual, finely constructed, singular universe.

Within this context, Les Sages Fous are exploring two new avenues: the infinitely small (you know often we see puppetry as being larger than life, or we see the strings and all of that) but here it is not the case at all! As I was saying, Les Sages Fous are using the infinitely small and a lot of very efficient lighting effects with small flashlights. Frankly, (laughter), it is absolutely amazing what we can do with this lighting technique. They prove it to us extremely well!

On the stage there are two puppet tamers, dressed in black. Very interestingly, those two puppeteers become full characters, all the while manipulating the puppets and the flashlights. They have the most incredible charisma! That is what captures our attention from the very first moment of the show. They dominate their art form in a most original way. And the beauty of it all, one of the most endearing elements of the 50 minute production, is that they are able to, through movement, to successfully give so much emotion to those little puppets! We become very attached to them! We are attached to those puppets emotionally. And this is a very important element in the production.

In this Cirque Orphelin we find a tail-less mermaid who wants to have legs; a tiny Bird Man, who is both adorable and pathetic; we meet the Inconsolable Acrobat, who is nothing but a head with arms and who is completely traumatised by his profession. And then there is the frightening and impressive circus director (who is played by Jacob Brindamour with a half mask) and who, through various lighting effects becomes a puppet. He gives us the shivers!

And this is why, I imagine, that the show is considered for adults (12 and up). It is bit frightening. Certain puppets, their expressions, and the gloomy, mysteriousness of this Cirque Orphelin make it a show that could frighten small children.

And the set....the set is ingenious! Everything is so well thought out, justified, so necessary. The show is absolutely captivating! I didn't phase out once the whole time. We dive into their world and never want to come out.

They are great artists, Les Sages Fous. You must absolutely witness them at least once in a lifetime! I have rarely seen people have such a command of their art form. And most of all, to be able to propose something so original with such a distinctive artistic signature. There is nobody else who does what Les Sages Fous do. They breathe life into those puppets and give them such unique personalities!

Now for logistics: one must absolutely go and see them. They are performing two more times next week at the Studio Théâtre Et Cetera. It is a very small, intimate space. Even when I saw it (at the cultural center) there was room for 50 people at most on a set of bleachers that had been installed in the middle of the room. They say it is 'unfinished' and work-in-progress' but I attest to the fact that there is a beginning, and an end... it is a must see! It is absolutely incredible to know that there are people like this in Trois-Rivières! »

## CIRCUS OF PARADOX

Trois-Rivières has always been a place of exploration for **Les Sages Fous**. Thanks to the constructive comments from the audience, each of their productions are elegantly fine tuned before blossoming overseas. With the work-in-progress of Cirque Orphelin; *small cruel tales*, they proceed in the same way. Meeting on the eve of a series of four performances.

KARINE GÉLINAS /

No tour schedule appears for Les Sages Fous in 2010. For the first time in many years **South Miller** (designer and director), **Jacob Brindamour** (actor) and **Sylvain Longpre** (actor and designer) have decided to invest their studio in the Rue Saint-Francois-Xavier throughout the summer and create their new show.

Entitled Cirque Orphelin; *small cruel tales*, this production, still in work-in-progress, leads the audience to an abandoned scrap yard. There, in the shadows of the multinational entertainment industry, two junk peddlers invent a circus from scraps and old objects. Thus is born a series of deconstructed stories depicting the life of a circus troupe of derelict and misfits. Their stories are both murky and luminous. "It's dark, but not that much. These are puppets that have difficult pasts, but they realize their dreams. They try, at any rate ..." says Sylvain Longpre.

"The show is about being an artist," says South Miller. "Our puppets are artists. Our own lives have been revolving around the 'show-business' for quite some years now. So we know art and success are double-edged swords ..." Indeed, three years ago, the troupe of puppeteers has skirted this harsh reality. "In 2007 we were invited to spend a month in a sort of outdoor German cabaret.

Normally, we never present our shows in a context like that. But it sounded interesting. We saw that other pertinent companies had also performed there, so we accepted the contract. The cabaret was in a huge garden. There were about 4,000 people who came in every evening, the list of shows in hand. They went from performance to performance as fast as they could to see as much as possible in one evening. One show that had the most success was one of two Hungarian circus brothers who had been performing the same act for 17 years. The act was 20 minutes and they had inherited it from their parents! We had heard that one of two Hungarian dreamed of returning to school. He wanted to leave the circus to become a trucker: we found this to be such an incredible sadness," she says. To make matters worse, his dream was almost impossible because their impresario put such a huge percentage of all of their wages into his own pocket.

There is also the story of this Dutch clown, a celebrity in his own country, who at this same event (in which he had become a sort of mascot), made himself a pin marked "Don't feed the clown". The audience would come year after year hoping to feed him cucumbers! While we were there, we said we had not yet made Cirque Orphelin [read *Small Cruel Tales*] because we were not mature enough yet. Somehow we realized that what we lived through in this Garden



Brindamour Jacob, co-author and performer of Les Sages Fous: "The city's residents are often witnesses for our hesitations, questionings and research. When the show is actually ready, it ends up leaving Trois-Rivières for the rest of the world."

Photo: Éric Gélinas

Cabaret was part of what we needed to talk about. There are, for example, those who can say that this clown Hans, who has been making a living the past 14 years in the Cabaret, is very well paid. But has he 'sold-out' or was he saved? OK, the contract pays his rent in Amsterdam for the rest of the year. We made money during that month in Germany as well, but I've never been more miserable in my whole life," says the artistic director.

### An Exclusive Contract

It is also to not fall into the trap of easy money and to keep their artistic integrity as members of this small theater company that Les Sages Fous signed a contract with Mr. Issimo. "We saw that the sharks of entertainment

world were circling around us, so we decided to sign an exclusive contract with a fictitious impresario to keep others at bay! Jacob Brindamour admits. Having an exclusive contract with Mr. Issimo protects us. We can't go work for others, and we are not permitted to do corporate events."

Initially, this exercise was a joke. But slowly, fiction met reality. "We had invented this character (Mr. Issimo), who has been following us ever since Parade Issimo, actually. We talk about him a lot, we've written about him. But as we have been imagining him, he has been born into existence. How often have we seen his white limousine pass by just at the beginning or the end of our show?" exclaims Sylvain Longpre.

### Work-in-Progress

Yes, it will be a work in progress version of Cirque Orphelin; *small cruel tales* which will be presented this month at the Maison de la Culture de Trois-Rivières, and the Studio Theatre Et Cetera. It must, however, be said that the works in progress of Les Sages Fous seldom look unfinished. "We know roughly where we are trying to go. Obviously at certain stages, it is presentable," says Sylvain Longpre. "We have been carrying this project for almost eight years." South Miller adds: "It's one thing to present a piece of work two or three times. But it's another thing to have an organized tour and present it 50 times! When you feel that this is not quite ready, it is a painful experience."