



D.R

Oh! Oui FRANCE

Stille Nacht

Company Oh ! Oui...

Our company, Oh ! Oui..., was formed after Joachim Latarjet, musicien and founding member of the Sentimental Bourreau company, met composer Philippe Decouflé (*Solo*) and actor Alexandra Fleischer.

Compagny Oh ! Oui...

Conception : Joachim Latarjet et Alexandra Fleischer
 Director and composer: Joachim Latarjet
 With : Alexandra Fleischer, Joachim Latarjet, Alexandre Théry
 Video : Mathilde Bertrand
 Lights : Léandre Garcia Lamolla
 Christine Tournecuillert

Sunday october 20th 2013 | Invisible Dog

Zoom

STILLE NACHT



« In April 2007, we went to Sambin, a small village in the Loir-et-Cher. René Fleischer had asked us to go.

Though he was born in 1935, he'd always said his childhood began in 1940, in Sambin. His parents are German. He didn't see them again until 1945.

for five years, he lived with a woman to whom he paid homage that April. All his childhood friends were there. It seemed they knew, without knowing. We all went, to listen to stories and discover others, because some were buried or had been silenced, often from shame.

After this ceremony, we wanted to know more, and went to ask René Fleischer about his childhood, about the war years in the country, and about his mother tongue, the language of love and of the executioner.

A destiny, a peculiar story, a stutter we know many children with similar stories were afflicted with, a broken, chopped up language.

Speak of what is you, but between the words, between French and German, to try to understand why, despite this "happy childhood," not a day goes by that René Fleischer doesn't think of these people who have disappeared.

It's a children's story.

The story of a child.

He has a secret. He must silence it, hide it, bury it.

He has to hide, to blend in, to faint, be eclipsed, be erased, to go away, to fade, to evaporate, dissolve. . . a little, disappear . . . for a while...

It's also a search,
for the hiding places...

for the answer to the question: why did the German language disappear from the Fleischer family? »

Can you sum up for me the story you tell in this show?

It's fairly complicated. Joachim and I wanted to tell the story of my father, René Fleischer. We quickly realized he's the one who tells it best, and decided to let him do so via video while we punctuate the story with what his experience means to us. This is where we got the idea for the themes of threat, dread, and danger, which are expressed through the show's music, dance and theatrics.

Did you collect texts on these topics or read accounts by survivors?

First we listened to my father talk about this period by interviewing him—the Second World War as seen by a German Jewish child hidden in France. Issues related to language, to one's native language, were central. Why did he refuse to speak German? Why did he make me take German as my first foreign language? We wondered about the possibility of dealing with these themes, with this period full of human tragedies and desolation while avoiding tackling them head on. We read a lot about the Holocaust, including works by Imre Kertész (even though we ended up not using them in the show) and Primo Levi, and watched a number of documentaries. One book in particular made a strong impression, though we discovered it very late in the creative process: *Les Disparus* [The Disappeared] by Daniel Mendelsohn. This book had an enormous impact on me because it discusses family secrets during this period; it tries to reveal them, to retrace them. And we've tried to do the same thing in our own way: to look at the story of René Fleischer as a riddle to be solved. To do that, we had to make the little boy grow up.

Did your father also think of the disappearance of language as a riddle? Did he offer any explanation? Did you think you might get different answers using different methods of inquiry?

That's right. My father is part of that generation of people who protect themselves by not talking much about themselves, but about events in an impersonal way. Paradoxically, he presented this period as happy, agreeable, saying he never lacked for anything. And there was always that forbidden topic: the disappeared, about which he never said anything. In our work, we drew heavily on *Masse et puissance* [Mass and Strength] by Elias Canetti, which we thought dealt very fairly with this era covered in ghosts and secrets, precisely because Canetti never tackles these issues head on, though they shape the whole book. We didn't want to bluntly name names either; we're afraid of realism. We wanted to do something that starts in the mind of a child and imagine what he might have felt and told himself. What actually happens on stage? A video shows your father telling his story while you perform theater, music and dance?

René tells us what he remembers: a little village in the Loir-et-Cher, a woman who hid him for five years, and German soldiers occupying the house, to whom he spontaneously spoke in his native language. The woman taking care of him became frightened and locked him in a room. He came out a stutterer, and never spoke German again. What happens on stage is everything we collected. We wanted to do a show about this while systematically eliminating everything that was too concrete or realistic. A dancer joined us and we wanted him to play all the roles: the child, the German soldier, etc., though this could also be a projection of the child's imagination. We wanted first of all to touch on certain themes related to childhood and its traumas: fear, threat, danger, nightmares, the question being what can a child imagine or understand during such a tragic period? René's presence on screen is highly emotionally charged: without him there wouldn't be a show.

This show has made it possible to break the family silence. I didn't do it as therapy, but I learned a lot about my family and its history. Even though I was afraid to do *Stille Nacht*, the desire to speak of the dead was stronger. We're the "post" generation: the generation that didn't experience the war and wants to understand, that needs to make the dead speak and to listen to them, to deal with the idea that, as Daniel Mendelsohn so beautifully put it, "the dead haven't disappeared, they're in limbo."