

Sefarad's

A woman in a white, draped dress is performing on a stage. She is looking towards the audience with a slight smile. The background is dark, and the audience is visible in the foreground, all bathed in a strong blue light. The overall mood is artistic and contemporary.

Sephardic songs
and music revisited by
THIERRY PÉCOU

A coproduction
OPERACT
ENSEMBLE VARIANCES
ARSENAL DE METZ
OPÉRA DE REIMS

A performance that associates ancient songs and contemporary compositions, musical style that is rooted in tradition with scenography inspired by contemporary art. An unusually intimate journey full of colours and emotions

operact

Sefarad's

Imagine a world, a long time ago. A multi-cultural world, warm, sparkling with life, where the inhabitants speak Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic and Judeo-Spanish. A safe haven. Then the inquisition came and forced the Jewish people to become nomads once again. Expelled from Spain, they spread out all around the Mediterranean basin. Over time, these men and women have maintained their ancestral songs, and enriched them with the popular music of the countries where they settled down. The result is an extraordinarily diverse, charming mixture, with Bulgarian Romanian, Italian, Arabic, North African, and Bosnian, Greek, Turkish and – of course – Spanish influences.

Now imagine a woman from this world, sharing her most intimate moments, singing in this wonderful mix of languages about the things women of all times encounter throughout the cycle of life.

That is *Sefarad's*. A journey into the Sephardic world, life, culture and – above all – music, with soprano Gaëlle Méchaly as the storyteller, the Sephardic woman, your guide.

Born from this rich tradition, she asked composer Thierry Pécou to create something new with these old songs, to mix them with the current musical influences in the same spirit as the Sephardic Jews would have done. The result of this experiment is a living testimony of what happened back then and happens nowadays when cultures and traditions meet: the music regenerates.

Sefarad's is a reinvention of the nomadic spirit, travelling to a new horizon consisting of all music between the Mediterranean world and jazz. Together with Ensemble Variances, Gaëlle Méchaly explores the entire spectre from oral tradition and improvisation to contemporary music and song. The careful staging of Stephan Grögler created an unusually intimate atmosphere, where the listener gets drawn into the woman's story full of colours and emotions.





Performances

ARSENAL DE METZ, WORLD PREMIERE
ABBAYE DE NOIRLAC
THÉÂTRE DE GARONNE, TOULOUSE
OPÉRA DE DIJON
FESTIVAL ARABESQUE, HAMBOURG
THÉÂTRE DE CORNOUAILLE
OPÉRA DE REIMS
PARIS TOWN HALL OF 4th DISTRICT

With

Gaëlle Méchal
Soprano

Stephan Grögler
Conception,
set design
and stage direction

Thierry Pécou
Composer and piano

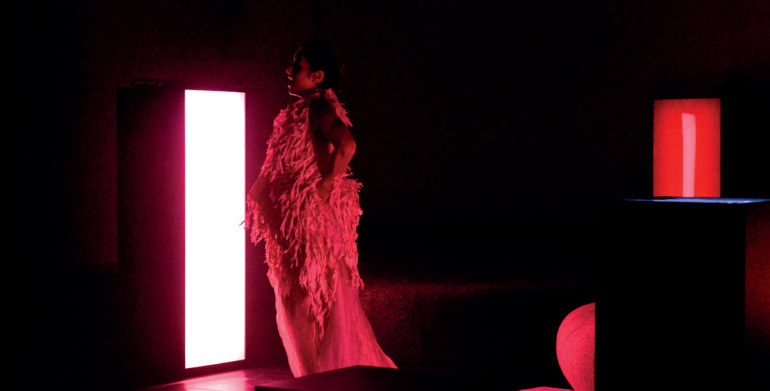
Ensemble Variances

Roy Krejberg
Costumes

Stéphanie Marin
(SMARIN) felt sofas

Sung in Hebrew, Arabic,
Aramaic and Judeo-Spanish
subtitled in English

Distribution



Sefarad's

A performance and a contemporary art installation sung in Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic and Judeo-Spanish subtitled in English

Music

Ballad, prayers, lullaby, complaint's songs revisited by composer Thierry Pécou

Musical composition

Thierry Pécou

Set design and stage direction

Stephan Gröglér

Costumes

Roy Krejberg

Felt Sofas (Livingstones)

Stéphanie Marin (SMARIN)

On an idea, with

Gaëlle Méchlay, Soprano

Musicians

Ensemble Variances

Anne Cartel : Flut

Carjez Gerretsen : Clarinet

Laurene Durantal : dubble-bass

Thierry Pécou : Piano

Karim Touré : drums

Lights

Cyril Mulon

Led Technology

Akwariom

Set construction

LFE

Films

Séverine Lathuillières

(Naïa-production)

Coproduction

operAct,

Ensemble Variances

Arsenal de Metz,

opéra de Reims

Création

Arsenal de Metz

September 2015

Performances

Nuits lumières de Noirlac

Théâtre de Garonne

Festival Arabesque Hamburg

Théâtre de Cornouailles Quimper

Opéra de Dijon

Opéra de Reims

Paris Mairie du Quatrième

Link

video.com/operact

More informations

www.operact.eu

www.ensemblevariances.com



The enchantment of Gaëlle Méchaly

Where does this urge to perform Sephardic songs come from?

I discovered the songs of the Sephardic tradition in the synagogue, as a child. My grandfather knew all the prayers by heart and I still remember his voice: it was a typical scratchy sound, marked by his strong Moroccan accent. My mother had some recordings of Judeo-Spanish ballads, and somehow I have the feeling she was always playing them whenever I was at home. These romansas (melodies) caused a state of pure inner joy: I loved the apparent simplicity of the melodic line and the melancholy that sometimes emerges, all the colours, those very oriental vocal curves. And the texts of course, with their unavoidable logic, sometimes even harsh; there was nothing romantic about it; they were just expressing common sense... I always promised myself: one day, I will do something with it. Express myself on stage in this familiar way; with the songs I grew up with, the same songs that inspired me to become a singer.

How are you going to reach your goal of making people rediscover this music, asking them to listen to it from a new perspective?

I talked a lot with Stephan Grögler about it. We came up with the idea to combine these ancient melodies with contemporary music; we also wanted to create a complete performance, to highlight the dramatic power of these songs. They have an expressive palette that makes each and every one of them a miniature opera in itself, so we wanted this programme, this

story, to become an "intimate opera".

To establish this, we got in touch with Thierry Pécou, a contemporary composer who is fascinated by music from oral traditions. He was able to give these songs a new musical line, blending in contemporary elements in a way that respects their history. Thus the new perspective.

The Judeo-Spanish language sometimes date back to the fifteenth century, how did you prepare for this?

My first approach was a thorough exploration of the language, I followed a course Judeo-Spanish for a year (it actually has a lot in common with the Castilian language of the fifteenth century).

So Sefarad's in short is a harmonious synthesis of the contributions of artists from different backgrounds.

Yes. I am convinced that this is the way we can offer this tradition a 'new' life. I also believe this is the only way to preserve this precious heritage, by keeping it alive and developing it at the same time, exactly like the Sephardim did throughout the centuries. I would like to add that, thanks to Thierry Pécou, Sefarad's is now going to be published by the prestigious German publisher Schott *. Schott is to the classical musician what la Pléiade is to the French author, so I am very proud that I helped Sephardic music to be listed between composers such as Mozart, Rossini and Wagner... I would say that is pretty good company!

Stephan Grögler

See the music, hear the space

Sephardic music comes from a mingling of multiple cultures and languages, forming a link between them. It is the result of centuries of travels, and has been influenced by each border that was crossed. Multi-cultural in both time and space, these songs tell the stories of the main events in every life by the voice of women, safely in the privacy of their family.

To regain that intimacy, I tried to establish a closeness between the singer, the musicians and the public in several ways: through the staging, the positions of all the participants*, the choice for felt sofas with organic forms** and the lights.

The audience is placed on the stage itself, in direct contact with the artists. Multiform blocks*** are placed on stage as luminous beacons, they radiate all innumerable shades of colour on stage, acting as a mirror – or an enhancement – of the emotions singer and musicians express. In this dim light, great light beams come in, slicing and cutting space.

This warm space full of softness, the impression of backpacks, the round organic (female) shapes of the felt sofas that remind of pebbles, it all helps to make the audience wonder. It is meant to raise questions: who are these people? What have they gone through to end up here? Did they just arrive or are they about to set off...? Well, heavy or light, filled with happy thoughts or nostalgic ones, those backpacks are loaded with memories that keeps us rooted in the reality of the present.

Between the felt sofas I put bright multiform blocks. Some are pointing to the sky like columns, forcing us to think in straight vertical lines and not just in soft and round forms. The blocks puncture the space, act as beacons for the interpreters through the course of events, but they also enclose them. These two opposing worlds allow me to navigate the characters between these two worlds, creating new musical and theatrical space constellations for each song.

The leitmotiv of the performance is formed by the order of the melodies, starting with birth,

ending with death. The projection of texts (song titles, information on their origins, translations) is not just accompanying the songs; it is also a visualisation of the fabulous interbreeding of languages and cultures.

The sophisticated, organic designs of Roy Krejberg, the magic he is able to weave into the textures and fabrics of the costumes he creates, give Gaëlle a stylish and unique look. It definitely has a strongly contemporary feeling, even powerful, but it also shows the delicacy and intimacy this repertoire requires.

Sefarad's staging is completely autonomous, without the need for specific theatre equipment (it only needs a connection to electricity). It has been created to make performances possible in unusual places, such as a museum, public spaces, etc.

* We can adapt the position of the audience and musicians to bi-frontal, circular or traditional, depending on location and acoustics.

** Sofa Living stones SMARIN

*** Performance digital device developed by Akwariom and groupédune



Thierry Pécou

How to create a singular sound



Sefarad's is a suite of Sephardic songs in Ladino language I composed on request of opera singer Gaëlle Méchaly. It is created for soprano, flute, clarinet, double bass, piano and percussion ad libitum. The cycle is following the major stages of life through different kinds of typical Judeo-Spanish songs: ballads and kantigas (medieval epics), songs about childbirth and lullabies, songs about purification and weddings, Colpas (religious songs), funeral songs ... At the heart of these songs we have (of course!) the original melodies, stories and texts. I wanted to keep the original melodies fully recognizable: I transcribed them in the easiest way possible, so the singer would have the freedom to improvise on them, colour them with ornaments, simply sing what was written or follow my suggestions for vocal ornaments.

The songs are of an old oral tradition and have complete stories in them, like Schubert Lie-

der. So the musical writing consisted mainly of creating a poetic universe in which the song and the narration can unfold. I wanted to establish a confrontation with the melody, without changing or distorting it, to create a singular harmonic and rhythmic language. I was inspired by some aspects of Jewish mysticism, particularly the ten sounds that belong to the ten sephirot * of the Kabbalah, and the rhythms from Arabic music.

In this cycle, the Kaddish has a special status because it is not based on any traditional melody and is composed using the liturgical text in Aramaic. It is the traditional prayer in honour of the deceased during burial ceremonies, and I was inspired by the rapid recitation of the rabbis in the Sephardic rite.

* According to the Kabbalists, God reduced part of his light (a process known Tsimtsum), in order to create the material world, and divine receptacles were filled with his essence. Unable to bear the intensity of this energy, the containers were broken into ten energy-essences. As a consequence, the energy in the entire universe is now spread through a system of ten transformers, called sephirot.



Sefarad's, an intimate opera

It may surprise you, but Judeo-Spanish song was mainly sung by women. Their voices kept the tradition alive throughout time, and thanks to them, we still know this wonderful music. It is not only a testimony of the culture and identity of these Jewish people in exile, but also of the way they blended in and adapted. It is a directory of female - and even feminist - voices, sharing every aspect of their daily life, love and traditions: from lullabies to funeral songs, telling epical, biblical or fantastic stories. They sing about love as a happy, faithful experience, but also about being broken hearted because of adultery or unanswered love.

The staging and dramaturgy is made to highlight all the stages of life that occur in the most intimate story a woman can tell: her own story. By these songs, the community customs were transferred from one generation to another. Sometimes the women did not stick to rules and traditions only, but also included some good advice or statements. The song was the subversive and discreet way to teach the next generation of Jewish women, who - according to tradition - were only allowed to express themselves freely within the closed environment of their house, all the lessons of life they really needed to know.

TITLES OF MELODIES

ADIO KERIDA / KUENDO EL REY NIMROD / A LA UNA / LA PARIDA / LA SERENA /
YO M'ENAMORI D'UN AIRE / MAMA YO NO TENGO VISTO / UNA MATICA DE RUDA /
MAMA YO NO TENGO VISTO 2 / KANTIKA DE NOVIA / SIDI HABIBI / LEKHA DODI / KADDISH /
NOCHES / PORKE YORACH BLANCA NINIA

Press

TÉLÉGRAMME-BRETAGNE

A performance we will remember for a very long time... Stephan Grögler's very effective staging, a beautiful setting with dimmed lights, enabled the excellent soprano Gaëlle Méchaly to almost address each viewer individually, as if she told him or her a story. Her pure and expressive voice took us on a journey, dragged us deep into the lands of our biblical ancestors. Sefarad's has won the hearts of the audience at the Cornish Theatre workshop. (...) All these undeniably charming melodies inspired composer Thierry Pécou (...) the combination led us into a warm, welcoming multicultural world.

DIAPASON

Irresistibly invigorating, colorful and well-sounding, the music of Thierry Pécou is a ray of sunshine in the austere landscape of the French musical creation. Pécou's music is always a call upon the listener to remember his roots and the nature that surrounds him.



WHAT OTHERS THOUGHT OF SEPHARAD'S

NATALIE DESSAY Singer

"To evoke, but not replicate, it's no imitation. Right from the soul of Jewish tradition, and then the interpretation of it. Pure poetry, in short"

SERGE GAYMARD Director of the Opéra de Reims, Philippe Le Goff, director Cesare CNCM

"The joint venture of soprano Gaëlle Méchaly and composer Thierry Pécou leads us subtly into the Sephardic musical universe they reinvented. The music is undoubtedly contemporary, without betraying its roots, and remarkably enhanced by the highly efficient staging of Stephan Grögler"

ISOLDE LAGACÉ Management Arte Musica / Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

"A captivating and moving journey through Sephardic culture. With its haunting melodies, the rhythms of the percussion, mixed with the beautiful voice of Gaëlle Méchaly, this whole evening (...) was simply pure happiness! "

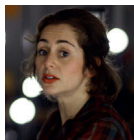
RUTH BÄSSLER Ministry of Culture in Hamburg (DL) charge of international exchange

"The performance in the Sankt-Katharinen church of Hamburg was fascinating, I will do my best for this show to get travel in other place in Germany"

ELIETTE ABECASSIS PHILOSOPHER Writer

"With all her characteristic elegance and talent, Gaëlle Méchaly brings a new version of Ladino songs, pure and highly sensitive"

Biography



GAËLLE MÉCHALY

Soprano

Gaëlle Méchaly studied music at the CNR in Marseille where she won four gold medals for her piano performance (Pierre Barbizet class), for

her part in chamber music and for her skills at singing including singing for the opera. She has won several international contests as prestigious as the Henry Sauguet award "Prix de la Sacem, Mélodie française du XXème siècle", "Prix Yves-Saint-Laurent", semi finalist in the Cardiff singer of the world.... Her musical career, rich and eclectic, extends from baroque to opéra comique, from musicals to contemporary music. Critics praised her for her vocal virtuosity, the clearness of her timber, her performances and her stage presence. She has performed on the greatest Palais Garnier, Royal Albert Hall, Tokyo Kioi Hall, Melbourne Recital Center, the BAM, New York Alice Tully Hall, Fenice of Venice... under the direction of Ricardo Muti, Bernard Soustrot, Yoram David, Emmanuelle Haïm. Faithful to William Christie and Hervé Niquet, Gaëlle Méchaly has sang in important baroque music festivals (Ambronay, Beaune, Versailles, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Cologne) and in the Aix-en-Provence festival. She recorded Zoroastre which was nominated for the 46th USA Grammy Awards in 2004.

www.gaellemechaly.com



THIERRY PÉCOU

Musical director and piano

Born in 1965 in Paris, Thierry Pécou studies at the Paris Conservatoire Supérieur, where he won First Prizes in orchestration and com-

position. He was pensioner at La Casa de Velazquez in Madrid, laureate of the "Prix Villa Médicis Hors Les Murs". He has won numerous prizes, including the "Tribune Internationale des compositeurs de l'UNESCO" "Prix Georges Enesco et des jeunes compositeurs de la SACEM" "Prix Musique de la SADC" "Prix Pierre Cardin de l'Académie des Beaux-arts" "Prix Simone & Cino del Duca for the Composer 2010" by the Academy of Beaux-arts "Grand Prix 2010" by the Academy Charles Cros for the recording of the Symphonie du Jaguar. His works have been commissioned and performed by artists such as the Kronos Quartet, Alexandre Tharaud, the Quatuor Debussy and at such festivals as Music

Week in Amsterdam, the Moscow Autumn Festival, New Music Concerts in Toronto, the Foro Internacional de Música Nueva in Mexico City, the Ambronay Festival in France, the Bath International Music Festival in England, the Tampere Choir Festival in Finland, the Shanghai Spring Music Festival in China, and such venues as the Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall and Izumi Hall Osaka in Japan, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. Among his recent compositions: Symphonie du Jaguar (2003, Festival Présences de Radio France), the opera L'Amour coupable based on Beaumarchais' La Mère coupable, on a libretto by Eugene Green staging by Stephan Grögler. Orquoy for orchestra (April 2013, May 2014, co-commission Arsenal-Metz, Orchestre National de Lorraine and Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern), Le Visage, le Cœur, concerto for piano and choir (July 2013, Festival de le Roque d'Anthéron). Recording of the Symphonie du Jaguar available since January (Harmonia Mundi, "Diapason d'or" award of the year. New album Tremendum (chamber music) (Harmonia Mundi, "Diapason d'or". Among his upcoming compositions: Concerto for trumpet and orchestra (season 2015/16, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Håkan Hardenberger, trumpet.

www.thierrypecou.fr



STEPHAN GRÖGLER

Stage director, set designing

Stephan Grögler produces numerous operas including La Somnambula (Bellini) with Nathalie Dessay for the Santa Fe festival, Teatro Comunale di

Bologna, Samson et Dalila at Lecce opera, Cendrillon in the Monnaie de Bruxelles and at the Grand Théâtre du Luxembourg, La Bohème in Bienne, Bluebeard and Der Zwerg, The Dwarf at the Opera of Berne, La Traviata at the Dublin Opera, Tancredi at the Opera of Marseille, La Cenerentola in Lausanne, Viva la Mamma at the Montpellièr Opera, Don Pasquale in St. Gallen opera, L'Anima del Filosofo at the Opera of Lausanne, Le Nozze di Figaro in Nantes and Angers, The Beggar's Opera in Caen and Rouen, Der Kaiser von Atlantis, The Emperor of Atlantis and The Turn of The Screw at Opéra Comique de Paris and the Lyon National Opera, the much acclaimed production of Lulli's Roland in cooperation with Christophe Rousset, Cambiale di Matrimonio for the Festival Aix-en-Provence and Ambronay festival. His interest in contemporary music leads him also to create the world première of Works by composers including Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Gracianne Finzi, Peter Maxwell Davies, José Evangelista, Pascal Dusapin... Among his upcoming projects: Opera National in Nancy, Die Weisse Rose, Pierrot Lunaire with Julia Migenes. Furthermore Stephan Grögler was entrusted by the Agency Marcadé the staging of events shows for houses Cartier or Van

Cleef & Arpels in Paris, New York, Los Angeles... And three times that of Rose-Ball for the Principality of Monaco with the world of artists as diverse as fashion Karl Lagerfeld, Naomi Campbell, art Fernando Botero, Marianne Faithfull, Lambert Wilson, Shirley Bassey, Ben Kingsley, Jane Birkin...

www.stephan-groler.com



ENSEMBLE VARIANCES

Artistic leader, composer and pianist Thierry Pécou has assembled an exquisite group of chamber musicians and solo-performers in order to create

more than mere concerts. Their performances are about experiencing music, about being touched by the deeper layers you would never get to know by just using your ears. The secret lies in the programmes Thierry Pécou creates: these do not just exist of separate compositions, but are compositions in themselves. Compositions that can be staged, or choreographed. Together with performers and stage directors from all over the world they create the perfect platform for contemporary music. Rhythms, phrases and movements take over, irresistibly spreading throughout the entire space and the concert has become a ritual in itself.

www.ensemblevariances.com

STÉPHANIE MARIN

Designer

French designer, Stéphanie Marin moved toward eco-design in 1990. In 2002, she decided to extend her research to design and habitat, a design without compromise between comfort, quality of the design and dream, the gestural induced by the use guides her throughout the work of design. Her anticonformist projects point out the narrowness of the link between art and design.

www.smarin.net

ROY KREJBERG

stylist

The Danish stylist Roy Krejberg designs the collections of the brand based in Paris PEACHOO + KREJBERG. It is recognized in the fashion world as one of the most original artists of his generation. It is part of the elite whose parades for «fashion weeks of Paris» are popular and monitored by the international press. The designer likes to mix influences, styles and codes in its architectural approach to design his collections, fine fabrics, meticulously designed products to obtain an element of «deliberate imperfection.»

www.peachookrejberg.com



CYRILLE MULON

Lighting Designer

His eclectic career led him to work as much for the scene for the film. From the School Louis Lumière, he began his career at the camera and works

including numerous documentaries on artists like Teshigawara, Régy Claude, Michel Portal, Pierre-Laurent Aimard. In 1998, he joined Peter Brook team at the Bouffes du Nord Theatre and participated in numerous international tours. Discovering the world of contemporary dance with the American choreographer Stéfanie Batten Bland, he collaborated since 2011 with the Franco-Berlin choreographers Sébastien Ramirez and Honji Wang Monchichi, Borderline. It also creates the lights for Bintou Dembélé Z.H, Jann Gallois P = mg and Diagnostics, Johanna Faye and Saido Darwin Iskio. And for the Opera of Rouen in the direction of Stephan Gröglers Trilogy Beaumarchais.



OPERACT

operAct : is a compagny created by director Stephan Gröglers. Its purpose is the production and distribution of live shows and ambition to transform by renewing the relationship between

the Lyric Art and its audience, creating traveling performances halfway between musical theater and contemporary art installation. A inventiveness thoughts scores service for a reduced formation in an economy of scale opening up to lightweight advantage. Mobile troupe, visual artists from different backgrounds, united by the identity of a strong artistic project in places of unexpected performances. Choose topics resonate with the news that speak of our fears and joys. An immersive experience that accompanies the public in a more immediate discovery of the work. For operAct, the challenges are many, in favor of emotion, with the stated purpose of giving the keys of a musical and visual art to address freely. The latest operAct productions: Spells and carafes, The White Rose, Sefarad's, als ob ..., Songs from the Gutter-Piaf (The Tiger Lillies)

www.operact.eu



SET UP PLAN

Depth of the scene : about 8m

Frame width of the stage : 8 -18m / Height poles : 3-8m

Detailed specifications and a broadcast budget are available on request

CONTACT

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operact

