



Théâtre Gérard Philipe
Centre dramatique national de Saint-Denis
Direction: Jean Bellorini

La bonne Âme du Sé-Tchouan

by Bertolt Brecht
Stage direction Jean Bellorini

French-speaking production with Subtitles



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Premiere October 2013
Now on tour

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La bonne âme du Sé-Tchouan (The Good person of Setzuan)

by **Bertolt Brecht**

Stage director **Jean Bellorini**

"This "dramatic parable" has been re-invested with an urge, a tragic contemporariness and a formal modernity that is even more poignant now than at the time it was written.

In a world like ours, where – it seems to me – we are losing all measure and particularly that of goodness, a world where we contemplate – almost with coldness – the violence that erupts every minute of the day, "THE GOOD PERSON OF SETZUAN" seems to offer on the side of art, like a snapshot of the atrocious schizophrenia that has taken hold of us.

The schizophrenia of SHEN TE, the good soul, and that of SHUI TA, the evil one, is revealed in the implacable light of theatre, our mirror and our life."

Giorgio Strehler - 1982

Set and lighting designer **Jean Bellorini**

Costume designer **Macha Makeïeff**

Music composers **Jean Bellorini, Michalis Boliakis, Hugo Sablic**

Sound **Joan Cambon**

Make-up designer **Laurence Aué**

With **Danielle Ajoret, Michalis Boliakis, François Deblock, Karyll Elgrichi, Claude Evrard, Jules Garreau, Camille de la Guillonnière, Jacques Hadjaje, Xavier Brière, Blanche Leleu, Clara Mayer, Teddy Melis, Marie Perrin, Marc Plas, Geoffroy Rondeau, Hugo Sablic, Damien Zanoly et un enfant**

L'Arche is the publisher of the performed text.



Premieres from 9 to 19 October 2013 at the Théâtre national of Toulouse Midi-Pyrénées

Tour 2013/2014 :

Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe > 7 November 2013 - 15 December / Comédie de Valence > 19 - 20 December / Théâtre Firmin Gémier - La Piscine > 7 - 12 January 2014 / Espace Jean Legendre - Théâtre de Compiègne > 16 - 17 January / Théâtre Liberté - Toulon > 23 - 24 January / La Criée - Théâtre national de Marseille > 29 January - 1^{er} February / L'Équinoxe - Scène nationale de Châteauroux > 6 - 7 February / Le Cratère - Scène nationale d'Alès > 13 - 15 February / Théâtre de la Croix-Rousse > 19 February - 2 March / Théâtre Louis Aragon, Tremblay-en-France > 6 - 7 April

Tour 2014/2015 :

People's Theatre of Beijing, China > 1er - 3 August 2014 / Théâtre Gérard Philipe, centre dramatique national de Saint-Denis > 8 - 18 January 2015 / Théâtre de Caen > 22 - 25 January / Scène nationale d'Albi > 29 - 30 January / Le Carreau, Scène nationale de Forbach > 4 - 5 February / Théâtre d'Angoulême, Scène nationale > 11 - 13 February / Scène nationale Evreux Louviers > 17 February / Domaine d'O, Montpellier > 4 - 5 March / Scène nationale de Sète et du bassin de Thau > 10 - 11 March / Les Treize Arches, Scène conventionnée de Brive la Gaillarde > 18 - 19 March / Centre culturel le Figuier, Argenteuil > 16 - 17 April

Production Théâtre Gérard Philipe - Centre dramatique national de Saint-Denis - Coproduction TNT - Théâtre National de Toulouse Midi-Pyrénées, Compagnie Air de Lune, Odéon - Théâtre de l'Europe, La Criée - Théâtre national de Marseille, Théâtre de la Croix-Rousse, Théâtre Liberté - Toulon, Espace Jean Legendre - Théâtre de Compiègne, Théâtre Firmin Gémier - La Piscine, Scène nationale d'Albi, L'Équinoxe - Scène nationale de Châteauroux, Le Cratère - Scène nationale d'Alès

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Director's Statement

The issue isn't about being current, it's about being contemporary.

In the remote Chinese province of Szechuan, the gods are travelling. They are looking for a good soul and manage to find one, who accepts to give them shelter for the night: it is Shen Te, the prostitute. To thank her, they give her money. She then quits her job and buys a small tobacco shop. That's when other troubles start for her: escaping from misery also means confronting it: not just physical, social misery, but also moral misery. The epic saga of the adventures of Shen Te is punctuated by desperate calls to goodness and outbursts of anger, in the face of the mediocrity and passivity of human beings.

The play deals with humankind and its schizophrenia, mercantile love vs. passionate love.

We will be facing the unbearable contemporariness of a world that is more and more at ease with its own cruelty, a world where toughness is a value that feeds the dignity of our egoisms. Thus Shen Te's cry for help at the end of the play, where she asks whether it is possible to change the world, is a cry aimed at the world of today – a cry for solidarity. We cannot achieve anything on our own. Destiny is in the hands of Man.

Brecht is with *the Good Person* a very humanist, rigorous and strict playwright: the writing is extremely maintained. Brecht does not just limit himself to the mere telling of a parable of goodness. It is one of his most thorough works from the point of view of poetry and direct speech.

The fable's didactic dimension tends to fade behind its poetry and lyricism.

It is a theatre of questioning in the face of the existence of Man – a political theatre – yet performed via the mystery of poetry... a somehow disorderly Brecht.

It is a theatre in which we don't forget that stories are being told. With and thanks to the artifices of theatre. Singing poetry. A theatre company. Several generations. Ancient gods, an old lady, a child, young people, men and women. A big family.

Some women's roles such as the landlady or Shin the widow will be performed by men. This is a *mise en abîme* of the play itself since Shen Te turned Shui Ta will find herself dealing with women played by men. It is without doubt with some of the impressions found in the cinematographic work of Almodovar that I want to play with the true confusion of genders. In order to go beyond the schizophrenia of "good/evil".

Brecht depicts these Szechuan residents with a clairvoyance that betrays his sadness and revolt in the face of people's incapacity to deal with the structures of domination.

Dishonesty and violence are reminiscent of 80's Russia with its communitarian tower blocks... A transition towards capitalism trying to find itself...

And then money. The only solution? Et then chaos.

The purest of poetry will be born from the dirtiest violence of the world.

Actors will be plunged into squalor. A crumbling wall, the sky. A tree, some rain, iron windows opening onto the huge dumping zone that may represent our world. And then again stars.

Like a sunflower growing in manure.

We need to imagine a simple, funny yet fearsome show. The rhythm will not be a military one but rather that of a dance, conscious of a light-footed grace and at the same time a violent strength. Between fable and reality, from dream to nightmare, from hope to fear... or rather the other way round.

The music of a dreamlike world and the noise of reality. Original and popular songs. Actors-musicians-singers-stage workers... at the service of the fable.

The presence of a mad, grandiose, virtuoso pianist. Brass, strings, percussions. Songs and a spirit of fanfare brought on by all 18 actors and a virtuoso pianist.

Jean Bellorini, June 2012

Something must be wrong with our world...

Shen Te:

**“Alas, your world is difficult! Too much misery, too much despair!
The hand that is extended to a beggar,
The beggar at once tears off!
Whoever helps the lost is lost himself!
For who could long refuse to be bad when he who eats no meat must die?
All the things that were needed – where should I have taken them from?
From myself! But then I perished!
A load of good intentions weighed me down to the ground.
Yet when I was unjust I walked mightily about and ate good meat!
Something must be wrong with our world.
Why is malice well rewarded? Why do punishments await the good?
Oh, how I should have loved to pamper myself!
And there was also a secret knowledge in me.
My foster-mother washed me in water from the gutter:
That gave me a sharp eye.
Yet pity pained me so, I was an angry wolf at the sight of misery.
Then I felt how I was changing and kind words turned to ashes in my mouth.
And yet I wished to be an Angel to the Suburbs.
To give was a delight. A happy face, and I walked on clouds.
Condemn me: everything I did I did to help my neighbour,
To love my lover, and to save my little son from want.
For your great plans, O gods! I was too poor and small.”**

Bertold Brecht – The Good Person of Setzuan Scene



Air de Lune's repertory artistic project

For a theatre of the present

It seems to me fundamental that in this day and age we explain ourselves directly to the public. We live in a fascinating era where the supremacy of technology transports visual and cinematographic art towards new experiments and forms. However if theatre has remained and persisted for thousands of years, it is because it is the home of speech... I would almost want to say « sacred » if this word didn't have such a religious, mystical connotation... Nonetheless this speech brings to the audience something absolute that is impossible to find via a screen. What I'm talking about here – even if it can seem a little simplistic – is Life , and about those inner worlds that are transmitted from person to person, playing and at the same time listening to each other within a theatre.

From the fusional shock between style and content springs forth poetry. In the space of an instant. Here and now. The art of the present, the art of the perceptible, the art of the ephemeral.

I would like to keep on celebrating the union of theatre with music.

Notions of happiness and dreaming are the basis for a humanist theatre. Theatre ought to be a celebration. A joyous celebration where we can hear everything, including the sternest of dramas. Poetry is indispensable to humanity. Theatre ought to be poetic. It ought to open up to imagination and leave an active role to the spectator. It has an educational mission: when it opens up new horizons to people and when it allows them to discover themselves more deeply.

Our shows will need to be intelligible on several levels and will always be constructed around emotion, instinct. Isn't the surest means to awaken the mind to touch the heart first, and isn't music the most universal means to do so?

I pledge to never be part of a trend or to follow one. It must be an evolving theatre that re-invents itself each time with a close link between the location and its time.

« *The world is beautiful because it is varied* » said Primo Levi.

The shows will be just as different as our world is. The content? Our artistic vision: a close, permanent link between music and speech, even the mere musicality of the text. The style? To aim towards all that makes us question Humanity and its condition. Theatre has several roles to play: it is didactic, metaphysical, but also at times light-hearted and entertaining. I like shows where you can laugh, cry and ponder – all in the space of the same evening.

I believe that people go to the theatre to be touched, to watch and listen « what is human ». Because it is where Humankind talks to Humankind, because time takes on a different value, human presence takes on a different dimension and because at certain times – however rare these may be – we can feel, almost concretely, this invisible link that connects us all: Life.

« *I believe theatre is one of the last experiences still being offered to Man which aim is to be experienced collectively.* » Laurent Terzieff

Jean Bellorini

Bertolt Brecht (1898 -1956)

Bertolt Brecht was born in Augsburg, Germany, on 19th February, 1898. He studied philosophy and medicine at the University of Munich before becoming a medical orderly in a German military hospital during the First World War. This experience reinforced his hatred of war and influenced his support for the failed Socialist revolution in 1919.

After the war Brecht returned to university but eventually became more interested in literature than medicine. His first play to be produced was *Baal* (1922). This was followed by plays deeply influenced by the work of Ernst Toller. This included *Drums in the Night*, a play about a soldier returning from war, *Jungle of the Cities* (1923), *Man Equals Man* (1926) and *A Respectable Wedding* (1926).

George Grosz knew him during this period: "Brecht was interested in English writers and Chinese philosophers. He read Swift, Butler and Wells, and also Kipling. He dressed like nobody else in the circle, and looked like some kind of engineer or car mechanic, always wearing a thin leather tie - without oil stains, of course. Instead of the usual sort of waistcoat, he wore one with long sleeves; the cut of all his suits were baggy and somewhat American, with padded shoulders and wedge-shaped trousers. Without his monkish face and the hair combed down on his forehead he might have been mistaken for a cross between a German chauffeur and a Russian commissar."

In 1927 Brecht collaborated with the composer Kurt Weill to produce the musical play, *The Little Mahagonny*. They then produced *The Threepenny Opera*. Although based on *The Beggar's Opera* that was originally produced in 1728, Brecht added his own lyrics that illustrated his growing belief in Marxism. He also worked with the composer Hanns Eisner in *The Measure Taken* (1930).

Brecht attempted to develop a new approach to the theatre. He tried to persuade his audiences to see the stage as a stage, actors as actors and not the traditional make-believe of the theatre. Brecht required detachment, not passion, from the observing audience. The purpose of the play was to awaken the spectators' minds so that he could communicate his version of the truth.

Brecht's plays reflected a Marxist interpretation of society and when Adolf Hitler gained power in 1933 he was forced to flee from Nazi Germany. After leaving Germany in 1933, Brecht lived in Denmark, Sweden and the Soviet Union. While living in exile he wrote anti-Nazi plays such as *The Roundheads and the Peakheads* and *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*. This was followed by *Life of Galileo* (1939), *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), *The Good Man of Szechuan* (1941), *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941) and the *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1943). He also spent time in Hollywood and helped with the writing of the film, *Hangman Also Die* (1943).

In 1947 the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), chaired by J. Parnell Thomas, began an investigation into the entertainment industry. The HUAC interviewed 41 people who were working in Hollywood. These people attended voluntarily and became known as "friendly witnesses". During their interviews they named nineteen people who they accused of holding left-wing views.

On 30th October, 1947, Brecht appeared in front of the HUAC. He denied he was a member of the Screen Writers Guild and the American Communist Party. Brecht pointed out: "As a guest of the United States, I refrained from political activities concerning this country even in a literary form. By the way, I am not a screen writer, Hollywood used only one story of mine for a picture showing the Nazi savageries in Prague. I am not aware of any influence which I could have exercised in the movie industry whether political or artistic. Being called before the Un-American Activities Committee, however, I feel free for the first time to say a few words about American matters: looking back at my experiences as a playwright and a poet in the Europe of the last two decades, I wish to say that the great American people would lose much and risk much if they allowed anybody to restrict free competition of ideas in cultural fields, or to interfere with art which must be free in order to be art. We are living in a dangerous world. Our state of civilization is such that mankind already is capable of becoming enormously wealthy but, as a whole, is still poverty-ridden. Great wars have been suffered, greater ones are imminent, we are told. One of them might well wipe out mankind, as a whole. We might be the last generation of the specimen man on this earth. The ideas about how to make use of the new capabilities of production have not been developed much since the days when the horse had to do what man could not do. Do you not think that, in such a predicament, every new idea should be examined carefully and freely? Art can present clear and even make nobler such ideas." Soon after giving evidence he left for East Germany.

In 1949 Brecht founded the Berliner Ensemble and over the next few years it became the country's most famous theatre company. However, Brecht wrote only one new play, *The Days of the Commune* (1949), while living in East Germany.

Bertolt Brecht died on 14th August, 1956.

Jean Bellorini

Art Director for Compagnie Air de Lune / TGP-CDN de Saint-Denis
Stage Director / Composer



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STAGE DIRECTION

- 2002 **Piaf, l'Ombre de la Rue** - Théâtre du Renard (Paris)
Re-staged in Avignon and on tour throughout France
- 2003 **La Mouette (The Seagull)** by Anton Tchekhov assisted by Marie Ballet at the Théâtre du Soleil as part of the first edition of the Festival Premiers Pas Enfants de Troupes
- 2004 **Yerma** by F. G. Lorca with Marie Ballet at the Théâtre du Soleil, for which he composed the music
- 2006 **Uncle Vania (Uncle Vania)** by Anton Tchekhov at the Théâtre de la Faisanderie in Chantilly
- 2008 **L'Opérette, un acte de L'Opérette Imaginaire** by Valère Novarina with Marie Ballet at the Théâtre de la Cité Internationale
- 2010 **Tempête Sous un Crâne**, a two-era show taken from Les Misérables by Victor Hugo at the Théâtre du Soleil – Adaptation by Jean Bellorini and Camille de La Guillonnière
On tour since 2010
En ce temps-là l'amour.... by and with Gilles Ségal at the Théâtre du Soleil
- 2012 **Paroles Gelées**, from François Rabelais, adaptation of the Quart-livre and other texts by Rabelais with Camille De La Guillonnière, musical composition
First staged at the Théâtre national de Toulouse Midi-Pyrénées and shown at the TGP-CDN of Saint-Denis and then on tour
- 2012/13 (project for June 2013)
Lilium (ou la vie et la mort d'un vaurien) by Ferenc Molnár
First staged as part of the festival Printemps des Comédiens in Montpellier
- 2013/14 (project for the Autumn 2013)
La bonne âme du Se-Tchouan (The Good Person of Setzuan) by Bertolt Brecht
First staged at the Théâtre national of Toulouse Midi-Pyrénées

OPERA STAGE DIRECTION

- 2009 **Barbe Bleue**, opéra bouffe d'Offenbach, at the Opéra of Fribourg
On tour in Switzerland, at the Théâtre Musical of Besançon, Opéra de Massy and in Belgium
- 2012 **Soirée Satie**, invited by the Academy of the Aix-en-Provence Festival
On tour in France and in Belgium

In parallel, Jean Bellorini is **very active in the field of training and teaching.**

He's a teacher since 2002 at the Saint Michel de Picpus school in Paris, where he works with more than a hundred pupils every year in various repertoires. Since 2003 he's in charge of the **professional auditions of the Claude Mathieu school**, where he's also been teaching regularly since 2005. He also works since 2008 at the CRR for the Choir of Paris.

Jean Bellorini is an invited artist at the **National Theatre of Toulouse Midi-Pyrénées** until the end of 2013.

The Compagnie Air de Lune was in residency at the **Théâtre Gérard Philipe of Saint Denis** until 2013.

Jean Bellorini won the Jean-Jacques Gautier award in 2012 from the SACD and the Best Newcomer award from the French Syndicate of Critics.

Since January 2014, Jean Bellorini was appointed director of the Théâtre Gérard Philipe, National Art Center for Drama of Saint-Denis (TGP-CDN de Saint-Denis). The repertory of the Compagnie Air de Lune becomes the repertory of the TGP-CDN de Saint-Denis.

CONTACT

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