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News Release

Le Fusil de chasse

Epistolary novel written in 1949 by Yasushi Inoué, adapted for the stage by Serge Lamothe and directed by François Girard, with Marie Brassard and Odriague Proteau. Artistic collaborators: Renée April, Joël Bergeron, David Finn, Alexander MacSween and François Séguin. Co-produced by the Parco Theatre (Tokyo), Usine C (Montreal), the National Arts Centre French Theatre, and the Brighton Festival. Running time: 1 hour 40 minutes with no intermission. November 23–26 at 7:30 p.m. and November 27 at 8 p.m. in the NAC Theatre.

Performed in French only.

November 15, 2010 (2010-11-15)

Could the distance from art to reality be but a single step? Could the creative musings of a poet's imagination inadvertently spark the burning desire to reveal the innermost secrets of an intimate relationship?

Almost impulsively, a man publishes a poem in a hunting magazine, *The Hunter's Companion*. In it he describes the solitary soul of a middle-aged hunter spotted on a trail on Mount Amagi, a pipe in his mouth, a hunting rifle propped heavily on his shoulder. A few months later, out of the blue, the poet receives a letter from a certain Josuke Misugi, who claims to be the man in the poem. The hunter asks him to read three letters written to him by three women shortly before their chance meeting on the mountainside.

The first letter is from his mistress' daughter Shoko, a disillusioned young woman who says she has known all about his affair with her mother ever since she got hold of her mother's diary and read it in secret. The second letter is from his estranged wife Midori. Midori's farewell letter conveys some tragic insights: she tells her husband that she has known about his affair all along, reveals that she has also been unfaithful, and finally asks him for a divorce. The last letter, written by his mistress Saiko, opens with the shocking words, "By the time you read this, I'll be gone." Emptiness, solitude... SUICIDE.

Disarmingly simple yet profoundly eloquent, this unconventional text meticulously deconstructs the deception that underlies human intimacy: Inoue's characters lie not only to each other, but to themselves. With exceptional sensitivity, the author conveys their dismay and confusion, trapped in the silence imposed by their duplicity and betrayal. But now the three women have broken their silence, and the hour of reckoning is at hand. The truth is exposed and the figure of Josuke Misugi, that "impregnable fortress," crumbles under the onslaught, pulverized by a series of stunning revelations. The originality of Inoue's tale resides in his transformation of an ordinary chronicle of adultery into an irresistibly seductive love story. With compassion and understanding, Inoue examines the factors that can drive a person to commit suicide, and the multiple possible meanings of that act.

It was Wajdi Mouawad who, a few years ago, handed a copy of *Le Fusil de chasse* (*The Hunting Gun*) to François Girard, award-winning stage, film and opera director, and suggested he make it into a movie. "I read it that very night," recalls Girard, "and I immediately fell under the story's spell. However, it seemed to me that it would work much better on stage than on film: the novel's epistolary structure, the austerity and elegance of Inoue's writing, the tragedy of Josuke—everything about *The Hunting Gun* seemed made for the theatre."

Armed with this conviction, and assisted by Serge Lamothe, specialist in stage adaptations, François Girard embraced the Zen spirit of the work and took a transformational approach to the project, casting Marie Brassard in the quadruple role of the poet and the three women (shades of his *Novecento!*). In solitary counterpoint he cast Rodrigue Proteau, physical actor *par excellence*, as Josuke. Throughout the play, Proteau never speaks: his challenge is "to deconstruct the momentary action from which the novel takes its title, and stretch it out for the duration of the performance."

In his director's notes, François Girard explains, "The sets and costumes were also designed in a spirit of minimalist transformation. Besides a curtain of text that hides Josuke from view, all we see is a floor: a floor made of water for Shoko, which turns into a surface of stones under the feet of Midori, and finally a wooden floor for the final letter from Saiko. The costume, too, undergoes a metamorphosis as layers fall

away successively from the poet, Shoko, and Midori.... The third woman, Saiko, finds a white kimono at her feet and spends her monologue putting it on. In traditional Japanese dress, a white kimono represents death; in the play, it becomes a metaphor for the suicide that is at the heart of the story.”

WHAT THE CRITICS ARE SAYING

“François Girard has created something superb, elegant and refined. His directing is in perfect keeping with the beautiful text, infused with a typically Japanese restraint that keeps us at a little distance. Alexander MacSween’s soundscape contains all the tension of this story of betrayal and lies.... As for the visual environment, it composes a series of tableaux. François Séguin’s deceptively simple-looking set is transformed with every monologue.... Marie Brassard, an actor with a truly unique stage presence, gives a nuanced performance in her three roles, from the confusion and pain of the agitated young woman, to the sensuality of the betrayed wife masking a deep wound, to the peaceful resignation of the mistress who knows she is about to die.”

– Marie Labrecque, *Le Devoir*

“Marie Brassard inhabits each of these women as they reveal themselves—sometimes candidly, sometimes despairingly or scornfully, but always with sincerity and heart, and with an openness that must have been sadly lacking in their relationships with the wordless man portrayed by Rodrigue Proteau.... “*Is it more important to love or to be loved?*” asks his mistress in a letter than begins, “*By the time you read this, I’ll be gone.*” This is the question asked by Yasushi Inoue, who also praises death for delivering us from this burden.”

– Jean Siag, *La Presse*

“The opening of *Le Fusil de chasse* at Usine C, directed by François Girard, was nothing less than a moment of grace.... The director and filmmaker of *The Red Violin* has taken a very organic approach, inspired by the three natural elements of water, stone and wood. On a stage inundated by torrential rain stands the magnificent Marie Brassard, unyielding amid her storm of words.... Marie Brassard delivers an impeccable, almost surreal performance. By simply changing her costume and the tone of her voice, she becomes a completely different character before our very eyes—and we are completely convinced, captivated by so much talent. Her subtle and nuanced performance is enhanced by a spare yet exceptional set.”

– Marie?Hélène Goulet, *7 Jours*

RENCONTRE DU JEUDI

On Thursday, November 25 the audience is invited to stay in the Theatre after the performance for a conversation with the cast and company on the subject: “*What’s the view through a window overlooking the Land of the Rising Sun?*”

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