

Melbourne International Arts Festival

6–22 October 2005

Théâtre du Soleil

Le Dernier Caravansérail (Odyssées)

Collectively devised by Théâtre du Soleil

Directed by Ariane Mnouchkine



Royal Exhibition Building

Nicholson St, Carlton

*Part One – Le Fleuve cruel
(The Cruel River)*

Tue 11 & Thu 13 Oct at 7.30pm

Sat 15 & Sun 16 Oct at 1pm

*Part Two – Origines et Destins
(Origins and Destinies)*

Wed 12 & Fri 14 Oct at 7.30pm

Sat 15 & Sun 16 Oct at 6pm

The Wed 12 Oct & Fri 14 Oct performances are followed by a post-show discussion.

Part One

2hr 40min including one interval
of 10 min

Part Two

2hr 50min including one interval
of 10 min

Performed in multiple languages with
English surtitles

A bar will operate for 1hr before and
after the performance. Food will be
available for purchase before the show.
Please note that the bar will be closed
during the interval.

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A co-production of Théâtre du Soleil and
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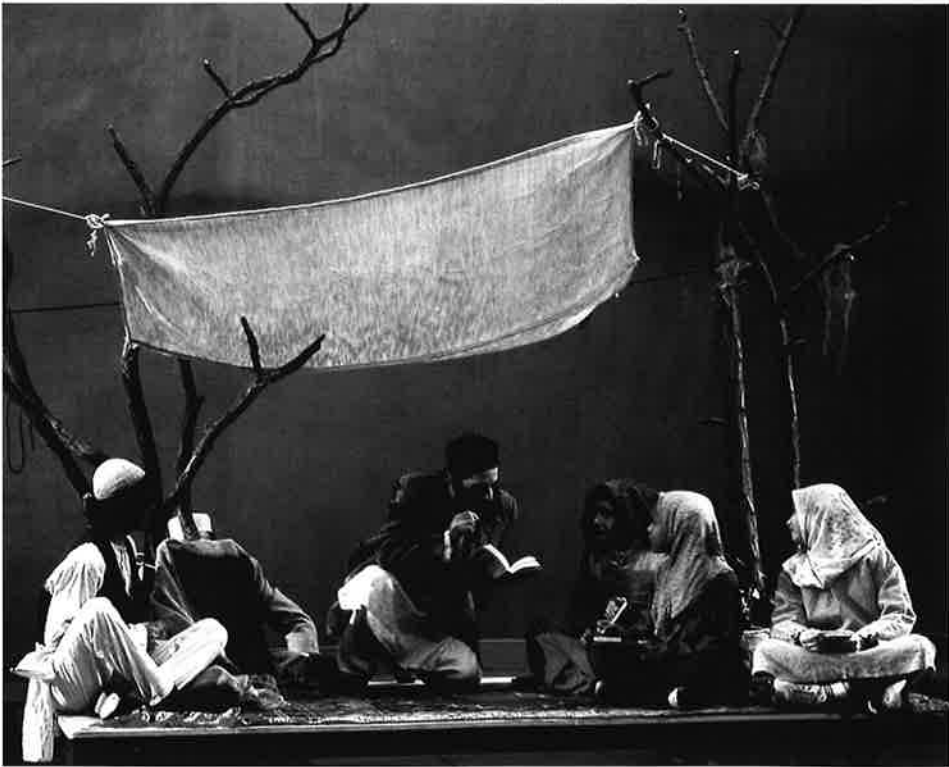
Le Dernier Caravansérail (Odyssées)

Odysseys recounted, heard, improvised & created by

Shaghayegh Beheshti, Duccio Bellugi-Vannuccini, Virginie Bianchini, Charles-Henri Bradier, Sébastien Brottet-Michel, Sergio Canto-Sabido, Juliana Carneiro da Cunha, Hélène Cixous, Virginie Colemyn, Olivia Corsini, Delphine Cottu, Marie-Louise Crawley, Eve Doe-Bruce, Emmanuel Dorand, Maurice Durozier, Sarkaw Gorany, Astrid Grant, Emilie Gruat, Pascal Guarise, Jeremy James, Marjolaine Larranaga y Ausin, Virginie Le Coënt, Jean-Jacques Lemêtre, Sava Lolov, Elena Loukiantchikova-Sel, Maïtreyi, Vincent Mangado, Jean-Charles Maricot, Judith Marvan Enriquez, Stéphanie Masson, Fabianna Mello e Souza, Alexandre Michel, Ariane Mnouchkine, Serge Nicolaï, Seietsu Onochi, Pauline Poignand, Matthieu Rauchvarger, Francis Ressort, Edson Rodrigues, David Santonja-Ruiz, Andreas Simma, Igor Skreblin, Nicolas Sotnikoff, Koumarane Valavane

And by the children

Sarah Gougam, Galatée Kraghede-Bellugi, Miguel Nogueira da Gama



Concept & Direction
Ariane Mnouchkine

Music
Jean-Jacques Lemêtre

Stage Design
Guy-Claude François

Set Pieces
Serge Nicolaï, Duccio Bellugi-Vannuccini

Painting & Dyeing
Didier Martin, Ysabel de Maisonneuve

Costumes
Marie-Hélène Bouvet, Nathalie Thomas, Annie Tran

Lighting
Cécile Allegoedt, Carlos Obregon, Cédric Baudic, Simon André

Sound
Patricia Cano, Yann Lemêtre, Marie Heuzé

Assistant Director
Charles-Henri Bradier

THEATRE DU SOLEIL
TECHNICAL AND PRODUCTION STAFF

Stage Managers
Etienne Lemasson, Antonio Ferreira

Stage Technicians
Everest Canto de Montserrat, Adolfo Canto Sabido, Kaveh Kishipour, Pedro Guimarães

Metal & Wood Construction
Alain Brunswick, Nicolas Dalongeville, Eric Den Hartog, Everest Canto de Montserrat

Tree Construction
Francis Ressort, David Santonja-Ruiz, Emmanuel Dorand

Masks
Erhard Stiefel

Make-Up
Tamani Berkani

Translation of the Stories
Shaghayegh Beheshti

Translation of Surtitles
Eric Prenowitz, Judith Miller

Surtitles Operators
Claire Ruffin, Judit Jancso

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Françoise Berge

Physiotherapist
Marc Pujo

Théâtre du Soleil



Founded in 1964 by Ariane Mnouchkine and a group of actors and technicians from university theatre, Théâtre du Soleil combines sociopolitical activism with a collective sensibility. The collaborative creation of original works is the hallmark of Théâtre du Soleil, which consistently functions like one large family, sharing daily meals together, often with the attending audience. The company consists of actors, technicians and designers from around the world, who speak 22 different languages between them.

Ariane Mnouchkine has directed some 29 productions with Théâtre du Soleil. Inspiration has come from major historical events such as the French revolution and the Indian partition, as well as from the epics of world literature and the works of playwrights including Shakespeare and Molière.

The work of Théâtre du Soleil has evolved from a mixture of Asian and Western influences. Ariane Mnouchkine considers that Asian theatre – music, dance, masks, etc – is a fundamental art form, like Greek tragedy or Shakespearean drama, and uses its traditions in the work she devises. Mask-maker Erhard Stiefel and musician Jean-Jacques Lemêtre, who composes and interprets the music for the productions, have worked with the company for almost 30 years.

Among Théâtre du Soleil’s most influential performances are the collective creations *1789* and *L’Âge d’or*; the historical and epic plays written by Hélène Cixous, including *L’Indiade, ou l’Inde de leurs rêves, L’Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge* (*The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*), *La Ville parjure ou le Réveil des Erynies* and *Tambours sur la digue* (*The Flood Drummers*, in the form of an ancient play for puppets performed by real actors); *The Shakespeare Cycle* (featuring *Richard II, Twelfth Night* and *Henry IV, Part I*); *The Atrides Cycle* (based on *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus and *Iphigenia* by Euripides) and Molière’s *Tartuffe*.

Théâtre du Soleil first visited Australia for the 2002 Sydney Festival, where it performed *The Flood Drummers*.

The company has also created several films, including *1789* (based on the play), *Molière*, (official selection, Cannes International Film Festival, 1978), *Au soleil même la nuit* (a documentary of the *Tartuffe* rehearsals) and *Tambours sur la digue* (based on the play).

Since 1970, Théâtre du Soleil’s permanent venue has been an old, spacious factory in Paris called the Cartoucherie. Théâtre du Soleil performs at the Cartoucherie, as well as on tour in France and abroad.

Notes on the Production

Le Dernier Caravansérail (*Odyssées*) opened at the Théâtre du Soleil in April 2003. It is a series of stories, fragments of people’s lives and snippets of destinies. These people are called refugees, illegal immigrants and migrants, but they call themselves voyagers. *Le Dernier Caravansérail* is an ocean of odysseys, sometimes heroic, sometimes banal, but always dramatic and traumatic.

At the origin of this adventure, there was the promise made to those whose stories are told here: to give them a voice. To bear witness to those who never leave a trace, whose cries and murmurs are never heard. Those who are silenced always.

The material from which *Le Dernier Caravansérail* is formed is a mixture of memories and personal narratives, listened to and collected over the course of a quest – a series of interviews conducted with Afghan, Kurdish and Iranian voyagers met during their layovers in Europe, Indonesia and New Zealand (Sangatte, Lombok and Dover) or in their Australian prisons (Villawood Detention Centre). The production comprises two parts. The first, *The Cruel River*, recounts the departures, the exoduses. The second, *Origins and Destinies*, explores the reasons for these departures.

Certain fugitives travel along the roads of what could be called intermediate Asia and cross a multitude of borders with great difficulty. Some are natural: rivers, mountains, lakes and oceans. Some are not so natural: great political scars cut into ancient empires by the West with blind swords and cannons. The most audacious, the luckiest, arrive at last in prosperous Europe. Alive.

Others have decided to aim at another end of the earth. They cross through India and South-East Asia and arrive in Indonesia, and then cross the Sea of Timor in the hope of reaching the guarded shores of Australia.

Each tableau is formed from decor and characters that are given independence by means of mobile platforms manipulated by the actors. Each platform that appears is like a fragment of the world, and as the platforms appear, one after the other, they end up peopling the stage and transforming it into a planisphere. “All the world’s a stage,” was Shakespeare’s insight and commandment.

Cast

Shaghayegh Beheshti

Azadeh, the Afghan lover (Part One)
Parastou, an Iranian refugee (Parts One & Two)
An Afghan woman, Saarif's wife (Parts One & Two)
Rachel Nasreen, the Iranian interpreter (Part Two)

Duccio Bellugi-Vannuccini

Tengiz, the young Kirghiz ferryman (Part One)
Razul, the red-haired Taliban (Part One)
Misha, the Russian smuggler (Parts One & Two)
Nusrat, a militant Islamic fundamentalist (Part One)
Hapali, the Indonesian sailor (Part Two)
Qhadir, a Taliban (Part Two)
Commandant Chrétien, a pilot (Part Two)
Wahid, a student, Iranian filmmaker (Part Two)
Nasser, an old Afghan man (Part Two)
Tariq, an Islamic fundamentalist (Part Two)

Sébastien Brottet-Michel

Rostam, an Afghan refugee (Part One)
Fawad, the Afghan lover (Parts One & Two)
Victor, a Red Cross worker at Sangatte (Part One)
A welder (Part One)
Liszitsa, a Serbian hooligan (Part Two)
Yelmas, a Turkish employer (Part Two)

Adolfo Canto-Sabido

Taha, a Kurdish refugee (Part One)
Madeh, the other Indonesian sailor (Part Two)

Sergio Canto-Sabido

Khalil, an Afghan refugee (Part Two)
Jhalil Khan, the Pakistani policeman (Part Two)

Virginie Colemyn

Parissa, an Iranian refugee (Parts One & Two)
Dalia, a Red Cross worker at Sangatte (Part One)
Naneh, the Iranian nanny (Parts One & Two)
Zina, a Chechen refugee (Parts One & Two)
Reena, Kokar's wife (Parts One & Two)
Cathy, the woman lost at the bus shelter (Part One)
Léone, the woman on the beach (Part One)
Lila, an Afghan refugee (Part Two)

Olivia Corsini

Nasreen, an Iranian refugee (Parts One & Two)
Olia, a young Russian refugee (Parts One & Two)
An Afghan woman (Part One)

Delphine Cottu

Solange, the nurse at Sangatte (Part One)
Babouchka, a Russian refugee (Parts One & Two)
Abib, a little Afghan boy (Part Two)
Takha, a Chechen woman, Zina's neighbor (Part Two)
Tracy, an Australian guard (Part Two)
Svetlana, a Georgian woman, Assia's mother (Part Two)
Sudi, an Iranian student (Part Two)

Marie-Louise Crawley

A Turkish woman (Part Two)
Claire, an English woman (Part Two)

Eve Doe-Bruce

Moussa, the amateur smuggler (Part One)
Fatou, a Red Cross worker at Sangatte (Part One)
Assa, Moussa's mother (Part One)
Api Singh, an old chubby Sikh (Parts One & Two)
A welder (Part One)
A Nigerian refugee (Part Two)

Emmanuel Dorand

An Afghan onlooker (Part One)
A CRS: a member of the riot police (Part Two)
Khalil, the informer (Part Two)
Yousseuf, a Pakistani (Part Two)
A Turkish miner (Part Two)
A guard at Villawood (Part Two)

Maurice Durozier

Kubilai, the Kazak smuggler (Part One)
Timour, a Kurdish refugee (Part One)
Kokar, the old Afghan with the astrakhan hat (Parts One & Two)
Mr Mirza Zamani, the Iranian father (Parts One & Two)
Azizulah, a boxer, an Afghan refugee (Part Two)
Yussuf, a Chechen (Part Two)
Mehmet, a Turkish smuggler (Part Two)

Sarkaw Gorany

Karwan, a Kurdish smuggler (Parts One & Two)
A stubborn Pashtun soldier (Parts One & Two)
Salahaddin al Bassiri, the Iraqi asylum seeker (Part Two)
Nassirallah, a Pakistani Islamic fundamentalist (Part Two)

Astrid Grant

Hanifa, a Bosnian refugee (Parts One & Two)
Martine, a Skinhead from Calais (Part One)
Flight Lieutenant Johnson, an officer in the Royal Australian Navy (Part Two)
Mrs Bogdanich, the Australian judge (Part Two)
A Turkish woman (Part Two)
Zpojmaj, an Afghan woman (Part Two)
Sophie, a British woman (Part Two)

Emilie Gruat

Julia, a refugee, forced to be a prostitute (Parts One & Two)
A Eurotunnel security guard (Part One)
Leyli, the daughter of the Afghan film buff (Parts One & Two)

Pascal Guarise

Amjad, a Taliban (Part One)
Marcel, a Red Cross worker at Sangatte (Part One)
The bearded Afghan on a bicycle (Part Two)
A CRS: a member of the riot police (Part Two)
A bearded Serbian (Part Two)
An Armenian miner (Part Two)

Dominique Jambert

Aziza, an Afghan refugee (Part Two)
An Afghan woman (Part Two)
Milenka, the Serbian bride (Part Two)
Alenka, a young Czech woman (Part Two)
An Afghan beggar (Part Two)

Jeremy James

Arko, an Afghan refugee (Part One)
Nikolai, a Serbian refugee, father of the little girl (Parts One & Two)
Ahmed, the Afghan barber (Part One)
Flight Lieutenant Duffy, an officer in the Royal Australian Navy (Part Two)
Mr Stanford, an English tailor and manager (Part Two)
Boris Piotrovich, Clavdia's father (Part Two)
David Kelly, a cheerful Irishman from England (Part Two)

Kaveh Kishipour

Laheq, the Pakistani engineer (Part Two)

Marjolaine Larranaga y Ausin

Nazanine, an Afghan refugee (Part One)
Bâbak, Tarkan's little brother (Part One)
Shirin, Parvaneh's daughter (Part One)
Assia, a Georgian refugee (Part Two)

Virginie Le Coënt

Kazhal, an Afghan woman (Part Two)
Viviane Melan, a businesswoman (Part Two, alternating with Fabianna Mello e Souza)

Elena Loukiantchikova-Sel

Adela, an Afghan mother (Part One)
Clavdia, Olia's mother (Parts One & Two)
Tamara, a Russian refugee (Parts One & Two)

Vincent Mangado

Tchoï San, the elder of the Kirghiz ferrymen (Part One)
The Afghan bird-catcher (Parts One & Two)
Tarkan, an Afghan refugee (Part One)
A Eurotunnel security guard (Part One)
A stubborn Tajik fighter (Part One)
Seyed Majnoun, an Afghan refugee (Part Two)
Richard Saheed, an Australian immigration officer (Part Two)
A French border protection security officer (Part Two)

Jean-Charles Maricot

Parviz, an Iranian refugee (Part One)
Joël, a Red Cross worker at Sangatte (Part One)
Eskandar, a young Iranian, Parastou's brother (Parts One & Two)
An Afghan smuggler on a motorcycle (Part One)
A CRS: a member of the riot police (Part Two)
A French border protection security officer (Part Two)

Judith Marvan Enriquez

Firouzeh, an Iranian refugee (Parts One & Two)
Meena, an Afghan woman with a camera (Part One)
An Afghan woman (Part Two)

Stéphanie Masson

Chantal, the other nurse at Sangatte (Part One)
Parvaneh, an Afghan refugee, Shirin's mother (Parts One & Two)
Sinna, an Afghan refugee (Part One)
Roya, an Iranian refugee (Part Two)
Sacha, Tamara's sister (Part Two)
Manon Hasne, a flight attendant (Part Two)

Fabianna Mello e Souza

Anastasia, a Russian refugee (Part Two)
Fariba, an Afghan refugee, another mother (Part Two)
Viviane Melan, a businesswoman (Part Two, alternating with Virginie Le Coënt)

Alexandre Michel

A Turkish miner (Part Two)
A guard at Villawood (Part Two)
A German border guard (Part Two)

Serge Nicolai

Dariush, an Iranian refugee (Part One)
Ihsam Hasâm Karîmollâh, the black Taliban (Part One)
Alexei, the Russian tramp (Part One)
Melko, the Kurdish smuggler (Parts One & Two)
Philippe Deval, company boss (Part One)
Habib Esmaili, professor, Iranian refugee (Part Two)
Azizulah, the Afghan film buff (Part Two)
The shepherd with the potatoes (Part Two)
Vuk, a Serbian pimp (Part Two)
Hafez, an old Afghan man, taking refuge in Peshawar (Part Two)
Ekhmet, a Turkish miner and smuggler (Part Two)
Mohamed Ataf, an Algerian fundamentalist (Part Two)

Seietsu Onochi

Dersou, the Afghan grandfather (Part One)
Bassil, an Afghan refugee (Part One)
Sayfar, an Iranian refugee by the tracks (Parts One & Two)
Hakya, a Taliban (Part Two)

Matthieu Rauchvarger

Baba jûn, an Afghan film buff (Parts One & Two)
Ahmad, a rapper, Iranian refugee (Parts One & Two)
Abdullah, a Taliban (Part Two)
A German border guard (Part Two)

Francis Ressort

Max, a Red Cross worker at Sangatte (Part One)
A Eurotunnel security guard (Part One)
A Turkish miner (Part Two)

Edson Rodrigues

Ali, a young Afghan refugee (Part One)
A French policeman (Part Two)

David Santonja-Ruiz

Denis, a Red Cross worker at Sangatte (Part One)
Aziz, an Afghan refugee, Parvaneh's husband (Part One)
A refugee (Part One)
Farouk, a Taliban (Part Two)
A French policeman (Part Two)
A German border guard (Part Two)

Andreas Simma

Kourosh, an Iranian refugee, who wants to cross by himself (Parts One & Two)
Saarif, a Pashtun (Parts One & Two)
Shamsali, an Iranian refugee (Part Two)
Abai Kalgan, the Georgian shepherd (Part Two)
Jiri, the Czech smuggler (Part Two)

Igor Skreblin

Yosco, the Serbian smuggler (Parts One & Two)
Salman, the Saudi fundamentalist (Parts One & Two)

Le Dernier Caravansérail (Odyssées)

Part One – Le Fleuve cruel (The Cruel River)

- Scene 1 A Passage, Central Asia
- Scene 2 Sangatte, the Red Cross Refugee Centre
- Scene 3 An Afghan Love (The Bird)
- Scene 4 One Dark Night, Sangatte
- Scene 5 The One Who Stayed, Moscow
- Scene 6 Summer Night in Teheran
- Scene 7 The Assault (Eurotunnel, the Train Tracks)
- Scene 8 An Afghan Love (Starry Night)
- Scene 9 On the Road, Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Scene 10 A Good Passport, Calais

Interval (10 min)

- Scene 11 Bride of the World, Sangatte
- Scene 12 The Night it Happened (Eurotunnel, the Train Tracks)
- Scene 13 A Little French Port, Calais
- Scene 14 An Afghan Love (The End)
- Scene 15 Somewhere in Africa
- Scene 16 Night Work, Calais
- Scene 17 A Little French Beach, Sangatte
- Scene 18 Work and Battles (Eurotunnel, the Train Tracks)
- Scene 19 Liberation, Kabul

Part Two – Origines et Destins (Origins and Destinies)

- Scene 1 On the Way to Australia
- Scene 2 Reminiscences – The Portrait and the Saucepan, Chechnya
- Scene 3 Last Attempts, Eurotunnel, the Train Tracks (January 2003)
- Scene 4 Reminiscences – A Good Passport, Moscow
- Scene 5 Reminiscences – The Right Hand and the Left Hand, Afghanistan
- Scene 6 Australia, Melbourne Appeals Court (October 2001)
- Scene 7 Calais, the Port (May 2003)
- Scene 8 Meanwhile in Teheran
- Scene 9 A Caucasian Story (The Idiot)
- Scene 10 Charles de Gaulle Airport (Today)

Interval (10 min)

- Scene 11 Australia, Melbourne Appeals Court (January 2003)
- Scene 12 A Caucasian Story (The Potatoes)
- Scene 13 Returns – Teheran (July 2003)
- Scene 14 Reminiscences – Wedding Present, Serbia
- Scene 15 England (September 2003)
- Scene 16 Returns – Peshawar, an Afghan Refugee Camp
- Scene 17 Returns – Coudrinka, Russia (Spring 2003)
- Scene 18 A Caucasian Story (The Precious Stones)
- Scene 19 Australia, Villawood Detention Centre (Saddam has fallen)
- Scene 20 Reminiscences and Future (Europe 2005)
- Scene 21 Returns – Jalalabad, Afghanistan (Today)
- Scene 22 London (Autumn 2002)
- Scene 23 England, on the White Cliffs (Today)

The stories were collected by Ariane Mnouchkine, assisted by Shaghayegh Beheshti, in Sangatte (France) between May 2001 and December 2002; in Villawood Detention Centre (Sydney, Australia) in January 2002; and in Auckland (New Zealand) and Mataram (Lombok Island, Indonesia) in February 2002.



In the Beginning of Our Memories... An Introduction by Hélène Cixous

In the beginning of our memories there was War. *The Iliad* told the story. After the War: *The Odyssey*. Those who did not return home, neither living nor dead, wander across the entire earth.

Today, new Wars thrust hundreds of thousands, millions of new fugitives onto our planet. They are fragments of dismembered worlds, trembling wisps of ravaged countries whose names no longer mean native shelter but rubble and prisons: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan...the list of poisoned countries grows every year.

‘But how can we recount these innumerable odysseys?’ wonders the troubled character of our director.

How many new little theatres must we invent to give each panic-stricken destiny its ephemeral lodging?

But how can our theatre transport these shells of theatres and wisps of human beings onto its ocean of wood and cloth? In our centuries woven with barbed wire, these atoms fleeing under political gusts form an entire, occasional people of disparate and threatened strangers.

‘What will become of us?’ ask those who have left their name, their family, their roots, very far behind. They are called ‘refugees’, ‘stowaways’, ‘illegal aliens’, ‘migrants’. But amongst themselves, they have a noble name: ‘voyagers’. They brutally voyage in holds and trucks, threaded through borders, and pushed

from port to coast and door to door by the poverty of contemporary hospitality, not knowing where or when the dangerous voyage will end.

They voyage endlessly and hopelessly but driven by belief. In place of religion, they have a naive faith in the existence of a country inhabited by the democratic deities they have heard of: freedom, respect. But where is this country? Where will they arrive? When will they arrive? Will they arrive?

And we, sitting in our relatively moderate countries, who are we? Their neighbours? Their witnesses? Their enemies? Their friends? Former voyagers who have forgotten? Or people for whom the voyage is lying in wait around the bend?

About Sangatte

The Centre for Urgent Humanitarian Care and Shelter of the French Red Cross (CHAUH) was created in September 1999. At first, the Centre managed the urgent situations of refugees fleeing from the war in Kosovo. After this war ended, other refugees took their place, coming from other regions of the world, including Afghanistan and Kurdistan. Initially the Centre was opened to accommodate 200 to 300 people; in June 2002, the Centre received as many as 1500 people on some days, with a bi-weekly turnover totalling one-third of its population. People came to the Centre with the intention of staying as short a time as possible. Some planned to cross the English Channel to illegally enter the UK. At the insistence of the British authorities, the Centre finally closed on 30 December 2002. No trace of it remains.

FROM THE WALLS OF SANGATTE

“My dear mother, forgive me for having abandoned you. I have taken all my desires with me and have left you all my suffering.”

An Iraqi Kurd (2001)

“Alas! We have betrayed ourselves; we have trapped ourselves. We are lost. We have destroyed our home with our own hands; we have become sorrow for our mothers, our fathers and our neighbours.”

Unknown (2002)

You shall leave everything you love most dearly: this is the arrow that the bow of exile shoots first. You are to know the bitter taste of others’ bread, how salty it is and know how hard a path it is for one who goes descending and ascending others’ stairs.

Dante,
The Divine Comedy: Paradiso, Canto XVII
(trans. Allen Mandelbaum)

It has been maintained in many countries that no citizen has a right to quit that in which he was born. The meaning of such a law must evidently be: ‘This country is so wretched and ill-governed we prohibit every man from quitting it, under an apprehension that otherwise all would leave it’ Do better: excite in all your subjects a desire to stay with you, and in foreigners a desire to come and settle among you.

Voltaire,
‘Equality’, *A Philosophical Dictionary*
(trans. William F Fleming)

In Search of Lives: Ariane Mnouchkine Interviewed

By Armelle Héliot

In 2001, Ariane Mnouchkine, who has led Théâtre du Soleil for nearly four decades, visited Sangatte to bear witness to the refugees’ stories. Some months later, when Théâtre du Soleil was performing *The Flood Drummers* in Australia (Sydney Festival, 2002), she visited the Villawood Detention Centre, and then travelled onwards to Indonesia and New Zealand, recording the histories of Afghani, Iranian, Iraqi and Kurdish refugees. She entrusted 100 hours’ worth of recordings to writer and collaborator Hélène Cixous. This source material was used in the early stages of developing *Le Dernier Caravansérail* (*Odyssées*).

Thirty-two actors, as well as 12 newcomers, collaborated under the direction of Ariane Mnouchkine, in order to create *Le Dernier Caravansérail* (*Odyssées*). The performance opens out into colossal frescoes of the exiles that times of war produce. After productions including *La Ville parjure* ou *le Réveil des Erinyes*, *Et soudain des nuits d’éveil* and *The Flood Drummers*, Ariane Mnouchkine and her collaborators employed the poetics of the theatre in order to interrogate the responsibilities of a world where disadvantaged people are marginalised and ignored.

How did you initially gather material for *Le Dernier Caravansérail* (*Odyssées*)?

I went to Sangatte in 2001, some months before September 11. I had read a number of things, but I wanted to understand for myself what this place was, and to meet the people there. I met a Kurdish poet and actor, Sarkaw Gorany, who obtained asylum and had just left Sangatte. He lived in Calais and was my interpreter when I went to Sangatte for the first time. Then he joined Théâtre du Soleil, where he is now an actor.

I had no preconceived idea about Sangatte before I went there, but after some hours, this place seemed to me to be the metaphor for the world. The place seemed like a refuge for all of humanity. I saw immense kindness and dignity, but also maliciousness... I then started to gather refugees’ accounts with the help of Shaghayegh Beheshti, a Théâtre du Soleil actor with Iranian origins. She succeeded in translating not only the Persian language, which is rich and poetic, but also the

emotions of the refugees as they told their stories. They told me about their lives, their journeys, their reasons for leaving, the roads travelled, their abandoned gardens. I recorded these histories.

In 2002, *The Flood Drummers* was performed in Australia, where you visited another detention camp...

September 11 made the subject all the more sad. The American reprisals were both hated and hoped for by many Afghanis, who wondered if they were going to be able to return home. Many of them were very afraid. I knew the story of the Norwegian boat, the Tampa, which had collected shipwrecked Afghani asylum seekers. The boat was blocked for a month by authorities before it was sent to Nauru, an island no bigger than the Cartoucherie [Théâtre du Soleil’s headquarters in Paris]: An island where some of them were still imprisoned two years later. This situation really shook me up.

I wanted to know more about the situation in Australia. I was allowed to visit the Villawood Detention Centre, a ‘four-star’ camp compared with the other Australian detention centres. I went there each day. I met Iraqis, Iranians, Cambodians, Koreans. The whole world was there. These refugees stay for years waiting for a tenuous [Temporary Protection Visa], or else they are forcibly returned to the country from which they have fled. I learnt here that the Australian navy illegally drove back ‘boat people’ towards Indonesia, secretly left them for a number of islands, and punctured their boats so that no one could leave. So I went to Indonesia. In Lombok, I visited a hostel where 240 Afghani people...were languishing while they waited for some international authority to throw some light on their situation.

It was in Australia and Indonesia, after hearing these stories, that you decided to create *Le Dernier Caravansérail*. What did you have in mind when you were recording these interviews with the refugees?

I asked the refugees to tell me their individual stories. I didn’t want to hear a political or social discourse, or anything that I could have gathered from the media. When I introduced myself to them,

I told them that I wasn’t a journalist. I also told them that I unfortunately couldn’t do anything for them, that I didn’t have any power, but that what I could do was make theatre, and that [Théâtre du Soleil] wanted to tell their stories.

But for them, the theatre is a mysterious thing. In Afghanistan, for example, theatre doesn’t exist. I had just made the film of *The Flood Drummers*, so I could also tell them that I made cinema, which they understand better. Little by little, I began to collect their words. Then it suddenly seemed necessary for them to tell me everything. I recorded 100 hours of interviews. They all asked me to tell what had happened, to them, to their families. Many told me about the beautiful life that they had before, how good it was. The younger ones, those who had only known war, had left because they had no future. I asked them to tell me what they would tell their grandchildren one day: “Who do you remember? Who have you met? Who did something good for you? Who did something bad? Who could have saved your life, but didn’t? Who couldn’t have saved your life, but did?” The narratives were very simple. Big and little things came to make an epic. Theatre isn’t there to deal with abstract ideas or to defend ideologies. I was not in search of ideologies. I was in search of lives.

What differences did you find between the refugees? Between political refugees and economic refugees?

The difference between political and economic refugees doesn’t mean anything: if many leave because the economic situation of their country is unliveable, they are primarily fleeing from a terrible dictatorship or religious fanaticism, like Islamic fundamentalism, which is political. I met some very pious people who described their children’s weddings, with rage in their hearts: the shutters were closed, there was no music, and they whispered for fear that the Taliban would search their house, because they might have had a little radio playing some ‘profane’ songs! They wanted to seek refuge in France or in Britain where they imagined they might find comfort. Are they wrong? Who doesn’t want a better life? That said, the real monsters have papers and can walk freely. Do you remember

when Vietnam invaded and liberated Cambodia, the first refugees who came to France, without the least difficulty? They were from the Khmer Rouge. I went into the camps where refugees told me that there were some among them who had waited several years before their files were examined, while the Khmer Rouge were setting themselves up in Paris. Refugees must have the power to free themselves from their torturers. In Britain today, in certain areas, refugees live again under the yokes of torturers.

How, from all this material, do you make theatre?

Actors need to listen attentively and stay receptive. They need to let themselves be flooded with images, sensations. There is a word – though overused – compassion. Compassion has nothing to do with pity. Compassion is sharing passion, even sufferance. But it’s also about fighting the bad which causes it. Actors must be able to share passion or suffering in order to embody emotions, situations. The actor is the medium. They have to become someone other, whether it be the King of England sleeping under a granite stone,

or an Afghani refugee. The principle is the same. For the King of England, there’s Shakespeare. For the refugee, there’s us, and the Théâtre du Soleil actors’ improvisations. Our creation is truly collaborative. Hélène Cixous brings her wisdom, knowledge and encouragement. The relationship between the refugees’ stories and the actors’ improvisations are direct, immediate. The link isn’t established by words, but by images, actions. I tell them what I have heard, but I don’t want to limit the actors’ imaginations or their ideas. I want to preserve their freedom to create. After a few improvisations, I told them to listen to accounts that might confirm their intuition.

The role of the director here is to let the actor-creator experiment. You can’t confuse ‘collective creation’ and ‘collective censorship’. I give the actors formal tools, which create the possibility of a space and journeys within that space. The rest is about their ideas and creativity. Even the set is constructed by the actors, who rehearse with drills in their hands! The audience who goes to see *Odyssées* – the epic stories of refugees – they are going to

see a work that is always in progress. Even today, I still don’t know anything about *Le Dernier Caravansérail*...I don’t know anything anymore...as much as doubt is part of my method...I think.

Can the theatre still be in spite of the world?

The theatre is a part of the world. When the theatre doesn’t cut itself off from the world, when it assumes the simple fact that it is in the world, it can make the world better. The theatre, like art in general, is one of those places that can make the world better, like an orange grove makes the world better. It’s a small light. Do you remember what the Afghani people did when their first village was liberated? They broadcast music and songs on the radio. The snipers were everywhere, but the men began to shave; they hoped for freedom for the women also. These are the little narratives that constitute *Le Dernier Caravansérail*.

Translated by Jasmine Chan



The Christmas Tale of a Chinese Man Wandering in Brittany

By Martine Valo

His accent makes you think that he has come from around Beijing. In search of a welcoming land, he landed in Paris by plane. In the capital, he probably passed by unnoticed, despite his lost look. Then, he had a walk before him, a long walk. Three months later, he wandered in Brittany, in the small market town of Languidic, not far from Lorient, exhausted, frightened, not understanding a word of French. He had covered 500 kilometres by foot. He arrived in the Morbihan without having taken a train or car. This is what he recounts when finally, he can speak to someone else who understands his language.

It's unusual for people from China to seek refuge in Languidic. On Thursday 21 December, the first resident in Languidic to be concerned about this 36-year-old stranger – strolling around with 200 francs in his pocket and no identity papers – turned to the town hall, which contacted the police. The man was in a bad way: he cried and was in desperate need of drinking water. He was terrified by the

thought of being sent back home. Due to a mix-up, he spent the night in a hostel for people in crisis in Caudan, some kilometres away. But how to find a translator?

A sergeant tried to telephone a Cambodian friend. But the two Asian men didn't understand each other. The police finished by speaking to Tina, who runs The Singapore, in Sainte Anne d'Auray. By chance, Tina – without a doubt the most charming owner of any Chinese restaurant in the south of Brittany – comes from Singapore. She counselled the asylum seeker on the telephone and the next day, Friday, offered him something to eat at her little establishment, where the police drove him. There, the particulars of his journey became clearer. The man had taken the train to Paris, where he changed his money at a kiosk. But who can ever know all of the twists and turns that drive a man from Beijing to Languidic?

After it was confirmed that the man was claiming refugee status, the restaurateur gave herself up with him to the prefecture of Vannes. There, everyone admitted that

the simplest thing to do would be to send him back to Paris, where he seemed to have contact with a distant cousin and where the Chinese community is larger than it is in the Morbihan. His translator explained to him that there was only a brief period left for him to process his request with the French Office of Protection for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides [OFPRA]).

Equipped with a provisional holiday visa, there was nothing left to do, but board the train. But who would pay for the train ticket? "It's Christmas, the time for good deeds," Tina said, while settling in her seat. "How complicated," she said, her voice full of laughter, "I believe in fate. It was foretold that our routes would cross...life is very good to me, so I have to give back. He seemed so frightened." She continued, "He seems like someone very decent, very kind. He told me, 'thank you.' "

This article first appeared in the French newspaper Le Monde, and is reprinted with the author's kind permission.

An Interview with Australian Théâtre du Soleil Actor Jeremy James

By Andi Moore

How (and when) did you become involved in Théâtre du Soleil?

I first met the company in June 1997 when I participated in their workshop in Paris. I had arrived in Europe six months earlier to undertake a professional development project, supported by the Australia Council, the Ian Potter Foundation and the Capital Arts Patrons Organisation. Over a period of 18 months I worked with a range of directors, actors, choreographers and teachers who are pioneering in their approaches to performance practices and the training of the performer and ensemble.

A colleague I was working with in London suggested I contact Théâtre du Soleil to register my interest for any future workshops. She had heard through the grapevine that the company was planning one for that summer – my timing was fortuitous.

Although I knew little about the company and had never seen the work of Ariane Mnouchkine, I was accepted into the workshop and I expected to stay for two

weeks – the length of the workshop. Instead I found myself swept into an adventure which lasted for two intensive months and opened a chapter in my life which remained unresolved until I returned to the company five years later.

The company is truly international – does that make creating work together different from other companies you've worked with?

The cultural diversity of the company was instrumental for the creation of this particular work. With scenes in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Russia, France and Australia, the company itself was an invaluable resource in addressing questions of culture, customs and language.

However, it is true that Ariane has been committed to maintaining an international troupe for decades. Though many European companies are composed of several nationalities due to the open borders of the EU, Théâtre du Soleil is unique in continuing to engage performers from countries outside Europe. It was partly due to this international approach that I was attracted to working with Soleil. I believe that this diversity reflects that of our audiences. The theatre-going public in the West is increasingly multicultural and I think that it is only right that artists identify and represent that change.

On a personal level, it is not [due to] the fact that the company is international that the work process has been different for me, but more to do with the fact that our working language, our 'official language' is French. That has made it both different and difficult. At times very difficult. It has been a humbling experience. I had just arrived from London where I had been teaching and directing projects for the previous five years. I then began a rehearsal process which was based on the

actors' ideas and improvisations. I felt lost and frustrated to not have the words, nor language, to communicate my ideas or understand the propositions of my colleagues. I had to accept a complete loss of control. It was a challenge to overcome my sense of personal and professional inadequacy during that early period.

What do you think the reaction to the piece in Australia might be?

As a piece of theatre there will be those who love it, those who are moved by the stories we recount, and there will be those who remain more at a distance and feel less touched by the piece. That is normal for any audience we have played to in Paris or on tour, and I do not expect the Australian public to be any different.

Of course, you are asking about sensitivities that may be provoked by the Australian content in the piece! Out of more than 40 scenes which make up the two shows, there are only four related to Australia. It is not a directed attack, though it is true that Australia does not bear well – but nor should it! I do not believe that this will surprise the audience who will attend the show – undoubtedly a more liberally-minded group of similar opinion, and critical of their government's position – so we will unfortunately be 'speaking to the converted' as is often the case in the arts.

There is clearly a large public in Australia already engaged in this discussion as is evident in the volume of literature, essays and critiques examining refugee and immigration issues that have been published in Australia over recent years. I am also aware that a large body of work has been created in response to this sensitive situation by Australia's theatre and art communities. So if any controversy is caused, it will result from the press and the position they take.

