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news

**For Immediate Release**

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***Seuls en Scène* - Princeton French Theater Festival**

***Celebrated French theater artists converge onstage at Princeton University***

***7th Edition of the Festival***

Link to photos: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xdsj6w4znai81iy/AABUQ8HUSg6w3DcvX0H0EXk1a?dl=0>

Photo 1:  Makita Samba, William Edimo, and Nicolas Giret-Famin in Harlem Quartet, photo by Tristan-Jeanne Valès

Photo 2: Ludmilla Dabo and David Lescot in Portrait de Ludmilla en Nina Simone, photo courtesy of Emmanuelle Ossena

Photo 3: Company of Claire, Anton et Eux, photo by Christophe Raynaud de Lage

Photo 4: Christine Bombal and audience in Gonzo Conférence, photo by Marc Domage

(Princeton, NJ) Princeton University’s Lewis Center for the Arts, Department of French and Italian, and L’Avant-Scène will present the seventh annual Seuls en Scène French Theater Festival, which will take place from September 21 to 29 at venues across the University’s campus. Most performances will be in French with English subtitles; all are free and open to the public.

Seuls en Scène ushers in the 18th season of L’Avant-Scène, a French theater troupe of Princeton students. It also celebrates professional theatrical achievements from the past year: many of the invited artists to Seuls en Scène are prominent contributors to contemporary theater in France. The Festival is organized by **Florent Masse**, Senior Lecturer in the Department of French and Italian and director of L’Avant-Scène.

The Festival begins with **Elise Vigier**’s Harlem Quartet, a stage adaptation of James Baldwin’s poetic novel Just Above My Head on September 21 at 7 p.m. and September 23 at 8 p.m. in the Whitman College Class of 1970 Theater. Hall Montana remembers and relates the lives of his family and friends, who are part of Harlem’s African-American community in the 1950s and 1960s. The Montanas have two sons: Hall is preparing to leave for the Korean War; Arthur loves singing gospel with his friends Crunch, Red and Peanut. The two brothers meet Julia, a young evangelical preacher, and her younger brother Jimmy, who is neglected by his parents. However, a tragic event occurs, which changes the characters’ lives forever. These events play out against a background of gospel songs, the civil rights movement, violence and sex. Baldwin’s sensual writing style is punctuated by poignant gospel lyrics that take audiences to the heart of Harlem, a world of love, religious fervor and suffering. This critically acclaimed show from the 2017-18 French theatrical season stands out with a rare all-black cast, unusual for a production in France. The show debuted last November at La MAC (Maison des Arts de Créteil) in Créteil and at Festival TNB (Théâtre National de Bretagne) in Rennes.

Playwright and musician **David Lescot** returns to Princeton to present Portait de Ludmilla en Nina Simone on September 21 at 9 p.m. and September 23 at 6 p.m. in the Whitman College Class of 1970 Theater. Nina Simone, one of the formidable artistic figures of the civil rights movement, was born to a poor black family in North Carolina and had dreams of becoming a great classical pianist. Citing racism as the barrier to realizing this dream, she instead became a singer earning the moniker “High Priestess of Soul.” In conjunction with the production Harlem Quartet, the National Dramatic Center Comédie de Caen asked Lescot to stage a portrait of the American singer. In the form of a documentary with interviews, this intimate musical portrait showcases Lescot’s desire to create a whimsical form of exchange. He plays guitar accompanying Ludmilla Dabo on stage, an actress with a lifelong affinity for the jazz of Nina Simone.

With the support of the **Cultural Services of the French Embassy** the Festival will also present a reading in English of Dough, written and directed by David Lescot on September 24 at 7 p.m. in the Hearst Dance Theater of the Lewis Arts complex. Dough is a choral text with a frantic and hectic rhythm, which addresses our relationship with money, and crosses different stages of life, from early childhood to adulthood. The piece directly reaches young people and is well-suited for family audiences. In the theater field, the Cultural Services of the French Embassy aims to highlight the work of French playwrights – both in French and English translation – for a broad American audience. In recent years, greater attention has been devoted to developing productions of plays translated to English with an American cast. Dough is part of this momentum.

**François Cervantes**, the artistic director of Compagnie L’Entreprise and writer in residence at the Paris National Conservatory for Dramatic Arts (CNSAD), makes his Princeton debut with Claire, Anton et Eux on September 22 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. in the Wallace Theater of the Lewis Arts complex. The show brings half of the 2017 graduating class of the CNSAD to Princeton. Cervantes asked the fourteen young actors to write dramatic texts based on their personal history. Summoning their ancestors and countless family memories, whether from the 16th or the 20th century, their past is brought to life on the stage, shedding light on and enriching the present. “The job of the actor is to offer hospitality,” the director likes to say, defending the necessity and the responsibility of his trade: to always give stories the place that is rightfully theirs, to fulfill that urgent need we have to talk to one another. Claire, Anton et eux (Claire, Anton, and them) is the mischievous title director Cervantes gave to this initiatory play, which is an homage to playwright Anton Chekhov and CNSAD, a school whose role is to teach, to understand, to welcome, and to foster and encourage new work. The show premiered in April 2017 at the Conservatory in Paris before playing at the 71st Avignon Theater Festival.

**Fanny de Chaillé** presents Gonzo Conférence on September 25 and 26 at 8 p.m. in theDrapkin Studio of the Lewis Arts complex. From a young age, de Chaillé has been a fan of rock music. In this unique presentation that demonstrates what happens when text is separated from music, de Chaillé stands offstage and speaks of her lifelong love for rock music while spectators focus on Christine Bombal, who embodies de Chaillé’s words onstage. At the end of the simple and precise demonstration, the disturbing conviction emerges that between rock music and theater, theater is perhaps the more wild and free medium. After studying aesthetics at the Sorbonne, de Chaillé worked with Daniel Larrieu at the Centre chorégraphique national in Tours, as well as with Alain Buffard, Matthieu Doze and Rachid Ouramdane, and performed under the direction of Gwenaël Morin. She regularly participates in projects with visual artists Thomas Hirschhorn and Pierre Huyghe. She also creates her own installations and performances.

Doreen by **David Geselson** will be performed at the Matthews Acting Studio at 185 Nassau Street on September 28 and 29 at 8:00 p.m. In 2006 philosopher and journalist André Gorz, published “Letter to D.”, a confession to his wife Doreen Keir, when she was diagnosed with an incurable disease. In this publication, he tells their love story and relives their shared life of 58 years. A year later both André and Doreen were found dead in their bed. This play is a counterpoint to Gorz’ confession that was made public. Transported to an evening in 2007 in the couple’s home the hour before they will commit suicide, we hear the story from her point of view. Doreen is an adaptation, a sort of theft, an attempt between reality and fiction, of the couple’s life and the beloved woman who we never got to know and who will die with him. This very well-reviewed show, winner of the Critics Prize (2017 Best original French play), premiered in November 2016 and was a hit of the 2016-2017 French theatrical season. Brigitte Salino wrote in Le Monde, “Doreen is a rare piece of theater. It offers much more than a love declaration, the portrait of a love so true that it seems invented, so well-reinvented that it seems even truer.” David Geselson who directs, acts and writes, created his own company in 2009. In addition to Doreen in 2016, he created En Route-Kaddish in 2014, directed Eli Eli written by Thibault Vinçon, and Les Insomniaques by Juan Mayorga. He studied at Théâtre national de Chaillot - Drama School and at Conservatoire National Supérieur d’Art Dramatique. As an actor, he recently performed in Tiago Rodrigues’ (Seuls en Scène 2017) production Bovary. He is also a screen actor.

This edition of the Festival will continue partnerships with New York City French cultural organizations and institutions, **Cultural Services of the French Embassy**/**French Institute Alliance Française (FIAF)**, and a few of the shows and guest artists of this year’s edition of Seuls en Scène will be presented elsewhere during their stay in North America.

Discussion with the artistic teams of the shows will follow each performance. During their visits, Festival artists will offer master classes for Princeton students related to their current theatrical productions. They will also participate in Program in Theater classes, such as the French Theater Workshop course, and L’Avant-Scène.

L’Avant-Scène anticipates a full year of programming. Masse plans to direct several student-acted plays. This spring, L’Avant-Scène will receive a particularly significant guest: French director and playwright **Pascal Rambert** is coming to Princeton as a Council of the Humanities Long-Term Visiting Fellow. He will teach a new performing and playwriting course in French leading to the creation of a full-length play. Rambert will also lead a master class for students in the Program in Theater.

Masse, who curates the Festival, was trained as an actor and director at the University of Lille and Lille National Theater under Daniel Mesguich. He later pursued his theater studies at Amherst College as a Levy-Despas Fellow and a teaching assistant in the Department of French. It is there that he originated L’Avant-Scène, a program that combines language and dramatic training. He has directed more than 50 full-length productions of canonical and new works of French theater since arriving at Princeton in 2001, and has hosted several prominent theater artists. In 2017, he was named Chevalier of Arts and Letters by the French Minister of Culture.

The Festival is being presented by the Lewis Center for the Arts, the Department of French and Italian, and L’Avant-Scène with support through the Lewis Center’s Arts Initiative Partners program, which annually seeks unique arts partnership projects with other University departments and affiliated groups and individuals. Additional support is provided by Princeton University’s Department of French and Italian, the Humanities Council, the Department of African American Studies, the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS), The Program in Contemporary European Politics and Society, the Center for French Studies, Rockefeller College, Jeune Théâtre National (JTN), the Fund for Contemporary Theater by the French-American Cultural Exchange Foundation (FACE), Institut français and the Cultural Services of the French Embassy.

Further information about L’Avant-Scène can be found at https://fit.princeton.edu/lavant-scène.

For more information on the Princeton French Theater Festival and the more than 100 events presented by the Lewis Center each year, visit [arts.princeton.edu](http://www.arts.princeton.edu).

**EVENT SCHEDULE**

Seuls en Scène 2018 presents *Harlem Quartet*

**Élise Vigier**

September 21 at 7 pm / September 23 at 8 pm

Whitman College Class of 1970 Theater  
Duration: 90 minutes, no intermission  
Performed in French (with English subtitles)

Seuls en Scène 2018 presents *Portrait de Ludmilla en Nina Simone*

**David Lescot**

September 21 at 9pm / September 23 at 6 pm

Whitman College Class of 1970 Theater

Duration: 65 minutes, no intermission  
Performed in French (with English subtitles)

Seuls en Scène 2018 presents *Claire, Anton et Eux*

**François Cervantes**

September 22 at 2 & 8 pm

Wallace Theater Lewis Arts Complex

Duration: 105 minutes, no intermission  
Performed in French (with English subtitles)

Seuls en Scène 2018 presents a reading of *Dough*

**David Lescot**

September 24 at 7 pm

Hearst Dance Theater Lewis Arts Complex

Duration: 65 minutes, no intermission  
Performed in English

# Seuls en Scène 2018 presents *Gonzo Conférence* **Fanny de Chaillé** September 25-26 at 8 pm Drapkin Studio Lewis Arts Complex Duration: 45 min, no intermission Performed in French (English synopsis provided)

Seuls en Scène 2018 presents *Doreen*

**David Geselson**

September 28-29 at 8 pm

Matthews Acting Studio, 185 Nassau Street  
Duration: 75 minutes, no intermission  
Performed in French

*Admission to all Festival events is free but ticket reservations are required by visiting:* <http://arts.princeton.edu/frenchtheater/>.

*For more information on the Festival, please contact Steve Runk, Lewis Center for the Arts,* [srunk@exchange.Princeton.EDU](mailto:srunk@exchange.Princeton.EDU) *or Florent Masse, Department of French and Italian* [fmasse@exchange.Princeton.EDU](mailto:fmasse@exchange.Princeton.EDU)