Ils nous ont oubliés

BASED ON THE NOVEL THE LIME WORKS BY THOMAS BERNHARD

DIRECTED BY SÉVERINE CHAVRIER



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"Illnesses lead man by the shortest path to himself."

Thomas Bernhard

Credits

Based on *The Lime Works (La Plâtrière)* by **Thomas Bernhard**Translation **Louise Servicen**Direction & sound design **Séverine Chavrier**Set design & props **Louise Sari**Props **Rodolphe Noret**Light design **Germain Fourvel**Sound design **Simon d'Anselme de Puisaye**Video design **Quentin Vigier**Costumes **Andrea Matweber**Bird training **Tristan Plot**Intervention IRCAM **Augustin Muller**Forest design **Hervé Mayon – La Licorne Verte**Director assistant **Ferdinand Flame**Set design assistant **Amandine Riffaud**Set construction **Julien Fleureau**, **Olivier Berthel**

Featuring Aurélia Arto/Adèle Joulin, Laurent Papot, Marijke Pinoy and Florian Satche (musician)

Video manager **Typhaine Steiner** Stage manager & set **Corto Tremorin**

Acknowledgements Rachel de Dardel, Marie Fortuit, Pascal Frey, Antoine Girard, Romuald Liteau Lego and Marion Stenton

Production for creation **CDN Orléans / Centre-Val de Loire** Production from 2024 **Comédie de Genève**

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Duration 3h45 (with 2 intermissions – 1h05/1h15/50min) / Show in French

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CONTACT TOUR

Comédie de Genève

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Project introduction

After *Nous sommes repus mais pas repentis*, a play that was presented at Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe in 2016, Séverine Chavrier has tackled another work by Thomas Bernhard, which is still somewhat influenced by his past as a court reporter. With devastating humour, the master of exaggeration addresses some of his major obsessions in *The Lime Works*.

Vast yet cramped, empty yet cluttered, the Lime Works is a building that is as white as a barren room and as black as the surrounding forest. A couple have locked themselves in after "barricading all the doors and locking all the windows". Indeed, Konrad needs absolute peace to write his *Essay on Hearing*—something which is seemingly impossible. His wife is disabled and totally dependent on him. Konrad has to do all the housework himself. Unbeknownst to his wife, he has to sell off the furniture bit by bit to ensure their subsistence. He also has to guarantee their safety by hiding weapons in almost every room, because isolation attracts prowlers...

A contribution in the form of a desperate farce to the "study of what controls the catastrophes of intelligence", *The Lime Works* is a magnificent ode to sterility. Chavrier makes it resonate on an icy and highly charged stage, fuelled by memories of *Persona* and *The Shining*: a frosty show, haunted by spectres and sounds, from voices emerging from the basement to percussion played on plasterboard on stage.



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Interview with Séverine Chavrier

What drew you back to Thomas Bernhard?

Séverine Chavrier: I didn't think I'd go back to this author because I felt I'd already said a lot with Nous sommes repus mais pas repentis. But I found his prose richer and more cataclysmic. So I went back to one of his earliest works, The Lime Works. At the time, Bernhard was still a court reporter. He'd just written Frost and Amras and was haunted by questions of suicide and madness. The soliloguy takes shape, the laughable impossibility of choosing a place to work and concentrate that is neither city nor countryside is at its height. Austria and its beautiful landscapes "that irritate the brain" is already hated but not yet singled out for its impossible denazification. The absurdity of the news still features prominently, and the cold grips bodies and minds in a harsh world (a far cry from the worldly criticism of Woodcutters) where hopes of a liveable form of misanthropy are quickly dashed. The Lime Works features a couple who isolate themselves and live reclusively in an inhospitable place. It's a long flashback, a murder investigation and a kind of reconstruction of the marital hell of the final few months.

The show is a thriller, isn't it?

S. C.: Throughout the show, you have to be able to ask yourself: who could've done it? It remains an investigation in the style of Kurosawa's *Rashomon*. There might be several possible versions right up to the final shot. Who really fired the shot? They say it's Konrad, but it could just as easily have been the nurse changing the dosage or the woman herself, cleaning her rifle. In the book, Bernhard showcases the discrepancies between the accounts of the main visitors. He plays on a few details. In any case, we've sought to sprinkle the last months of his life with premonitory visions, tacit and unconscious threats, and deliberate yet fearful flirtations with death.

And in this reconstruction of the murder, there's also the very theatrical question of truth and falsity. The set design, the video images and the sound design all play on this. There are fake trees. There are fake birds, hunting calls and real birds. Is she a real nurse? Are there really visitors? Mannequins or flesh and blood? Are there many actors or just three? Do we hear footsteps in the snow or voices on the other shore like Konrad and his auditory hallucinations?

But at the heart of this Lime Works lies a couple, Konrad and his wife...

S. C.: Beyond these facts, I think the real subject is the distress of these two people who are bound to each other by their hatred. Ultimately, Konrad really does abandon his wife, he no longer cares for her. He himself no longer has any hope of writing. They wear each other down. That's how they're bound to each other. Bernhard used disability a lot, particularly in his plays. Is Konrad's wife really crippled? Or is she using it to win a battle in this hopeless war? It's a way of holding her husband hostage. They both blackmail each other constantly in that way. Mrs Konrad's sacrifice of coming to live at the Lime Works to enable her husband to write might be the tribute to a previous sacrifice, i.e. that made by Mr Konrad over the previous twenty years of compulsively travelling the world to thwart the mad rush of illness. Theirs is a tale of fallen aristocracy. They arrived with two barges full of furniture. They've kept only worthless objects around them, spreading the rest throughout the building. Konrad has sold everything behind his wife's back. She still believes she's living in some form of glamour. But in the end, there's nothing left but a few trinkets that are quickly buried by the snow. It's beautiful to see what's left of a life. In their isolation, they become paupers. I love this situation of survival that Bernhard imposes. This was already the case in *Nous sommes* repus, where the sisters sent the servants away to prepare the meal. We'd worked a lot on the fact that they couldn't do it at all. Here again, they can't manage to survive. So they get deliveries, which are brought all the way to the Lime Works.

Sometimes they wait until late afternoon for their meal, and then stay for hours "prostrate in the dark, without eating, exhausted". It speaks of the whole world of aristocracy, but also of terrible desolation in a world that no longer has a face. There are many masked visitors, silent noisv. obsequious or shameless. interchangeable, who enter, who wait, who come "knocking at the door" and disturb Konrad in his research and his writing endeavour. More often than not, however. he needs someone to talk to and ends up pouring his heart out to the first person he meets, holding them hostage in a brilliant yet desperate soliloguy.

The visitors also include the nurse, a made-up character who doesn't feature in the novel.

S. C.: This character helped me better define the couple's violent relationship. She also bears the faces of the many visitors. It's not really a question of desire but of obstacles. Bernhard said little about youth. So I drew on Elfriede Jelinek for this character who thinks she can control the couple. She steals a bit from the woman, taking a few worthless objects from her. There was also the idea of being dispossessed of something, in illness and in the immensity of the Lime Works. In the opening lines of the novel, Konrad buys a piano to calm his nerves, and some firearms. He closes himself off, locks himself away in this fear of others, of foreigners-themes that Jelinek would later take up again and again. For this Lime Works is curiously inhabited. There are basements where people could be hiding, corridors where others are trapped. During the work process, I brought people into this Lime Works: one of the actors from Aria da Capo, a 12-year-old child and my 3-year-old daughter.

Birds are also visitors to the set: a crow and some pigeons. They echo the question of solitude, abandonment and the link between nature and habitat. In view of Bernhard's very masculine, 20th-century perspective, we sought to call on more contemporary, clearly feminist visions, such as Vinciane Despret's in *Habiter en Oiseau* or Donna Haraway's in her *Companion Species Manifesto*, and also Bernhard's reference to Kropotkin in the book (Konrad likes to read Kropotkin to his wife, while she likes to read Novalis).

To add investigation to the investigation...

And Konrad has come to live here to write an essay on hearing—a great text.

S. C.: Bernhard talks about the sterility associated with the quest for an absolute that is ultimately inhibiting. Where, how and when does one work and give shape to one's intellectual work? But with the tone of a huge farce—that of the impossibility of putting down on paper an idea that is in your head. Because you're not in the right place at the right time. Because you were disturbed. As we said, Konrad has many visitors who come to disturb him. His wife, who is disabled, also disturbs him.

In the end, in my fight with Bernhard over his latent misogyny, it's quite funny because there's a reversal of roles. The man is grappling with his writing and the management of his material life. He's also swallowed up by the servant. Konrad is a househusband who has to write. In the novel, Bernhard says almost nothing about his essay, so it was up to the set design to express that. We designed the stage as a resounding space: the sound of a chip or a snore, of a door slamming, like in a boulevard, of walls ringing. Everything on the stage makes a sound. There's an improvising musician, Florian Satche, on stage who also makes everything echo. This show is a musical poem. I wanted to find that anxiety-inducing

quality that isn't just strangeness but tension, despair and, above all, melancholy.

And why the title, *lls nous ont oubliés* ("They have forgotten us")?

S. C.: This Lime Works is like a small stage enclosed in a forest, a little inaccessible. It's an isolated, immense place. The challenge was to play out this immensity on a very small stage, with its different rooms and basements. We achieved this by using video and surveillance cameras in very small spaces. It's a place that is inaccessible because of the snow too. At the end of the novel, Konrad says that the snowplough doesn't even come any more. It snows a lot in the show and in the end, this small stage has become a world under a bell, a snow globe of sorts. The set design tells the story of a short circuit through isolation. Looking at his autobiography (especially Die Kälte) and his painful battles with lung disease, I imagined that in this forest, with these masked characters, there might be patients from a sanatorium wandering about nearby; it was also a kind of reverie on Thomas Mann's Magic Mountain.

I don't know what will be left of this counterpoint, but while improvising in this mental space, the actors started shouting: "They've forgotten us, they don't give us our medicine or our snacks any more, we want hard drugs...".

2021-2022 TOUR

- 12 13 March 2022, Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, Barcelona (SP)
- 24 25 March 2022, Tandem Scène nationale Arras-Douai (FR)
- 12 27 April 2022, Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe (FR)
- 3 11 June 2022, Théâtre National de Strasbourg (FR)
- 8 9 July 2022, Teatro Nacional São João, Porto (PT)

2023-2024 TOUR

- 12 14 September 2023, CDN Orléans / Centre-Val de Loire (FR)
- 7 13 October 2023, TNP Théâtre National Populaire (FR)
- 30 November 2 December 2023, Comédie de Genève (CH)
- 16 January 10 February 2024, La Colline Théâtre National (FR)

AVAILABLE ON DEMAND



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Offending the audience

DRAMATURGICAL LEAD

I feel that, in adapting Thomas Bernhard for the stage, there is always the hope of "offending the audience".

Garibaldi, the circus director in *La force de l'habitude*, has a crazy dream of one day being able to perform Schubert's *Trout* quintet instead of his usual circus acts.

In *Corrections*, it is the architect who by dint of drawing and re-drawing the ideal construction of a cone-shaped house, simply forgets to build it. In all these characters there is always the vain hope of the ideal work. But at the very moment when the possibility of the great work is there, when all the conditions are right, when the artist is finally going to be able to act, something, sometimes a trifle, disturbs the moment of "most intense concentration" and "destroys the project".

The "offense to the audience" is thus both the work that the public expects and that never comes, and the hope "of one art rather than another". It means creating in the absence of what should be.

It is the permanent collapse of the artistic and philosophical ideal in favour of the most outdated, everyday reality. It is the permanent abandonment of representation, which is constantly disrupted by reality.

Séverine Chavrier



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Press clippings

Séverine Chavrier enters the novel as if into a landscape that she recomposes. She doesn't follow Thomas Bernhard, but pursues the quest he inspires in her, which could be that of a total art of the stage, where music, sound, video, bodies and voices combine around a text. (...) Chavrier wants the audience to feel engulfed in the closed-door relationship between Konrad and his wife. And she succeeds: there's no escaping "her" Lime Works, which is punctuated by scenes of stunning beauty and expressiveness, especially in the first and last parts.

Brigitte Salino, Le Monde, 21 April 2023

If Séverine Chavrier's adaptation takes liberties with Thomas Bernhard's novel, it's to get as close as possible to the spirit of the work, to let us hear its scathing, disturbing irony, that strange mixture of cruelty and empathy that can be read between the lines. (...) Chavrier has written a thriller that keeps us on the edge of our seats right to the end.

Marie-José Sirach, L'Humanité, 25 April 2022

The strength of this show lies just as much in what surrounds the main characters. A desolate forest, passing birds, dazzling snow, masked extras and a soundtrack played partly live by Florian Satche. Séverine Chavrier calls it a "musical poem", which is accurate. The walls echo, the guns pop (a little too much), the silences are dizzying. In those moments, Ils nous ont oubliés becomes more of a mental landscape than anything else.

Philippe Noisette, Les Echos, 21 April 2022

What impresses above all is the kaleidoscopic universe created by [Séverine Chavrier] to transpose Thomas Bernhard's accumulative, iterative, syncopated literature to the stage. (...) A multitude of perspectives fuel this reinvention of The Lime Works. At the crossroads of theatre, music, sound, visual arts and video, Chavrier has created an imposing theatrical symphony, establishing herself as a true writer for the stage.

Manuel Piolat Soleymat, La Terrasse, April 2022

Séverine Chavrier's production of this difficult novel is a master stroke of exhilarating radicalism. First of all, the director manages to prove—contrary to what we had previously thought—that it is possible to be afraid in a theatre (...) Chavrier captures the unhealthy game that is played between individuals who no longer love each other, but who remain together. (...) And after 3 hours 45 minutes of performance, you leave dazzled by such radicalism and finesse.

Igor Hansen-Love, Les Inrocks.com, 14 April 2022

Séverine Chavrier

DIRECTOR



@ Magali Dougados

Director of CDN Orléans / Centre-Val de Loire from 2017 to 2023, Séverine Chavrier is a musician, director and philosophy graduate.

After a *hypokhâgne* class, she went on to win a gold medal and a degree in piano from the Geneva Conservatoire, as well as a first prize in musical analysis. She began training as an actor at a very young age, taking classes with Michel Fau and François Merle, then taking part in various training courses where she continued to learn from artists such as Félix Prader, Christophe Rauck, Darek Blinski and Rodrigo Garcia.

Each of her shows is an opportunity for encounters and cross-fertilisation.

As an actor and musician, she has worked with many different people while directing her own company, La Sérénade Interrompue. Alongside Rodolphe Burger, she met Jean-Louis Martinelli, for whom she created and performed the music for several shows at Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers (*Schweyk* by Bertolt Brecht, *Kliniken* by Lars Norén and *Les Fiancés de Loches* by Feydeau).

Séverine Chavrier has developed a unique approach to directing, in which theatre enters into dialogue with music, dance, images and literature. She designs her shows using all kinds of materials: the bodies of her performers, the sound of the prepared piano, the videos she often makes herself, not forgetting the spoken word—erratic words that she shapes by immersing herself in the world of the authors she loves.

In 2009, her play *Épousailles et Représailles*, based on a play by Hanokh Levin, which premiered at Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers, was then programmed at Le Centquatre – Paris by Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe for Festival Impatience, dissecting the vicissitudes of the couple with humour, cruelty and humanity.

In October 2011, Séverine Chavrier, then associate artist at Le Centquatre – Paris, created *Série B – Ballard J. G.*, inspired by James Graham Ballard, for Arte's Festival Temps d'images, then, at Festival d'Avignon 2012, *Plage Ultime*, performed at Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers and MC2 Grenoble.

Between 2014 and 2016, she was invited to create two plays at Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, *Les Palmiers Sauvages*, based on the novel *I Forget Thee, Jerusalem (The Wild Palms)* by William Faulkner, and *Nous sommes repus mais pas repentis*, based on *Déjeuner chez Wittgenstein* by Thomas Bernhard. After touring France's leading theatres (Bonlieu – Scène nationale Annecy, Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil, Comédie de Reims, Théâtre d'Arras, L'Apostrophe Cergy-Pontoise, Théâtre Liberté Toulon...), these two plays were presented as a diptych at L'Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe in Spring 2016.

They were then revived at CDN Orléans / Centre-Val de Loire and toured throughout 2019-2020 (Le Monfort Théâtre, Théâtre de la Ville – Paris, Théâtre national de Bordeaux en Aquitaine).

Since 2015, Séverine Chavrier has also been developing a long-term project with the creation of *Après Coups, Projet Un-Femme*, the first two parts of which, created in 2015 and 2017, were presented at Théâtre de la Bastille in Paris and toured to Lyon, Rouen and Orléans, bringing together female artists from the circus and dance worlds. A diptych was created in Orléans before being presented at Théâtre national de Bretagne – Rennes, manège – Scène nationale-Reims, MC93 and CDN Besancon Franche-Comté.

Since 2013, she has been a regular performer at Centre national des arts du cirque in Châlons-en-Champagne, supporting students in the Échappées programme.

Music, which she plays in her own productions or with prestigious improvisers, continues to occupy an important place in her life as an artist. In 2013, she improvised at the piano, in a duo with Jean-Pierre Drouet on percussion for Festival d'Avignon and Opéra de Lille, and in a trio with Bartabas at La Villette. In Autumn 2016, at La Pop (Paris), she created the show *Mississippi Cantabile* with Congolese bassist Armel Malonga, a musical encounter between North and South.

In January 2020, invited by Carmen Romero at Santiago a Mil Festival, Chavrier staged a Spanish version of *Les Palmiers Sauvages (Las Palmeras Salvajes)*, with a Chilean artistic and technical team. This new version of Faulkner's text toured in Spanish-speaking countries.

In 2020, her creation about adolescence and music, *Aria da Capo*, premiered at Théâtre national de Strasbourg in partnership with Festival Musica. The show toured during the 2020/2021 season (CDN Orléans / Centre-Val de Loire, Théâtre de la Ville-Les Abbesses, Centre Pompidou – Paris) and in 2022/2023 (Théâtre des 13 vents – CDN Montpellier, Théâtre national de Bordeaux en Aquitaine, ThéâtredelaCité – CDN Toulouse Occitanie, Les Halles de Schaerbeek – Brussels, Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers).

With *After All*, in 2021, she also developed a teaching activity and was artistic director of the 33rd class of students at Centre national des arts du cirque.

In 2022, she created *Ils nous ont oubliés* by Thomas Bernhard at Teatre Nacional de Catalunya in Barcelona, prior to its run at Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe – continuing to explore the relationship between theatre, music, images and literature. She is currently working on an adaptation of Faulkner's novel *Absalon, Absalon!*

Laurent Papot

ACTOR

After training at École Florent, Laurent Papot founded La Sérénade interrompue with Séverine Chavrier in 2003, producing a dozen shows, including *Les Palmiers Sauvages*, based on William Faulkner's *I Forget Thee, Jerusalem (The Wild Palms)*, which premiered at Vidy-Lausanne in 2014 and was revived at Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe together with *Nous sommes repus mais pas repentis* by Thomas Bernhard, which premiered at Vidy-Lausanne in March 2016 and was revived at Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe, and *Ils nous ont oubliés* in 2022.

His theatre credits include work with Vincent Macaigne (*Requiem3*), Jérémie Le Louët (*Macbett* by Eugène Ionesco, *Hot House* by Harold Pinter), Aurélia Guillet (*Déjà là* by Arnaud Michniak), Blandine Savetier (*Love and Money* by Dennis Kelly), Philippe Ulysse (*C'est comme du feu* by William Faulkner), Ivo van Hove (*Vu du Pont* by Arthur Miller) and Simon Stone (*Les Trois Soeurs*).

His film career includes work with Guillaume Brac (*Un monde sans femmes*), Jules Zingg (*Les Voisins, Kudoh, Les Restes*), Vincent Macaigne (*Orléans*), Philippe Ulysse (*Le Sourire des Astronautes*), Thomas Grenier (*Château de Cartes, Le Chant du Coq*), Clémence Madeleine-Perdrillat (*Bal de Nuit, Le Cowboy de Normandie*), David Lucas (*Home Run*), Hugo Dillon (*Fraigers*). He also works with Orchestre National d'Île-de-France, reciting *Peter and the Wolf* at Philharmonie de Paris conducted by Enrique Mazzola.

Marijke Pinoy

ACTRESS

Marijke Pinoy has been working for theatre and film for over thirty years, having trained at Conservatoire de Gand (Belgium), where she was awarded the First Prize in Dramatic Art in 1985.

Her many collaborations include Milo Rau, Peter Van den Eede, Mikaël Serre, Johan Simons – Cie de Koe and action zoo humain.

For many years Marijke Pinoy worked for Theater Zuidpool, where she appeared in *De Soldaat – Facteur en Rachel* (1997) and *De drumleraar* (1999) directed by Arne Sierens. In these two plays, she acted alongside Jan Steen, with whom she often works, as in *Zwijg Kleine* (1997), a production by De Werf.

In 2000, she received the Velinx Audience Award for the monologue *Bouche B*, directed by Eric Devolder. She directed a text by Arne Sierens in 2011, *Mouchette / Colette*, then *Yerma mérite des claques* in 2004 and *Soeur sourire* in 2007. She has also worked in film: *Vidange perdue* by Geoffrey Enthoven (2006) and *Ben X*, the first film by Nic Balthazar (2007), *Au cul du loup* and *Elle ne pleure pas, elle chante*. More recently, she has appeared in *Belgica, Problemski Hotel* and *Soomer*, a film by Victoria Deluxe. In 2011, she performed in *Offending the Audience* by Peter Handke, directed by Peter Van den Eede, Cie de Koe at Théâtre de la Bastille for Festival d'Automne in Paris, and in *L'impasse, I am what I am*, directed by Mikaël Serre for Festival Temps d'images and the F.I.N.D Festival at the Schaubühne in Berlin, and in *Les enfants du soleil* at Théâtre Maxim-Gorki.

Marijke Pinoy has performed at a number of major festivals—mainly with French productions—including Avignon, Paris, Lausanne, Reims, Lille and Berlin. In recent years, she has appeared on television in *De Smaak van de Keyser*, *In Vlaamse Velden*, *Red Sonja* and in the international series *The Team*.

After previous collaborations with NTGent for *Over there, between the ortles* and for *Woyzeck* directed by Eric Devolder, she was part of the cast of *Onderworpen* (based on the novel *Soumission* by Michel Houellebecq) and the diptych *Platform/Onderworpen*, directed by Johan Simons and Chokri Ben Chikha. In 2018-2019, she starred in Milo Rau's production of *Oreste à Mossoul*.

In 2021, she performed in *Les Brigands*, directed by Mikaël Serre, and wrote the solo *Le pouvoir de dire non* as a tribute to Rosa Luxemburg and Hannah Arendt.

Marijke Pinoy also defends the rights of artists and undocumented migrants and teaches at KASK – Ghent School of the Arts.

Florian Satche

MUSICIAN

Florian Satche is a drummer, improvising percussionist and composer, known for his unique way of exploring all the nuances, timbres and sonorities that drums and percussion can offer. In 2012 he co-founded Tricollectif, an artists' collective that brings together musicians, writers and video artists. As a member of Tricollectif, he has taken part in a number of projects, including *Petite Moutarde* with Théo Ceccaldi and several new works by the Orchestre du Tricot.

A Jazz Migration prize-winner in 2013 with Marcel & Solange, he won the group prize at Concours national de jazz de la Défense in 2011 and the prize for best instrumentalist at Tremplin Jazz européen d'Avignon in 2013 with Valentin Ceccaldi's quintet, *Toons*.

Florian Satche has performed with such artists as Joëlle Léandre, Samuel Blaser, Christophe Moniot, Alexandra Grimal, Séverine Chavrier, Jean-Luc Cappozzo, Yom, Théo and Valentin Ceccaldi, Roberto Negro, Gabriel Lemaire, Quentin Biardeau, Julien Desprez, Ivan Gélugne, Adrien Chennebault and Guillaume Aknine.

He has also composed music for theatre and dance with the following companies: Les oiseaux mal habillés, Théâtre de l'Éventail, Les veilleurs – Emilie Leroux, Furinkaï, and Satchie Noro.

In 2019 and 2020, he toured France with *Lent* and *Ours*, two productions by Tricollectif. He also took part in the new work by the Orchestre du Tricot, *Constantine*, on tour in 2021 and 2022.