



DIE REISE

OU LES VISAGES VARIABLES
DE FELIX MIRBT

UNE PRODUCTION DU THÉÂTRE DE LA PIRE ESPÈCE ET DE MARCELLE HUDON
EN CODIFFUSION AVEC LE THÉÂTRE AUX ÉCURIES

CRÉATION ET INTERPRÉTATION : OLIVIER DUCAS, MARCELLE HUDON, FRANCIS MONTY
MUSICIENS : ALEXIS DUMAIS, NICOLAS LETARTE, CLEMENS MERKEL
AVEC LES TEXTES ET LES MARIONNETTES DE FELIX MIRBT
COLLABORATION À LA CRÉATION : CLEMENS MERKEL CONCEPTION SONORE : NICOLAS LETARTE
ASSISTANCE À LA MISE EN SCÈNE, DIRECTION DE PRODUCTION : CLEMENCE DORAY SCÉNOGRAPHIE ET COSTUMES : JULIE VALLÉE-LÉGER
MONTAGE : RÉGIS GUYONNET VIDEO : MARCELLE HUDON RECHERCHE : MARCELLE HUDON, ALMUT ELLINGHAUS

PRESS KIT

pire-espece.com
info@pire-espece.com
7285 rue Chabot
Montréal (Québec) H2E





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A MEMORY PROJECT

SYNOPSIS

In 1943 the Americans and the Russians were gaining ground in the war against Hitler's Germany. Although only 13 years old, Felix Mirbt crossed Germany by bicycle with his father, who carried in his bag 3.5 million marks, a sandwich and a small pistol. The marks were destined for German refugees, the sandwich for Félix and the pistol for the unforeseen.

At the time of his death, Felix left behind a phenomenal quantity of puppets that show the evolution of his extraordinary artistic career. He also left behind a 500-page manuscript that combined memories of that initiatory journey with theoretical reflections on puppet theatre.

The authors, Francis Monty, Olivier Ducas and Marcelle Hudon had all known and worked with the master puppeteer. Together they bury themselves in his notebooks and its various versions, and they bring back to life some of his puppets. With remarkable musicians - Clemens Merkel, violin of the Bozzini Quartet and nephew of Felix, Nicolas Letarte, eccentric iconoclast, and Alexis Dumais, virtuose - they make up a cubist portrait of this artist that took a very important part in the evolution of the contemporary puppetry.

THE GENESIS OF THE CREATION

The idea of creating a play that would be a tribute to Felix Mirbt was a desire shared by the three artists (Francis Monty, Olivier Ducas et Marcelle Hudon). In this piece they are joined by Clemens Merkel, a musician and performer with Quatuor Bozzini and the nephew of Felix. While for each of them meeting Felix had been a decisive encounter, they were surprised that so few traces of him remained in the Quebec cultural landscape. They decided to go back in time to see what artistic seeds the man had sown.

Refined through the subjective filter of these three artists, *Die Reise or the many faces of Felix Mirbt* is a performance based on the uncompleted autobiography that Felix Mirbt left behind at the time of his death, and includes his puppets, archival documents and excerpts from plays he staged.



DIE REISE
ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt



FELIX MIBRT FROM THEIR WORDS

Felix Mirbt was my mentor. His extraordinary knowledge of puppetry nourished me. He took a bold approach to creating art that I really liked. His irreverence toward the text, the music and the marionette was part of who he was, one of his pleasures in fact. I'm now working on this piece using his own writings as a point of departure. It's a way of honouring his subversive spirit so, for the sake of integrity, I'm treating it with congenial irreverence.

Marcelle Hudon

Until the very end and despite his illness, Felix Mirbt continued to search for what eluded him. He pursued his research without compromise and with persistence, know-how and a great sense of humour. That quest still drives me forward. Shortly before he died, he had sketched for me the main themes of his project (creating a show based on his journals) and suggested that I be involved, so here I am following in his footsteps and groping forward, because the process involves getting lost. I'm recreating the story of his life.

Francis Monty

I had the chance to work with Felix Mirbt on his last show, in 2000. I was a recent theatre school graduate, and had barely begun to touch on the theatre of objects. That remarkable experience left an indelible trace, and the image I retain is of four puppets (the four of us) in a rehearsal hall concentrating hard, each of us manipulating a block of red wood, searching for hours (it seemed to me interminable!) for forms, shapes, images or a choreographed ritual when suddenly Felix said "Yes, I like this".

Searching, taking the time to allow images to emerge, letting the spectator develop his own relation to the images. Felix did not create puppet theatre, but rather theatre based on the relationship between the actor/puppeteer and the marionette (the totemic object) and the relationship between the manipulator and the object being manipulated. Four concentrated puppeteers, with four red blocks.

One day he said to me "Most puppeteers like to make and show off puppets, but not to perform plays." I knew him after he had made and manipulated all sorts of puppets (and what incredible puppets!). He was a master with extensive experience who knew how to dazzle and impress, but as he approached the end he aimed to refine form and image. Four red blocks.

Olivier Ducas





IN SEARCH OF FELIX MIRBT

The journal

In 1943 the Americans and the Russians were gaining ground in the war against Hitler's Germany. Although only 13 years old, Felix Mirbt crossed Germany by bicycle with his father, who carried in his bag 3.5 million marks, a sandwich and a small pistol. The marks were destined for German refugees, the sandwich for Felix and the pistol for the unforeseen.

At the time of his death, Felix left behind a 500-page manuscript that combined memories of that initiatory journey with theoretical reflections on puppet theatre. His memoirs contain several versions of a single incident. He would view it from a different angle, correct a phrase, add details. This unsettling yet fascinating game of repetition was echoed in his work. Truth is never only one thing but a matter of perspective, which raises an intriguing theatrical challenge of how to tell a story in a Cubist manner. He loved toying with double and triple points of view, for he himself was a man of many facets.

In writing down his memories and thoughts in a journal, he began constructing his own fairy tale after having worked for so long on those of others. The foundation of a performance took shape, but he did not have the time to bring it to fruition. Mingling fiction and the documentary, Monty, Ducas and Hudon plunged into his multifarious journal to retrace his improbable journey and his most remarkable career.

Confessions of a puppeteer

*I am known as a puppeteer
a teller of fairy tales-
but I did adult stories - didn't I?
I had collected fairy tales, by the book, until
I had filled more than three meters of shelf space.
Years later I started to write
And I discovered that I had fallen into my own fairy tales
I needed to write about the big war, that roared and had ended*

*What are they, these stories of mine?
As stories go, are they too fantastic?
But as fairy tales?
I had lived them, hadn't I?*

The Puppets

Marcelle Hudon worked with Felix Mirbt for a dozen years. In the last months of his life, Felix told Marcelle that after his death she could use the marionettes as she saw fit. From his first string puppets to the abstract forms of his later work, his impressive collection is a rarely seen treasure trove. Although often solicited by curators, his wife Almut Ellinghaüs (a puppeteer and colleague of Felix) has always refused to give his collection to a museum as she believes that a puppet comes to life by being manipulated. She is enchanted by Die Reise ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt, as it is in accordance with her own wishes. Almut is a significant resource for this project.



DIE REISE
ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt



Interviews

In addition to researching Felix's material legacy, Francis Monty and Marcelle Hudon met with many of his former colleagues. In April 2010 they travelled to Ottawa and Toronto to interview family members, fellow artists and one of his former producers. The purpose of that journey back through time was to gather testimonials and different points of view from those who knew Felix.

CREATIVE TEAM

Creators and Manipulators: **Felix Mirbt, Olivier Ducas, Francis Monty, Marcelle Hudon**

Musicians: **Alexis Dumais, Nicolas Letarte, Clemens Merkel**

With the texts and puppets from **Felix Mirbt**

Creative Contributor: **Clemens Merkel**

Sound Design and composer: **Nicolas Letarte**

Assistant Director, Production Manager: **Clémence Doray**

Costumes: **Julie Vallée-Léger**

Lighting: **Régis Guyonnet**

Videographer: **Marcelle Hudon**

Researchers: **Marcelle Hudon, Almut Ellinghaus**

Resource Persons: **Almut Ellinghaus, Marianne Mirbt, Tom Miller, Robert Moore, John et Cathy Nolan (Rag and Bone Theatre), Guy Mignault, Guy Warrin, Lawrence Cherney, Thereza Przybilski, Manie & Ferry Roelofs.**

TO GO FURTHER

Die Reise inscribes itself within a wider vision from the creators to make available to all the work of Felix Mirbt. Thus the show is completed by two other creations from a more documentary aspect.

I perform, I built / l'atelier, la scène, mémoire et marionnettes de Maître Mirbt

Julie Vallée-Léger gives live to Felix Mirbt's puppets and writings in an exhibition in coproduction with ManiganSes, Festival international des arts de la marionnette à Saguenay.

www.pire-espece.com/felixmirbt.html

In order to fulfill the interest of everyone who want to know more about Felix Mirbt, Marcelle Hudon and La Pire Espèce have created a website about the work of the puppetmaster. The onlookers can discover, among other things, informations about his life and his work, photos from his shows, excerpts from his diary and interviews with his former co-workers.



FELIX MIRBT (1931-2002)

Felix Mirbt was born in Germany in 1931. During the war years, he went to the theatre as often as possible. He was most interested in puppetry, and learned a lot about the rich tradition of the art form in Europe. Felix Mirbt arrived in Quebec in 1953 at the invitation of puppeteer Micheline Legendre. He began his career here with puppet theatre companies and in television, before moving on to working as a set designer and production manager for various theatres. In 1973 he directed Henry Beissel's play *Inook and the Sun*, and began experimenting with the elements that would characterize his work – full-view manipulation and the use of actors-manipulators and narrators, treating voice and manipulation separately. In the late 1970s he directed Büchner's *Woyzeck* and Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, working with Jean Herbiet and the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. Those two plays clearly established puppetry as a major force in contemporary theatre.



Mirbt questioned theatrical conventions and brought to the fore the symbolic role of the manipulator and the marionette. His interest in music led him in the 1980s to stage operas, and he worked on several theatrical productions based on contemporary music. He collaborated with Linda Bouchard at the National Arts Centre on the *Introduction à la musique contemporaine pour enfants* project and later with Almut Ellinghaus on *Requiem au café crème / A Sweet Round of Poison*, presented in several Maison de la culture centres in Montreal in 1995-1996.

During the course of his career, Felix Mirbt sought to break with theatrical tradition by introducing new conventions. His performances toured Canada and Europe, notably the Edinburgh Festival. His work brought him national and international recognition as well as several awards, including a UNIMA Citation of Excellence in the Art of Puppetry in 1978, a first prize for design at the Prague Quadrennial in 1979, a nomination for the 1981 Dora Mavor Moore Awards and a career tribute from the Association québécoise de marionnettistes in 2000. His art has inspired a number of puppeteers across Canada.

(based on a Canadian Museum of Civilization biography)

SELECTED PLAYS

1973 *Inook and the Sun* by Henry Beissel
1974 *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner
1978 *The Dream Play* by August Strindberg
1981 *Happy End* by Berthold Brecht

1988 *The soldier's tale* by Igor Stravinsky
1995 *Requiem au café crème* de R. W. Fassbinder
2000 *Shorelines*, a collective creation



DIE REISE
ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt



PRODUCER

LE THÉÂTRE DE LA PIRE ESPÈCE

La Pire Espèce is a brotherhood of creative forces, artisans of the unusual and advocates of fusion and borrowings. Inspired by the art of part-buffoon, part-barker puppet masters, the company creates theatre that marries raw materials with unbridled imagination, baroque extravaganza and surgical precision. The company plays with stage conventions and the rules of dramatic narrative in a desire to establish complicity with the audience.

Since 1999 La Pire Espèce has produced 16 original works, given more than 1500 performances in 4 languages (with half the shows presented abroad) and received 3 awards for its now renowned *Ubu sur la table*.

It is also a troupe committed to its community and the driving force behind Carte Premières, the biggest theatre subscription ticket service in Canada. It is a founding member of Aux Écuries, a centre for creating and presenting new works and an incubator for emerging talent.

AUTHORS

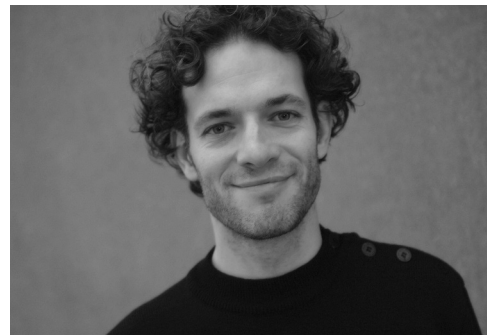
FRANCIS MONTY Director & Performer

A 1997 graduate of the playwrighting program at the National Theatre School of Canada, Francis Monty is a theatrical jack of all trades – directing, clowning, puppetry and his many writing projects all intertwine. In 1999 he co-founded Théâtre de la Pire Espèce with Olivier Ducas, and both share the position of artistic director. He has co-created many of the company's plays, including *Ubu sur la table* and *Persée*. A number of his plays have travelled across Canada, and to Brazil and Europe, including *Par les temps qui rouillent*, *Déclownestration*, *Traces de clown* and *Léon le nul*. He received the 2005 Masque award for best original script for *Romances et karaoké*.



OLIVIER DUCAS Director & Performer

Olivier Ducas is a graduate of the acting program at the National Theatre School of Canada. His decisive encounter with Francis Monty led in 1999 to the founding of Théâtre de la Pire Espèce, where he serves as co-artistic director. He works as a playwright, actor, director and manipulator for the company. Ducas is the co-creator of *Ubu sur la table* and of *Persée*, and the writer and director of *Roland*,





DIE REISE
ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt



la vérité du vainqueur, nominated for a best play for young audiences award in 2008. In addition to his theatre work, Ducas also gives classes in the theatre of objects to theatre professionals, and theatre school teachers and students.

MARCELLE HUDON
Director & Performer

Schooled in theatre and interdisciplinary art and a constant experimenter, Marcelle Hudon has 30 years of puppetry experience, having studied the craft in France and Germany and with the Italian company Giocco Vita. Her pieces include *Les portraits de la renarde*, *Interludes (orchestre de marionnettes automates)*, *Le requin blanc se multiplie*, *Par bonheur* and *Poursuite*, presented at international festivals of theatre, puppetry and interdisciplinary art. She collaborated with Felix Mirbt for close to a decade, and is also a performer and a director who specializes in shadow plays, puppetry and the theatre of objects. She has worked on shows for both adults and young audiences for several puppet theatre companies such as Pigeons International, Théâtre de la Pire Espèce, Le Petit Théâtre de Sherbrooke, Kobol marionnettes, Le Double Signe, le Théâtre des Confettis and Bouge de là. She has been a puppet manipulator for a number of television series (Télé-Québec, YTV) and played the main character in the film *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* (Clyde Henry, NFB, Warner Brothers). For a number of years she has been teaching classes for theatre and dance professionals.





DIE REISE
ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt



COLLABORATORS

NICOLAS LETARTE

Sound Design, Music, Sound Effects

Nicolas Letarte's talents include music, visual art and computer skills. In his art he aims for synaesthesia, where one stimulation evokes the sensation of another. A composer, decomposer, multi-instrumentalist and sound effects master, over the past quarter-century he has been marrying music to cinema, theatre, literature and dance. A percussionist by training, he specializes in electronic music and the musical saw (acoustic and electric). He has toured the globe presenting his work, and has worked with major artists and diverse troupes and companies.



CLEMENS MERKEL

Musican & Creative Contributor

A native of Freiburg, Germany, Clemens Merkel settled in Montreal in 1999. He studied at Musikhochschule Freiburg with Jörg Hofmann and Nicolas Chumachenco and took master classes with Irvine Arditti, Wolfgang Marschner, Rudolf Baumgartner and Christiane Edinger. He performed with the Basel Radio Symphony Orchestra in Switzerland, the Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra and with chamber orchestras in Cologne and Essen. He has received a number of awards and bursaries from several institutions, including the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec and the Canada Council for the Arts. Clemens Merkel currently performs with the Quatuor Bozzini and teaches at Concordia University and also privately. He is Felix Mirbt's nephew, and one of the initiators of *Die Reise or the many faces of Felix Mirbt*.



ALEXIS DUMAIS

Musician

A pianist and bassist originally from Rimouski, Alexis Dumais studied piano at the Conservatoire de musique de Rimouski, and then jazz at Cégep St. Laurent and the University of Montreal, where he worked with the pianist Lorraine Desmarais.

A founding member of the group Sagapool and its pianist and bassist, he also plays keyboard with the group Loco Locass. He has worked as a studio and stage accompanist for artists such as Martin Léon, Catherine Major, Julie Hamelin, Fanfare Pourpour and Jean-François Lessard.





DIE REISE
ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt



PRESS REVIEWS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LA PIRE ESPÈCE

What is striking about the theatre of objects is its childlike abandon, its dynamic spirit, its subversive energy and its confidence in the spectator's ability to grasp the symbolism of what is portrayed.

Jean St-Hilaire, *Le Soleil*

Théâtre de la Pire Espèce consists of committed theatre professionals who nonetheless never take themselves seriously [...]. Slowly but surely Pire Espèce has established its own particular niche on the Montreal scene with theatre that explores masks, clowning, direct contact with the public and an apparent nonchalance toward acting and narrative in works that are, however, often orchestrated down to the tiniest detail.

Marie-Andrée Brault, *Jeu*

Over the past few years the founders of Pire Espèce have established an impressive method for creating new works. Simultaneously constructing all aspects of a show at once (thus refusing to accord the text precedence), they mingle disciplines and assemble diverse styles and levels of meaning with an uncanny sense of equilibrium. While their main innovation is the radical manner in which they breathe new life into the theatre of objects, their style is also characterized by a rigorous approach toward the use of the actor's body.

Christian Saint-Pierre, *Revue Esse*

MARCELLE HUDON

Marcelle Hudon plunges the spectator into a dreamlike world where boundaries disappear in a realm of pure fantasy and where conventional notions are turned upside down, beginning with received ideas about children and adults. She is a miniature gargoyle whispering our primal fears and terrors into one ear, and into the other tenderness and simple joys, all of which is apparent in these six short phantasmagorical tales, each of them fascinating.

Solange Lévesque, *Le Devoir* (review of *Le requin blanc se multiplie*)

Marcelle Hudon works on a level of rapture. Her performances are vehicles of illusion and reverie, finely tuned orchestrations of sounds, images, noises, words, structures and perspectives that are constantly interacting and playing with each other

Lorraine Hébert – FTA (review of *Le requin blanc se multiplie*)

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DIE REISE
ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt



ARCHIVAL PHOTOS OF FELIX MIRBT'S WORK



Shorelines, 2000



Requiem au café crème, 1995-97



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ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt



Une soirée Vian, 1994



The soldier's tale, The famine, 1988-96



Happy End, 1981-85



DIE REISE
ou les visages variables de Felix Mirbt



A Dream Play, 1978-80



La boîte à joujoux, 1972