



THE QUEST

CÉDRIC EECKHOUT

Studio Théâtre National Creation 19/20
THÉÂTRE NATIONAL WALLONIE-BRUXELLES

THE QUEST

CÉDRIC EECKHOUT

At the intersection where stand-up, absurdity and existential drama meet, Cédric Eeckhout obsessively pinpoints the similarities that unite his destiny with that of the vast political and economic continent; he covers history both on the large and the small scale. For him, important dates in his existence correspond strangely to defining episodes in United Europe. Even his name is linked, when you think that his initials are EC!*

On the one hand is his story: a 40-year-old actor, looking for eternal love, marked from an early age by the separation of his Walloon mother and his Flemish father. And on the other hand, the story of the European Union, whose foundations are now threatened by rising nationalism and the possibility that it will break up.

In his intimate questions, the actor stops at the fragmentation of Europe, questions the ambivalent effects of neoliberalism... and looks at his own cradle: he is the fruit of a meeting between the North and the South of Belgium which, at the end of 18 years of union, gave way to divorce. Will the fate of the European Union be better? Presenting himself as a 21st century knight in protective combat armour, he is accompanied in his quest by his mother and his cat Jésus.

Together they went to Holland, Sweden, Hungary... but also to Flanders and Wallonia, to question our contemporaries on his intimate and political reflections on the themes of the family and Europe. They met and interviewed key people for the European future, intellectuals, politicians, artists, but also ordinary European citizens, and even members of Cédric's family.

A Studio Théâtre National création

* EC: European Community



In *The Quest*, which is his directorial début, Cédric Eeckhout tackles a quest that could be summed up as the search for an ideal union with another being, but it is also a questioning of what union is in general. This reflection leads to another larger one on the European Union. With much humour, he pursues these parallel interrogations, mixing personal and political issues.

"He imagined that nothing would be more beautiful for him, more useful for his country, than to resuscitate errant chivalry by going himself on horseback, armed like the paladins, seeking adventures, righting wrongs, repairing injustice".

— *Don Quixote*, Cervantes

How did the project come into being?

Could you remind us of the main stages?

Cédric Eeckhout: The main idea came from the fact that I worked with several European directors on the theme of Europe. In each of these projects, we did a lot of improvisation on this theme and we also talked a lot about ourselves, especially with Falk Richter who often uses the lives of his actors in his writing.

It was his playwright, Jens Hilje (current director of the Gorki theater in Berlin, and former co-director of Thomas Ostermeier at the Schaubühne) who suggested that I try to write or to do a show in the form of stand-up. It got me thinking and I said to myself that I would like to work on Europe while talking about myself too. In fact, the idea of making connections between my personal and political life came to me quite quickly and amused me: that my crisis of being single in need of a healthy and balanced relationship (a union), could have links with the crises that Europe has been going through since 2008.

— Interview with Cédric Eeckhout October 2019

A stand-up

The show could be compared to an American stand up show. Indeed, Cédric Eeckhout occupies centre stage with a microphone and keeps us going alone, with a self-deprecating autofiction for an hour and a half.

Why stand-up? First, because during my research on this practice, I discovered that American stand-ups were often very depressed, and that currently, most clubs had a psychiatrist on staff, or an accompanist for their performers.

So I thought that was the most natural way to talk about a contemporary existential crisis. And

then, it's because this form offers a possibility of direct dialogue with the public, which is the main partner. And finally, because it is about performance. It's something of a scary challenge and I need to be scared to work.

Characters

The knight, his mother and his cat

Cédric arrives on stage dressed in armour like the knight Don Quixote, a mythical figure in Cervantes' novel (1605).

Like Don Quixote, our hero is in search of an impossible love in an individualistic and harsh world in which humanist ideals are abused. His search for a "never-ending love story" will come up against his sometimes bitter reflections on the crises (couple, existential and European) that dot our lives. The companions of his quest are his mother and his cat.

These two characters embody a certain ambiguity between reality and fiction. This is his real mum - who is not an actress at all - who throughout the show peels potatoes with which she then goes on to make fries. She appears as the spirit of common sense and her interventions push the hero towards rational choices. There is also his cat Jésus who takes care of the musical and sound accompaniment and is also the direct witness of his amorous setbacks. These two characters also constitute the link with his family history and his past..



Interview shooting, September 2019, Linköping, Sweden

European identity

The residencies

*What interests me is to see if people have the same vision as me, namely can my life be Europe?
Does my family resemble Europe? Can relations between people represent a political reality?*

Between April 2019 and February 2020, with a view to nourish his project, Cédric Eeckhout undertook a series of residencies - Groningen, Luxembourg, Ghent, Budapest, Madrid, Brussels, Mons and several cities in Sweden - during which he interviewed citizens on their relationship to Europe and their personal crisis.

The artist drew up a questionnaire with questions which draw parallels between the conception that people have of Europe with their vision of the couple and of union in general. Still under the same conditions and in the same setting consisting of a table with a tablecloth and somewhat old-fashioned objects and knick-knacks, Cédric and his mother interviewed dozens of people in different European countries:

- What is a couple's plan?
- What language do we choose to speak within a couple?
- Why do we decide to stay together after a crisis?
- How can we trust each other?
- What are the differences / similarities between a family reunion and a European summit

Scenography

Stage right we see a kitchen with some basic furniture. This is the mother's space, perhaps also the space of family, of childhood... Stage left is Jésus the cat and his musical and sound installation. In the center, the actor and his microphone in a device that refers to the stand-up, facing the public and close to the front rows.

Above Cédric is a screen with extracts from the surveys which he comments on throughout the show. Behind him a large blue curtain - European colour - hides the backdrop.

Language

Cédric Eeckhout speaks in English. This allows a distance from the subject and evokes the vehicular English with which we communicate throughout the EU. It is deliberately a basic English that he himself calls "Euro trash English". It also refers us to the multiculturalism of this Europe of 26 and our difficulties in communicating and understanding each other. Subtitles ensure that the audience can follow what is being said.

Overcoming crises, a major challenge

The show could be seen as a chronological evolution from crisis to crisis. The hero's quest is indeed a romantic quest for ideal love, but it is always hindered and unsuccessful, since it is almost impossible in a world dominated by individualist neoliberal ideologies contrary to this romantic ideal.

In the same way, the ideals of peace and solidarity which were able to bind the European countries and govern the construction of the Union after the war are relegated and replaced by economic concerns in which there is little room to imagine oneself as a citizen.

After the climax of Brexit that we can see as the first defeat of the European Union - and which Cédric Eeckhout relates to a failure of love that has remained bitter, now a deeper reflection opens, linked to the public health crisis we are going through. This implies an obvious search for solidarity between the countries of Europe and between citizens, whatever the size and importance of what brings them together. The show ends today with the peaceful reunion of Cedric's parents and an invitation to consider the concept of Union differently.



Cedric Eeckhout

As an actor and performer, since 2002 he has worked on most Belgian stages with various directors and with Belgian and foreign companies.

At the European level

- *Project* by Thierry Salmon - School of Masters 2005 (directed by Rodrigo Garcia),
- *Hansel and Gretel* by Anne-Cécile Vandalem, Das Fräulein (Kompanie),
- *Rausch* by Anouk Van Dijk and Falk Richter / Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus (2012), Avignon (2013) and European tour
- Second collaboration with Falk Richter after the creation in 2011 of *Play Loud* (Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles)
- *Les Enfants du soleil* by M. Gorki directed by Mikael Serre / Vidy Lausanne, comédie de Reims, Théâtre Montfort (Paris).
- *Do you still love me* directed by Sanja Mitrovic, Stand up tall, a creation of Reims scènes d'Europe 2015, France-Belgium-Holland-Germany tour 2015/2016
- *Game of You / Ontroerend goed*, Europe-Canada 2014-2015-2016-2017
- *The Seagull* by Anton Tchekhov directed by Thomas Ostermeier / Vidy Lausanne, Odéon Théâtre de L'Europe / Tour France Europe
- *Fear and Desire* (Gaia Saitta and Julie Stanzac / If human) dance show created at the Equilibrio festival in Rome in 2013, Belgium-Italy tour 2013-2014-2015.

In cinema

He has worked with Joachim Lafosse: *Ça rend heureux*, *Tribu*, Rithy Panh: *A Dam Against The Pacific*, Laurent Tirard: *Le petit Nicolas*. He can be seen alongside Vincent Cassel: *Gauguin* d'Édouard Deluc.

Winner of the Union Prize for Belgian Artists 2001, he was nominated for the 2005 Belgian Theatre Prize as best male actor (for Chekhov's *The Seagull*, directed by Xavier Lukomski and *Hot House* by

Pinter) and has received numerous other awards at various international short film festivals. He has also participated in the writing of various theatrical and film projects.

Douglas Grauwels

The Belgian actor, director and playwright Douglas Grauwels trained at the IAD (Institut des Arts de Diffusion, Louvain-la-Neuve), at the CET (Center d'Études Théâtrales de l'Université de Louvain-la-Neuve under the direction of Jonathan Chatel), at the École du Jeu directed by Delphine Elie and finally as a foreign student at the CNSAD (Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique, Paris). He began his professional career in 2013 with Falk Richter and Christopher Kondek for the production of *For The Disconnected Child* at the Schaubühne in Berlin. The same year, he worked with Salvatore Calcagno on the dramaturgy of the show *La Vecchia Vacca* at Tanneurs in Brussels.

In 2014, he assisted Jeanne Candel on *Le Goût du faux et autres chansons* presented at the autumn festival. He collaborated again as a playwright with Salvatore Calcagno for his production *The Pool Boy* at Tanneurs (Brussels) and *Io Sono Rocco* at the KunstenFestivalDesArts. This year, he is directing *La Vraie Vie* d'Olivier Liron with Émilie Flamant at the VARIA theatre. He interpreted and co-wrote *J.C.* directed by Juliette Navis at 104 in Paris.

Jo Libertiaux

Jo Libertiaux is not a professional actress, *From Here I Will Build Everything*, the short version of this project, was her first experience on a theatre set. Jo is a hairdresser and, although now retired, she continues her passion at home with a few clients who have remained loyal to her.

Jo Libertiaux is the mother of four boys, of which Cédric Eeckhout is the youngest. She is also the happy grandmother of five boys and a girl. Lately she joined the University of the Third Age to learn English..

Schedule of the creation process

Residenties

- 08 > 12.04.2019 - Grand Theatre / Noorderzon, The Netherlands
- 17 > 21.05.2019 - Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg
- 02.06.2019 - Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg (TALENTLAB)
- 24 > 26.06.2019 - NT Gent, Belgium
- 21 > 25.08.2019 - Trafó House, Hungary
- 06 > 13.09.2019 - Riksteatern, and several cities in Sweden
- 19.10.2019 - Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles
- 17.11.2019 - MARS, Mons arts de la scène, Belgium
- 07 > 10.02.2020 - CDN de Madrid, Spain

Performances

- 01 > 16.10.2020 - Swedish tour organized by the Riksteatern
- 11 > 12.11..2020 - NT, Gent, Belgium
- 01 > 4.12.2019 - L'Ancre, Charleroi, Belgium
- 11 > 12.05.2021 - Mars, Mons arts de la scène, Belgium
- 26 > 27.05.2021 - Trafó House, Hungary
- 08 > 9.07.2021 - Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg
- Dates à confirmer - Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles
- Dates à confirmer - CDN de Madrid, Spain

Contact

Juliette Thieme
Diffusion
jthieme@theatrenational.be

Professional webpace

Professional webpace access
www.theatrenational.be/pro

Login: diffusion
Password: TNBstudio

Tour calendar

www.theatrenational.be/en/pages/145-tour-calendar

THE QUEST

CÉDRIC EECKHOUT

Writing and directing
Cédric Eeckhout

With the partnership of
Douglas Grauwels

Dramaturgy
Nils Haarmann

Costumes and set design
Laurence Hermant

Light design
Emily Brassier

With
Cédric Eeckhout
Douglas Grauwels, alternately with **Andrea Romano**
Jo Libertiaux

Assistant director
Eulalie Roux

Consultant English language editor
Daisy Phillips

Translation, transcription, surtitling
Isabelle Grynberg
Tineke de Meyer
Lola Chuniaud
Pulse Translations: Christopher Smith,
Francis Smith, Valérie De Heyn, Valentine De Luca

Video editing
Dimitri Petrovic

Stage Manager
Romain Gueudré

Video direction, light operator
Ludovic Desclin

Sound operator
Pawel Wnuczynski

Stage director
Pierre Ottinger

Studio Théâtre National Creations

Production
Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles

Co-production
Riksteatern, Les Théâtres de la ville du Luxembourg, Mars – Mons Arts de la Scène, L'ANCRE – Théâtre Royal, Grand Théâtre / Noorderzon, Trafó Budapest, Centro Dramático Nacional (INAEM), La Coop asbl et Shelter Prod.

With the support of
Taxshelter.be, ING et du Tax Shelter du gouvernement fédéral belge

Thanks to
R.Lang, A.Romano, F. Denis, A De Vestele, M. Godichaux, FIND Festival 2017, NEST - CDN Thionville Lorraine, Le Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, La Comédie de Reims, La Criée – Théâtre National de Marseille, Le Lieu Unique, Maison de l'Histoire Européenne.

We thank the teams of theaters who welcomed us during the various residences in Europe between April 2019 and February 2020 as well as the 85 people who agreed to be interviewed for this project.

Costumes and set design
Ateliers du Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles

Contact

Production manager
Juliette Thieme
jthieme@theatrenational.be

Tour manager & international relations
Matthieu Defour
mdefour@theatrenational.be

Professional workspace

Professional workspace access
www.theatrenational.be/en/espacepro

Login: diffusion
Mot de passe: TNBstudio

On tour

www.theatrenational.be/en/productions/agenda

Studio Théâtre National Creations

Over the years, the Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles has supported artists and companies and enabled them to create by providing them with resources and infrastructure. In return, these creators breathe new energy into the Theatre and punctuate the seasons with laboratories, rehearsals, meetings and performances.

Artists of different ages, origins and languages, one after another they work on what will become the Studio Théâtre National creation. These artists have in common a sense of collectivity and teamwork which gives their approach a great energy on stage, making possible the invention of singular languages, where form and substance have nothing to separate them reasons to stand out. The Théâtre National welcomes these artists who take their stories and questions in hand, and helps them to carry these Studio Théâtre National creations.

→ Interviews and reports on www.theatrenational.be/backstage

THÉÂTRE NATIONAL WALLONIE-BRUXELLES CONSTRUCTEURS D'HISTOIRES/ VERHALENBOUWERS/ STORY MAKERS

THÉÂTRE NATIONAL WALLONIE-BRUXELLES

Bd. Emile Jacqmain 111-115

B-1000 Brussels

+32 2 203 41 55

info@theatrenational.be

www.theatrenational.be

