

Maiden flight to the land of childhood
Interview with D. Kimm

***Comment j'ai appris à parler aux oiseaux* is your first play for young audiences. What prompted you to write it?**

The idea came to me suddenly, unexpectedly, while I was working on another project which I subsequently abandoned. I read Yoko Ogawa's very beautiful novel *Petits Oiseaux* ("little birds"). One of the characters in the book is an artist who only speaks "bird," and I immediately thought of this title: *Comment j'ai appris à parler aux oiseaux* ("How I learned to talk to birds"). I knew right away that it would be for children. That scared me, because I'd never written anything for young audiences. But try as I might to escape it, there was no denying that because of its poetic and playful nature, its honest and straightforward theme, this was going to be a play for children.

What surprises you the most about young audiences?

Oh, contact with children is so moving! Knowing they are alert and listening, eager to get involved, excited and fragile—just like little birds, in fact. I'm really impressed by their ability to follow me during the show: they'll laugh at the funny parts, then understand right away that the tone of my acting has changed, and they'll start listening intently. It's as if we were all taking a trip together. And of course my greatest reward is having the children come up to me after the show to talk to me or give me a hug.

How did you come up with the character of Mademoiselle Mouche?

I'm not a playwright, I'm a poet and performer. I had a mental picture of an eccentric old maid who does things her own way, a person who is both vulnerable and determined to move forward. I developed the character in several stages, with help from fantastic consultants and collaborators. As she evolved, M^{lle} Mouche became more tender, more confident, wackier and even a little impertinent!

Why birds? What's your connection to the avian world?

At first I was attracted to birds' beauty. As I did my research over several months, I went into "bird mode." They're fascinating: how they learn to fly, their courtship rituals, their intelligence. I learned that their pretty songs are mostly a way to mark their territory—and they're not always very nice about it!