

Moving forward on the fine line between age groups

A conversation with Nini Bélanger

When did it become clear to you that you were going to create two shows from the same text? And what was the motivation, the desire, behind this choice?

With *Vipérine*, a children's show we toured for six years, we discovered something I found fascinating: we could reach out to both young audiences (ages 7–9) and teens (ages 13–15). Depending on the age of the spectators, the actress who played the 10-year-old girl adapted her performance, making it candid or preadolescent.

With *Petite Sorcière*, I wanted to push that experience farther. In my practice, I had never created a show for very young children (ages 5–6). The main storyline of *Petite Sorcière* is a pretty cruel tale. Could we present that to little ones? How? The two shows are born of those questions, with the desire to respect the audience, to trust them, to share a story with a universal message, from which everyone, depending on their level of maturity, can take what they need. That's why I create theatre.

Knowing that some intrepid spectators will see both versions, what were the challenges in creating and staging each version of *Petite Sorcière*?

I built the long version in opposition to the short one, to challenge myself, but also to offer children a standalone theatrical piece, something we don't often see in theatre for young audiences. Everything was conceived and constructed to make it a very different experience from the short version. And as much as I was in control of the short version, my objective in creating the long version was to let myself be surprised. Cat videos, colourful lighting, a very immersive sound environment—these elements stand out like UFOs in my theatrical practice! Two *Petites Sorcières*, two worlds.

What's it like to create a play with your partner? What does it entail?

When we're creating a show, it takes up a lot of space in our lives, and working together allows us to share this exciting time. We are both the greatest admirers and the harshest critics of each other's respective approach. We know we can trust each other completely; it's an amazing opportunity to excel, both artistically and personally.

Working with Pascal Brullemans is pure joy, and bringing his words to you through *Petite Sorcière* is a privilege ... Yes, I am privileged to work with this sensitive and talented writer every day. Pascal is the brightest, most creative person I know. He makes life beautiful and meaningful. I often pinch myself when I think about how amazingly lucky we've been to share our love for the past 25 years.

Yes, this is a public declaration of admiration and love.

Interviewed by Amélie Dumoulin