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The Kennedy Center



FEBRUARY 2004

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

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EISENHOWER THEATER

Thursday & Saturday Evenings, February 12 & 14, 2004, at 8:00

The
Kennedy
Center

Festival of France

January - April 2004

The Kennedy Center
presents

CDDB-THÉÂTRE DE LORIENT
Centre Dramatique National de Bretagne
U.S. Company Debut

production of

La Bête dans la Jungle

French version recreated and adapted by MARGUERITE DURAS

Originally adapted as a play in English by JAMES LORD

Based on "The Beast in the Jungle," a novella by HENRY JAMES

The Actors

JUTTA JOHANNA WEISS

JEAN-DAMIEN BARBIN

Direction & Set Design

ÉRIC VIGNER

Dramatist

SABINE QUIRICONI

Assistant to the Director

BRUNO GRAZIANI

Lighting

CRISTOPHE DELARUE

Sound

XAVIER JACQUOT

Costumes

PAUL QUENSON

Makeup

SOIZIC SIDOIT

English Translation

MIKE SENS &
JUTTA JOHANNA WEISS

English Titles

MIKE SENS-MWT

The Festival of France is held in cooperation with the Embassy of France with support from the Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation, Florence Gould Foundation, Association Française d'Action Artistique, Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater, FedEx Corporation, HRH Foundation, Grand Marnier Foundation, and French American Cultural Foundation.

International Programming at the Kennedy Center is supported through the generosity of
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Patrons are requested to turn off pagers, cellular phones, and signal watches during performances.
The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not allowed in this auditorium.

La Bête dans la Jungle

The Beast in the Jungle

six tableaux with prologue and epilogue

Cast

John Marcher.....Jean-Damien Barbin
Catherine Bertram.....Jutta Johanna Weiss

An Introduction to the Play

Centering on the themes of love, memory, remembrances, secrets, and the unsayable, *La Bête dans la Jungle* is a play full of surprises to which three famous authors have contributed. Adapted in French by Marguerite Duras from the play by James Lord, and based on a novella by Henry James, CDDB-Théâtre de Lorient's production concentrates on John Marcher and Catherine Bertram, the two main characters. John and Catherine meet at a reception in Weatherend Castle. The repressed memory of their former encounter stirs in John as he contemplates Van Dyck's painting of the Fourth Marquis; he realizes that he and Catherine had met ten years before in Italy. Their reunion at Weatherend Castle becomes the first in a long series of meetings throughout their lives, as they are bound together by the secret destiny John Marcher feels unable to escape from and which he names "the beast in the jungle."

One Play, Three Authors

In 1903 Henry James revisited the Greek myth of "Narcissus and Echo" in his novella entitled *The Beast in the Jungle*. Like the mythical figures, John Marcher, the author's main character, is fascinated by his own image, while Catherine Bertram is transformed by the indifference of the person she loves.

In the early 1960s, James Lord, an American art chronicler living in Paris who had achieved fame for his portrait of Alberto Giacometti, adapted the novella into a stage play. Respecting the narrative structure of the story, he introduced a new element—painting—by means of the portrait of the Fourth Marquis by Van Dyck. The new device served as a pictorial expression that emphasized the mirror effect of John Marcher's contemplation.

In 1961 and 1962 Marguerite Duras began her first French adaptation of the play, in collaboration with James Lord. Twenty years later, in the early 1980s, Ms. Duras brought director Alfredo Arias into a collaboration that produced a second and final adaptation, introducing major changes. In her new adaptation, Ms. Duras concentrated on the two main characters, John Marcher and Catherine Bertram. She cut the role of the governess and placed the entire play in Weatherend Castle. Marguerite Duras' final version of *La Bête dans la Jungle* was published in her theater collection in 1982 as part of Gallimard's *Tome III*, and Mr. Arias directed the play that same year with Delphine Seyrig and Sami Frey in the roles of Catherine and John. Another 20 years passed before Eric Vigner returned her version of the play to the stage.

Now, a century after Henry James revisited the Greek myth of "Narcissus and Echo" in his novella *The Beast in the Jungle*, CDDB-Théâtre de Lorient brings us the French play version by Marguerite Duras. Thus, *La Bête dans la Jungle* is the fruit of three great figures in literary history, of two literary genres—a novella and a play, and of two languages—English and French.

Éric Vigner—From Reality to Imagination in the Theater

It is a matter of time, memory, secret—Marguerite Duras' final version of *The Beast in the Jungle* serves as a blank canvas upon which the French director and set designer Éric Vigner unfolds his complex universe, built in successive layers that come to light one by one. Trained in the visual arts, Éric Vigner “writes” in space with text, language, sound, and light. Since his renowned staging of Marguerite Duras' book *La Pluie d'Été* in 1994, a collaboration that cemented a strong friendship between director and author during the last years of her life, Mr. Vigner has continued to explore space in relation to the representation of theatrical images.

“The essential engine of my work is not ideological or analytical, but poetic, inexplicable, and emotional. Empty spaces, sterile signs, a socio-political, aesthetically poor theater is of no interest to me. I try to invent what would be the Baroque of the 21st century. I aim to surpass theatrical images, to create open works in which each spectator can imagine his or her own story.” ❖ Éric Vigner

In 2001 Éric Vigner staged a second work by Marguerite Duras at CDDB—Théâtre de Lorient—her stage version of *The Beast in the Jungle*. Then, in 2002 he directed her masterwork *Savannah Bay* (starring Catherine Samie—who recently toured the U.S. in *The Last Letter*—and Catherine Hiegel) in Paris at Comédie-Française/Richelieu Hall, marking the entry of the work of Marguerite Duras into the Comédie-Française repertory.

Mr. Vigner's imaginative setting for *The Beast in the Jungle* spans a multitude of influences, beginning with the invention and use of Euclidian perspective in the Italian art of the 13th and 14th centuries up to contemporary art. He uses a series of moving frames, vacillating between flat image and depth of field, to form the *tableaux* as settings for the phantoms imagined by Henry James, James Lord, and Marguerite Duras. A Fragonard* landscape, rendered on a unique 70,000-piece bamboo curtain, veils the scene. Mr. Vigner challenges the eye to orient itself and to capture new dimensions in theatrical illusion. At a distance, Van Dyck's portraits seem to become the witnesses of Weatherend Castle itself, a timeless place where John Marcher and Catherine Bertram meet. Éric Vigner gives no answers, but opens all possible interpretations, inviting the audience to look, listen, and choose their own.

*Jean-Honoré Fragonard (French painter 1732-1806)

The Actors

Jutta Johanna Weiss (*Catherine Bertram*), an actress fluent in German, French, and English, was born in Vienna, Austria. She worked under the direction of Otomar Kréjca in Vienna's Theater an der Josefstadt before moving to New York City in 1988 to pursue acting studies in English with Sanford Meisner at the Neighborhood Playhouse and later with Robert Lewis in his master classes. In 1994 she was invited to perform with Andrei Serban in Avignon and in 1995 with Anatoli Vassiliev in Moscow. She has also performed roles in plays by Giraudoux, Ibsen, and Lorca, as well as by contemporary American and Austrian playwrights. Ms. Weiss joined the CDDB–Théâtre de Lorient in 1998 to play the title role in Victor Hugo's play *Marion de Lorme*, directed by Éric Vigner. She has continued to work with him, performing roles in Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinocéros* (2000) and Roland Dubillard's "...Où boivent les vaches" (2003).

Jean-Damien Barbin (*John Marcher*) was born in Nantes, France. He studied at the Conservatory of Nantes, Superior National School of the Arts and Theater Technique, and the National Superior Conservatory of Dramatic Art in Paris with Michel Bouquet and Daniel Mesguich. Since then he has performed in classical plays by Shakespeare, Racine, Marivaux, Hugo, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, Shaw, and Claudel, as well as in contemporary plays by such authors as Eugène Ionesco, Edward Bond, Nathalie Sarraute, Jon Fosse, and Lars Noren. Mr. Barbin's career is marked by intensive collaborations with directors such as Michel Bouquet, Daniel Mesguich, Olivier Py, and Jacques Lassalle, and with Éric Vigner for *Rhinocéros* (2000) and "...Où boivent les vaches" (2003). He has worked in film and television under the direction of Jean-Paul Rappeneau and Francis Girod. He made his directing debut at CDDB–Théâtre de Lorient in 2000, directing Stig Dagerman's story, *Notre besoin de consolation est impossible à rassasier*.

The Director

Éric Vigner (*Director*) was born in Rennes, France. He received a degree in visual arts and then continued his studies as an actor at the Conservatory of Rennes, at the National Superior School of the Arts and Theater Technique, and finally at the National Superior Conservatory of Dramatic Art in Paris. He has performed under the direction of Jean-Pierre Miquel and Brigitte Jaques, among others. With Philippe Clévenot and Maria De Medeiros, he appeared in both the play and the film *Elvire Jouvet 40*. In 1990 Mr. Vigner founded his own company "Suzanne M." and in 1991 staged *La Maison d'Os* by Roland Dubillard. That same year he was invited to present his company in the play at the prestigious Autumn Festival of Paris. Also in 1991, Peter Brook invited Mr. Vigner to join him in research on the art of directing. Éric Vigner has become known as the most inventive French director of his generation. In 1993-94 he staged *La Pluie d'Été*, the first work based on the writing of Marguerite Duras, and formed a deep friendship with the author. He received the honor of "Lauréate" for *Villa Médicis Hors Les Murs* (1994).

Parallel to his work on contemporary playwrights such as Audureau, Motton, Rebotier, Ionesco, and others, Mr. Vigner has a particular interest in the classical French theater, staging plays by such fundamental authors as Corneille, Molière, and Racine.

In 1995 the French Ministry of Culture named Mr. Vigner to the post of director of the Centre Dramatique de Bretagne (the Dramatic Center of Brittany), which in 2002 became a national center due to his work. His production of Corneille's *L'Illusion Comique* was nominated for the Molière French Theater Award in 1996, and in 1998 Mr. Vigner was presented with France's highest civilian award, the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. Since then he has continued to direct throughout France and around the world, including three productions for the Comédie-Française: Racine's *Bajazet* (1995), Molière's *L'École des Femmes* (1999), and Duras' *Savannah Bay* (2002). He has directed the baroque operas *La Didone* (2000, Lausanne Opera House) and *L'Empio Punito* (2003, Bach Festival, Germany). In 2004 he will direct the opera *Antigone* at both Montpellier Opera House and Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, and Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* at the National Theater of Seoul in Korea.

CDDB-Théâtre de Lorient

Centre Dramatique National de Bretagne

The National Dramatic Center of Brittany has achieved renown in France and throughout Europe as a center for the development of French contemporary theater. In addition to developing work of his own there, director Éric Vigner, with a focus on contemporary authors, invites a variety of young artists to create and present their first works at the theater. Over the years, the work of artists such as Peter Brook, Alfredo Arias, Claude Régy, and Jérôme Deschamps has been presented at the CDDB-Théâtre de Lorient. In addition, the theater has hosted many international productions and co-productions.

Since its founding in 1996, the National Dramatic Center of Brittany has gained a unique visual identity through a series of theater posters created for it by the graphic designers M/M (Paris), who are known for their collaborations with fashion designers such as Yohji Yamamoto and Calvin Klein, contemporary artists like Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno, and pop stars such as Björk and Madonna.

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