

# In 'Solitude'

## 7 Stages launches ambitious translation of gay French playwright's works

ATLANTA'S THEATER SCENE IS ABOUT TO score a major coup as 7 Stages prepares to bring the work of one of France's most acclaimed contemporary playwrights to Little Five Points. "In the Solitude of Cottonfields," one of the final plays written by gay Frenchman Bernard-Marie Koltès, premieres at 7 Stages April 24 after more than a decade of work to secure and translate the moving piece.

Since his AIDS-related death in 1989, Koltès has posthumously ascended to upper echelon of French playwrights and flirted with international acclaim. His plays have been produced in the United States before, but they relied on translations into what's known as British English, which didn't make them the best fit for U.S. audiences.

"The owner of the rights [to Koltès' plays], his brother, François, feels that these plays don't capture the fascination that the author had with culture in the United States, especially western films," says Del Hamilton, artistic director of 7 Stages. "These plays, I wouldn't say are about popular culture, but



they make it more Americanized than the former British versions," says Hamilton, who has worked for almost two decades to stage Koltès' works.

7 Stages is the first American theater to showcase the new translation of Koltès' "In the Solitude of Cottonfields," and the theater's artistic associate Isma'il ibn Connor is playing an integral role in adapting Koltès' work for English-speaking audiences across the globe. François Koltès personally tapped Connor to do new English translations of all of his brother's plays.

"There's a rhythm to it, to me, that's akin to jazz or akin to rap. There's something about it, this musicality in the language that draws you in, makes you feel it, sense it, and be alive in a way," Connor says.

"The existing translation, to me, it didn't capture the musicality — it was a completely different play," he adds.

**HAMILTON FIRST CAUGHT WIND OF KOLTÈS'** rising star while traveling in Berlin, where he heard about a dynamic young writer in Paris. The two spoke over the phone and agreed to meet at Koltès' home, but the French playwright was too sick for company



Famed French director **Eric Vigner** is leading 7 Stages' production of 'In the Solitude of Cottonfields.' (Photo by Bo Shell)

by the time Hamilton arrived.

"Like so many people from the early days of the epidemic, he didn't want to talk about his health," Hamilton recalls. "And yet, he couldn't help but talk about it because, of course, it affected how he thought, how he felt, whether he could go out and get a croissant, or if he had to stay in the house."

Gay themes were not a major part of Koltès' work, but his sexual orientation undeniably influenced his writing.

"His plays, I think, reveal a kind of sensitivity to themes that are of appeal to homosexuals, but his plays are about the larger questions of existence," Hamilton says.

In "Solitude," Koltès explores the nano-second two men, a black man and white

man, meet for a business transaction. It remains unclear exactly what is being sold and purchased, and the play uses the interaction to look at death, capitalism and race.

"It's very important to be here," says acclaimed French director Eric Vigner, who was brought to 7 Stages to direct the show.

"I think about the history of Atlanta, the geographic situation, the cultural situation, and it's really good to be here to do this play," Vigner says. "In Boston, for example, it will have no sense."

**'In the Solitude of Cottonfields'**

April 24-May 17

7 Stages, 1105 Euclid Ave., \$10-\$50  
404-523-7647 [www.7stages.org](http://www.7stages.org)