

WAAROM THEATER

Episode 1 - Bert Luppès

[Music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

BERT LUPPES

The question of "why theatre," trying to answer it in this day and age, does bring me to different thoughts than I had before.

[Music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

KAATJE DE GEEST

This is "Why Theatre". NTGent's podcast in which people state their personal "why" through fiery speeches, declarations of love and anecdotes. In this episode you will hear Bert Luppès, who is currently performing Yellow, by Luk Perceval.

[Music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

BERT

When I was at theatre school, people often said: theatre is the mirror of reality. You hold a mirror up to people. But I became more and more convinced of the fact that you don't have to hold a mirror up to people, because then it's a reflection of a truth and you see that in the mirror. No, these days I am much more inclined to distort that truth, or interpret that reality, and whether this is politics or entertainment, that's all fine, I have my own preferences, but it's not about that mirror for me. It goes much further than that. So I am not at all in favour of theatre being the mirror of reality, no.

You go and watch something, in artificial lighting, or well, that's not even necessary. But you see that people are showing something, that it is live, that it is created there, and so it is also an interpretation that you see, an idea, an interpretation of the truth, of the rea- Not that it is real and not that it is reality. You don't really see someone die on stage.

But I do worry sometimes that we're close to making that transition, that transition to what you see on stage is almost, or well, real. I am concerned about that. That you really see someone injure themselves, that you actually see someone die on stage. No, I wouldn't like that. Then I'd be missing something. I don't want to watch that.

[Piano music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

I have always seen theatre not only as acting, but also as being a director or a coach or a teacher - theatre as a means, not only as an artist.

For me it wasn't a matter of life and death. Sometimes, I notice... I just did the selection in Maastricht, where I work as a teacher. You definitely notice with those students who have been acting for ten years or so and have thought since they were eight that they would become an artist or an actor, if you are then told: "this is not it," a whole world collapses in front of you. And of course that is terrible for those students. On the other hand, I always think: if you want to do

a profession like that; do it, that's fine, but at the same time keep a backup-plan in mind. Because there is - it is very difficult. It is a very tough training, it is like top-class sports and well, sometimes there are other possibilities to become an actor aside from taking actor's training. You see that more and more these days. Of course, here at NTGent too, more and more people are appearing on stage who are not officially actors or actresses and who have not made a profession out of it. And well, you also see that theatre, certainly here with Milo, not only depends on people's acting skills, but much more on people's personal stories and therefore brings reality on stage much more than an imagination of that reality or a fanciful interpretation of that reality. That you start to ask yourself: what I see on stage, is that true or not? Is it real or not? It is often presented as if it is real, and as an audience you surrender to that and think: well, the story that is being told here, that must be the personal story of the person on stage.

[Piano music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

What is theatre, really, or what is not theatre? It is actually a lot, so it is very rich. It is very full. It is very grand and there has always been theatre and there is always a need to watch people do something for you. There is always a need to communicate, and theatre is a way of communicating.

There is not just one way of making theatre, there is not just one way of acting. There are all kinds of forms and sizes of that theatre present in society and for each form of theatre, there is an audience, because if there is no audience, there is no theatre. And I train people in an academy, on the one hand I give them my ideas and my taste - because it's often about taste - but on the other hand they can also oppose it, because it is not sanctifying, there is not one way. There is not one single truth.

I do have my own taste and my own way and my own preference, yes, that's just up to you or me or each of us to decide: I find this interesting or I find that fun or I find this relaxing or I need that, I can't determine that for everyone, I don't want that at all. But there are many ways. That's what I find interesting about theatre. It helps me when I read or see or hear things, and I am brought to thoughts, to other thoughts, to new thoughts. Those thoughts are precious to me. I don't have to agree with them, but the fact that I can relate to them is very nice.

There is so much more than just the play that is shown on stage from 8.30 to 10.30 p.m. And I have the feeling that this is becoming more and more evident to many people. And I have the idea that this is becoming more and more - that many people are becoming more aware of this, I think. I think so, yes. Yes, it is communication, it is a social exchange. Of course it's important what you make, and there are - of course. But there is a lot you can make and have to make and want to make.

[Piano music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

So now after the lockdown, we are rehearsing Yellow again, which we had to stop last year. We had - I think - four more weeks of rehearsals left in March 2020 before we had the premiere and now February 2021 so almost a year later we have restarted, but the story will be told in a different way. And so now we are working on a film version. And there's this feeling that I recognise when I'm filming: I never know what the end result will be. Whereas when I make theatre, I can feel what the end result might be. In this case, I don't know that at all. That is exciting.

In Luk's performances you are together on stage almost all the time, literally, you are not entering or exiting, you are all on stage. And you are all telling the story. It is always an ensemble performance with Luk. You're always working with each other to tell the story you want to tell.

When we started again two weeks ago, I think yes, everyone was so excited - including me - that we were allowed to work again. Yes, that is very special. I also feel... I think it is a great privilege that we are allowed to do that. I'm well aware of that, that when I'm playing a scene, as I am today, that I can do my job, and yes, I do find that very special.

[Music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

The question of "why theatre," trying to answer it in this day and age, does bring me to different thoughts than I had before.

So for one year... I haven't been able to rehearse, I haven't been able to perform. The only thing I did was teach at the theatre academy and I was able to do some film work, but really performing and rehearsing a new show? That fell away, and of course that was in itself a fairly quiet experience at first. I thought: jeez, what I had actually prepared for as being my busiest period of the past years is now becoming the quietest period. And how does that feel, not to be so preoccupied with the profession and not to be so preoccupied with acting? And that actually felt pretty good, that I thought: well, it can be done this way too. But that just lasted too long, and so the hunger and the need to play and to show things to an audience grew. That need became greater and greater. And I felt less and less happy because I - I have been an actor for 42 years now and I have never experienced a year without acting. And so - at a certain point after a few months the need came back - yes, I wanted to start acting again. But not only for myself, I didn't think about having to earn money, because I wasn't making any money, but also for the whole sector. It was at a standstill.

It shouldn't be too much about the actor as a person. Of course, the actor as a person misses his work and when you've been doing it for 42 years, you suddenly fall into a hole, but it's more than just the actor's personal story. At least I hope so. Because I'm not doing it for myself.

[Piano music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

You can hear that too, or read it in the book, "Why Theatre?": theatre is also a chance to get away from everyday stress. People sometimes say: theatre has the same functions as a church used to have. You know, that you come together and that you are in a different space, in a different atmosphere, in a different rhythm, at a different pace, and that you can look at something quietly for a while and maybe even fall asleep, well, yes. If you fall asleep in the theatre, well, that's a shame. But on the other hand, maybe it's a good sign. I used to fall asleep when my mother used to read me exciting stories before I went to bed because it gave me a kind of relaxation, a kind of familiarity. Yes, well, I'm not making a plea for people to fall asleep while you're standing there acting your heart out on stage.

I'm not worried about that anymore. No, no, no, maybe I used to, but now I think: well, you must have had a very hard day. Or well, it is nice that you are so relaxed, that you can just fall asleep here. Maybe you will still hear something.

[Piano music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

I look forward to playing, just the thrill of performing in front of a live audience, the fact that you are on stage. That you show something to people, I just miss that social activity. Of course, I also worry whether the audience will come back. I think they will. I think - I am convinced of it, but yes, soon we will have not seen them for over a year and they haven't seen us.

Yes. Well, I hope we'll meet again and I hope we'll meet again in the theatre as well and in art as well... Because it is a social activity. And that's what I've really experienced, and I think the audience has experienced it too, and that's what I hope will happen, that at some point, well, it will persist and that people will say: oh, I feel like going to the cinema again, or to a dance performance. We're going to the theatre and we're going to dress up nicely or we're going to watch something that might be very special for two hours. Well, let it happen. I hear live music, I hear live singing.

[Music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

Because the fact that it is live, that's the unique thing.

[Music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

KAATJE

This was "Why Theatre". Thanks for listening.

[Music from "Yellow" - Sam Gysel]

You can find more information about the performance Yellow on ntgent.be. The music you heard is by Sam Gysel.

This podcast was made for NTGent by myself, Kaatje De Geest. You can find all the credits in the show notes of this episode on the website whytheatre.eu.