

The Tragedy of King Christophe

by Césaire, directed by Christian Schiaretti



création

January 20 — February 12, 2017
Grand Theater, Roger-Planchon room

With

Marc Zinga, Stéphane Bernard,
Yaya Mbile Bitang*, Olivier Borle,
Paterne Boghasin, Mwanza Goutier,
Safourata Kaboré*, Marcel Mankita,
Bwanga Pilipili, Emmanuel Rotoubam Mbaïde*,
Halimata Nikiema*, Aristide Tarnagda*,
Mahamadou Tindano*, Julien Tiphaine,
Charles Wattara*, Rémi Yameogo*, Marius Yelolo,
Paul Zoungrana*, plus walk-on parts
*Collectif Béneéré

Valérie Belinga singer, Fabrice Devienne pianist,
Henri Dorina bassist, Jaco Largent percussionist

dramaturgy and artistic consulting
Daniel Maximin, Mathilde Bellin
stage design, props Fanny Gamet
assistant Caroline Oriot
lights Julia Grand
costumes Thibaut Welchlin
assistant Mathieu Trappler
make up Françoise Chaumayrac
music Fabrice Devienne

Co-production Théâtre National Populaire,
Théâtre Les Gémeaux, Sceaux

On tour: Théâtre Les Gémeaux, Sceaux
February 22 — March 12, 2017

TNP press contact

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Aimé(er) Césaire

[To know Césaire is to love him]

The TNP is once again offering a glorious union of poetry and politics.

After the 2013 theatrical creation of *A Season in the Congo* (winner of the Syndicat professionnel de la Critique's 2014 Georges-Lerminier prize), Christian Schiaretti is bringing *The Tragedy of King Christophe* to the stage, a masterpiece among decolonization tragedies which affirms that Politics is the modern powerhouse of fate and that History is living and breathing politics.

The aspiration of the TNP is to produce – along the same scenographic lines and with the same stock of actors, notably the Burkina Faso Béneéré collective – both of Césaire's tragedies: *A Season in the Congo* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe*.

Christian Schiaretti likes to point out that the poet «is not seeking to blame us, but rather to empower us.»

Revival: *A Season in the Congo*

Festival des Récréâtrales, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
October 29 — November 5, 2016

Théâtre National Populaire
December 2 — 10, 2016

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Aimé Césaire and Christian Schiaretti, an inevitable meeting of the minds

As a man of the stage — producer, director, teacher — Christian Schiaretti is devoted to the power of the word and the dynamics of ideas. For the past fifteen years he has developed a portfolio of projects from which rare texts stream: *The Ploughman of Bohemia* by Johannes von Saaz, *Jeanne* by Charles Peguy, *The Visionaries* by Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin...; in which vast and demanding works take form: *Coriolan* and *King Lear* by Shakespeare, *Par-dessus bord* and *Bettencourt Boulevard* by Michel Vinaver, *Celestina* by Fernando de Rojas...; and through which symbolic actions emerge:

— the determination to preserve artistic continuity within the TNP, involving – as its corollary – the establishment of an in-house repertory. This project was made possible by hosting a company of actors on-site for the past ten years..

— the implementation of actions promoting poetry in the inner city, via cycles of meetings/readings/performances, grouped under the title «*Les Langagières*» (the language laborers). Christian Schiaretti initiated these actions as director of the Comédie de Reims and he intends to pursue them at the TNP.

— the commitment to anchor the TNP's efforts within a perspective to tauten the historical cord of this emblematic theater.

It is all these facts and convictions, taken together, which have profoundly attuned Christian Schiaretti to the writings and thoughts of Césaire, for whom the word is likewise a wondrous weapon.

Metellus

Christophe! Pétion!
back to back I dismiss the twofold tyranny
that of the brute
that of the haughty skeptic
and know we not which side is more evil minded!
Great promising
to hail you as a man is hailed
we have kept vigil o'er the crested mounds
through the furrowed hollows. Vigil
down upon this black soil, reddening
it with our fertile blood to suit the regency
and the trance of the masterful conch...

The Tragedy of King Christophe, Act I, Scene 5

The Tragedy of King Christophe

A political fable

The play opens to a popular Haitian pastime: a cockfight. Because politicians clash like cocks, the proletariat mocks them in personification: one rooster represents Alexandre Pétion and the other Henri Christophe. In 1806 these two men battled for the succession of the tyrannical Dessalines regime. Christophe emerges victorious. The Sénat offers him the title of President of the Republic and hands him the new constitution. Judging that presidential power had been gutted of its significance, Christophe rejects it and founds a kingdom in the northlands of the country. To restore its dignity to Haiti, would it not be better for a single man to embody power, an absolute guarantee of stability, resolution and love of the people? The idea catches on and a royal court quickly forms around the new king. We'll see then how a man who caused the fall of a dictator, once in power himself, commits unforgiving acts. A political fable, this play traces back to a past replete with echoes of the present: behind these men who adopt names bequeathed by their former despots, how can one fail to recognize the torments of a continually ailing world? In a single powerful stroke Césaire bangs together the failure of a king and the future of a country, the contradictions of a man and the lyrical tones of dignity restored.

They stole our names

Haiti is the first black colony to have fought for its independence and then, once independence acquired, to have adopted the regime of a republic. This all took place at the end of the 18th century. Today the people of Haiti represent one of the most downtrodden populaces of the world, given the situation as you know it. I became fascinated with Haiti because it is a sort of «magnifying eye» for the whole of the West Indies, and for Africa as well. A close-up look at the history of Haiti gives us a comprehensive grasp of the problems of the Third World.

I would like to insist here on the fact that the tragedy of King Christophe depicts a true episode of Haitian history. Often in France people ask me about the King and think that this is an imaginary story. Not at all. We have highly-detailed documentary archives about the reign of King Christophe. Even the ruins of the Citadelle which he had built to forever commemorate the liberation of Haiti exist still today.

The play scrupulously follows the history and the events, so much so that many of the declarations of Christophe are historical quotes, often reproduced word for word. This is thus a Haitian play and, above all, a West Indian one. I even tried to imbue the French language with this West Indian hue, both in vocabulary and syntax. This authentic atmosphere can also be noted by a certain pomposity, very characteristic of the Haitian political scene.

I'm often asked: «Are you pro-Christophe or not?» The answer is not simple. I am definitely shocked by so many of King Christophe's attitudes and the extremely brutal means employed. I cannot at all approve the despotic side of this character. But King Christophe is not a hero, he is just a man with all his complexities and that is what is so dramatic, so poignant. The originality of my play is to show the multiple facets of a human being. King Christophe is a slave and his maneuverings are awkward, often ludicrous, but also touching. These maneuverings, I understand them. Most especially there is the tragedy of this man who says: «They stole our names». Because myself, my own name, what authenticity does it have in relation to me?

Excerpted from an interview with Aimé Césaire, at the time of the first staging of *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, directed by Jean-Marie Serreau, 1965.

Aimé Césaire (1913-2008)

He is one of the founders of the negritude movement in literature and politics. Born in Basse-Pointe, Martinique, he later left for studies in mainland France, where he was accepted at the École Normale Supérieure. It was there, in contact with such African students as Léopold Sédar Senghor, that he became aware of the impact of colonialism on the cultural practices of oppressed peoples. In 1939 he returned to Martinique where he finished writing *Return to My Native Land*, which marked the dawn of a surrealistically-hued poetic vein, as confirmed by Breton himself and by the 1946 publication of the anthology *Soleil cou coupé*.

In 1950 the journal *Présence Africaine* published his *Discourse on Colonialism*. As an involved but critical communist, he condemned Thorez's Stalinism before founding the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais and becoming, first, the Martinican *deputé* at the Assemblée Nationale, then *conseiller général* of Fort-de-France. A poet of immense stature, Aimé Césaire also wrote for the theater: *Et les chiens se taisaient*, *Une Saison au Congo*, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* and *Une Tempête*. In addition he wrote a number of essays on the subject of black identity. In 2011 he was honored with a memorial in the Panthéon.

Christian Schiaretti

He led the *Comédie de Reims* from 1991 to 2002. As director of the TNP since January 2002, he has staged *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht; *The Father*, *Miss Julie* and *Creditors* by August Strindberg; *The Annunciation of Marie* by Paul Claudel; *7 Farces et Comédies de Molière*; *Philoctète* by Jean-Pierre Siméon; three plays from the Golden Age: *Don Quixote*, *Don Juan*, *Celestina*; the five first plays of Florence Delay and Jacques Roubaud's *Graal Théâtre*; *Mai, juin, juillet* by Denis Guénoun (shown at the 2014 Avignon Festival); *King Lear* by William Shakespeare; *Électre* and *Antigone* by Jean-Pierre Siméon; *Bettencourt Boulevard ou une histoire de France* by Michel Vinaver; *Ubu roi (ou presque)* by Alfred Jarry.

His productions have been showered with awards: *Coriolan* by William Shakespeare, 2006, *Par-dessus bord* by Michel Vinaver, 2008, and *Une Saison au Congo* by Aimé Césaire, 2013.

Schiaretti produced Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas* to mark the inauguration of the TNP's newly-restored Grand Théâtre on November 11, 2011. He is very much attached to repertory theater and regularly reprises his creations with the troupe's players.

Performance schedule

Théâtre National Populaire

January 2017

Friday 20, Saturday 21, Tuesday 24, Wednesday 25,
Thursday 26, Friday 27, Saturday 28, Tuesday 31,
at 8.00 pm

Sundays 22, 29, at 3.30 pm

February 2017

Wednesday 1, Thursday 2, Friday 3, Saturday 4,
Tuesday 7, Wednesday 8, Thursday 9, Friday 10,
Saturday 11, at 8.00 pm

Sunday 5 at 3.30 pm

Sunday 12, at 2.30 pm

Théâtre Les Gémeaux

February 2017

Wednesday 22, Thursday 23, Friday 24,
Saturday 25, at 8.45 pm

Sunday 26 at 5.00 pm

March 2017

Wednesday 1, Thursday 2, Friday 3,
Saturday 4, Wednesday 8, Thursday 9, Friday 10,
Saturday 11, at 8.45 pm

Sunday 5, 12 at 5.00 pm

rhône-
alpes



arte



un événement
Télérama

