

Between falling bombs

8+

years old



How to find your way without your glasses

One day, between two blinks of an eye, the world turned upside down. Young Felix, a little short-sighted and a little naïve, found himself in a world even more opaque than before. It must also be said that when this story begins, in September 194... Felix had long since broken his glasses. There was often very little to eat at mealtimes, and the adults had suddenly started whispering. They whispered incessantly, in secret, which did not help the poor boy figure out what was going on. He already couldn't see very well, and now he couldn't hear anything either.

Several chasms would open under young Felix's feet: he would have to escape the military education machine designed to crush children. He would have to outwit the soldier's absurd questions. He would have to keep pedalling between the bombs raining down around him. And as an ultimate test of his resilience, he would have to stand his ground while everything around him collapsed.



Crédits : Mathieu Doyon



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*"This is an old, old, old story and yet I actually met the person who it's about.
Back then, tired as it was, the sun desired to hide, and darkness covered all the land.
All colour was gone, everyone lived in black and white. Men strolled willy-nilly, without
aim, often walking backwards, some even forgot their mother's names.
The screeches of the creatures of the night gave everyone a terrible fright."*



Crédits : Mathieu Doyon

Project origins

Master Canadian puppeteer Felix Mirbt was our mentor. When he died in 2002, he left behind a great many puppets, a radical approach to manipulating them, and a fascinating diary. In just a few pages, his diary recounts the incredible bicycle trip he made with his father in 1945 in his native Germany, which was on the verge of collapsing under a hail of bombs...

"In 1945, when he was only 13 years old, Felix Mirbt crossed Germany on a bicycle with his father. He carries three and a half million marks in his suitcase, a sandwich, and a lady's little pistol. The marks are for German refugees, the sandwich for himself, and the gun...."

the diary

In his diary, Felix recounts – 50 years after the events – the improbable journey he experienced when he was 13 years old. This fragmented memoir delivers powerful, frightening anecdotes. Nevertheless, Felix perceives these terrible events as both grandiose and exhilarating. Through the alchemy of wonder within, he transforms the unbearable images he faces. The world collapses as Felix undergoes a profound transformation. Felix called this voyage, this journey of self-discovery, his fairy tale.



Crédits : Mathieu Doyon

From story to fairytale

Freely inspired by the story of Felix's bicycle trip and episodes taken from his diary about life at the Schulpforta military school, young Felix is at the centre of a bizarre, unusual, and disturbing philosophical tale, populated by photographer rats, wacky but dangerous wolves, and homing pachyderms.

How can you build a sense of self when everything around you is collapsing? This is not a play about World War II, but rather the story of a child swept up in a whirlwind of madness. The war serves as a backdrop to a world that still belongs to adults, a troubled and incomprehensible world that young Felix experiences with all the innocence and candour of a child.

The learning process underlying fairy tales reassures the child. It holds that if the hero never gives up, despite many trials and repeated failures, he will, in the end, succeed in his quest. Fairy tales are often intended as warnings. But can we warn children about the madness of adults? Such is the underlying challenge behind this project: to instill hope, despite the horror.

"Felix

I had never seen my father on a bicycle.

I had never seen a city on fire.

I had never seen a tank in action.

I had never seen anyone die.

I had never seen a talking Rabbit...

Rabbit

Pst, pst! Child, follow me; I know a shortcut!"

taking a step back

The show is performed by three actress-manipulators. An unpredictable narrator, who is more than willing to play the bad guys, brings the story to life. She takes us from one place to the next, through underground shortcuts or sewers and, making great leaps across time, she places Felix at the heart of the action, one episode at a time. The project brings together the different forces of mask, shadow, and object theatre, creating an evocative form that tells the story with images as much as it does with words.

*" The little rat
Well done, Rabbit, we succeeded!*

*Felix
No, I'm not a Rabbit... I think I'm more of a bit of a wolf.*

*The little rat
Yeah well... As my grandmother used to say, who will live will tell
(or whoever lives will see the real rat, etcetera)! »*



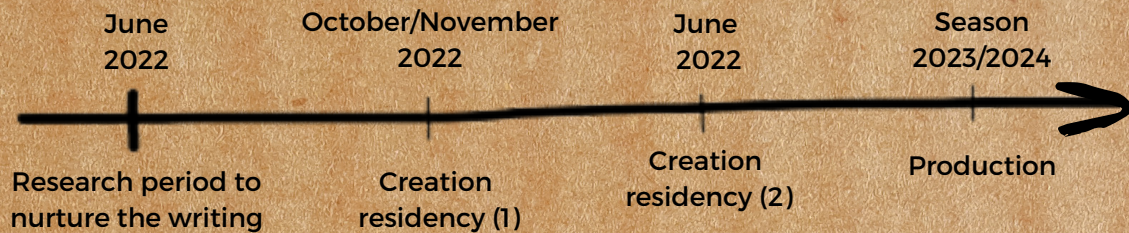
Who is hiding behind all these masks?

From military school to the streets of Berlin, Felix meets the same masked faces, encounters the same voices, the same shadows. For in this very serious story of a child, war is everywhere. The mask gives shape to a troubled world where everything is constantly changing, where people hide behind ideals. A world where authority figures need to be questioned, and where we must be suspicious of appearances. The three actresses take on multiple roles. The vary voices and masks and bring this motley crew of characters to life as our young hero struggles to find his place among them.



About the team and next steps

Next steps



Team

Text: Francis Monty

Story inspired by texts from the diary of Felix Mirbt

Stage direction: Olivier Ducas et Francis Monty

Creative collaboration and performer: Marcelle Hudon

Performers: Anne-Marie Levasseur et Marie-Ève Trudel

Stage designer, costume design, and accessoires: Julie Vallée-Léger

Dramaturgic support: Jonathan Cusson

Assistant stage director: Martine Richard et Julie Brosseau-Doré

Production: Théâtre de la Pire Espèce



Crédits : Mathieu Doyon



marcelle Hudon

She collaborated with Felix Mirbt for ten years. She received from the master the mission to take out his puppets from time to time to give them a little exercise. Some puppets in the collection escape any traditional classification. They ask the puppeteer for an exceptional commitment. Marcelle is one of the few people who know how to handle them. In addition to being an artistic collaborator of La Pire Espèce, with whom she co-produced two shows, Marcelle usually comes in the same boxes as the Felix puppets. She is practically the user manual. Her great expertise in shadow theater, and multimedia performance will also be used in this production.

Julie Vallée-Léger

Julie is a long-time collaborator. She has developed an expertise in object theater and materials that have made her a first-rate interlocutor for the company for 13 years. She acted as co-author with Olivier Ducas on the show *Cites*, private collection. She is an accomplice of the image, of a signed language that combines collage, linocut, and video graphics manipulation. She takes excellent care of the puppets of Felix, which she frequented when designing an exhibition dedicated to them in 2012.

La Pire Espèce

Since 1999, La Pire Espèce has been borrowing techniques from different disciplines such as puppetry, theatre of objects, clowning, cabaret and street theatre. By exploring the creative process, it explores stage conventions and the rules of dramatic narration, and seeks to establish a close complicity with the audience.

La Pire Espèce is also twenty two original works, one exhibition, two street theatre pieces, five cabarets and more than 1700 performances. Half of that number was performed abroad during recurrent tours in Europe and around the world. Its work include also three Spanish translations, four English translations and a bold adaptation for both the deaf and the non-hearing impaired, six co-productions in Quebec and in Europe and several professional workshops for theatre artists and teachers.

Olivier Ducas

Creator and Artistic Co-Director

Olivier Ducas studied acting at the National Theatre School of Canada. His decisive encounter with Francis Monty led in 1999 to the founding of Théâtre de la Pire Espèce, for which they act as co-artistic directors. In addition to being a playwright, actor, director, and object/puppet manipulator for Théâtre de la Pire Espèce, Ducas is co-creator of the company's shows (*Ubu on the Table*, *Perseus*, *Gestes impies et rites sacrés*, *L'anatomie de l'objet*, *Die Reise or the Many Faces of Felix Mirbt*, *Futur intérieur*), which tour internationally. In 2008, he wrote and directed his first solo creation, *Roland*, la vérité du vainqueur. In 2014, he repeated the experience with *Cities*, adding solo performer to his list of playwright and stage director credits. More recently, he teamed up with Karine St-Arnaud to create *Zen Tales*, a series of minimalist short forms where vegetables reveal all their substance.



Crédits : Mathieu Doyon



Crédits : Mathieu Doyon

Francis Monty

Creator and Artistic Co-Director

A graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada playwriting program in 1997, Francis Monty is a theatrical jack of all trades – directing, clowning, puppetry and his many writing projects all intertwine. In 1999, he founded the Théâtre de la Pire Espèce with Olivier Ducas, and they have since shared the company's artistic direction. As co-creator of the company's shows, he co-wrote and directed *Ubu on the Table* in 1998, *Perseus* in 2005, *Gestes impies et rites sacrés* in 2009, *Die Reise or the Many Faces of Felix Mirbt* in 2011, and *Futur intérieur* in 2014, and he adapted Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* into *L'Effet Hyde* in 2018. He has written works that have been performed in Canada, Brazil, and Europe: *Par les temps qui rouillent*, *Déclownestration*, *Traces de cloune*, *Romances et karaoké* (for which he received a Masque Award in 2005 for best original story), *Leo the Zero*, *Ernest T.* (nominated for the Louise-LaHaye Award for excellence in playwriting for young audiences), *Carbon Copy Kid* and *Nous sommes mille en équilibre fragile*.

La Pire Espèce is a brotherhood of merry demiurges, artisans of the extraordinary who are firm believers in hybrids and interminglings. Inspired by the art of clowns, by fairground barkers and puppeteers, its theatre combines raw materials with unbridled imagination, baroque plenitude with surgical precision.



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