

# barbican

## Stereoptik: Stellaire

**Welcome** to the Barbican for this year's London International Mime Festival, which is always eagerly anticipated as we re-emerge into each new year. Once again we look forward to joining forces with Helen Lannaghan and Joseph Seelig, the festival's directors, to bring four exciting and very different productions to the Theatre and The Pit, as well as a programme of slapstick shorts in our cinema. We're thrilled to once again be presenting international work on our stages: in the Theatre, Compagnie 111 returns with *aSH* by French theatre director Aurélien Bory performed by Indian dancer Shantala Shivalingappa. This is followed by *Interiors* from Scottish theatre company Vanishing Point. In The Pit, UK-based company Thick & Tight make their Barbican debut with *Short & Sweet*, a thoroughly modern variety show performed by a fantastic line-up of artists, which is followed by *Stellaire*, a love story beguilingly told through handmade cartoon-theatre by French company Stereoptik.

Whether you're here to see one, some or all of this year's London International Mime Festival Shows, we hope you have a fantastic time.

### **Toni Racklin, Head of Theatre and Dance, Barbican**

We're delighted to welcome Stereoptik back to The Pit and to the Festival following its unforgettable *Dark Circus* in 2016.

Romain Bermond and Jean-Baptiste Maillet create handmade and magical live cinema with paper, chalk, charcoal, sand, silhouettes, projection and live music. Start the year with astral romance, sit back and be propelled into orbit with this love story unfolding through space and time.

After last year's pause the Mime Festival is back large and live! We are delighted, as ever, to partner with the Barbican in bringing exceptional French artists to London.

### **Helen Lannaghan and Joseph Seelig, London International Mime Festival Directors**

Supported by the Institut français du Royaume-Uni, towards the promotion of French artists in London International Mime Festival

## **Key information**

**Running time:** 1 hour, no interval

**Age guidance:** 8+

**After show discussion:** Thu 3 Feb facilitated by Guillaume Pigé and BSL-interpreted by Jeni Draper

The script of the voiceover is available to download from our website or on request at the venue

## About the show

Wonder at the universe and stars as two virtuoso artists create a beautiful visual feast, a graphic novel that literally emerges before your eyes.

Set in a magic-lantern world, *Stellaire* is a love story unfolding through space and time. Using paper, chalk, charcoal, sand, silhouettes and projection, the Stereoptik duo's gentle live music accompaniment highlights this enchanting astral romance.

Following *Dark Circus*, their big top cowboy melodrama at the Barbican for LIMF 2016, Romain Bermond and Jean-Baptiste Maillet return with this latest handmade mini-spectacle.

## Interview with *Stellaire* creators Romain Bermond and Jean-Baptiste Maillet

### How do astrophysics come into play in *Stellaire*?

**Romain Bermond:** *Stellaire* ties a love story together with the creation of the universe. Both phenomena embody expansion and movement. When two people meet and live a love story, there's a form of expansion – the birth of children, or the family history they become part of.

**Jean-Baptiste Maillet:** We are working with scientists whom we met at the Groningen University in the Netherlands. At the end of one of our *Dark Circus* performances, a couple – two Indian scientists – told us that our way of performing would be ideal to tell the story of the history of the universe. This idea really struck us, as we're both fascinated by these questions. We decided to use this idea. This show has a bit more text than *Dark Circus* did, but it still very much bears our mark in the visual and musical aspects. We use the images that we create to make this love story resonate with physics and astronomical notions – some more complex than others.

### How do you represent, for example, time and space with images?

**RB:** What we can say at this point in the creation process is that we create a parallel between the two stories we're telling right from the outset. From the beginning of the show, you understand that the universe you see, which is changing and moving, corresponds to the lifespan of an individual and a couple in love. We then continue with this analogy; once it has been established, it no longer needs to be explained or focused on. It is simply a constant throughout the show. The life of the couple tells the story of the universe and vice versa. This permanent metaphor takes on a life of its own.

**JBM:** After they meet, the female character, who is an astronomer, makes an important discovery. She thus leaves for the other end of the world to participate in various conferences. A sequence on her voyage allows us to look at the notions of distance and time. These two principles only have value in function of their reference point. When a man or a woman without strong family ties goes to Tokyo for two weeks, his or her relationship to time and space remains the same. However, when a strong tie binds an individual to a place, geographic distance and time change meaning: Tokyo becomes very far away, two weeks becomes an eternity, etc. In

addition to the conferences where the woman discusses her discovery, the life of this couple, but also of people in general, is a means for us to talk about physics.

### **Do we get into the story via the male character?**

**RB:** He is an artist. Painter, illustrator, sculptor, he creates comics, cartoons... the multidisciplinary aspect of his work allows us to try many different aesthetic worlds in the piece. We use *mise en abyme* (ie. a story within a story) constantly in our work, between us manipulating our raw materials on stage and what is actually happening in the story.

It's never clear if the hands that appear on the screen, which are working to make the story move forward, are those of the man in the story or not. As we said, the woman makes a major astronomical discovery after she meets this man, something opens up in her. And something also opens in him. Their meeting shows an imaginary world to him in which fantasy and sublimation tell their story but in a dream, a fantasy.

**JBM:** Since he's an artist, he can make up anything he likes regarding their relationship, depending on his feelings for this woman, and as an echo to what she develops in a very scientific fashion in her conference presentations. When she speaks about gas giants, he imagines superheroes aboard space shuttles, lunar stations and other images from science fiction.

### **Is the setup the same as usual on stage? What is new visually or musically?**

**RB:** We are starting from the same setup. There will perhaps be some changes in filming and projection, but the two foundational elements – orchestra and drawing table – are still there. Regarding visual techniques, some are completely new, others are new versions of older techniques. We are finding new ways to use them: we are developing an increasingly personal, unique language.

**JBM:** Musically, the one-man band is still there, but the parts that evoke film music will be recorded using real string and brass instruments. Up to this point, we've always used synthesizers. With this return to real instruments, the feelings created are more palpable. We may use a solo cello, a string quartet. With real instruments and real musicians, it feels more alive, more tangible.

### **For the images, will there also be a lot of material that will be prepared in advance?**

**RB:** For the animation, we are working in the same direction as in *Dark Circus*. We have increased and diversified the interactions between the animated drawings, partially conceived in advance, and the hands that manipulate them live. There will also be more filmed material in this show. We are using video images that we create in advance and then transform in order to include them in the techniques we use for drawing, drafting, and animating that we use on stage. The way we use sand has also changed a lot, as will our water techniques.

**JBM:** Yes, an aquarium is part of three of our shows, and we'll use it again in *STK5*. In fact, both from a musical and visual perspective, it's as if we've created a tool that continually reveals new possibilities to us. The more we work with it, the more ideas it gives us: the more possibilities it reveals, the more we invent.

**RB:** Of course, we can't precisely say at this point what the aesthetic of the show will be, but we both do watercolours, so there will probably be passages using watercolours, perhaps live. It gives an interesting effect to the images, but it is also

relevant in the story we are telling, since watercolours bleed and expand, require time to dry, and have to be set aside before you can continue working on them. In addition, we're working on other moments that will be done in gouache – this is new for us. Gouache is matte and lumpy, which we like. And lastly, paper will be in the foreground: its materiality, its whiteness. That's our primary tool.

### **Is the principle still to watch live the creation of a story and the materials used to tell it?**

**RB:** Yes. And to make this work accessible to all audiences. This time, the performance may not be of interest to children, but the show nonetheless has an intergenerational and intercultural character. Intercultural perhaps more so than ever, because of the characters and professions presented in the story.

**JBM:** We want spectators to leave with knowledge and confirmation from a scientific point of view, in addition to the poetry of the show itself. The links between art and science are clear when you think about their relationship to the unexpected. Many scientific discoveries come from initial errors or unexpected deviations. It's the same in art. An artist might unexpectedly change directions, depending on the surprises and constraints provided by material or a gesture. Science takes a similar path: the results differ depending on the hypothesis posed at the outset.

**RB:** The show ends by opening up to the big questions of life, love, the universe.

### **How technically scientific does the show get?**

**JBM:** We are going to take care that the scientific information be presented such that the vast majority of spectators will understand it. We want wonder and poetry to remain front and centre.

**RB:** We start on planet Earth and our solar system, and then we travel to neighbouring galaxies. As we move out in space, we periodically evoke technical notions like gravity or space-time. We hope that our audiences will leave the show with answers to their questions about the universe, confirmation of things they already knew, but also questions that will make them want to prolong the experience.

Marion Canelas (April 2018)

## **About the Company**

Created in 2008 at the same time as the eponymous show, Stereoptik brings together Romain Bermond and Jean-Baptiste Maillet, both visual artists and musicians. Based on a score they build and write together, every one of their shows is built under the eyes of its audience, live. Theatre of shadows, of objects and puppets, silent films, unplugged or electronic concerts, fairy tales and cartoons are some of the many fields and genres whose boundaries Stereoptik likes to play with. At the heart of the many forms of art that appear on the stage is one principle: to show the audience the technical process that leads to the apparition of characters, of scenes, of a story. The audience is free to let themselves be carried away by the images and stories projected onto the screen, or to see in detail what leads to the movement of the cartoon on the screen, how ink creates a silhouette on a transparent background, what instrument is used to bring it to life. Visual, musical, and without text, Stereoptik's creations arouse curiosity and wonder in audiences of all ages and all nationalities.

## Creative team

Directed and performed by **Romain Bermond** and **Jean-Baptiste Maillet**  
Scientific collaboration **Pratika Dayal** and **Anupam Mazumder**, University of Groningen, **Jean Audouze** astrophysicist  
With participation on film of **Randiane Naly** and **Clément Métayer**  
**Kahina Ouali**, **Claude Whipple**, **Saadia Bentaïeb** Recorded voices  
**Frédéric Maurin** Artistic Collaborator

## Biographies

### Romain Bermond

Romain Bermond's passion for the visual arts bloomed in childhood. He took a perspective drawing class at a young age, which led him to specialize in visual arts already as a high school student in Paris. There he met two masters, Isabelle Labey and Fabien Jomaron, who guided him in his studies. He then went on to earn his bachelor's in fine arts from the Visual Arts Faculty in Paris, and participated in his first collective exhibit at the Nouvelle Ecole du Montparnasse. On this occasion, he met Horacio Garcia Rossi, an Argentinian kinetic art painter, who then became his mentor. Soon after, Romain Bermond exhibited his work in several Parisian sites, in particular at the Gabrielle Laroche gallery and the Guigon gallery, and he participated in numerous art events in France and abroad (SLICK, Nuit blanche...). Alongside his work in theatre as a set designer, scenographer, or musician, he developed an interest in percussion and Afro-Cuban music, and thus began to study with great names such as Miguel Gomez, Anga Diaz, and Orlando Poleo. He thereby joined several different groups, Cuban music orchestras, and brass bands.

### Jean-Baptiste Maillet

Jean-Baptiste Maillet began his musical studies at the age of seven in conservatories in Chatillon and Yerres, and in the regional conservatory in Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, where he studied composition and percussion, as well as piano. He was also a student at the American School of Modern Music in Paris for four years, where he diversified his techniques to include arranging, and discovered jazz, quintet writing, brass, and big band. His eclecticism was apparent from the very start of his career, with projects in chanson française, brass band, electro, in addition to circus and film music. He has shared the stage with internationally renowned musicians such as Clyde Wright (singer from the Golden Gate Quartet), David Walters, Cheptel Aleïkoum, Les Yeux Noirs, Jur (co-founder of the Cridacompany), and Florent Vintrigner from La Rue Kétanou.

It was in a brass band that Romain Bermond and Jean-Baptiste Maillet met. Together, they designed their first show in 2008, *Stereoptik*, which was a huge success with their audiences and with curators. This was the beginning of the Stereoptik company, which, since 2011, has crossed the globe with four shows and an exhibit in its repertoire. Their show, *Dark Circus*, premiered at the Festival d'Avignon in 2015 and has since been performed on many international stages (London International Mime Festival, Wiener Festwochen, Zürcher Theater Spektakel, Festival Romaeuropa, Hong Kong Arts Festival...). This show has toured far and wide in prestigious settings. With support from the French Ministry for Culture and the Centre-Val de Loire region, Stereoptik is now a partner of the Théâtre de la Ville de Paris and the Hectare, a state-funded theater in Vendôme.

## Key sponsors

**Production:** Stereoptik

**Co-production:** Théâtre de la Ville – Paris, La Criée – Théâtre national de Marseille, CDN Tours – Théâtre Olympia, L’Hectare – Territoires vendômois-Vendôme, Romaeuropa Festival, L’Agora – scène nationale d’Evry et de l’Essonne, Le Trident – scène nationale de Cherbourg, L’Echalier de St Agil, Théâtre Jacques Prévert d’Aulnay-sous-Bois, Scène nationale d’Aubusson, Théâtre des 4 saisons de Gradignan

Stereoptik is associated artist at Théâtre de la Ville-Paris and at l’Hectare, Territoires vendômois-Vendôme. Their projects are supported by La Criée, Théâtre national de Marseille and Théâtre Epidaure de Bouloire.

Stereoptik acknowledges financial support from the Ministère de la Culture / DRAC Centre Val de Loire and from Région Centre Val de Loire.



## London International Mime Festival

Directors: **Helen Lannaghan** and **Joseph Seelig**

[mimelondon.com](http://mimelondon.com)

London International Mime Festival (LIMF) promotes contemporary visual theatre. Its productions have been nominated for, and won, Olivier Awards, and in 2017 the festival was honoured with the *Empty Space - Peter Brook Special Achievement Award* for its work over four decades. Founded in 1977, LIMF is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

LIMF 2022 gratefully acknowledges core financial support from Arts Council England, and the support of Institut français du Royaume-Uni towards the promotion of French artists.

**INSTITUT  
FRANÇAIS**  
ROYAUME-UNI

**EN!**  
**SCÈNE** ■