

Tomorrow I'm off to Kinshasa again. For two reasons. In a few days Thomas Steyaert will start work on the dance performance *Mounds of Mud* (working title) in Kinshasa. It is a KVS/Ultima Vez coproduction that will be shown at the KVS in April.

And of course to make preparations for the performances of *pitié!* in Kinshasa, which will be quite a job. Not an easy task technically speaking, with a large team, and we want to make it a real highlight.

pitié! in Kinshasa! There may well be a lot of people who question such an enterprise. The fact that the Congolese Serge Kakudji is the major star of the production, and that he can now show his brilliance in the Congo (and not only in Europe and Asia) is a good thing, but is not sufficient justification for such a great undertaking.

pitié! is very hard in form and content, and very relevant to the Congo. We may now no longer be surprised when we see a piece by Alain Platel, but I remember very well that when I first saw one I was quite taken aback. Both the public and the performing artists of Kinshasa should also be able to experience this. Kinshasa really is the right place for *pitié!*.

But then there's the point that just 'two shows and that's it' isn't really enough to justify the whole thing either. We want to make it into a really big event.

Through the European Commission, we have found finance in Kinshasa to bring performing artists from other Congolese towns and cities to Kinshasa, as well as from other African countries. To see the performances, to take part in the various workshops given by performers from the *pitié!* team, and also to show their own work in Kinshasa. I have previously said that we would like to work on a more regional basis, and stimulate contact and exchange between performing artists in central, east and southern Africa. So this is a good first step. If everything works out, we shall also be able to present two marvellous dance productions from Maputo in Kinshasa.

In addition, Thomas Steyaert's *Mounds of Mud* will also be opening in that same period. In other words, we are going to organise a festival there: *Première plateforme de danse contemporaine à Kinshasa*, with *pitié!* leading the field. There has never been a festival of this sort in Kinshasa.

Performing artists from Kinshasa itself are also involved, in both the workshops and the programme itself. So we shall have an excellent mixture: good-quality productions, intensive contact between performers from Kinshasa, the Congo and the surrounding region, and undoubtedly great public interest.

It is with a performance like *pitié!* that we can tempt important people to visit the festival: ambassadors, directors of major companies, etc. And they are needed, to commit themselves to supporting the performing arts in Kinshasa. Because while money is being put into music shows and suchlike, there is nothing for theatre and dance. So *pitié!* is a way of exerting leverage.

As a matter of fact, a German television crew will also be there to film for the Arte channel. That too is a good way of making people much more aware of the cultural cooperation with the Congo.

The performances of *pitié!* are at the Centre Culturel Français on 20 and 21 July. This is the only feasible venue for this sort of production. So there is no tour of Kinshasa as we would normally do, but we shall make sure that the public we want to attract will indeed be able to come to the shows. We shall provide transport, and I shall be giving introductions to the whole festival in several places.

We are going to make a real party of it, with live performances, a festival centre with a bar and restaurant, and as lively as possible.

So it will be a lot more than just two performances of *pitié!*

Paul Kerstens

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