

LAETITIA CASTA

« Clara Haskil, Prelude and Fugue »

by Serge Kribus



staged by
Safy Nebbou

« Clara Haskil, Prelude and Fugue »

text by
Serge Kribus

staged by
Safy Nebbou
assisted by
Virginie Ferrere

with
Laetitia Casta
piano
Isil Bengi

Set design Cyril Gomez-Mathieu
Light Eric Soyer
Sound Sébastien Trouvé
Musical advisor Anna Petron and Isil Bengi
Repeater Daniel Marchaudon

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Special thank to pianos Nebout & Hamm

NEBOUT & HAMM

Clara, or the sonic simplicity of a beautiful Latin name. Radiating, transparent, it expresses brilliance and light. With Clara Haskil, this light is both very powerful and very fragile. Humble and intense, bordering on mysterious.

Her friend Charlie Chaplin shared one day that he had met but three geniuses in his life: Einstein, Churchill and Clara Haskil. She was one of the greatest pianists of the XXth century. Why was that? Who could say? Her talent was a grace that shined as soon as she was a child, and which manifested before she had even learnt how to read. A simple little Rumanian girl that did her utmost, with only one finger, to reproduce on the piano a melody by Schumann which her mother had played. Some sixty years later, after innumerable trials, she was finally recognized to her real value, multiplied concerts, traveled far and wide all over the world. And yet, she seemed never to have changed, barely moved. Genius, Baudelaire said, is just childhood recovered at will; but Clara Haskil, who never had any children, sometimes seems like she doesn't even need to recover a childhood she never lost. Unless she had been deprived of it? ...

Serge Kribus, well versed on childhood, was fascinated by Clara's luminous mystery. He pored over archives, spend a long time investigating – less to resolve the enigma than to dream up on stage the portrait of this strange woman who was for so many of her listeners an unmatched source of joy. He meditated her biography, consulted his archives, listened to her recordings, imagined her emotional wrenches, her bereavements, her doubts – the death of her father while she was barely four years old; leaving for Vienna, then Paris, far away from her beloved mother and sisters; being humiliated around Alfred Cortot, who wasn't very fond of her; her friendship with Dinu Lipatti, who disappeared too soon; her badly treated scoliosis, which forced her to give up the violon. Her anguish before recitals, and her incredulity in front of this constantly renewed miracle: how much her audience loved her.

And so, was her life like a skillfully modulated, single note? Right from the very first time he read the play, Safy Nebbou was struck by this fate, clearcut as an outline and yet not as simple as it may seem, through this woman's ability to stay true to herself, regardless of how admired she was by the crowds of her fans, and the years passing by. And little by little, through that voice reinvented by Serge Kribus, he started to recognize a face akin to hers. That of Laetitia Casta, whom he had led in *Scenes from a Marriage* by Bergman, where she costared with Raphaël Personnaz. For a while now, she had been sharing with him that she wished to work with him and be confronted to this quite unique challenge for any actress: being alone on stage. He let her read the text, and Laetitia Casta was immediately enthralled. With her and for her, between a movie with Juliette Binoche and an upcoming feature film with Isabelle Adjani, Safy Nebbou thus returns to the stage to compose, as only he knows how to compose, a new portrait which is at the same time an encounter with a remarkable woman.

Prelude, Fugue – and Invention: Four questions to Safy Nebbou

Where did that desire to put on this play come from, for you?

It came from way, way back! ... I got started in the world of theater, about thirty years ago. I started by being an actor. But I was suffering from stage fright far too much, to be able to last very long: the best times for me, were once the shows were over... As a result, little by little, I began to shoot. Short movies at first, then longer and longer films. And now here I am, a filmmaker. But I've always remained fond of the stage. I loved to work with Bergman at the *Théâtre de l'Œuvre*. We really got along very well with Laetitia Casta. And so when she told me that she wished to do a solo stage performance, it struck a chord in me: on the part of an actress, this is no ordinary desire. And it's something that you should not try and force. The actress herself has to feel that the time has come for her to do that, that it fits her next step, both in her personal life and as an performing artist. That's how I started to look for a project that would suit her, and we both agreed on Clara Haskil.

And why Clara Haskil?

Instinctively, I would say that all the ingredients are there for a meeting to occur between these two women, between that part and its performer. The reason I say « instinctively », is because if you stop and think about it, what will strike you are the differences. For instance, all throughout her life, Clara Haskil's body made her suffer. Some witnesses remembered her silhouette as she left the backstage and walked towards the piano: curbed over, stunted, almost hunchbacked, she sometimes gave the impression that she would barely be able to walk. But once she was there, sitting in front of her piano, her hands on the keyboard, she became transfigured. Laetitia is almost the opposite: her perfect and athletic beauty is famous the world over. And so, how are they related? I feel the sympathy between them. There's something deep that connects them to each other. Starting with their grace. It does not show up in the same areas, but with Clara just as with Laetitia, it has to do with innocence and childhood. They're both artists who, in a certain sense, never « learnt » any of their skills. They just practised it, developed it, but basically, their expressive power, which is so sensitive and touches people so powerfully, is organic, almost animal-like. They are both, as we say, forces of nature. That's maybe what explains some of their other common points. They're both shy – hard to believe, but true. Many performers have in fact very secret and seclusive personalities. Some, of course, seemed to be born to live in the public eye. But others will display what's most intimate in themselves. This is extremely valuable, mysterious and rather rare. And there, the two bodies may be as different as you could imagine them to be, but however their sensitivities, their soul qualities, are extremely close to each other. We think we know these two women, but we can sense that they're somewhat withdrawn, reserved, cast aside, almost wild, to the extent that we hardly can guess who they really are – until the instant they dazzle you by allowing what they have to give, to come out and shine.

How do you consider approaching the work?

As you would approach theater, definitely not in the same way as you would a movie! More specifically: by taking advantage of what the theater enables you to do, and which you can hardly allow yourself to do in a movie. When you start shooting a movie, there's such a huge number of decisions that you've already made. Even the style of the teaspoon on the table, is already defined — or the set designer came and asked you to choose. And even if you're working with the camera on your shoulder, the way I like to do it, you've already very precisely set down so many points of reference. The theater can keep a much more creative, home-made approach. I already know who my scenographer will be, and also my sound creator. We're going to be working together. In fact, my dream is to start working in a large space, a stage large enough, so that we'll have enough leeway to change it any way we want. I've got the sense that we shouldn't confine ourselves, restrain ourselves to a tiny stage, just because we're dealing with a monologue. Of course, being really close to a performer such as Laetitia would be quite appealing in a way, but I want to preserve the possibility of playing around with how we move around, the depths of various game plans, and their speed. We're really going to carve that space with various sound backgrounds and voice textures. The text suggests many images, but we shouldn't let ourselves be overly seduced by its dreamlike quality. I'm not completely opposed to that, but I would prefer that we start from very concrete material, and build up from there. For instance, the story starts with a scene at the Brussels Train Station — *Gare du Midi*. We can imagine the echo of people walking around in the waiting room, or the hum of crowds waiting on the platforms, which can remind us of the echoes of a full concert hall just before the show begins, or the rythmical clicking of the trains, like dominos falling on a table, one by one, during a game... Or a December fog, which soon becomes smoke welling up from a large fire...

And so in a way, you want to start from set design suggestions?

That's part of the idea, yes. Of course I'll be preparing myself, obviously, but in a quite different way than I would for a movie. That's why I want to avoid resorting to video images, as a matter of fact — even though I may still change my mind eventually! ... We're all going to join together there, with our own ingredients which, in a way, we're all going to be « cooking » together. I'll see how I can articulate and punctuate this script, which is very dense and very fluid at the same time. I'll see how I can perhaps open up some clearings in there, to give Laetitia enough freedom as a performer. Or freedoms. She will certainly be Clara in many different ways. Sometimes she will be embodying her. Sometimes she'll be telling her story. Sometimes she'll be in both worlds at once, choosing to resort to her presence as a piano player, or not. In fact, there are several Clara's, we're browsing through all the different periods of her life — and by the same token, at the same time, we'll be visiting large parts of the XXth Century. In order to trace such a pathway, you need to create a line that's flexible and full of life. And avoid doing a documentary, or a « biopic ». The subtitle which Serge Kribus gave to his own writings is « Prelude and Fugue », which is like an invitation to be very accurate. Fine. But then again, let that be « a Clara-style » accurateness! The precision of a performer who has completely absorbed the essence of the script she's performing, who owns it competely, and has turned it into something really personal, and who's inviting us each night she's performing, to watch her invent something new.

This interview was made on November 27th 2019

Laetitia Casta

Laetitia Casta started her career as an actress by playing Falbala in *Asterix and Obelix against Julius Cesar*, in 1999. She continued in 2000 with the blockbuster TV movie *La Bicyclette Bleue* (The Blue Bicycle) by Thierry Binisti. She reappears in 2001 in *Les Âmes Fortes*, a drama directed by Raül Ruiz, then in *Rue des Plaisirs* in 2002, by Patrice Leconte.

In 2004 Laetitia Casta goes on stage, where she performs *Ondine* by Jean Giraudoux, directed by Jacques Weber.

In 2006, she played in the film by Pascal Thomas *Le Grand Appartement*, then with Gilles Legrand *La jeune fille est les loups* in 2007, but also with Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau *Née en 68* in 2008. That same year, she had one of the main parts in *Visage* by Tsai Ming-Liang, which was presented as part of the official selection of the 2009 Cannes Film Festival.

At the same time she goes back on stage with *Elle t'attend* (She's waiting for you) written and directed by Florian Zeller at the *Théâtre de la Madeleine*.

In 2010, her masterful performance of Brigitte Bardot in Joann Sfar's film *Gainsbourg, vie héroïque* (Gainsbourg, a Heroic Life) earns her a nomination for the Cesar Awards in the category of best second female actor. Kamen Kalev then offered her a part in his movie *The Island* (2010) which will be selected in the 2011 Cannes *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* (Directors' Fortnight).

In 2012, she performed in Yvan Attal's film, *Do Not Disturb*, as well as in *La nouvelle guerre des boutons* (The New War of the Buttons) by Christophe Barratier, and in Nicholas Jarecki's thriller, *Arbitrage* in which Laetitia's partners are Susan Sarandon and Richard Gere. The film was quite popular at the Sundance Film Festival in Salt Lake City, Utah.

In 2013 she reappears in *Des lendemains qui chantent* by Nicolas Castro with Pio Marmaï, Ramzy Bedia and Gaspard Proust. In 2014 she played in Audrey Dana's 5-star casting film, *Sous les jupes des filles*, (Under the Girls' Skirts) with (among others) Isabelle Adjani, Marina Hands, Alice Taglioni and Vanessa Paradis.

In 2015, the broadcasting on French public television of Arnaud Sélignac's TV movie *Arletty, une passion coupable* (Arletty, a Guilty Passion) earned her the *Laurier d'or* (Golden Laurel) for her performance as a female actress.

She returned on stage in 2017 in *Scenes from a Marriage* by Ingmar Bergman directed by Safy Nebbou where she performed along with Raphaël Personnaz at the *Théâtre de l'Œuvre*, which kicked off a large world tour, notably in Italy and in China...

In 2018 Laetitia was with Jacques Gamblin in *L'incroyable histoire du Facteur Cheval* directed by Nils Tavernier. In the same year she performed in *l'Homme Fidèle* directed by Louis Garrel.

In 2019 Laetitia Casta appeared in Delphine Lehericé's film « *Le milieu de l'Horizon* » with Clémence Poesy.

We'll soon see her again in an Arte TV series « *Une île* » (An Island) directed by Julien Trousselier.

Concomitantly to her career as an actress, Laetitia Casta worked with UNICEF to take the defense of warrior-children and became the Art Director for Cointreau to promote creative initiatives led by women.

Laetitia Casta was also awarded the Title of *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* (Knight of Arts and Letters) in 2011 by Frédéric Mitterrand, French Minister of Culture.

Safy Nebbou

Safy NEBBOU is an author, filmmaker and film director. He started as a theater actor and director, then shooting a few short movies, which earned him worldwide awards: In 1997 *Pédagogie* ("Teaching Skills") with Julie GAYET, in 1999 *La vie c'est pas un pique nique* ("Life is not just a picnic"), in 2001 *Bertzea*, and in 2003 *Lepokoa*.

In 2004 he signed his first full-length feature film: *Le Cou de la Girafe* ("The Neck of the Giraffe") with Sandrine BONNAIRE and Claude RICH. In 2007 *L'empreinte de L'ange* ("The Angel's Fingerprint") with Catherine FROT and Sandrine BONNAIRE. In 2008 *Enfances* ("Childhoods") with Elsa ZYLBERSTEIN. In 2010, *L'Autre Dumas* (Selected for the Berlin Festival) with Gérard DEPARDIEU, Benoit POELVOORDE, Mélanie THIERRY, Dominique BLANC and Catherine MOUCHET. In 2012 *Comme un Homme* ("Just like a Man") with Emile BERLING, Charles BERLING and Kevin AZAÏS.

On June 15, 2016 his latest film came out, an adaptation of a book by Sylvain TESSON, *Dans les forêts de Sibérie* ("In the Forests of Siberia") with Raphaël PERSONNAZ and Evgueni SIDIKHINE. Original music composed by Ibrahim MAALOUF for which he made a video clip: **Red & Black light**.

He will then go on to sign the adaptation with Jacques FIESCHI of *Scenes from a Marriage* by Ingmar BERGMAN, with Laetitia CASTA and Raphaël PERSONNAZ, at the *Théâtre de l'œuvre*, in February, 2017.

His latest movie is an adaptation of the book by Camille LAURENS *Celle que vous croyez* ("Who you Thought she Was") with Juliette BINOCHE, Nicole GARCIA, François CIVIL, Guillaume GOUIX, Marie Ange CASTA and Charles BERLING. Official selection at the Berlin Film Festival 2019.

Script of *L'œil du loup* by Daniel PENNAC, adapted with Marie DESPLECHIN

To come:

June 2021 Direction of *Suzanne Valadon* screenplay by Virginie DESPENTES Santiago AMIGORENA and Safy NEBBOU with Isabelle ADJANI, François CIVIL and Arnaud VALOIS.

He has also shot a large number of ads for French domestic and international brands, as well as humanitarian campaigns for **Enfance et partage**, **Elles s'imaginent**, **l'Institut curie**, **Solidarité laïque** and some others...

Isil Bengi

Turkish/Belgian pianist Isil Bengi was born in Istanbul where she gave her first concerts and won first prize at several national piano competitions. She performed at the age of 12 as a soloist, selected by the Turkish government, before the legendary pianist Idil Biret.

At the age of 16, she received a scholarship from the Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbası Foundation to deepen her musical education in Belgium with renowned piano teachers Evgeny Moguilevsky, Piet Kuijken and Alexandar Madzar, as well as chamber music courses, with Muhiddin Dürrüoğlu and Dirk Vermeulen at the Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles and Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel where she obtained her Master diploma.

Moreover, Isil Bengi went on to follow master classes worldwide with renowned artists such as Anne Queffelec, Jean Fassina, Bernard Lemmens, Paul Gulda, Bruno Canino, Boyan Vodenitcharov, Hamish Milne, Pierre Amoyal, Miriam Fried, to name a few.

Isil Bengi has been very active in various chamber music projects and gave several concerts in Europe exploring the chamber music repertoire. In March 2019 she recorded an album called Belgian Romantic Works for Cello and Piano with Paul Heyman on Et'cetera Records.

From 2016 to 2019, Isil Bengi has been touring worldwide with the show "Respire", featuring on stage 2 acrobats and solo piano.

She released her first solo piano album "HIKAYE" on the 10th of January 2020 on Fuga Libera / Outhere Music, an original program around composers from different origins (Armenia, Switzerland, Japan, Belgium, Greece, Yugoslavia), all influenced by their cultural roots. This project is related to Isil Bengi's personal story.

Her concert activities includes solo recitals as well as chamber music in various music halls in England, Poland, Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, Turkey, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Italy, Greece, Japan, including venues such as Bozar, Wigmore Hall, Radio Suisse Romande, Cemal Resit Rey concert hall,...

Isil Bengi is an insatiable artist who developed a unique personality throughout her experiences and curiosity towards the richness of cultural diversity, styles, and piano techniques, combined with a genuine sensitivity and dedication to the highest standards in Art.

The pianist Isil Bengi could be defined as refined sophistication meeting original wilderness, creating a fulfilled artist of true musical integrity, and deep emotional strength.