

Interview with

**Marie Gignac**, actress and co-artistic director of the Carrefour International de théâtre de Québec

***What prompted you to become an actress?***

I think it was my dream from way back, when I was a little girl, but I had sort of buried it inside me because both my parents and teachers were encouraging me to pursue something more intellectual, more academic, and better paying as well. But the dream came back in full force in my early 20s. I was at university and I was simply not happy. I had the feeling that I wasn't developing, that I wasn't reaching my full potential. Actually, the main reason is that I wanted to do something that would involve my body, heart, mind, and soul, all at once. I wanted to devote myself entirely to something and to be whole, with my entire being. And I felt that the stage was the place for this. I wanted to create. I loved literature, which is what I was studying. I loved words, poetry, and I had a hunch that doing theatre would encompass all my desires, my longings.

***Where there moments during your training that had an important effect on your artistic practice?***

I had teachers that greatly influenced me, such as Marc Doré who was the director of the Conservatoire during the time I was there. He also taught and was very influenced by what he'd learned with Lecoq, in Paris, when designing his course. In our third year, he wrote a play for our graduating class, and he created an absolutely wonderful part for me. And that really touched me. I felt, playing that role, that I broke through a barrier. I changed gears, not in terms of speed, but in terms of moving on to the next level in my work. Going back a bit, to the very beginning of my second year, I worked with Mathieu Gaumont, the acting teacher replacing Jean-Guy, who was absent. I worked on a text by Marguerite Duras, whom I adored, called *La Musica*. This also "uninhibited" me, so to speak, because, during my first year, I was rather shy. I wasn't quite getting it. I was still too much in my head, and all that. They often tried to open me up, and it had the opposite effect. But when I came across a type of literature that I deeply loved, that's when everything became unblocked; things just opened up. That's what I remember, but my training is pretty far in the past. However, training is on-going in practice. I love the feeling that I'm always learning. I think that the major turning point in my life was when I started doing creations, with Robert Lepage, when I started to write, design, improvise, and create shows from scratch, with a team. That was an extremely important event in my practice.

***What do you like most about being an actress?***

The restaurants! I'm just kidding...

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I love to rehearse a show, whether it's a creation or not. I really love the rehearsal process, to be in a rehearsal hall with a team; to dissect and scrutinize a character and the thought-process that goes along with this work. I enjoy the surprises that can happen when you rehearse a scene – when something surfaces in your partner's work or your own. I really, really love that aspect of it. Very, very much. I truly love team work. I love the companionship. I've tried solo work. I once did a solo piece and it wasn't right for me. I prefer the collective side of theatre, being with "the gang." That's something I really love.

***What do you like the least about being an actress?***

I'd probably say the whole shallow "social" side of it, or what is considered public relations. I have a bit more difficulty with that, it can be very unpleasant, depending on how it's done. When the encounters are real and honest, when they're sincere, it's pleasurable and enriching. But when it's on a superficial level, it bothers me a bit.

***What do you think the difference is between playing a role that's already written and working to create a character and a text?***

There actually shouldn't be a difference as far as the result goes. I think the end result should be the same. But I think it's maybe easier, in a certain way, to become completely and deeply involved in interpreting a character when you yourself created her, improvised her. It's more whole. However, whether you're on stage saying lines that you wrote or that were written for you, you must own them completely. The actor's work on someone else's text is to take it on and make it sound like you're inventing it as you go along; that's not as easy, but you should be able to achieve it. In fact, that's the actor's work, right there. There has to be the same freshness, the same invention, the same spontaneity at the moment when the lines are spoken, when moments are experienced, and when situations unfold on stage, as if it were all really happening for the first time. There are texts that are more literary, more detailed, where the language is very precise. In that case, it's less spontaneous and more meticulous. But I still think you have to arrive at the truth using clear elocution and delivery to make it seem as though you're composing these lines, that you really are saying them for the very first time.

**You are also co-director of the Carrefour International de théâtre de Québec. What does this involve? How do you reconcile this job and your work as an actress?**

My main responsibility as artistic director of the Carrefour is programming; that's the most important aspect of the job. That means going to see a lot of shows in Quebec, Canada, and abroad. It involves trips, research, meetings, and, based on what we see and hear about, putting together a program that includes some 20 shows each time, for each festival. There are actually two artistic directors: I share the job with director Brigitte Haentjens. I'd even say that there are three of us, since there's also the director

general who takes on all the other aspects, the business side of things, which makes our job much easier. I always say that we have the fun tasks; we dream and she executes. So, that's it, but it's also about overseeing the overall activities, everything that's artistic and, therefore, the marketing. We don't invent anything, but we supervise it all so that it communicates what we want to highlight artistically at each festival. We have to reconcile that with our practice. Brigitte is a director, she carries on with her work and I continue to act, and I'm also directing now. I do a bit of film, of television. You do all kinds of things in Quebec when you're an artist. It's not easy to focus on only one thing because, to make ends meet, you have to take on many projects at once. It can pull you in many directions. You always feel you're not giving enough time to one job. When I'm rehearsing or doing a show, I feel that I'm depriving my colleagues at the Carrefour of my presence and vice-versa. When I'm travelling abroad, I know I'm not doing my job as an actress in Quebec. Sometimes, you just have to make choices: I might have to turn down roles because I have a program to put together. I might have to make an important trip to Europe to see something we're interested in, which I couldn't see later on or that wouldn't be playing again. So, you always have to make certain sacrifices in one area in order to carry out the other job at the same time. However, it's extremely rewarding and stimulating. It's a privilege to be able to do the two jobs at once. It's a privilege for the programmer to also be an artist, and it's a privilege for the artist to have access to all these shows. I couldn't otherwise afford trips to Avignon, Edinburgh, and Berlin which reveal a whole other side of theatre practice and expose me to other cultures, to other ways of doing things, and that's extremely fulfilling. It really nourishes the artist in me.