

## Chatting With Actors From Melbourne French Theatre



Melbourne French Theatre are about to launch their latest show *Le Père Noël est une Ordure* at the Library at the Dock in the Docklands in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. The brilliant black comedy juggles high farce and grotesque black humour, filled with an assortment of eccentrics including a lonely Serbian with deadly chocolates, a cross-dressing chronic depressive and a suicidal gun-toting Santa Claus.

Amongst the cast is an eclectic group of people who have come together to present this play in French with English Surtitles. TheatreArtLife asked a few questions to Guillaume Sabouraud who plays Katia, the transvestite and Richard Ryan who plays Preskovich.

### GUILLAUME SABOURAUD

Guillaume works in IT as an infrastructure architect and “creative problem solver”. He has an insatiable appetite and curiosity for technology and anything that can be analysed or taken apart. He loves to understand how things work and is a perfectionist. Guillaume is also a musician and he has eclectic musical tastes. He is French but often calls himself a “Citizen of the world” for having lived in 5 different countries (including France, Japan and Australia) and visited many more. He happily joins any conversation in French, English or Japanese to socialise with total strangers and compares himself to a “chameleon” willing to blend-in (to adapt rather than to disappear). Also, he can easily put on a variety of accents which helps to impress his audience. Playing this character (originally the role of Christian Clavier) full of sincerity, common sense and simplicity in this cult French drama is an exciting challenge for Guillaume to convey emotions and make the audience laugh.

**Guillaume, how did you become involved in Melbourne French Theatre?**

I went to the last two Melbourne French Theatre productions last year with my wife Valentine. When she received the newsletter mentioning the auditions for the next production she forwarded it to me. As soon as I read the name of the play, I was excited and immediately thought: this play is in my French DNA and I want to be part of the fun. I was highly motivated and believe that it was quite evident during the audition.

**What is your role in Le Père Noël? What was the journey that led you to play this character?**

All roles are important. However, the one I wanted and put on the top of the list of my application form for the audition is in my opinion the most interesting one. I was really lucky to get it as we were quite a few at the two auditions to want it.

I'm playing Katia: a chronically depressed homosexual transvestite. He is the former husband, Jean-Jacques, of Therese, the woman working at the help line (played by Dominique Croser). I imagine that getting separated from his former wife – whom he still loves immensely – is the reason why he is now depressed; he doesn't really know who he is anymore and even his sexuality became undecided. His fate is unfortunately quite dramatic.

I admit I inspired myself a lot from the original actor (Christian Clavier who was as good as difficult to challenge) but I also added my personal inspiration and ideas to make my own variant of that character. I have quite a few 1 to 1 dialogues with Josette (played by Candice) that are absolutely hilarious, we really enjoy doing those together. I also have a rather long section with Alexis (playing Pierre Mortez) that is quite memorable too, especially when I dance a slow with him...

It is not really such a difficult journey apart maybe from having to wear high heels: the first time I tried them on, I had to take them off after 30 minutes because I was starting to have painful cramps in the thigh.

**Do you also act in English Speaking roles? Do you have a preference?**

No, and this is my first play anyway. It would not be an issue for me to play in English as long as I get the proper coaching.

Note that I actually have a microscopic bit of English in my lines: I tell Therese – my former wife – through a door (while she is having “fun” with another man): “I love you, I need you”... This is the only English language the audience will hear in the whole play and five seconds of pause for the people running the surtitles!

**Is French your native language? Is there any adaptation of the language within the script for this performance? I.e. more modern French terminology or is it word for word as the script dictates?**

Yes, I am a French native.

This play is not really old (1979) so we didn't have to adapt any of the script to make it modern. However a few references were not very clear and our assistant Melissa did a great job looking up the meaning of a few things so that we understand better.

**Whose responsibility is it to run the surtitles along with the dialogue?**

We have a couple of bilingual English/French Monash Masters students and an RMIT graduate who will be running the surtitles. I believe that their main challenge will be to cope with all the mistakes we can make: if we ever skip or change the order of a couple of lines or even change a few words, it will be a bit difficult for them to follow and catch-up. They come from the English translation of the play by Executive Producer and co-founder Michael Bula.

**Do all the crew working on the show understand French and if not, how do they take their cues?**

Not at all. However, most of us speak English. One of the challenges here is to explain to our director (Bruce) why we feel like doing this or that because it makes sense when you read the French script.

**How important is it to you personally to present culturally diverse content on a theatrical stage in Australia?**

**Although I'm a citizen of the world (I really like to say this as I've travelled a lot and lived in several countries), I'm very proud to be French and want to do my best to promote the best of our culture and heritage. This is definitely important to me and a unique occasion.**

This is also putting a lot of pressure on all the French cast: all the French natives who will be coming to the performances know that play and the movie very well and probably have very high expectations. We don't want us to disappoint them and we're really working hard to give the best we can.

**Given the fact that Australia is quite a multicultural society, do you think there is enough diversity represented in the performing arts?**

It's a bit difficult to tell, especially for "Australia". Melbourne is probably one of, if not the best, city culturally-wise. There is a great selection of shows and multicultural events. I'm quite amazed to see how big the French Film Festival or Bastille Day or the International Comedy Festival are.



## RICHARD RYAN - PRESKOVICH

Richard fell in love with French at an early age. Seeing the musical film *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*) he wished he could communicate with Catherine Deneuve in her own language! At university, he immersed himself in French poetry, especially Paul Verlaine. He has 'performed' in classrooms for many years, teaching French, Latin and many other things. The 2007 film *Molière* (directed by Laurent Tirard) re-awakened in him an interest in this 17th Century playwright. When it comes to human foibles such as pride, vanity, ridiculous crushes etc., nothing has changed in 350 years! Men will still do almost anything to impress women...write songs, build towers and so on. Long may it continue! His latest appearances in 2017 were as Monsieur Tibaudier and his own valet Jeannot, not a bad feat in Molière's *La Comtesse Bis* and as Gusman, the Chauffeur in *Every Trick in the Book* by Feydeau.

### Richard, how did you become involved in Melbourne French Theatre?

I have known about MFT for years. Didn't think I was up to being involved, plus I was too busy with full-time teaching. Then I auditioned for *La Comtesse Bis* in February 2018 and got the role of Monsieur Tibaudier. I have played in the September 2017 show *Every Trick in the Book* as chauffeur Gusman and now in this my third show in a row!

**What is your role in *Le Père Noël*? What was the journey that led you to play this character?**

I play the role of Rhadam Preskovich [Serbian]. My influence on this character is in the early years of SBS television seeing Yugoslav programs. My brothers have Eastern European in-laws (Lithuanian and Polish).

**Do you also act in English Speaking roles? Do you have a preference?**

I would like to try English and perhaps other languages. French is not my native language (I am Australian of Irish origins). I play an immigrant in this show which is appropriate.

**How long is *Le Père Noël* playing for and where can we find you?**

There will be 6 performances between May 2nd and 5th in the "Library at the Dock" of Melbourne.

**Evenings [4]:** Wed 2 May to Sat 5 May 2018 inclusive at 8 pm

**Matinees [2]:** Fri 4 May [sold out] and Sat 5 May 2018 both at 2.30 pm

**Library at the Dock, Performance Space, second floor, 107 Victoria Harbour Promenade,  
Docklands 3008**

**Melways 2E F6**

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