

Talisman Theatre proudly presents

ME AND YOU

Text: Talia Hallmona and Pascal Brullemans
Translation: Alison Bowie / Dramaturgy: Patrick Leroux
Direction: Arianna Bardesono



A Word to Teachers, Parents and Adolescents

It is with pleasure that we proudly present to you our play *Me and You*, a text by Talia Hallmona and Pascal Brullemans that examines the issues of immigrant identity and integration using autobiographical fiction to tell a story of immigration as experienced by the author. The show was performed in English in the spring 2016 at Montreal Arts Interculturels, and in French in 2014 at the Theatre Aux Écuries as well as at the opening of the 2015 Festival La Rencontre Théâtre Ados.

The play *Me and You* asks the following question: What does it mean to be Québécois?

Are you a teacher or a parent wishing to go to the theatre with your teenagers? We wish to support your efforts by proposing this accompanying guide. The information provided on the show and the exercises used will initiate the young people to a creative form of theater that engages them, sharpens their critical sense and promotes discussion. The purpose of this guide is to make you experience personally and nonconventionally the process of *Me and You*, from writing down a personal anecdote to the integration metaphor. We also wish to accompany the spectators, stimulate their imagination, make them think it over and provoke them to interact with their classmates and the artists involved.

Enjoy reading this document and the show!

Lyne Paquette
Artistic Director of Talisman Theatre

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The Text

Summary

“My name is Talia Wagih William Wassef Hallmona. I was born in Egypt but my first name is Greek. In fact, my father is Egyptian and my mother’s ancestors were Italian and Greek. When you see me, you don’t get the impression you are admiring a young middle-Eastern woman with mysterious charms. When I talk, you don’t hear the Mediterranean singing. I could easily pass for a girl from Lac-Saint-Jean. Being an immigrant is not simple, you know. But what is worse is an integrated woman, who floats between two countries, two languages, two cultures...”

A young actress tells us about her childhood memories and arriving in Quebec. During her tale, she tells us how she met Julie Sirois, her best Québécois friend, who died in an accident. Because Talia refuses to accept this fact, she interrupts the story and changes the course of destiny by giving her role to Julie. But she soon discovers that sharing her life with another person involves taking risks, especially when you have to unite two contrasting cultures. *Me and You* is an autobiographical fiction in which reality and freedom are in conflict, and portrays a friendship that defies convention. The show takes a good look at immigrant identity by asking the question, “Do we recognise others for what they give us or for what they take from us?”

The Main Themes of *Me and You*

Integration, intercultural friendship, multiple identities, love, uprooting, arrival into a new country, the personal need to feel Québécois, Quebec...

Me and You is a show that is both funny, accessible, and profound, dealing with the themes of integration, and the relationships between Quebec and its immigrants. What steps, separations, joys and losses are part of integration?

What do you have to do to be considered Québécois? Am I condemned to always be seen as an extension of my past? Who is it that considers me a foreigner? Me? Others? Me because of the others? The others because of me? All of the above?

The Play

The Motivating Factors Behind This Show

We feel an urgent need to present this show because we meet teenagers in school yards coming from all over the world who speak Quebecois and live as Quebecers. And we meet native born Quebec youth who can speak some Arabic, who know Arabic food, music and even literature better than the author. We believe this is a magnificent phenomenon.

Origins of the Project

The storyline of *Moi et L'autre* originated in a personal anecdote of the actress and co-author of the show. On September 11th, Talia finished a rehearsal, opened her cellphone and received a text from her mother, "Titi, come home immediately! The Arabs, the terrorists, they blew up the Twin Towers. In Montreal, the people, they are going to get revenge on the Arabs and hit them... Where are you, Titi?" Talia replied, "At school, mom. I can't come home right now, I have a class."

Mama: "Then don't tell anyone you are Egyptian, eh, Titi ! No one! If someone asks you what is your name, you have to lie. Give them another name. Not Hallmona. A Quebec name. Tell them you are called Julie." On September 11, 2001, her mother asked her to lie about her origins. This was the beginning of Talia's questioning about immigrant identity which has resulted in the show *Me and You*.



Think It Over

What determines at what point immigrants can state they are Quebecers? What is a foreigner? Can you be from several countries? Several cultures? Do you have to be born in a country to feel at home there?

Our Times

Quebec is coloured with cultural diversity! In these times when everything goes so fast, we wish to take the time to discuss the cultural identity duality of current Quebec.

The Theatrical Form

The show plays with the conventions of autobiographical fiction. This artistic form means the spectator is constantly wandering between fact and fiction, between playing and non-playing. This aesthetic position reflects the identity crisis experienced by the characters torn between their two cultures.



“Blessed are the crazy people, because they let the light shine through.” (Arab proverb)

The Socio-Historical Context

Letting the light shine through and appreciating our differences - that is what drives Theatre Fêlé and Talisman Theatre. We wish to create theatre together for adolescents and the young at heart that examines human frailty through stories that highlight an increasingly hybrid society. Through theatre and dialogue, we wish to provide our spectators with a space for reflection and discussion. Through our shows, we wish to establish a dialogue between youth, diverse cultural groups and theatre artists. With their openness on the world and the cultural diversity in which they evolve, our youth today make up an audience that has a lot to share. Creating for this audience demands rigorous research to succeed in representing their cultures on stage.

Building Bridges between Artists, Teachers and Teens!

Our purpose is sociological. We wish to use autobiographical fiction in order to spark a thought process among adolescent spectators about issues revolving around immigration and integration, and we believe that a story based on personal experience is a fantastic tool to reach this goal. In the case of *Me and You*, the autobiographical/fictional main character is both the co-author and the main actor. Therefore, the authors insisted on basing the story on her memories and then making fiction intervene to flip into a universal statement addressed to all spectators.

Before the Show: the writing process

Be the author!

Accompanying your students in their artistic discoveries calls for certain keys: the prior exploration of a text, of a language and a poetic world. The following workshops will make it possible for you to explore the world of *Me and You* with your students.

From the Personal Anecdote to the Metaphor on Integration

In order to write this play, co-author Talia Hallmona kept an intimate diary for 4 months. In this diary she took notes on several of her memories of integration: leaving Egypt, arriving in Quebec, her first

day of school, the first Quebecois word she learned, and that she said, her first friend in Quebec, the first snowfall she saw, the typically Quebecois thing she learned, her first kiss, etc...

By reading this diary, Pascal Brullemans and Talia Hallmona realised that the greatest dream of Talia was to become a native-born Quebecer, a Julie Sirois!

Exercise

In order to explore this dramatic form just as Talia did, we suggest you write the beginning of your own autobiographic fiction on one sheet in 15-20 minutes:

1. Introduce yourself. Write down your name. Where does it come from? Does it have a meaning? Your age? One of your characteristics?
2. Where were you born? Describe the place where you were born, the city where you grew up. What you love and hate the most about this place.
3. Write down an anecdote you experienced when you arrived in Quebec or else tell about an anecdote you experienced with an immigrant.

Be the actor!

In order for your students to experience this exercise in depth, ask them to read their text in front of their classmates.



Before the show: the creative process

Be the creator!

The authors of *Me and You* based their work on improvisations, exploring situations with our two main characters Talia and Julie. Here are a few situations you can explore with your students.

Improvised Situations

1. The first day at school. Ask 2 young people of different origins to improvise a first day of school. Improvise the encounter between a Quebecois and an immigrant. Which one will speak first? Which word will be said?
2. The metamorphosis. Talia dreams of being a Quebecer, of being Julie Sirois. Improvise her metamorphosis.
3. Typically Quebecois: Improvise the typically Quebecois thing you could teach an immigrant. And vice versa: improvise the thing from your country of origin you could teach a Quebecois? ex: dancing baladi, singing a jig, speaking Arabic, Chinese, French, etc...

THINKING IT OVER AFTER THE SHOW

- "The others, the foreigners -- do we recognise them for what they give us or for what they take from us?"
- Do you consider yourself a Quebecer, a Montrealer, a Canadian, an immigrant, an Indigenous person? All of the above? None of the above?
- What does a Quebecois look like?
- What were your impressions? Which moment touched you most? Why?
- In a word, what is *Me and You* for you?



AUTHORS'S NOTE



"My name is Talia Wagih William Wassef Hallmona. I was born in Egypt but my name is Greek. In fact, my father is Egyptian and mother is original Italian and Greek. When you look at me, no one has the impression of admiring a young Middle Eastern woman with enigmatic charms. When I speak, you do hear the Mediterranean sing. In fact, I can easily make myself pass for a girl from Lac-Saint-Jean.

Being an immigrant, you know, it's not simple.

But worst, is being integrated, a floating state between two countries, two languages, two cultures ... "

-- Talia Hallmona, co-author

"Even as a Quebecois, Talia realizes she cannot reconcile what she is. What we discovered is that, in fact, having an identity problem is perhaps the most Quebec way of life!

We do not give an answer in this play *Me and You*, but we have something to build from it ... Ultimately, primary schools today are filled with immigrants and children of immigrants, the situation has changed. The relation to the Other is not the same, but everyone still has to find his or her place."

-- Pascal Brullemans, co-author



TRANSLATOR'S NOTE



The first time I read through *Me and You*, I was struck by the complexity of its language and its story. The play is a journey across time, space, and cultural boundaries; it is a story about finding one's identity. It is a world where we are constantly being asked to reassess our understanding of our own heritage and our own use of language. The play is a deep emotional journey, but the playwrights have skillfully woven humour into the story, allowing us the chance to breathe and reflect. The story revolves around the idea of the Other, so placing it in a new language adds an additional layer of intricacy that needs to be negotiated not only by the characters in the play, but also by the audience. This funny, and profoundly moving story raises questions that anyone living in a multicultural or multilingual community will face at some point in their life. The play brings people together to help each other find answers. — Alison Bowie, Translator

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I am an immigrant. I left my country in 1999.

Once you leave the land that gave birth to you, whether willingly or not, you forever earn the citizenship of a fictitious country I call limbo. You will never be from here and won't ever again be just from there. You're in limbo. In an in-between. In a no man's land that escapes simple definitions. At first it is uncomfortable; you experience anxiety and the deep urge to belong. Later, you learn that the place you're dying to call home is carried in you, on your shoulders, under your skin and in your heart. And that little body of yours has been shaped just as much by your life experiences and your inherited DNA, as by the many significant people you have encountered so far.

This is where *Me and You* lives. In the shift from my story and my identity to the awareness of how the Other makes Me who I am. And vice versa. *Me and You* is one step after integration. It is a renegotiation of the idea of identity itself. It is a joyful exercise in empathy, an honest search that cares to ask important questions and a generous act of sharing.

Arianna Bardesono –Director, *Me and You*

A native of Italy, Arianna is a graduate of the Directing Program at the National Theatre School of Canada. She has directed for various theatre companies in Montreal (Repercussion, Teesri Duniya, Infinitheatre and Théâtre du Quat’Sous) and for Cuatro Milpas Teatro in Mexico. Arianna has been a resident artist at the Stella Adler School of Acting in NYC, as well as at La Tohu in Montreal. As a puppeteer with Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia she has toured extensively throughout North America and in Singapore. Arianna is the co-founder and co-artistic director of the independent theatre company Odelah Creations, whose mandate has been to create original daring work, committed to innovation both in form and content. Odelah’s creations have been presented both in Montreal and Toronto. Since 2011, Arianna has been a mentor and teacher both at the National Theatre School of Canada and Dawson College. She is currently the Associate Artist at Imago Theatre while pursuing her Master’s studies in écriture scenique at UQAM. Arianna has been awarded the John Hirsch Prize in 2013, which selects and celebrates emerging theatre directors with great potential.



About the artistic director



Lyne Paquette - Artistic Director, Talisman Theatre; Set Design, *Me and You*

Lyne is a founder of Talisman Theatre. A graduate of the National Theatre School (2005), theatrical set and costume design is Lyne's second career; prior to this she had worked as a professional engineer for international consultancies since graduating from McGill (1987). Beginning as an Assistant Designer at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, and an internship with Michael Curry Designs, Lyne has since designed for many theatre, dance, puppet, and opera productions in Montreal. She has designed set and costumes for Talisman productions since 2005.

ABOUT TALISMAN THEATRE

Talisman has a vibrant, living mission: to produce English-language premiers of Quebec plays in translation for Montreal's public and students. We have two unique strengths that allow us to bring Quebecois plays to English-speaking theatre-goers: we retain the essence of traditional Quebec theatrical practice as part of our hybrid development process; and we have developed a talented bi-lingual team with its own distinctive artistic approach. (www.talisman-theatre.com)

Since 2006 Talisman Theatre productions include Daniel Danis' *That Woman* (2006 & 2007), *Down Dangerous Passes Road* by Michel Marc Bouchard (2008) (both translated by Linda Gaboriau) which won for the Prix de la critique 2008 for best English production. 2009 was the stunning production of Marilyn Perreault's *Rock, Paper, Jackknife...* (translated by Nadine Desrochers), *The Flood Thereafter* (2010) by Sarah Berthiaume (translated by Nadine Desrochers), *Coma Unplugged* (2011) by Pierre Michel Tremblay, *The Medea Effect* (2012) by Suzie Bastien (META winner for Best Actress and Best Translation 2012) (translated by Nadine Desrochers), *The Aeneid* by Olivier Kemeid (winner of the 2014 Montreal English Theatre Award for Best Indie production – METAs), *Billy (The days of Howling)* (2015) by Fabien Cloutier, *Province* (2016) by Mathieu Gosselin (translated by Nadine Desrochers) and last year's *Yukonstyle* by Sarah Berthiaume (translated by Nadine Desrochers).

Me and You

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Translation: Alison Bowie

Dramaturgy: Patrick Leroux

Direction: Arianna Bardesono

Set Design: Lyne Paquette

Costume Design: Fruzsina Lányi

Lighting: David Alexandre Chabot

Sound Design: Jesse Ash

For more information on our team, please visit www.talisman-theatre.com

TALIA: *“Being Quebecois means whining about the winter, whining about the rest of Canada, whining about the Habs’ coach....”*

Julie: *"Being Quebecois, it happens in the heart, so you do not need a script and not as you need me, and she tears the script ..."*

Contact Details

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