

Comédie de Genève

PRODUCTION BOOKLET

Coup Fatal

A PLAY BY
**FABRIZIO CASSOL, ALAIN PLATEL
AND RODRIGUEZ VANGAMA**



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Recreation December 2024 at Comédie de Genève

Adresse postale

Promenade Louise-Boulaz 2
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**“To be young, gifted and
black.”**

Nina Simone

Credits

Musical direction Fabrizio Cassol
Artistic direction and staging Alain Platel
Orchestra conductor Rodriguez Vangama
Compositions Fabrizio Cassol , Rodriguez Vangama based on Handel, Vivaldi, Bach, Monteverdi, Gluck
With the collaboration of Coup Fatal
Scenography Freddy Tsimba
Light design Carlo Bourguignon
Sound design Guillaume Desmet
Costumes Dorine Demuynck
Photography Chris Van der Burght
Artistic direction assistance Romain Guion, Éléonore Bonah

Featuring Stephen Diaz (countertenor), Russell Tshiehua (vocal), Bule Mpanya (vocal), Fredy Massamba (vocal), Deb's Bukaka (balafon), Tister Ikomo (xylophone), Cédrick Buya (percussions), Bouton Kalanda (likembe), Silva Makengo (likembe), Erick Ngoya (likembe), Brensley Manzodulua (guitar), Évry Madiamba (percussions and gourd instrument) and Rodriguez Vangama (electric guitar, balafon)

Production (from 2024) Comédie de Genève
Touring Nicolas Roux - OTTO productions

Production at creation (2014) KVS – Bruxelles and les ballets C de la B
Coproduction Théâtre national de Chaillot - Paris, Holland Festival - Amsterdam, Festival d'Avignon, Theater im Pfalzbaum, Torinodanza, Opéra de Lille, Wiener Festwochen
With the support of Ville de Bruxelles, Ville de Gand, Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie, Province de la Flandre-Orientale and autorités flamandes

Estimated running time 1h50 | Age 12+ | Show in French

Created 10th June 2014 at Wiener Festwochen - Austria

Recreation
December 2024 at Comédie de Genève (Main Stage)

Available from January 2025
Production and touring set-up in progress

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Revival of an unforgettable project

DRAMATURGY NOTE

Coup Fatal (“Fatal Blow”): an orchestra, a group, a show, a concert, a tour?

This is a project that does not fit into a single box; it is plural in nature; it bridges and connects; it is “trans-” a whole lot of things, starting with itself. It is what poetry does best, enchantment without mawkishness. Developed by successive iterations from 2010 to 2014, this cult show, which has played to sold-out venues all over Europe, seems just as relevant 10 years on.

Supported by Jan Goossens, then director of KVS – Brussels and founder of the Festival des Arts in Kinshasa, it took 4 years of rigorous discussions between Rodríguez Vangama, Fabrizio Cassol, Serge Kakudji, Alain Platel and dozens of musicians, for the work to fuse and catalyse, in a “natural”, profound and exuberant way, the baroque scores of Monteverdi, Handel, Gluck or Bach and the many unwritten interpretations of Congolese music, traditional or popular, not forgetting rock and jazz.

Coup Fatal was born on 10 June 2014 at Burgtheater in Vienna, the capital of opera, during the Wiener Festwochen. It is a manifesto of resilience, vital insolence, and pride. These twisted heroines and heroes of baroque antiquity – Cleopatra, Ptolemy, Orpheus – who never stop cursing, loving and betraying each other, sublimate and reinvent themselves in the music and uncompromising art of living of the Congolese.

In the beginning is the music: a dialogue between the likembe and the electric guitar, melodies that call and respond to each other on either side of the stage, searching for each other... And just before the final curtain, we hear the breathing, rhythmic exhalations stubbornly driving the music. In the interim: the rocking quest for harmony between the arrogance and machismo of the baroque *Coup Fatal* and the flamboyance of the “Sapeurs”, Kinshasa’s dandies. Yes, much like La S.A.P.E, who arrive majestically when you least expect them, or the use of blue, made-in-China plastic chairs, which are ubiquitous in Africa, the show bears witness to the genius of the subversive interpretation of the symbols of history, past and present. There is no need for irony: exuberance is legitimate. In front of a stage curtain designed by visual artist Freddy Tsimba from the detritus of war, the movements have to be grand and swaggering. Cassol and Vangama, Platel and the members of the group carefully and rigorously choose what will be said and heard, what will be seen, what will remain invisible and what will burn from the inside – like the impassive face of maestro Rodríguez Vangama throughout the performance.

“Young gifted and black”, with the words of Nina Simone as a guiding thread, the journey can continue along the path of bridges or rafts, cobbled together and solid, objects that have the fantasy and magnificent impurity of strokes of luck, blows of fate, and thunderbolts all mixed together.

Led by Vangama, still accompanied by Cassol, Platel and other newcomers, *Coup Fatal* strikes again; today, as we all know, Kinshasa is the capital of the world.

Véronique Timsit, November 2023

Score

In *Coup Fatal*, an orchestra of 13 musicians from Kinshasa, conducted by Rodriguez Vangama, draws inspiration from the baroque repertoire of several composers. Congolese countertenor Serge Kakudji selected the arias, and the original music is enriched by the diversity of the musicians.

Starting with the vocal parts, a new contemporary universe is recreated in terms of sound and image. This new music is a natural and exuberant fusion of baroque phrases, traditional and popular Congolese music, rock and jazz.

Composer Fabrizio Cassol and guitarist Vangama provided the musical direction. Alongside the musicians, director Alain Platel and dancer Romain Guion (whose credits include *C(H)OEURS*) created the theatre version. Freddy Tsimba worked on the set. In Kinshasa, he created disturbing life-size sculptures using ammunition shells collected from Congolese battlefields.

The baroque flamboyance and coquetry of the “sapeurs”, the dandies of Kinshasa, adds to the arrogance and machismo of *Coup Fatal*. There is no need for irony, the exuberance is legitimate. Against a backdrop of ammunition shells, movements must be grand and boastful, and blandness must be shrill and defiant. Rather than a tribute to baroque music, *Coup Fatal* is an ode to the uncompromising elegance of the Congolese.



Interview with Fabrizio Cassol

Bernard Debroux : This isn't the first time you've carried out this type of experiment, mixing and fusing different musical and cultural worlds to come up with something new...

Fabrizio Cassol : It's my life! My daily bread! It's a passion that goes beyond music, because it's about culture in the broadest sense, with its social and spiritual aspects linking memories that are sometimes ancestral. People are at the centre of it, and music is its emanation.

BD : So the challenge is to find musicians who have the special ability to fit into this approach...

FC : ... and we're very lucky to have Rodriguez Vangama in the team who plays the role of conductor and who is the living memory and library of the group. Rodriguez is the mainstay of the band on stage, a different kind of conductor, and an outstanding guitarist. I love his elegance when he leads the musicians. His sensitivity finds a place in every musical extension, and he's probably the only person in the Congo who can fulfil this role.

BD : This special ability does not mean that you have to have a classical training and know how to read scores...

FC : We don't work like in the West at all, we have to invent ways of working that are specific to the situation. Scores are just memory aids. There isn't really a culture of reading or writing music, especially for musicians more closely related to jazz or Congolese music. In our group, some people sometimes come to see how certain notes are written on paper, but that's not the main thing. The score is invented on the spot according to the ability of each musician, the musical need, and the exceptional instrumentation with three likembes, three guitars, three percussion instruments, two marimbas, and three singers. Apart from Serge Kakudji, none of them has had a baroque education...

BD : At this stage in the development of the work, how would you characterise what is specific to this experiment in crossing music and cultures?

FC : There have been several stages. I sometimes work a bit like Alain Platel does with his dancers. It'd

be absurd for me to come up with "scores" that had been precisely composed beforehand. First of all, it's essential for the musicians to come together naturally around this (baroque) music, and I was immediately intrigued by their

first encounter. When I arrived in Kinshasa, I realised that the musicians had managed to connect Handel to their musical universe. I wanted to know how they'd done it!

Work often begins with fascination... They didn't really concern themselves with the structure of the music and its sequences, but rather with what they "felt". From this confrontation, my job was to find a kind of musical dramaturgy where all the details could find their place. That's essentially where my role lies, while connecting with Alain's universe.

Coup Fatal is a real show where music and dance are one and the same, and I try to create links everywhere. It's a game of ramifications between baroque songs and Congolese polyphony. These links stem both from the original piece (baroque) and from the often-incredible suggestions that the musicians come up with in response. The Baroque and Congolese languages have one thing in common: they're polyphonic, but in different ways. You have to weave the two together to create a new sense of unity, as if these types of music from different sources were merging to create a new one.

BD : Is it easy to shift from one musical universe into another, even if what predominates is the breath of Congolese music?

FC : It's not easy to explain the harmonic feelings of Westerners or Congolese people. For us, what contributes to the beauty of harmonies is often the way we play on anticipation and delay, because harmony is made up of balance and imbalance. This culture leads to all sorts of movements in the interpretation of music. You can accentuate a tension and minimise its resolution by injecting nuances. For Congolese musicians, it's more abstract, because it's time anchored in the present that gives meaning, groove and beat. In *Coup Fatal*, we therefore had to work on nuances and certain melodic interpretations without slowing down their

natural flow. Injecting into their movements other movements that give rise to new sensations. The musicians understand how a small detail, which in their usual world means very little, suddenly becomes very important here. This understanding allows us to enter another musical dimension. There's also the interplay of musical crossovers. Take Bach's first prelude, for example. There are always two or three other African voices superimposed on Bach, and they remain constant

throughout the piece. There's a subtle shift from an atmosphere of Congolese rumba to the prelude, the mood is totally Congolese and yet Bach remains present! It's the same process when Serge sings, you might think it's just baroque but in fact the Congolese flow is not interrupted.

This show lies somewhere between a Congolese music concert and a kind of strange opera. Joy has an important place in it, but the depth of certain emotions is necessary, as evidenced by the presence of Nina Simone's song *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*. Serge Kakudji is the soloist, but the other two singers play an essential role – they're phenomena! The relationship between movement and music is incredible, and don't forget that Kinshasa is the home of La Sape, the Société des Ambianceurs et Personnes Élégantes.

Excerpts from the interview with Fabrizio Cassol conducted by Bernard Debroux, text included in Alternatives théâtrales 121/122/123 "Créer à Kinshasa/Creating in Kinshasa", July 2014



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Press clippings

"The musicians take it in turns to pass on musical themes that are immediately taken up by another. From the moment countertenor Serge Kakudji joins the musicians in singing his moving arias, we witness the magical union of Western baroque music and the supple rhythms of Africa. It works like clockwork, it's a party! The door curtains made from ammunition shells are the only references to the atrocious current events in the Congo. And then, for a moment, tragedy strikes".

Annette Embrechts, *De Volkskrant*, 18 June 2014

"Vivaldi evolves into a rumba, literally becoming belly music. We see an explosion of energy, a parade of spectacular numbers. Nina Simone's 'To be young, gifted and black' and Handel's 'Lascia ch'io pianga' merge, tears and pathetic yeah-yeahs go hand in hand. It's a celebration of pride and the will to live, to ward off misery".

Geert Van der Speeten, *De Standaard*, 14 June 2014

"In this show under the musical direction of Fabrizio Cassol and conductor and guitarist Rodriguez Vangama, works by Monteverdi and Händel, Vivaldi and Gluck are remodelled by Congolese instruments and voices in an original contemporary composition. It's a delightful counterpoint to the original sound, enthusiastically recovering the typical structures and rhythms of the Baroque period".

Silvia Kargl, *Kurier*, 12 June 2014

"Serge Kakudji cries. He sings the aria 'Lascia ch'io pianga' from Handel's opera 'Rinaldo' and Almirena's tears become his own. It's not an operatic character we see on stage, but a black countertenor expressing the suffering of an entire continent in a pure, clear voice. The last word of the first verse is the last word we can understand, the song flowing in a magnificent and rich amalgam of African music. That last word is 'Liberta'. Freedom."

Egbert Tholl, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12 June 2014

"It was around half past midnight. For a while now, you could see the silent flashes of lightning whitening the sky and illuminating the courtyard of the Lycée Saint-Joseph, where the wild musicians from Kinshasa, under the masterful direction of Rodriguez Vangama, were wrapping up this formidable show entitled Coup Fatal, which links their repertoire to Baroque pages chosen by the Congolese countertenor Serge Kakudji, who performs them with fascinating sensitivity. Fourteen men on stage, all breathtakingly talented, mischievous and intelligent, under the direction of Alain Platel. The audience was on its feet, applauding wildly as the performers disappeared backstage for a moment, only to return dressed up like clairvoyants, laughing at themselves with marvellous good humour."

Armelle Héliot, *Le Figaro*, 8 July 2014

“It is here, in this non-place which anyone can appropriate, that we discover an unusual concert, where colonialism and post-colonialism are finally left aside. The challenge was not an easy one: the idea was to shift from a Baroque to a Congolese repertoire, from a rumba to a Bach prelude. Congolese guitarist Rodriguez Vangama plays an important role in ensuring that this venture (...) is a perfectly balanced musical creation on a grand scale. When countertenor Serge Kakudji searches for his Eurydice in a moment of madness, as if he were looking for a corpse in the River Congo, we hear the music even more clearly. This show is a fair fight.”

Marie-Christine Vernay, *Libération*, 8 July 2014

“It is around Kakudji and his unique vocal talent – but you should also see him jumping up and down in his chair as he listens to his colleagues play and sing – that this production took shape, with the improbable combination of European baroque repertoire and Congolese rumba – essentially a musical challenge. And it works wonderfully! Coup Fatal is an invitation to celebrate. However, in the programme we learn that the gold curtain on the set, which we imagined to be made of pearls, was made from ammunition shells by Congolese artist Freddy Tsimba. It’s a message that is barely visible, but always present in this twirling concert, which we can’t forget affirms life in a land mined by war.”

Rosita Boisseau, *Le Monde*, 8 juillet 2014



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Fabrizio Cassol

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Composer and saxophonist with the band Aka Moon for 20 years, Fabrizio Cassol regularly works with choreographers such as Alain Platel (*les ballets C de la B – vsprs, pitié!, Coup Fatal*), Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (*Rosas*), the Samoan Lemi Ponifasio (*Mao Company*), the Congolese Faustin Linyekula (*studio Kabako*), as well as in opera with Philippe Boesmans and Luc Bondy, and in theatre with tg Stan.

For several years now, he has been working with KVS – Brussels under the direction of Jan Goossens, following a residency at the La Monnaie/De Munt opera house – Brussels under the direction of Bernard Foccroulle. Since 2012, he has been in residence at the Fondation de l'Abbaye Royaumont near Paris, where he is continuing his study of world cultures, his most recent creation being *AlefBa* with musicians from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey.

His interest in non-European music was sparked by a seminal trip to the Aka Pygmies of the Central African Republic in 1992 and trips to Asia (mainly India) and Africa working with Malian diva Oumou Sangare, Griot Baba Sissoko and the Black Machine, master Indian percussionist U.K Sivaraman and Senegalese musician Doudou N'Diaye Rose. On the improvised music scene, Cassol has worked with Marc Turner, Robin Eubanks, David Gilmore, Magic Malik, Marc Ducret, and Joe Lovano.

With DJ Grazzhopa, he created the first big band of 14 DJs, and with the instrument maker François Louis he helped design the Aulochrome, the first chromatically polyphonic wind instrument. His practice of oral and written expression, from chamber music to symphonic works, has led him to give regular workshops and masterclasses all over the world, including at the Conservatoire National Supérieur in Paris, the Royal Academy in London, the Jerusalem Conservatoire, and in Algiers, Beijing, Berlin, Chennai, Tunis and Royaumont.



Alain Platel

ARTISTIC DIRECTION

Alain Platel trained as a remedial teacher and is a self-taught stage director. In 1984, together with friends and family, he formed a company that operated as a collective. From *Emma* (1988) onwards, he began to distinguish himself more clearly as a director. He created *Bonjour Madame* (1993), *La Tristeza Complice* (1995) and *Iets op Bach* (1998), productions that earned Les ballets C de la B (the name adopted by the troupe) international stardom. With playwright Arne Sierens, he achieved a similar effect for the Victoria theatre company for young audiences in Ghent, with *Moeder en kind* (1995), *Bernadetje* (1996) and *Allemaal Indiaan* (1999).

After *Allemaal Indiaan*, Platel announced that he would not be producing any more shows, but Gerard Mortier persuaded him to create *Wolf* (2003), a piece about Mozart for the Ruhrtriennale. Platel's choral project *Coup de Chœurs* for the opening of the new KVS marked the start of a close collaboration with composer Fabrizio Cassol.

vsprs (2006) marked a change of direction. The exuberance of the previous shows, expressed in the diversity of the performers and the themes addressed, gave way to greater introspection and nervousness, revealing a world of impulses and aspirations, and also of violence, as in *Nine Finger* (2007) with Benjamin Verdonck and Fumiyo Ikeda.

After the baroque style of *pitié!* (2008), *Out Of Context – for Pina* (January 2010) was an almost ascetic reflection on the arsenal of movements surrounding spasms and tics. Through this language of movement, Platel is logically pursuing his quest for a way to translate feelings that are too powerful. His aspiration for something that transcends individuals has become increasingly palpable.

In collaboration with Frank Van Laecke, *Gardenia* was created in June 2010. This production was inspired by the film *Yo soy así*, in which the closure of a cabaret for transvestites in Barcelona is the starting point for a plunge into the private lives of a memorable group of old artists. Opera director Gerard Mortier asked Platel to create *C(H)OEURS* (2012) for the Teatro Real – Madrid, featuring the famous choral scenes from Verdi's operas. In a second phase, he added pieces from the works of Richard Wagner. The tension between the group and the individual has been a central theme in Platel's performances for many years. In *C(H)OEURS*, his most extensive project to date, Platel, with his dancers and the chorus of the Teatro Real – Madrid, explore just how dangerous the beauty of a group can be.

In *tauberbach* (2014), he continued to explore and develop his movement vocabulary known as "bastard dance". The theme of this creation is living (surviving) with dignity in almost impossible conditions. But to avoid any misunderstanding: Platel is not necessarily looking for expansion. His collaboration on small projects such as *Nachtschade* (for Victoria in 2006) and coaching such as for Pieter and Jakob Ampe and their creation *Jake & Pete's big reconciliation attempt for the disputes from the past* (2011) are evidence of this. These two projects have left undeniable traces in his reflections on what theatre is.

During that time, he also made a number of discreet dance films, whether with British director Sofie Fiennes (*Because I Sing* in 2001, *Ramallah! Ramallah! Ramallah!* in 2005 and *VSPRS Show and Tell* in 2007) or solo with *Les ballets de ci de là* (2006), an impressive dive into the life of a troupe formed twenty years ago that takes us as far afield as Vietnam and Burkina Faso. It is also, and above all, an ode to the city of Ghent, his home base.



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Rodríguez Vangama

ORCHESTRA CONDUCTOR

Rodríguez Vangama is a musician artist born in Kinshasa. A guitarist and bassist of great renown, he is much in demand for his talents as a musician, arranger and producer by such great musicians as Papa Wemba, Werrason, Jean Goubald, and Monik Tenday. He has played in the jazz group J'AFROZZ and worked with Pierre Vaïana and Baloji, notably on the recording of his album *Kinshasa Succursale*.

He has collaborated with Fabrizio Cassol on a number of concerts. He has been invited to festivals all over the world and played at the Festival d'Avignon and toured internationally with *Coup Fatal* (2014) as co-composer and he is still touring the world with Alain Platel in *Requiem pour L.*, for which he co-wrote and conducts the music.

Rodríguez has toured extensively with Lexxus Légal in Africa and Europe. With his group Les Salop'arts, he blends Congolese popular music with elements of jazz and rock. In 2016, he founded Guez Arena, the first Congolese cultural centre in Kinshasa, to train and produce several artists with his Arena Music label.

In 2019 with Lydie Toran, he founded the Avignon-based Compagnie Artères, which aims to produce live shows with international artists.

He then signed two tracks on the *Qalf* album with Damso and Universal France and got involved in several projects with different artists, at the Méca in Bordeaux and Théâtre Vidy in Lausanne, for example. He is currently touring internationally with Ray Lema for the *Hommage à Franco* project. His concept album, *Empire Kongo*, was released in 2022. This work is based on the dislocated history of the Kongo Kingdom and everything that represents the domination of humans by humans. Musically, it is tinged with Blue Note and the polyphony of world music.