



OH! BOY!

D'APRÈS LE ROMAN DE MARIE-AUDE MURAIL
MISE EN SCÈNE / OLIVIER LETELLIER
RÉC / LIONEL EROGGAH
ADAPTATION / CATHERINE VERLAGUET
CRÉATION LUMIÈRE / LIONEL MAHÉ
CRÉATION SONORE / MIKAEL PLUMAH

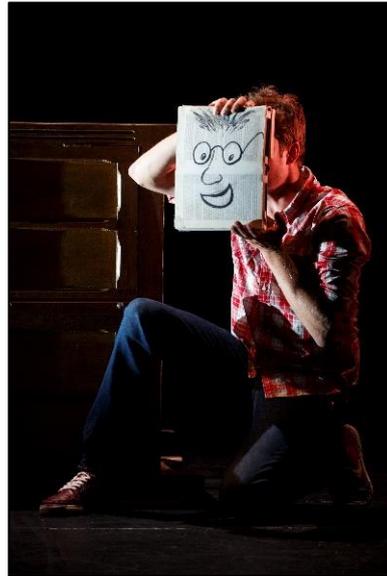
OH BOY!

Oh Boy!, a major success on the French stage for young audiences, has been seen by approximately 175,000 spectators in six years. That's 700 performances in Europe and North America.



OH BOY!

Adapted from the novel by
Marie-Aude Murail
Adapted for the stage by
Catherine Verlaquet
Directed by
Olivier Letellier
English translation by
Nicholas Elliott
Actor
Matthew Brown



Story

"These stories are the product of a struggle, the last chance to give children the words to express suffering, desire, love; words to identify evil, goodness, fear, and hatred... All the words that make men and women stand up tall. But whatever we want to tell children, we have to start by finding an interesting story that doesn't overflow with didactic lessons as soon as you get into it."

Marie-Aude Murail, author

When 26-year-old Balthasar Killchicken receives a summons from Family Court, he wonders what he's done wrong. When he sees his half-sister Jocelyn waiting for him with the judge, he asks himself what she's blaming him for now. When he finds out he has a half-brother and two half-sisters—Simeon, 14, Morgan, 11, and Venice, 5—he tells himself this isn't the first time his father has abandoned his children. And when the judge appoints him the children's designated guardian, he nearly makes a dash for the fire escape.

Oh Boy! is the straightforward, deeply moving story of three siblings who drop out of the sky and into the lap of a totally unprepared young man. With tenderness and humor, this contemporary tale examines some of life's most devastating events, including illness and the loss of a loved one, and challenges society's definitions of normalcy and family.

About the show

Of all the characters in this dense novel, we decided to tell the story through Balthasar's eyes. Because ultimately, he is the one most transformed by the story.

Because his father left before he was even born, Balt has had to put up some emotional walls. Consequently, humor and a carefree attitude are integral parts of his character.

Oh Boy! is the journey of a man who refuses to grow up.

Oh Boy! is a serious drama told by a funny guy.

Oh Boy! is that rare play for young audiences that dares to address sensitive subjects such as family secrets, homosexuality, a mother's suicide, adoption, and illness. The story's strength lies in the endless comedic potential of Balt's life: his diva personality, his cowardice, his clumsiness, and an amazing capacity for self-deprecation that can break dramatic tension with a mood-shifting quip, creating the distance required to watch scenes that would otherwise be emotionally overwhelming.

But Balt is more than just a jokester; he is also a pure and honest soul, who doesn't kid around with his real feelings, or with ours.

Oh Boy! is an attempt to see life from this character's amazing point of view, so different from our own.

Olivier Letellier, director



Press review

La Terrasse, July, 2010 / Oh Boy! / By Agnès Santi

Above all, it's the story of a set of siblings: three orphans, Simeon (exceptionally gifted, 14, a senior in high school), Morgan (8, quiet and bright), and Venice (5, beautiful and adorable), discover their half-brother Balt, a carefree gay guy who isn't particularly ready to take responsibility for being their legal guardian, and their half-sister Josiane, a well-established ophthalmologist who'd like to have kids. The single actor on stage (Lionel Erdogan) plays Balt, sometimes serving as a narrator, sometimes as a character as childish as Simeon is mature, hiding traumatic childhood scars beneath his lightness, humor, and offhand manner. When Simeon is diagnosed with a severe illness, Balt slowly changes and stays by his side. The boy's recovery serves to heal the man, with the help of some final revelations about his past. The director Olivier Letellier stages this initiation tale, winner of the 2010 Molière for best play for young audiences, with intelligence and sensitivity, tackling the most serious subjects while managing to play them down, ultimately leaving us with a feeling of resilience based in tenderness and humor.

Le Point, November 4, 2010 / Oh boy! Run, don't walk! / By N. Van Egmond

Parents, children: hurry! Whatever you do, don't miss this gem, described as a play for kids (and awarded this year's Molière for best play for young audiences), but equally charming, enchanting, and moving for adults. A play that makes the tears flow then dries them out with a good joke. That shatters clichés and reunites a broken family through the journey of Balthasar Killchicken. An initiation tale, a tender coming-of-age story that tackles death, sickness, adoption, and the quest to find your roots, without once being moralistic. Balt, a free and easy gay man whose favorite exclamation is "Oh boy!" discovers at 26 that he has a family. Two half-sisters, a half-brother. A blonde doll of a five-year-old and two exceptionally gifted kids of 12 and 14. "How can I be a guardian and teach kids to grow up to be upstanding, when I'm so twisted?" Yet the four of them get used to each other and wind up getting attached. And all would be well that ends well, if Simeon didn't get diagnosed with leukemia... This stage adaptation of Marie-Aude Murail's prizewinning novel takes Balt's perspective. He serves as the narrator and recreates his entire world through a host of props. The happy siblings are represented by books of different sizes, drawings, a rubber duck. The high school mob? A little blackboard with Playmobil figures. Balt's cell phone? A Barbie doll. The nightclub where Balt goes to drown his sorrow? The theater plunged into darkness and lit by a single disco ball. The show is cleverly staged, subtly paced, and, especially, perfectly acted. With his striking, impish presence, the dynamic Lionel Erdogan gives the show its sparkle.

**Télérama Sortir / Cultural events for the week of November 3-9, 2011
Oh Boy! / By Françoise Sabatier-Morel**

Balt, a 26-year-old man, likes his somewhat frivolous, carefree life. One fine day, three kids barge into it. Balt's half-brother Simeon and half-sisters Morgan and Venice have been orphaned and need to find a new family: namely, him, Balthasar Killchicken. Catherine Verlaquet's adaptation of Marie-Aude Murail's great novel rises to the difficult challenge of structuring the narrative through the perspective of a single character, the story's narrator. He plays himself and the others, mimicking, playing with objects that represent the other protagonists. Her accomplished writing works well with Olivier Letellier's clear, flowing direction and actor Lionel Erdogan's performance. As the only actor on stage, Erdogan delivers a lively performance that gives this story dealing with difficult themes (death, illness...) the sensitivity and humor found in the book. A show not to be missed, which won the 2010 Molière for the best play for young audiences.

Aligre FM Radio / November 10, 2014 / Oh, Boy! / By Véronique Soulé

Unless I'm mistaken, this is the first time for Marie-Aude Murail, one of the most prolific authors of books for young readers, with 80 novels for children and teens, and one of the most acclaimed, with numerous literary awards: her novel for teens, *Oh, Boy!*, published in 2000, is now being staged. As is often the case with Murail, family and family relations are at the heart of the novel. Adults do not necessarily live up to their responsibilities, while the three children, two exceptionally gifted kids and a little cutie, have the persistence required to make them change their minds. For these three kids who have just lost their parents—three orphans—the priority is to continue living together. While Marie-Aude Murail doesn't avoid a few clichés and caricature, intentional or not, her lively writing, humorous tone, striking dialogue, and well-depicted portraits of each of the characters—children, social worker, half-brother, aunt, a judge at family court, the doctor etc.—make this 200-page novel a very enjoyable read.

But how can one adapt all the characters and events in this novel into a 60-minute play? Catherine Verlaquet, the author of the stage adaptation, has successfully maintained Marie-Aude Murail's imaginative style, while exclusively giving the floor to the children's half-brother Balthasar, a devil-may-care 26-year-old, saddled with unwanted new responsibilities from one day to the next. Balthasar—or rather, Lionel Erdogan—is alone on stage to recount this family saga, from his own perspective, telling of the happy episodes and the more difficult, even tragic ones, and especially his growing attachment to Simeon, the overly reasonable teen. He tells—and acts out—his own story, but also gives voice to his brothers and sisters, to the judge and the doctor, by using various objects and toy figures. Like the script, which is fluid, energetic, and maintains a steady rhythm, Lionel Erdogan's performance, as sensitive as it is kinetic, moves from seriousness to lightness, bringing out the tenderness and poetry in the story, to accompany Balthasar's journey to maturity. On stage, an imposing wardrobe is practically the only set piece but serves multiple functions, playing its part as, among other things, the repository of family secrets.

Directed by Olivier Letellier, who runs the theater company Le Théâtre du Phare, *Oh Boy!* is as moving for children as it is for adults.



THE COMPANY / THEATRE DU PHARE-OLIVIER LETELLIER

**Libération November 14, 2014 / Portrait: Olivier Letellier
Boy, boy, boy / By Frédérique Roussel**

If only Olivier Letellier had come across *Oh Boy!* as a child, he would have had a different outlook on life. But he was well past 35 when he opened this book with a cover that had earlier left him cold: a row of naked Barbies by a swimming pool. He was on a tour to a corporate holiday camp and found himself with some free time. Everything about the novel immediately enchanted him: the playful, cheerful tone, the way it dealt with sickness and a broken, blended family, the feeling of abandonment it described. He told himself he would have liked to have a big brother like Balt, the carefree 26-year-old gay man who is faced with the arrival of his three orphaned siblings. It was fate: Olivier Letellier would have to stage *Oh Boy!* some day.

At the time, the director was anxiously anticipating turning forty. Something about his life had to change. He decided to stage the show with the actor Lionel Erdogan. Bingo. It won the Molière for best play for young audiences in 2010. By late 2014, *Oh Boy!* had been performed 650 times.

In his Paris apartment in the 10th arrondissement, Letellier is affable, with a gentle gaze and voice. Without betraying any feeling, he goes over his life story. He often uses the expression "survival mode" to describe the hard times. On the table in the living room, a guidebook to New York. With his partner of three years, he is setting off for a friend's wedding on the other side of the Atlantic. Their return is scheduled for the opening of *Oh Boy!* at Chaillot on November 14.

Little Olivier spent his childhood on the banks of the Marne, in Champigny, in a mixed landscape of detached houses and low-income housing projects. He was five when his family moved nearby, to the café-restaurant his father, a butcher by trade, had bought as it was on the verge of

bankruptcy. A happy time, between the familiar ruckus of the foosball table and the noon rush. "I was kind of the mascot. I remember these big guys who would come in for a coffee or a drink. They would pass me around!" The business adjoined a movie theater. "My big brother and I saw King Kong there." On weekends, the brothers would visit their grandparents in the 13th arrondissement, where the Bibliothèque François-Mitterrand metro stop now stands. His maternal grandmother, a native of Brittany, was thick-skinned, impervious to feelings.

Olivier's mother fell ill: a brain tumor. He was only six and a half. "My father shifted into survival mode and continued running the café-restaurant without her." Ten long years passed as she wasted away. "At the end, she let herself die. I don't have many memories of her." The teenage Olivier spent his time at friends' houses, getting home as late as possible to escape an absent mother and an overwhelmed father. Olivier seemed like the ideal buddy, the kind who would chitchat with his friends' moms. Of his own mother, he has held on to a final memory.

On Mother's Day, he went to visit her at the hospital in Créteil. A hallway with cracked paint, a sinister room. "She was just skin and bones. I was seventeen. To me, she hadn't been there for a long time." His grandmother was unwell and unable to come to her daughter's funeral. The remote Breton matriarch's only comment was: "What will people think?"

Until he turned 25, Olivier continued to live at home in Champigny, with his father, who had gone back to being a butcher. Their relationship was wordless, devoid of communication. "Maybe that's why I gravitated toward words."

After the loss of the love of his life, Olivier's father set up house with a woman whose husband was a friend. Sickness and this void in his past inspired Olivier Letellier's most recent show, *Un chien dans la fête*, which he asked Stéphane Jaubertie to write from the perspective of a child, to show the shame felt by a little boy living in a house exuding disease. While his plays often echo his life experience, Letellier does not consider theater psychoanalysis. "I use my own story to put words on situations. Maybe *Oh Boy!* could have helped me accept my mother's sickness, when I was a kid." Avoiding pathos, his projects manage to find a delicate balance between harshness and humor, by mixing disciplines: storytelling, theater, video, puppets, circus...

Theater imposed itself naturally. While pursuing a degree in sales, then theater administration, Olivier Letellier created a theater workshop for preteens when he was twenty, in Champigny-sur-Marne. The Centre Jean Vilar, "an incredible place, with virtually professional facilities," became his home. It was also here that he spent his two years serving as a conscientious objector. Next, he trained at the Lecoq school: "That's where I was born." His first experience as an actor was in Alain Molloy's *Liliom*. He also worked using the Forum theater technique for social change. In 2000, while performing at the Maison du Conte, he had a revelation. "I discovered direct address, another relationship to space and to encountering the audience." Also at the Maison du Conte, he staged *L'Homme de Fer*, in which he directed himself in a play for young audiences adapted from a tale by the Brothers Grimm.

When he was at the Lecoq school, he had a Yugoslav friend who read palms. She did not read palms to see the future, but images. In Olivier Letellier's palm, she saw a lighthouse ("un phare"). It became the name of his company. A word that shows him the "light."

Contact

Alice BROYELLE
PRODUCER
T > + 33 (0)6 14 12 82 77
alice@heatreduphare.fr

Maëlle GRANGE
BOOKING AND COMPAGNY MANAGER
T > + 33 (0)6 61 98 21 82
maelle@heatreduphare.fr

THE COMPANY
Théâtre du Phare-Olivier Letellier
11 rue Fénelon 75010 Paris – France

www.theatreduphare.fr