

Art'Sign Presents

# The Open Couple

by Dario Fo and Franca Rame  
(Dramaturgie Publishing House)

Translation into French  
**VALERIA TASCA**

Visual adaptation  
**NOÉMIE CHURLET, ROB ROY FARMER  
ET CÉLINE RAMES**

Direction  
**CÉLINE RAMES**

Musical creation and interpretation  
**MAURO COCEANO**

Wardrobe mistress  
**FANNY ELOIR**

Choreography  
**YOANN ROBERT**

Lighting creation  
**NICOLAS DAMIEN**

Actors

**NOÉMIE CHURLET and ROB ROY FARMER**



# How Art'Sign discovered Dario Fo's and Franca Rame's theater

In July 2005, David de Keyser, who was in charge of the « Clin d'œil » Festival in Reims (deaf culture international meeting), gave Noémie Churlet a free hand and the possibility to present the creation of her choice. Noémie chose Waking Up by Dario Fo and Franca Rame, a monologue she had discovered shortly before.



***"It's the first book that made me laugh so much, knowing that the women's plights it brings up are still topical... I vowed to give a "visual" interpretation of that monologue to the deaf audience, because our community needs to develop culturally, to exchange and to gain access to knowledge..."***

A few months later, Noémie Churlet suggested to the director, Céline Rames, to attend a rehearsal of the work in progress. And this is how their collaboration began! They both knew that there would be many foreigners at the Reims festival, so one of their main preoccupations was to be understood by everybody. Therefore, they focused their work on an international sign language, more iconic and universal.

They also found in Dario Fo's and Franca Rame's writing a fabulous echo to their own research. In Can't pay? Won't pay!, a translation comment written by Valeria Tasca evoked this specificity:

***"Dario Fo uses all the possible dialectal variations, from Northern Italy essentially, and from Italian. It leads to a language different from that spread by the mass media; certainly a less national, but much more collective, language, because it reminds of the accent, the cheekiness and the verve of the people we can hear on the streets."***

Dario Fo's theater is inspired and improved by popular theater. Hence the prominence of the body in the writing; and in the acting, the use of a language more "collective" than academic language, the importance of the narrative and the function of the "actor-storyteller". For these authors, the sole purpose of writing is to put on paper the live experience of the bodies on stage.

Noémie and Céline's work exactly corresponds to this approach. It stems from the text to return to the body that initiated everything. The sign is not only a structural element of composition; its value lays in the space it occupies, in its rhythm and in its musicality! The sign aims to be a movement of the whole body; it serves emotion, broadens the metaphor and gives substance to it.

# Tracing the history of the project "Open Couple"



Céline Rames and Noémie Churlet met Rob Roy Farmer at the "Clin d'œil" Festival in 2005. This event gave them the opportunity to exchange their artistic conceptions and to launch the **Open Couple** project.

They met again a few months later to elaborate the project more in detail. A period of exploration followed: the members of the team took the time to discover each other. They organized workshops in France and worked on the adaptation of this comedy, which is based on the same approach as the one of **Waking Up**, i.e. a visual form accessible to everyone, without subtitles or interpretation.

That constraint of accessibility slowly revealed a style that intertwines different registers, such as mime, dance, clowning, storytelling, etc. And progressively the story took shape.

The team rapidly felt the need to collaborate with a musician, and even to have him on stage. The artistic approach which emerged had much in common with silent movies; thus, they naturally directed their research towards that direction. Their meeting with the pianist Mauro Coceano, a composer who works, among others, for silent movies, was going to be decisive for the continuation of the project.

***The musical score of "Open Couple" thus resorts to three different approaches which appear in turns and sometimes at the same time.***

***The first one is inspired by the cartoon style and has been purposely composed as a caricature, with exaggerated sound effects and unrealistic punctuations.***

***The second one is more "graphical" and plays with the movements of the actors and of the light.***

***The last one, contrasting with the first one, is centered on the characters' psychology. It creates a more inner acting, often minimalist.***

# A few words about the play and the authors



Written in the 80's, **Open Couple** is a caustic and furious comedy based on the theme of the couple. The eternal story of a couple already old... married for ten years. The man has gotten bored and multiplies conquests. His neglected wife vainly threatens to commit suicide. Then comes the day when their son advises her to take a lover. But the inconstant husband hates being a deceived husband!

Dario Fo was born in 1926 in San Giano, a village in Lombardy, by the Lake Maggiore, in a democratic and antifascist proletarian family. Quite young, he discovered the popular theater and the oral tradition, thanks to his grandfather, a well-known « fabulatore ».

In 1954, he married Franca Rame, the daughter of a famous family of popular actors, who soon became his inseparable partner. Together, they played traditional farces in their own way and wrote great comedies as *Open Couple* a play in which they denounced the institutions and the ruling classes, using a very imaginative style.

*Mistero buffo* (1969) and then *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1970) are certainly the most successful plays written by Dario Fo. In 1970, Fo broke up with the Communist Party and the couple founded a theater collective named "*La Commune*". After having occupied the Palazzino Liberty in Milano, Dario Fo finally obtained a theatre which he opened in 1974 with the performance of the famous play *Can't pay ? Won't pay !*

Dario Fo's anti-conformism as well as his political and social commitment led him to countless legal procedures and controversies in Italy, with the government, the police, the television, the Pope... He was often summoned in foreign countries to play and to stage theater or opera works, such as "*Le Médecin volant*" in 1991 and "*Le Médecin malgré lui*" (by Molière) at the Comédie Française. A distinguished unconventional artist, he received the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1997 for denouncing the political practices of his time and restoring the humbles' dignity, in the tradition of the medieval tumblers.

# Adaptation into a totally original language

For the adaptation of *Open Couple*, the Art'Sign Company chose a visual formulation accessible to everyone. The play was not translated into French Sign Language but into a visual language aiming at being universal. Taking this fact into account, it is interesting to note that Noémie Churlet and Rob Roy Farmer the actors come from two different countries: she is French and he is Australian. They did not have access to the same text at the beginning.

Originally, *Open Couple* was written in Italian. Rob Roy Farmer read the English translation of the play and Noémie Churlet the French one. These two translations are quite different, in terms of quantity and quality. In an ordinary context, this situation could be a problem, but in that case, this constraint was very rewarding. The necessary de-verbalization necessary to any good translation became here literally inescapable.

This was how we proceeded: after reading the play, comedians and director worked on the table. Each one gave a proper version of the text into sign language, as close to the original text as possible. We used a "word to sign" translation, in order to express an expression, a coinage, a stylistic device, etc. This way, everybody knew what the others had read and understood. Everybody could benefit from the respective qualities of each translation. Then, still in French Sign Language, each one of them supplied the main idea of the scene, a synthesis of the situation, and of the action. These information later nurtured in their minds and the comedians improvised on stage from that scene. In the days that followed, their proposal was enriched or refined, cleared from the specific official signs in order to head to more iconicity, to an imagery common for the greater majority.

Working on Franca Rame and Dario Fo's text to create a visual language emphasized the de-verbalization process, specific to any translation. Moreover, the point was not to "reformulate" what is said in an existing language but to create a new language and unknown signs; which the team did as they worked on releasing the original meaning wanted by the authors. Therefore, the comedians and the director spared a great time settling translation problems. It was not about translating a word by a sign or a comical expression, which would reduce the work to a simple mechanical and indigestible transcoding. The most important thing was to translate the authors' ideas, not only their words.

The team endeavored to produce a version that could have been produced by the authors themselves. That is why Art'Sign Company's work on *Open Couple* is much more a creation than an adaptation work.



# The team

## Noémie CHURLET

<http://www.noemiechurlet.com/>



Actress

Noémie started her actress training in 1999 at the Cours Florent.

She enriched this basis with several clown courses.

She had a part in *La sorcière égarée* written by Joël Chalude, *La vie ordinaire de...* directed by Chantal Liennel and *Le Petit Prince*, directed by Maria Fitz.

In 2005, she adapted and created **Le Réveil** by Dario Fo and Franca Rame.

She was also in several movies (TV and cinema): **Le bateau de mariage** by Jean-Pierre Améris, **Box** by Julien Cretin, **Projet Robinson** by Philippe Lepage.

Since 2000, she tells stories in French Sign Language (LSF)

for the oldest and the youngest. She also works as a presenter for **S'il te plaît, dis moi**, an audiovisual program created by Ludovic Guyonneau.

As a jazz pianist, accordionist and percussionist, he has written music for theater plays and silent movies : **La chute de la maison Usher**, **Metropolis**, **L'homme à la caméra** (quintet). He is also the author of the music written for *Le bonheur* de Alexandre Medvedkine (showed at the Forum des images in Paris and at the Festival d'Anères dedicated to silent movies and their specific music).

He also produces himself in solo, playing piano or accordion.

## Mauro COCEANO



Musician and composer

## Rob Roy FARMER

<http://www.robroyshow.com/>



Comedian

In 1998, Rob creates the **Rob Roy Show**. He presented his show all over the world : England, France, Italy, Uganda, Sweden, United States, Albania, Wales, Cambodia, Germany, Scotland, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, Holland, Spain, Japan, Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Ireland, Belgium, Slovakia, and Australia.

These last few years, Rob Roy succeeded to promote his own visual theatre.

He has also organized workshops in Uganda, Cambodia, at the Victoria College for the Deaf in Melbourne and at the Western Australia Deaf Kids Theatre in Perth, Australia.

In 2002, in Washington, in the **Deaf Way** international colloquium,

Rob played in front of an audience of 9000.

He has presented his show more than 120 times, in 25 different countries.

She began in 1994 as an assistant director on plays for children. In 1997, she directed a show based on old French songs, **La Parisienne**, presented during one month in Jerusalem. In 1999, she began to work on a new creation, **Douce Amère**. This visual and musical show encountered great success in 2005, at the **Lives Art** festival of Philadelphia, United States.

In 1996, she discovered the sign language.

This discovery soon had a great influence on her work.

She decided to pursue her work on a language more and more visual, addressed to a larger audience that brings together deaf and hearing people.

## Céline RAMES



Director

# Technical requirements

**Running time:** 1 hour

**Staging:** one day (light and rehearsal)

**Settings:** 3 hours

**Fittings:** 2 hours

## On tour :

**The team :** 4 people

**2 comédiens :** Noémie Churlet, Rob Roy Farmer

**1 musician :** Mauro Coceano

**Director :** Céline Rames

## Home team

The organizer must provide 1 manager / light technician for setting, adjustment and driving light.

If necessary, the company may call a technician, but the budget will then be reassessed.

## The stage area :

**Minimu size :** 10 m openin  
7 m depth  
6 m poles in

## Plateau :

Black leg cloth or bare walls

4 leg clothes on the sides (corridor and garden)

They are necessary to allow the play off stage and the various costume changes

## Room :

Ideal conditions to be met for visibility :

- Dark or black
- Benches

## Dressing room :

- Minimum 2 boxes with mirror
- Supply of bottled water

## Sets :

To be provided by the hosting place. If this is not possible, please note that transportation costs will be added

- Table (1m20 (L) - 80 cm (l) / 70 - 80 cm tall)
- 4 chairs
- 1 coat

## Light :

Projectors :

- 9 cuts
- 1 cutting 1KW
- 18 PC
- 17 PAR 64 with 8 CP 62, 3 CP 61 and 6 CP60

## Filters :

Gélatin : n°119, 195, 201, 202, 203, 204, 206  
(The fire plan, the list of memory contents and fires is available on request)

## Sound :

*In France :* the musician brings his equipment, please only provide defray costs for transportation equipment depending on type of transport.

*Overseas/Abroad:*

• **A digital stage piano : Roland RD 700**

• **ROLAND KC350 KEYBOARD amp combo**

HP 30 cm et moteur de trompe, puissance de sortie 120 W  
Process mix four stereo channels

Two pairs of stereo inputs: microphone, input monitor input / output connection stereo

Dimensions : 490 (L) x 385 (P) x 470 (H) mm

Weight : 17.5 kg

• **Stand pro universel Piano Ref : PT**

said "Table leg" adjustable height and width and very stable to play the piano, completely foldable for easy transport.

Good crossing legs

Adjustable stand :

Sun : 73/107 cm (L) x 67/80 cm (H) x 32 cm (P)

## Financial terms

### Cost of show :

Please contact Art'Sign - Estimate on request.  
Discount from 3 performances.-

### Ancillary expenses borne by the organizer :

- The copyright
- Travel expenses from Paris.
- Meals and accommodation if necessary

## **Contacts**

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