Cry me a river

A journey towards the wisdom of Karelian mourners

(Working title)

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Director Sanja Kosonen

PROMO PACK
« There, the forest is soothing and reassuring. There on the moss, I indulge myself and let nature engulf me, support and listen to me. There, I weep. »

« One by one, the characters appear on stage for an act of redemption. Their bodies are their expression, their breath, their voice and their movements. Crying is purifying oneself, taking one’s mask off, denuding oneself. ».
In Karelia, the country of my forebears, women traditionally knew how to weep. They practised these improvised chants on their own, in the forest, letting go of their emotions, to heal themselves. The poetical power of words associated with a distinctive rhythm and a crying melody provided an atmosphere for abandonment. During rites of passage (funerals/weddings), professional mourners used to accompany the participants and help them cry. This universal rite existed throughout the world but has almost disappeared in the Western countries.

In 2007, in Finland, I participated in a workshop on «crying chants» organised by a group of contemporary singers whose aim is to revive and reinvent this forgotten tradition. Since then, I have integrated to some degree this ancient wisdom.

I am struck by the fact that our «modern» societies seem to have forgotten about rituals of shared emotions. Revealing emotions in public is considered a sign of weakness. At the same time, people are eager to witness and feel the humanity of others but in contemporary society it’s through reality shows and series that we look for «genuine tears». We feel the need for such moments of purification but we have lost the ways of letting go of our emotions.

«Crying» in this tradition means «singing». In my point of view, «singing» involves the voice as much as the body. «Crying» is not «lamenting» either. It is an act of abandonment leading to renewal. Purifying oneself for rebirth.

This performance proceeds from a necessity to share my artistic universe. The concept of crying guides me as much towards the river deep inside the human being as it evokes the absurdity and awkwardness demonstrated when dealing with private emotions. I regard the mourner as the antithesis of a clown, an anti-clown in a way.

After crying, laughing erupts.

Sanja Kosonen
WHY CRY?

Crying is characteristic of and exclusive to the human being. Pretending to laugh is relatively easy but it seems we need to appeal to our emotions, even artificially in order to generate «false tears». Crying is necessarily associated with strong feelings, positive or negative.

«Cry Me A River» questions the process of crying. How and why do we cry? Why do we feel better after crying? Why do we feel ashamed of crying in public? We are deeply moved by someone crying. On top of that, it is the first sound we produce after birth, the sound of survival, full of power.

When dealing with strong feelings, we are overwhelmed by tears without being able to control them. In a society where people want to control everything, crying is considered a weakness. Crying is often associated to a negative femininity. «Real men don’t cry!». Or used to infantilise: «Don't cry, stop behaving like a baby». We are taught to hold back our tears and emotions, despite the fact that they are fundamental to the human species.

The tradition of the mourners offers a different aspect to the act of crying. Rather than being condemned, it is encouraged and stimulated in order to maintain a society or a person’s stability. The mourners believe that retaining one’s emotions causes sickness invoking the symbol of peeling an onion. Crying allows the shedding of the emotions that we keep inside ourselves, layer by layer, on the road to recovery.

Crying is stripping ourselves emotionally The performance explores this nudity, layer by layer.

If the clown’s role is to make his public laugh, the mourner’s is to make them cry. The social function of both professions is very similar: they produce the same effects in terms of benefit, relief and relaxation. A fit of laughter draws tears and can sometimes make you cry. Likewise, after crying, laughing can easily erupt. Why are the mourners disappearing while «one-man shows» achieve great success?

This performance deals with the connections that exist between different emotional levels (cries and laughter) and how we can instigate feelings in ourselves and others.
« Cry Me A River » is a multidisciplinary performance involving various unique artists and creators. The spectators embark on a journey in search of the inner rivers from which laughter and tears emerge. A combination of dancing, singing, circus and fine arts, the performance intertwines solos and collective tableaux in a choreography tending progressively towards the stark and unadorned with the final scene composed of a single individual, pure, as a tear.
POTENTIAL LEADS

Private and collective weeping as a starting point for a multi-layered playwrighting

The creative process will be based on the improvisations that will take place during the R&D period. We will focus on solo performances and collective scenes. Each artist, an expert in his/her discipline, will create his/her own «wail» with its specific language. During the periods of collective creation, the artists will be invited to share and explore different techniques based on voice and movement as well as each other’s disciplines, ultimately creating a collective language and music. Working on each performer’s strengths and weaknesses, expressiveness and intense sensibility will prevail over style and aesthetics. These improvisations will be the ground material for a choreographic and dramatic composition comprising multiple layers of sound recordings, images and movement. This will define a frame from which the artists will be able to give free reign to improvisation as in Karelian mourning.

Our aim is to re(invent) a singular approach for the production of the performance, borrowing from circus and dance traditions. Our specificity is to create a flexible and versatile script that will allow the substitution of artists from one performance to another. The purpose is not to have understudies but for each artist to create his/her own role, the collective parts being assimilated by all. This versatility will allow the performance to be pliable and constantly innovative. Thus, the audience will see a different show each time. Taking into consideration the reality of the artist’s life and the difficulty of organising their respective agendas, the substitution of the artists will facilitate touring.

Choreography, sound recording and voices as shared languages

Our collaboration with Belgian choreographer Iris Bouche will allow artists with all their physical diversities and different qualities of movement to investigate corporal improvisation. Iris’s experience of «inclusive dance» with disabled people makes her particularly relevant to work with all types of physiques. This method accentuates the concept of the group and the collective unit while rendering each individual his/her singularity within the group. The main language used in the performance is that of movement. The circus arts pursue the quest for the extreme gesture in order to convey intense emotions. The spectacular circus prowess are designed more as a basis of an artistic language than to demonstrate a superhuman talent. During the R&D period, every member in the team will have the opportunity to explore various dancing techniques such as contact dancing, butoh and the art of performing. The voice and singing form the primary material for the Karelian mourners. From a simple, sometimes dissonant melody, they were able to improvise a song whilst taking into account the context, the group and the historical background. They could also induce a trance in a group. Violaine Lochu’s voice and vocal experiments tally with the image one could have of a contemporary mourner. Each member of the team will participate in the working sessions dedicated to the voice in order to hear each personal voice: a song, a breath, a text, a word, a cry, a fit of laughter... The voices and sounds on stage will blend with the music and these layers of sonority will be composed, remixed and re-edited by our sound designer, Sami Tammela.
POTENTIAL LEADS

A stage design opposing organic and industrial materials

The set is comprised of translucid curtains and tulle, a tightwire and an aerial installation made of pebbles. The curtains composed of different types of material will be rigged to the pipes and will create a myriad of versatile spaces in the stage’s depth. These curtains will also be used as a support for the screenings of artist and video maker Muriel Carpentier. Present on stage, she will explore various screening techniques involving videos, drawings and the injection of pigments in water thus creating an evolving visual universe in interaction with the other artists. In accordance with the lighting design, the visual installation will create adjustable spaces on stage toying with the idea of appearance/ transparency. The uncluttered, intimate and minimalist atmosphere of the setting will give prominence to the artists and allow the spectator to project his own imagination.

The use of every dimension on stage is made possible through aerial circus artists (sky), a tightrope dancer (intermediate zone) and dancers/clowns/jugglers (ground). The suspended pebble installation emphasises this 3D effect. As part of the installation, the pebbles also serve as circus apparatus. Suspended from ropes or in equilibrium, these pebbles will enable us to work on the movement, balance and weight. Stones symbolised sacred places and also talismans for the mourners. The pebbles on stage will serve as a tangible guiding thread, a link between the characters.
POTENTIAL LEADS

Both the setting and the costumes are composed of natural and industrial elements that establish a dialogue or a confrontation. As from the first experimentations, we will look into the use of several materials and objects: from the organic (water, wood, stones/pebbles, clay) to everyday objects (food, a hairdryer, a skateboard, music instruments) and voluminous costumes/circus apparatus/set design. By doing so, we aim at questioning the contrast that exists between a natural, mineral environment and modern everyday costumes, festivities or accessories.

Research sketches/soil dress
Sanja Kosonen // Tightrope dancer, circus artist

After studying circus arts in Finland (Arts Academy of Turku) and France (National Center of Circus Arts (CNAC) in Châlons-en-Champagne 2005), Sanja collaborated with several companies as a tightrope dancer. She has been living in Brittany for ten years but she is strongly attached to Finland and returns there regularly to work.

She uses the tightrope as a way of expressing herself. Whilst in balance, she experiments her dance steps, pushing herself further towards the limits of gravity.

Following her collaboration with Finnish company Circo Aereo in “Louisiana Circus” (2005), she joined the company Les Colporteurs in the productions “Le fil sous la neige” that toured around the world from 2006 to 2017. She also participated as a performer and choreographer in the creation of two small pieces designed for the outdoor “Les Etoiles” (2007) and “Sur la route” (2009) with Antoine Rigot.

In 2012, Sanja took part with six other Finnish female artists in a collective creation “Mad In Finland”. Originally a one-shot production, it has been touring in auditoriums as well as with Galapiat Cirque’s big top since. In 2013, she created and performed in «Capilotractées», a hair hanging duo with Elice Abonce Muhonen. The production has been touring in France and overseas since.

2016 marked her first collaboration with the National Opera of Finland where she performed as a tightrope dancer in «Circ’Opera». It was also her first long-distance crossing on a 100m-long wire, 5 meters above a Lapland river during the «Silence Festival».

She is currently working on a new production called «Lahde», a high-wire solo performance which will premiere in June 2018 in Finland. After such diversified and rich scenic experiences, Sanja would now like to develop her own project as a director, something she has aspired to for a long time.
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PROJECT INITIATRESSES

L'Avant Courrier – executive production

L’Avant Courrier is an organisation that provides back-up, production and touring management in the field of contemporary circus. It was founded in Nantes (France) in January 2014. They currently support a dozen artistic projects in terms of production and/or touring management but they also operate on a more punctual basis (vocational training, short-term missions, punctual advice).

L'Avant Courrier perceives itself as a close partner of the artistic teams in the creation and implementation of their productions, taking into consideration their individual needs and concerns. Each collaboration is thus unique. At present, they support Galapiat cirque’s productions (Mad in Finland, Capilotractées, Marathon, Blanc), Porte 27 (Chute !), Groupe Bekkrell (Effet Bekkrell, Titre Indéfini), la Contrebande (Bal Trap, Willy Wolf), Pauline Dau (Vanités) and Sanja Kosonen.

The organization also acts on a local level and organizes a festival called l’Avant Curieux (launched in 2017) as well as access and outreach programmes.
The artistic team is composed of female and male circus artists, dancers, a singer and a plastic artist who share a strong presence on stage and a flawless expertise of their discipline. The performance gives prominence to each artist’s personal voice, its physical and acoustic dimension. This intimacy which makes us one and all unique and united.
ARTISTIC AND PRODUCTION TEAM (IN PROGRESS)

Sanja Kosonen (Finland / France) : tightrope dancer

Sampo Kurppa, (Finland) : clown and juggler
After studying circus at the Arts Academy of Turku (Finland), Sampo specialises in physical expression at the Jacques Lecoq International School of Theatre in Paris. He is a member of the collectives Agit Cirk (circus and music) and Kallo Collective (physical theatre and clown).

Nedjma Benchaib (France) : dancer and acrobat
Having studied at the Ecole Nationale des Arts du Cirque de Rosny-sous-Bois (ENACR) and at the Centre National des Arts du Cirque (CNAC) in Châlons en Champagne and specialised in acro-dance and Chinese pole, Nedjma has a passion for hip hop and contemporary dancing, singing and writing. She loves exploring ways of mixing disciplines. Nedjma works as a performer, dancer, choreographer, singer and as an author with various artists and companies. She also leads research labs dealing with circus ground acrobatics and dance.

Sakari Männistö (Finland) : juggler
Having grown up in a circus environment, Sakari started juggling and creating his own shows at 13. He learned with masters such as Arcadi Poupon, Maksim Komaro, Denis Paumier and Jay Gilligan. He collaborates as a performer or a director with many companies (among which Agit-Cirk, Circo Aereo and Gandini Juggling), touring around the world.
Meanwhile, he has also led masterclasses and organised the Silence Festival in Lapland since 2006 (since 2017, the festival has also taken place in London).
ARTISTIC AND PRODUCTION TEAM (IN PROGRESS)

Gabriela Munoz (Mexico) : clown
Gabriela studied at the London International School of Performing Arts (LISPA), a training based on Jacques Lecoq’s teaching methods and then at the School of Physical Theatre. Since 2011, she has joined Clowns Without Borders USA and has led numerous Masterclasses around the world. She also produced two solo performances «Perhaps Perhaps Quizas» (2010) and «Limbo» (2015), which she presented in Avignon in 2016.

Violaine Lochu (France) : singer
Violaine Lochu’s field of exploration focuses on language and voice. Her performances, videos, radio pieces, are a mix of her own vocal experimentations with a free interpretation of various written or oral traditions, theoretical reflections and acoustic recordings which she collects during the many encounters she makes through her work. A graduate of the ENSAPC (Ecole nationale supérieure d’art de Paris Cergy) and a fine arts master’s degree (université Rennes 2), she exhibits and performs in France and abroad.

Muriel Carpentier (France) : set designer, plastic artist, video maker.
Trained at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Arts in Dijon, she works on her own projects or together with other artists (Mulupam, A4Designers, CMS Company, Kino Moutarde, Ces Messieurs Serieux among others) juggling with drawings, photographs, videos, installation art, performances and set designs. She set up a solo exhibition called «Abysses» in 2017 at the ABC gallery in Dijon and produced «Mrs Wolf», a visual and acoustic performance with Marion Boisard in 2018.

Jérémie Bruyère (France) : stage manager, light technician
A Technician, manager, builder, jack of all trades, cook...with Galapiat Cirque, Makadam Kanibal, Les Trottoirs du Hasard and Cirque des Oiseaux Fous among others. Since 2012, he has been working as the production manager of the show «Capilotractees».

We are currently looking for an aerial circus artist
ARTISTIC COLLABORATIONS

Iris Bouche (Belgium) : choreographer
Iris trained at the Royal Institute for Ballet in Antwerp, then at the New York Alvin Ailey Dance Center (summer programme) and at the Rudra Béjart School Lausanne. In 1995, she began an apprenticeship at The Rosas company – Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and toured with several productions (Woud, Just Before, I Said I, Drumming, Achterland and In Real Time). Since 2001, she has worked with many different artists, including Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (Myth, Olympique Dramatique Adams Appels) and Les Colporteurs (Sur la Route...). At the same time, she has carried on her own experimentations and created a dozen choreographic pieces, films, etc. From 2011 to 2016 she worked as the artistic director of the department of contemporary dance at the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp / AP University College. She has also set up several «inclusive dance» projects involving persons with reduced mobility.

Sami Tammela (Finland) : sound designer
Sami became a technician, sound engineer and designer in 2009. He works on studio recording for various Finnish groups but he also operates in the field of performing arts by designing soundtracks or by creating live music. Since 2013, he has been collaborating with Race Horse Company, Circo Aereo or Rauli Kosonen. At the same time, he is studying for a master’s degree «Sound in new media» at the university of Aalto (Finland).

Costume designer (in progress)
Lighting designer (in progress)
TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Multidisciplinary performance (circus-dance-singing-fine arts) designed for auditoriums in an end-on configuration. 6 performers on stage

Required stage dimensions (TBC): 14m x 12 m x 6 m
Set up: approx. 1 day

Suitable for an audience of approx. 900 pax
Duration: 70 min
From 10 years on

SCHEDULE

The rehearsal period will be split into two distinct phases.
Two R&D periods focused on improvisation will take place in 2019 involving several artists. These will aim at exploring working methods and determining the production’s final team. Rehearsals will then take place during a relatively short period of time.

R&D periods 2019

February, 10 days in Cirko, Helsinki, Finland
September, 10 days in CCN2 - centre chorégraphique national de Grenoble, France

Rehearsals 2020

February-March: 2 weeks
May-June: 3 weeks
June-July: Tech week
October: 3 weeks rehearsal and premiere in Cirque Theatre Elbeuf, France.

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