

Bourse d'accompagnement
pour metteur en scène
emergent
BOURSE FOCUNA

Théâtre

Lauréate 2020

Sally Merres

Jury

Simone Beck
Laura Graser
Laure Roldàn



FONDS
CULTUREL
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BIOGRAPHIE

Sally Merres

After finishing her literary and linguistic studies at the University of Cologne in 2016, Sally Merres began an internship at the *Théâtre National du Luxembourg*, where she mainly worked as an assistant director. After her 11-month stay, she continued to assist several national, as well as international directors, such as Myriam Muller (*Rumpelstilzchen*, *Breaking the Waves*), Frank Hoffmann (*De Schéine Männchen*, *Rausch*), Pol Cruchten (*Vor dem Ruhestand*), Claude Frisoni (*Où on va, Papa?*), Marion Poppenborg (*Heimat ist kein Ort*) and Max Claessen (*Versetzung*). She has also been an artistic collaborator for Anne Simon's street performance *Anxiety*. In 2019 she travelled abroad to assist Berlin-based director Milena Paulovics in her adaption of

Shakespeare in Love at the annual open air theatre *Burgfestspiele Bad Vilbel* in Germany. Later that year, she made her directorial debut with *Every Brilliant Thing* by Duncan Macmillan, starring Isaac Bush. The play was produced by the Luxembourgish theatre collective *Volleksbühn* and was performed at an abandoned mansion in Luxembourg city. In 2020, the *Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg* and the *Kinneksbond Mamer* made a call for projects and her project (*Cant'*) *stay at home* that she developed with two other friends was selected by the jury and is set to be performed in January 2021. Sally Merres is also a part of the Luxembourgish theatre collective *Independent Little Lies*.



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FLIGHT 49

Flight 49, a creation by Australian director Simon Stone, is inspired by the Dutch theatre classic *The good hope/ Op hoop van zegen* by Herman Heijermans from 1900. “(The good hope) is seen primarily by many as an indictment of a society in which the cold profit principle leads to deaths of many people. An early 20th-century fishing village hands over its fathers and sons to the reckless practices of a money-hungry shipowner who is not so keen on boat safety regulations. The play is also a beautiful portrait of a community that has learned to live with the sacrifices and loss of life and conforms to the will of God.

Simon Stone creates a radical adaptation. In the arrival hall of an airport, relatives and friends wait for the return of their loved ones as the plane disappears from the radar. Surrendered to the scraps of information from the authorities and the internet, they await the confirmation of their worst nightmare. Desperation and anger take hold of them.”

Produced by the International Theater Amsterdam and co-produced by TheSingel and Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, *Flight 49* premiered in Amsterdam in September 2020 and is performed in Luxembourg in February 2021.



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RAPPORT D'UTILISATION



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Flight 49 at the Internationaal Theater Amsterdam

My time in Amsterdam has come to an end and as I am writing this, I have mixed feelings about how this whole experience went. I will try to be as concise and comprehensive as possible, but I am also still digesting and processing the time I've spent here.

To start at the very beginning, I was supposed to start rehearsing in March, the 23rd to be exact. Obviously, when I applied for the bourse d'accompagnement, no one knew how bad the Covid-19 situation would get and that it would bring the whole world to a standstill and hit the economy hard, especially the cultural domain. Because of everything that was happening in the world, our production got pushed back until further notice. They were trying to figure out new rehearsal dates (which was really complicated and they ended up changing the dates several times) that enabled everyone to still participate in the project. After a lot of hassle, they split up the rehearsals, meaning we rehearsed for roughly two weeks in May/June and then 4 weeks from August until September.

I was really lucky that I knew someone in Amsterdam whom I could stay with, otherwise I would have never been able to a) afford staying here for so long and b) find something so short notice. (They told me we were starting rehearsals one day before the actual rehearsal). The first block of rehearsals also changed slightly so I had to cancel my train back to Luxembourg and book a new one.

Finally, they changed the date of the premiere 6 days before the actual premiere. One of the actors called in sick and they had to find a replacement. They ended up pushing the premiere for another 2 days, which meant that I could not even attend it, because I needed to be back in Luxembourg for the week-end...

Oh, I also forgot to mention that the play's title changed from *The Good Hope* to *Flight 49*, simply because the text was supposed to be based on Herman Heijermans' *Op Hoop van Zegen* but Simon ended up writing something that was so far off the original play that he decided to change the title.

RAPPORT D'UTILISATION

Concerning the whole rehearsal process, it was definitely a very interesting time, to say the least! It was also very intense – obviously, the conditions due to the sanitary crisis in which we had to work in were not the best, but we still tried to make the best of it and we were able to make it work. However, starting off text rehearsals with Zoom meetings, breaking up the rehearsal schedule and “exposing” our team to the danger of the virus, made it not the best and easiest situation to work in.

Since I was approached by the Grand Théâtre to assist this production, I did not know at first that the ITA already had an assistant (who works there full-time). This put me off at first, because I had some bad experiences with being 2 assistants for one production. Luckily, the assistant on this project was super nice and we tried to divide the tasks between us, so that I still had some work to do. We decided that I was writing down all the cues (technical cues and stage cues) and that he would be more in contact with the production office and the technical team (which was an obvious choice since he already knew everybody). Unfortunately, the language was kind of an issue (which I was concerned with at first, but then brushed it off because the director was Australian and we rehearsed in English), but it turned out that the actors or the



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whole team went straight back to Dutch whenever they could (which is totally understandable!) but it did put a barrier between me and the rest of the team, which only seemed to break at the very end of the play (like in the last few days). In addition to this, the director was not really acknowledging me as an assistant. He always only referred, spoke or asked the other assistant when he wanted or needed anything, which again, made me feel like I was not really a part of the team. However! I don't want to sound ungrateful or making it sound like everything was negative because it was not. Firstly, I want to say that it is so important that institutions like the Focuna exist and that there is a need and a desire to provide culture and give people the chance to participate in something they would not have the means to otherwise. Secondly, if you decide to go abroad and work with a “new” team, there will always be the possibility of it not working out the way you might have hoped for. Nevertheless, the whole production team (especially Renee Roetman) and the technical team, as well as, of course Daan, the assistant, were all super nice and they did everything to make me feel like I was needed and that I was part of the team. So I just want to give huge credit to them for putting in so much effort!

RAPPORT D'UTILISATION



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I can also say that I have definitely learnt a lot from this production, mostly from a directing point of view (which is great because that is what I strive to be! :-)). Simon has a very unique way of directing – he has a very clear vision of what he wants, not only from the actors but also from an aesthetical point of view (camera, stage, costumes etc.). It was definitely inspiring to see how much theatre can do with an empty space, great dialogue and actors. He is able to distract the essence from both, what he writes and how to get that out of the actor and onto the stage. He has such a brilliant understanding of what theatre can do, how it can be used to really touch people and doing all of this is such a natural and authentic way. It was fascinating to see how “little” actors have to do in order to convey a certain emotion. Sometimes and in this case, a lot of the time, less is more! :-). Obviously, this production worked a lot with video footage and live camera, this helps a lot with creating certain atmospheres and situations that would not have been possible without and takes the

play to another level. Even when it came to these video shots and live camera moments, Simon knew exactly how we wanted each shot to look, how the camera should move around the actor, how close or far the shot should be, what frame should be used, what lens etc. Like I have said before, a director that has such a clear vision makes the process very enjoyable because you know what you are working towards and the actors have clear “guidelines”. In the same breath, it can also feel controlling at times. For example, Simon never really asked anyone about what they thought about a certain scene or a rehearsal in general. Since he knows what he wants, he does not need to get “help” from anyone, which also makes it that the assistant is really just a “behind the scenes” assistant and is not at all implied in the creative process of the play. Some people might like that and appreciate the fact that they do not need to provide any creativity, but I guess that if you want to become a director yourself, you would appreciate being implied in the creative process!



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