

**CHRISTOPH MARTHALER
ET ENSEMBLE**

The Summit

2025 Creation

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2025 Creation

Director

Christoph Marthaler

Cast

Liliana Benini
Charlotte Clamens
Raphael Clamer
Federica Fracassi
Lukas Metzenbauer
Graham F. Valentine

Dramaturg

Malte Ubenauf

Dramaturgical collaborator

Éric Vautrin

Scenographer

Duri Bischoff

Costumes

Sara Kittelmann

Director's assistant

Giulia Rumasuglia

Production

Tristan Pannatier

Production

Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne
Piccolo Teatro di Milano -
Teatro d'Europa
MC93 - Maison de la culture
de Seine-Saint-Denis

Coproduction

Festival d'Automne à Paris
Bonlieu Scène nationale
Annecy
Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen
Les Théâtres de la Ville
de Luxembourg
Malraux scène nationale
Chambéry Savoie
Les 2 Scènes, Scène nationale
de Besançon
(in progress)

At first all the arrangements for building the Tower of Babel were characterized by fairly good order; indeed the order was perhaps too perfect, too much thought was taken for guides, interpreters, accommodation for the workmen, and roads of communication, as if there were centuries before one to do the work in. In fact the general opinion at that time was that one simply could not build too slowly; a very little insistence on this would have sufficed to make one hesitate to lay the foundations at all.

People argued in this way: The essential thing in the whole business is the idea of building a tower that will reach to heaven. In comparison with that idea everything else is secondary. The idea, once seized in its magnitude, can never vanish again; so long as there are men on the earth there will be also the irresistible desire to complete the building. That being so, however, one need have no anxiety about the future; on the contrary, human knowledge is increasing, the art of building has made progress and will make further progress, a piece of work which takes us a year may perhaps be done in half the time in another hundred years, and better done, too, more enduringly. So why exert oneself to the extreme limit of one's present powers? (...)

Such thoughts paralyzed people's powers, and so they troubled less about the tower than the construction of a city for the workmen. Every nationality wanted the finest quarters for itself, and this gave rise to disputes, which developed into bloody conflicts.

These conflicts never came to an end; to the leaders they were a new proof that, in the absence of the necessary unity, the building of the tower must be done very slowly, or indeed preferably postponed until universal peace was declared. But the time was spent not only in conflict; the town was embellished in the intervals, and this unfortunately enough evoked fresh envy and fresh conflict. (...) To this must be added that the second or third generation had already recognized the senselessness of building a heaven-reaching tower; but by that time everybody was too deeply involved to leave the city. (...)

Franz Kafka, 1920

Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir

Every year, before delegations and their entourages travel to a summit, countless questions have to be answered: Who is to meet whom (and when), and what particular issues need to be addressed? And in what language? If most of the summit participants are fluent in Italian, their command of French may be only approximate, and their command of English and German almost non-existent. For others, the opposite might be true. Caution is therefore the order of the day! A moment's inattention and you could find yourself on a patch of ice, risking a fall with serious consequences. Preparing for a summit is an art in itself, a balancing act, a climb without ropes. For such undertakings, you need summit experts. Six hand-picked people climb the steep paths to the site and assess the situation beforehand. These six specialists have been to the summit many times. Without any special equipment. And no one knows the secret to their success. At least not officially.

The Swiss director Christoph Marthaler is devising a new multilingual show, together with his associates Duri Bischoff as set designer and Malte Ubenauf as dramaturg. It will be a summit meeting between six actors from at least three countries, who will from time to time utter phrases that could well have been written by Franz Kafka. But perhaps they have been devised by highly paid ghostwriters who know exactly which word is most appropriate at which moment. We can only guess. Or trust. Or turn around long before we reach the top, and begin the descent step by step.

MALTE UBENAUF

*I do nothing
 there is nothing to do
 there is nothing to do today
 it's difficult to keep
 it's difficult to hold that
 that there's nothing to do
 that nothing comes to my aid
 nothing that comes to help me
 there is absolutely nothing coming to help me
 the thing is I do absolutely nothing
 because, there is absolutely nothing to do
 I have to resist
 I have to resist everything
 anything that wants me to do something
 because there's absolutely nothing
 so I must do nothing
 I know it's a particularly important and opportune moment
 it's a moment, it's a moment on which all past events depend
 and all the future events
 it's from that moment
 that moment where nothing happens
 that everything will happen
 that everything will happen in the future and that everything will happen in the past
 it's a moment where I must
 where I must do nothing
 it's a moment where I must do nothing
 it's a moment where, if there's nothing to do, then I must do nothing
 logically, if I've worked it out correctly, something happens every day
 but, but, I can't wait for something to happen today
 I won't wait because
 because it's not a given
 it's not a given that something will happen every day
 it's not a given!
 we're not sure about that
 we can't wait while being certain of that,
 that something will happen today
 it's really not a given that something will happen today
 so, there's no point in waiting for it
 so, I won't wait for that
 I am not waiting for something to happen
 nothing is happening
 and I do nothing
 and I do nothing because, if something must happen,
 something will happen
 but something can happen only if I do nothing
 only if I wait
 I won't wait for the thoughts to come
 the ideas, the thoughts, they come only when they want to*

In this new play, Christoph Marthaler himself has not escaped his subject: making together. Clearly, this has always been a more or less underlying or explicit theme in his shows: watching human beings organise themselves, for better or for worse, while the back (the past) provides only minimal or even burdensome energy, and the front (the future) holds little attraction, because perspectives are lacking. Neither convincing progress nor decisive revolution; neither restful continuity nor obvious disruption. The protagonists have to make do with what they have in an empty present, and they reveal themselves as they are: quirky and tender, melancholy and cruel.

In French, English, German and Italian, the word “summit” refers to an important meeting and a peak. It’s an organisation as much as a goal. When you’re at the summit, there’s nothing better: it’s the highest, the furthest, the most prominent. But at the summit, there’s nothing. At the summit there are discussions, but everything has already been discussed. At the summit you can see far ahead, beyond a time that does not yet exist, but above all you see the summit itself.

At this new *Summit*, the performers – actors and translators alike – come from different European countries and cultures and speak different languages: French, Italian, German, and no doubt a little English. As a result, it’s not entirely certain that they will understand each other.

This political and cultural meeting is as much a reflection of Switzerland, the director’s country, as it is of Europe. *The Summit* is not really the story, or even the image, of these political organisations, but that’s where this play is rooted. *The Summit* is not an observation, but a possible form of our present, of our times: when we have to find unity or common ground in the greatest diversity, when we no longer know what lies between stubborn authoritarianism and radical relativism.

Then we may discover that human beings are linked in other ways. It is possible that this can only be seen in the silences and sometimes the melodies, that it can be heard in the missing words, more than in the words spoken.

Europe is a waking dream and an invigorating reality, an evolving power and a regulated administration. Europe is certainly at the summit, but at the summit there is nothing left but the sky. Europe is a way of doing things together that belongs to our time, and it is also a Tower of Babel. As Kafka wrote, it may seem dubious to build it when, of course, subsequent generations will do it better and faster. But in the process, we squabble in the downtime. A summit is an opportunity to clear the air.

For this show, in order to *make together*, all the elements are being prepared together - more than ever before. The cast, the set design, the body of texts and the musical repertoire are all progressing together, not separately. If one element evolves, the others all move with it.

It's not just a working method, it's the subject of the show.

There will be driving forces that have been part of the history of Christoph Marthaler's theatre for a long time, as well as new arrivals. Some of the performers have worked with him for several decades, others are recent encounters. There will be literary texts, ranging from stories by the Austro-Hungarian Franz Kafka to contemporary poetry by the French writer Christophe Tarkos, from short stories by the German Arno Schmidt to meditations by the Italian Claudio Magris, as well as speeches from the European Parliament and suggestions by the performers.

What is it that binds together the disparate, how do differences come together when the blueprints are missing? This is what the creative process provides an opportunity to observe, and what the play will showcase.



Photo credits : proposals from ChatGPT to the request "color photograph of a diplomatic meeting of 6 people, accompanied by a brass band and organized in the 1970s on a Swiss mountain à la Caspar David Friedrich"

“ET ENSEMBLE : RÊVER À LA SUISSE”

AN EXHIBITION

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The theatre of Christoph Marthaler and his ensemble – archives, documents, photographs and personal accounts, by Éric Vautrin, researcher and dramaturg of the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, collaborator on the show *The Summit*

According to the Littré dictionary, “*rêver à la suisse*” is “to have the appearance of thinking about something, while thinking about nothing” (synonymous with the popular expression “*rêver à la moutarde*”, according to the same dictionary).

To mark the creation of *The Summit* between Italy, France and Switzerland, Vidy is staging an exhibition devoted to Christoph Marthaler. Since *Murx den Europäer! Murx ihn! Murx ihn! Murx ihn! Murx ihn ab! Ein patriotischer Abend* (Exterminate the European! Exterminate him! Throw him out! A patriotic evening - 1996, Volksbühne Berlin) at least, Christoph Marthaler has been surprising the European theatre scene with his musical and choral theatre. A master of critical slowness, a keen observer of hidden embarrassments, and a delicate chronicler of melancholy comedies, Christoph Marthaler has rooted his theatre in a wide-ranging history of art that spans the Hydropathes of Parisian bohemia to Dada and Beckett, while drawing parallels between the romanticism of Chopin and Schubert, the variations of Erik Satie and John Cage and the pop tempi of Abba, for example. In so doing, he has broadened the horizons of both musical theatre and stage writing, becoming the tutelary figure – albeit a discreet and elusive one – for several generations of theatre-makers, from Philippe Quesne to David Marton, Thom Luz and Gisèle Vienne.

His training at the Jacques Lecoq school is sometimes mentioned, but who is familiar with his early music in Zurich in the 60s, his student performances with Graham Valentine (already!) at patronal celebrations, his wacky and joyous musical groups with Dodo Hug on *primetime* Austrian television, his site-specific shows in a pharmacy or in the German railway station – of sinister Helvetic-Nazi memory – in North Basel? And although he has been making two or three shows per season for the last 30 years, crossing European borders as well as those of the literary and musical repertoires, many of his creations are little known, even though they form and inform one of the most tender and radical theatres of our time, bringing together artists and collaborators who are set designers, musicians, singers and dancers of the highest calibre.

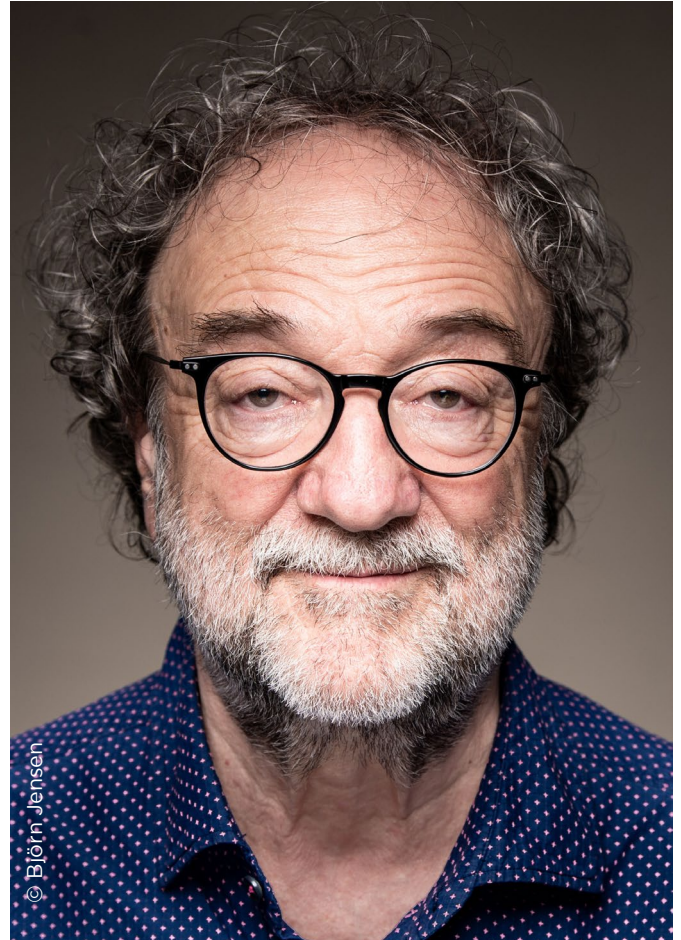
Rêver à la suisse - Christoph Marthaler et le théâtre is an exhibition in some ten chapters, accompanied by an eBook and bringing together photographs, audio and video recordings, archival documents and testimonies from some of his key collaborators. Around thirty telephones from all eras, as well as two or three monitors, TVs or screens (to be adapted as required) will broadcast voices, songs, recordings and other interviews, many of them made for the purpose of this exhibition. It will also feature around fifty photographs and some twenty posters (A2 format).

The exhibition accompanies the show and is available to be displayed during performance runs. The eBook can be used as an accompanying outreach resource if required.

There are many peoples today who, unconcerned that it might collapse, believe that their contribution to the community can be extracted from the marvellous construction so that they may reach heaven and eternity on their national strength alone. But there are still others who believe that no single people, no single nation, could ever achieve what the united forces of Europe have barely managed to achieve after centuries of heroic community. Men who firmly believe that this monument must be completed in our own Europe, where it was begun, and not on foreign soil in America or Asia. The time for joint action has not yet come, and the trouble that God sowed in our souls is still too great, and it may be years before the brothers of yesteryear begin to conceive again, in a spirit of peaceful rivalry, a venture against the infinite. We must, however, return to the site, each to the place where they left off, just as confusion was setting in. Perhaps we will not see each other at work for years, perhaps we will barely hear from each other. But if we set to work now, each in their own place, with the same zeal as in the past, the tower will grow again, and the nations will meet again on the summit.

Stefan Zweig, 1916

Born in Erlenbach in the canton of Zurich, Christoph Marthaler started out as an oboist and flautist before joining Jacques Lecoq's theatre school in post-May 1968 Paris. His first shows, in Zurich, Basel and then at the Volksbühne in Berlin, then directed by Frank Castorf, profoundly revitalised musical theatre. His performances were soon presented at festivals across Europe, and then in the major opera houses. He was artistic director of the Schauspielhaus in Zurich from 2000 to 2004. Together with set designers Anna Viebrock and Duri Bischoff, dramaturgs Stefanie Carp and Malte Ubenauf, and a handful of faithful actors, singers and musicians, he has developed an aesthetic of the derisory, rooted in everyday settings and Swiss history. Through slowness, irony and discrepancy, his scenic, musical and choral poetry owes as much to Dada as to Schubert or John Cage. At Vidy, he presented *King Size* and *Das Weisse vom Ei* (*Une île flotante*) in 2014, and *Tiefer Schweb* in 2018. He was also due to present his creation *Das Weinen* (*Das Wähnen*) [*Pleurer. Imaginer*] by Dieter Roth in autumn 2020, but this was cancelled due to the pandemic. In 2021, he created *Aucune idée* at Vidy.



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