

La Comédie

Productions

de Valence



C'est dans l'obscurité qu'on discerne le mieux

Homage to Julius

Written and directed by Penda Diouf

Production: La Comédie de Valence, Centre dramatique national Drôme-Ardèche et Bonlieu scène nationale Annecy dans le cadre de SPIRITE, Pôle international de production et de diffusion; Théâtre du Nord - CDN Lille Tourcoing Hauts-de-France; A Parté

**Centre dramatique
national
Drôme – Ardèche**

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Direction
Marc Lainé

aparté

spirite
Pôle international de production et de diffusion
Annecy - Valence - Chambéry - Clermont-Ferrand

THÉÂTRE DU NORD
CENTRE DRAMATIQUE NATIONAL LILLE TOURCOING HAUTS-DE-FRANCE - CDN - DIRECTEUR DAVID BOUET

C'est dans l'obscurité qu'on discerne le mieux

Homage to Julius

Written and directed:

Penda Diouf

Music: Julius Eastman

A piece for 4 performers: Jean-

Christophe Folly and Wilhem Latchoumia
(piano), (casting is ongoing)

Artistic Collaboration:

Anthony Thibault

Set Design: Marc Lainé

Costume Design: Mayuko Tsukiji

Lighting Design: Claire Gondrexon

Sound Design: Lundja Medjoub

Video: Yann Seweryn Assistant Director:
Iris Laurent

Production: La Comédie de Valence,
Centre dramatique national Drôme-Ardèche
et Bonlieu scène nationale Annecy dans
le cadre de SPIRITE, Pôle international
de production et de diffusion; Théâtre du
Nord - CDN Lille Tourcoing Hauts-de-France;
A Parté

Executive production: La Comédie
de Valence, CDN Drôme-Ardèche

Coproduction: MC93 — Maison de
la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis; Scène
nationale de l'Essonne; Malraux Scène
nationale Chambéry Savoie dans le cadre
de SPIRITE, Pôle international de
production et de diffusion

With additional support of the Fondation
Albertine (partner support is not
finalised)

Penda Diouf is a member of the Comédie
de Valence Theatre's Artistic Ensemble

New production Autumn 2027 Available for touring in 27-28

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Reviving the memory of Julius Eastman through an investigation into his life and work means giving voice to queer and racialised minority figures active in the United States in the 1970s and reflecting on his heritage today without diminishing the complexity of his personality nor of the circles he moved in. His tragic death – and the disappearance of his musical scores – have contributed to the erasure of his work. And more besides...

Who is Julius Eastman?

Julius Eastman (1940-1990) was an Afro-American composer, pianist and singer, a major yet long forgotten figure in American minimalism. Born in Ithaca (New York State), he studied at the Curtis School of Music in Philadelphia before integrating the avant-garde New York musical scene of the 1970s. His music exceeds the strict boundaries of minimalism per se to include spoken word, rap, rock, jazz, and Caribbean sounds. His compositions are built on repetition, loops, progressive accumulation, but are infused with urgency, tension and a contained violence that radically demarcate them from those of his contemporaries (Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Terry Riley). In 1980, at a legendary concert at Northwestern University, he presented four provocatively titled works: *Crazy Nigger*, *Evil Nigger*, *Gay Guerrilla*, *Nigger Faggot*. This was not cheap provocation, these titles put a name to what Julius Eastman was: a poor, gay, black man with multiple identities he was not afraid of openly assuming. They inscribed race, gender and class into avant-garde classical music – a rare political gesture at the time. At the intersection of music, dance, performance and film-making, his artistic output was deeply generous. He also seemed animated by a great spiritual energy. At the end of his life, living hand-to-mouth and homeless, he discovered the Sufi mysticism of Ibn Arabi. His demise in 1990, at the age of 49, was met with almost total indifference.

The encounter

I have been researching Julius Eastman since 2019. What began as a commission by the Comédie – I am an associate author here – has grown into something much more expansive. I have travelled to New York, Buffalo and Philadelphia. I met his brother, Gerry Eastman, who shared his family memories with me. I interviewed his friends, Ned Sublette and Karl Singletary, and his former lover, R Nemo Hill, who today are all between 75 and 85 years old and who were active members of the New York avant-garde scene or played an important role in Julius' life. These testimonies, archives and conversations have provided the material for a novel. But the theatre opens other possibilities. This piece will take the form of a performative counterpoint to the novel. It is not an adaptation nor a biopic nor a biography, but rather a living dialogue with all the different facets of Julius Eastman.

► Julius Eastman
Stay On It; Wild Up

A play in 3 movements

ATTICA, 1971: WHEN POLITICS INFILTRATES MUSIC

On 13 September 1971, a revolt broke out at Attica Prison, located in New York State. The mostly black and Puerto-Rican prisoners rose up against the racist violence of the prison guards. Brutal repression followed. Several inmates were killed, others tortured. News of the event spread across the world. Living at this time only a few kilometres from Attica, in Buffalo, Julius Eastman must have known what had happened. But according to his (white) friends, he never spoke about it publicly, not even on the radio a few days after the events. Did he really have room to make such a statement?

Three years later, in 1974, he composed *Crazy Nigger*, and in 1979, *Nigger Faggot, Gay Guerrilla, Evil Nigger*.

What lies between Attica and his compositions? How did this event push Julius to question the idea of race, which had been absent from his previous works? How did it introduce politics into classical avant-garde music? The Atlantic slave trade did not only displace bodies, it invented a grammar of repression that has been perpetuated, institutionalised, right up to the prison cells of Attica and until today. The holds of a slave ship and an American prison have this in common: restricting the black body to the smallest living space possible, denying them a sense of self. Julius Eastman was born into this continuum. Like so many others, he comes from this line of subjugated bodies. The first movement will examine this silence and shift, this before and after Attica.

LOOP, LABYRINTH, MUSIC

The fundamental principle of Julius Eastman's minimalism is the loop. A musical motif is repeated, introduces an imperceptible variation, adds another layer. It turns, comes back on itself, progresses without going forward. It is hypnotic, obsessional; a spiral.

This undulating form collides with the oppressive architecture of New York, all rigid straight lines. The long streets compose a labyrinth where everything looks the same. We keep going over the same ground, or so it appears, unable to find a way out. The city crushes the most fragile, aggravates their economic and psychic situation still further.

I also associate the loop with obsessive ruminations, getting stuck in our thoughts, trying to find a way out of the labyrinth of our minds. Julius' final years were made up of circles. He was suffering from a mental disorder. He roamed the same streets in Lower East Side, slept in the same shelters or parks. In his music, though, he found a way out or a respiration at least.

However obsessional his minimalist compositions are, they always leave a space for a breach, a gap, for an improvisation that breaks the motif.

Perhaps he wasn't looking for a way out of the loop, but just wanted more air. And to add a dose of play, trouble the patterns, inject more life into the composition.

The second movement will explore this tension between musical repetition, mental rumination and architecture.

It is said that Julius Eastman vanished, that all trace of him was erased. But maybe such a reading – by reducing him to a passive victim of the invisibilisation that is the lot of black and minority artists in America – only adds to the wrongs that were done to him. In the latter part of his life especially, Eastman, it must be remembered, went through a profound spiritual awakening, giving rise to a radical humility in his relationship to the world, to sound and to God.

In an interview, he spoke about finding peace. We know that he was deeply spiritual. In a recording of one of his rare surviving performances, he repeats 'God gave and God took away' as if it were a fatality. At the end of his life, he discovered Ibn Arabi's Sufi mysticism. One of his favourite sayings was a quote from the Muslim prophet Muhammad: 'Die before dying'. This sentence echoes across his entire life. The spiritual death of his ego, of all those he was attached to, of his convictions.

Rather than being subjected to a process of effacement, what if he himself was partly responsible, that he had accepted, chosen or even provoked his own disappearance in accordance with his inner life? As if vanishing from the public arena was his way of devoting himself more entirely to the essential.

The third movement will speak of spiritual liberation.

This show is an attempt, using a plural and fragmented form, to capture something of Julius Eastman in all his dimensions as a person, a dancer, a pianist, someone engrossed in spirituality. However long since he has been relegated to the margins of history, here is a man whose presence continues to haunt those who knew him intimately or just in passing, who knew his body or his music. Jean-Christophe Folly plays him from the hereafter, in that intermediary space Sufi mystics know well: not entirely dead, still within reach. Julius addresses us from that threshold, as freely as only those can who have nothing left to lose or to prove. A dancer and choreographer will give movement and gesture to the frictions of a black queer body in a social and artistic sphere where it was still not fully welcome. This also means referring to the 1970s gay community in New-York, and Julius Eastman's very open attitude towards his sexuality, the important place it occupied in his everyday life.

The pianist Wilhem Latchoumia will allow us to hear Eastman's music in all its intensity. He is not on stage to illustrate Eastman's compositions, but in live dialogue with the other performers. His playing will criss-cross the show like a stubborn breath, returning over and over to the same motifs until exhaustion and beyond.

Finally, another performer will recite Ibn Arabi's poems and verses from the Quran. Bringing Islam and homosexuality into a space of dialogue is not meant to be provocative; it is rather a gesture towards the mystic tradition that Julius Eastman turned to at the end of his life. In Sufism he found a language in which spirituality could conjugate with desire and out of this union touch the divine.

The play will be accompanied by a film of New York: places where I looked for him, marginal spaces he inhabited, sites of his disappearance. I film this city like a metaphor of a script that no-one will ever be able to decipher or fully understand.

Stage setting: theatre, film, presences

► Julius Eastman
Stay On It; Wild Up

The film does not document, it will supplement the dramaturgy. It will create a space where word and image dialogue, in which Julius appears and vanishes, where the city becomes a character. Film and theatre are embedded: sometimes the theatre will comment on the images and sometimes they will respond or even contradict the words.

Why this show?

Julius Eastman's work cannot be understood without placing it in a social, cultural and economic context. But it also just as essential to understand that he was deeply spiritual – a mystic – and a man who refused to compromise. His life, music and disappearance compose a total artwork.

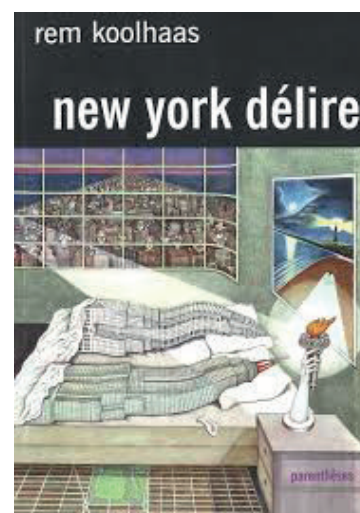
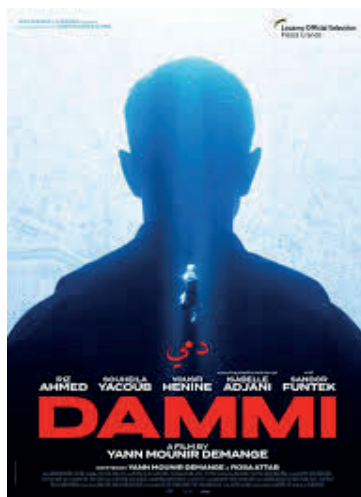
This show is an attempt to dialogue with him, a way of pursuing the conversation I began with him six years ago. And a way of giving back what he gave to me: a pathway to freedom.

Julius has taught me that being a person of minority – woman, black, artist – can constitute a territory to be claimed. His music became his weapon. He was black, gay, a composer, a mystic, homeless – all those things together, a multiplicity without hierarchy. Affirming oneself means refusing to be boxed in, it means acquiring the freedom to define oneself or rejecting any definition whatsoever. The spiritual quest which accompanied him throughout his life led him to transcend all the labels.

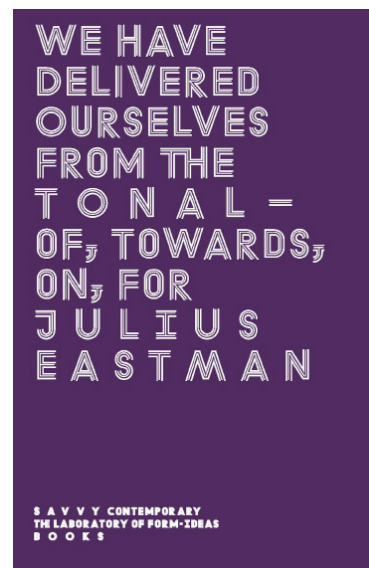
His compositions demonstrate a great liberty of form and I hope that my texts and performances also foster community, as human beings, first and foremost.

Penda Diouf, june 2026

Inspirations



Dammi by Yann Demange
*Black madness mad
 blackness* by Theri Alyce
Swim by Peter Spanjer
News from home by Chantal
 Ackerman
New York délire by Rem
 koolhaas



Gerry by Gus Van Sant
Soy Cuba by Michail
 Kalatozov
Paris is burning by
 Jennie Livingston
The lonely city by Olivia
 Laing
We Have Delivered
Ourselves From the Tonal:
Of, Towards, On, For
Julius Eastman

Penda Diouf writes for the performing arts. Her plays, *La Grande Ourse* (jury prize winner at the text'avril festival held at the Tête Noire Theatre in 2018, winner of the 2021 Collidram prize, finalist for the 2022 Sony Labou Tansi prize) and *Pistes...* (winner of La Chartreuse reading committees' prize and awarded Best Radio Fiction in Germany in 2022, Marulic Grand Prize for Radio Fiction in Croatia in 2024, and broadcast on France Culture) are edited by Editions Quartett publishing house. The play text of her 2025 show, *Sœur·s, nos forêts aussi ont des épines*, is published by Solitaires Intempestifs. She has also written *La Brèche*, a commission from the Théâtre National de Strasbourg (TNS), published in a collective work entitled *Ce qui nous arrive* by Editions Espaces 34. Her play for young audiences, *L'arbre*, appeared in the collective work *Liberté Egalité...2* published by Editions Théâtrales jeunesse, alongside her text, *Le blues des mots*. The TNS published two of her texts in their revue, *Parages: J'mêle*, the fruit of a commission from the Théâtre du Peuple in Bussang, and *Cœur sec*. Her play, *Noire comme l'or*, written during a residency at Culture Commune, was short-listed by the reading committee of TQ2A/TQI and the Tête Noire Theatre. For a scheme promoting civic engagement in high schoolers – supported collectively by the TNS, the Colline, the Grand T and the Comédie de Reims theatres – she contributed *Gorgée d'eau*. It was staged in a production by Maëlle Dequiedt in 2021 and has been touring ever since. She wrote *Si vous vous taisez les pierres crieront* with Kevin Rittberger. The text was given a public reading at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin in 2021.

Her plays have been translated into Armenian, Czech, English, Finnish, German and Italian. As winner of the 'Mondes Nouveaux' programme, Penda Diouf created *La nuit des reines* at the Saint-Denis Basilica in 2023. In 2025, she directed her own play *Pistes...* which premiered at the Théâtre du Nord before then going on tour (more than thirty performances to date). Penda Diouf took part in the 'Opéra de ci de là' programme for two years running at the Aix-en-Provence Lyric Arts Festival. She has been the recipient of numerous writing residences at the French Institute in Tunis, London's Royal Court Theatre, the Villa Albertine in New York and the TNS. She contributed to Marc Lainé's installation-exhibition *Entre vos mains* alongside other members of the Artistic Collective associated with the Comédie de Valence Theatre, first staged in Valence and then on tour, notably at Gennevilliers Theatre, T2G. She made a documentary, *Voies sensibles: l'art de marcher en Seine-Saint-Denis* for France Culture during her residency at the MC93 theatre. Her plays have been staged abroad, most notably in: Quebec, for *Pistes...*, directed by Nathalie Fontalvo; Germany, for *Les paysages de May*, directed by Miriam Ibrahim; Belgium, for *Harriet Tubman, passeuse de l'ombre*, directed by François Ebouélé, and also in France: *Sœurs, nos forêts aussi ont des épines* directed by Silvia Costa, *Pistes...* in her own production, *Les invisibles*, directed by Malou Vigier, *Mots dits*, directed by Lucie Berelowitsch, *La Grande Ourse*, directed by Anthony Thibault. *La Grande Ourse* will be performed at the Théâtre de Poche in Geneva in a production by Evelyne Castellino. She is the co-founder, along with Anthony Thibault, of a certification label entitled Jeunes Textes en Liberté, which seeks to give support to writers of contemporary theatre, especially promoting greater diversity in the voices and stories in today's theatre. She was nominated 'new theatre talent of 2023' by the Board of the SACD (French body supporting theatre writing). *J'ai accouché de mon frère et c'est mon seul enfant* will be published by Les Solitaires Intempestifs next autumn.

In a teaching role, Penda Diouf is a member of the jury at L'école du Nord and the CNSAD in Paris (Conservatory for Dramatic Arts). She was nominated patron of Class 8 at L'école du Nord for student authors, directors and dramaturgs. She also supports resident authors at the Maison des auteur·rice·s in Limoges. She is an associate artist at different Centres of Dramatic Art, in Valance (the Comédie), Lille, and on Réunion Island, as well as for the nationally recognised theatre of the Essonne region, L'Agora, south of Paris.

Julius Eastman

Julius Eastman was born in Ithaca in New York State where he spent his whole childhood until entering the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. At the end of his studies he moved to Buffalo, a city known for its strong musical scene, especially jazz, where he launched a hugely successful professional career. He contributed to the creation of the SEM Ensemble and more generally to the cultural life of the city. Good reviews led to Julius Eastman performing his work across the world. He bought a house in a white, upper-middle class neighbourhood of Buffalo, which he left to his brother Gerry when he took the abrupt decision to quit Buffalo and try his luck in New York, dreaming of bigger things. He resided in East Village, performed at The Kitchen and other major 'underground' venues. His natural generosity and compassion led him to support a number of marginal persons who he housed or helped out financially when needed. In a city which is the very emblem of capitalism, of the myth of the self made man and of mass consumption, Eastman had an extremely detached relationship to money, so much so that he stopped paying his rent and was evicted. All his belongings in the flat, including his musical scores and recordings, were seized and then destroyed 30 days later. It would seem that he made no attempt to recover them, describing his work as 'inconsistent'. Increasingly prone to mental instability, he spent the latter years of his life in the streets of New York, around Tompkins Square, reportedly losing his grip on reality. He died in Buffalo on 28 May 1990 after a career cut short far too quickly, a long way from everyone.

Jean-Christophe Folly

After training at the Claude Mathieu Acting School, then at the French National Academy of Dramatic Art in Paris, Jean-Christophe Folly has alternated between independent art cinema, theatre and television. He has most notably worked with the filmmakers Ruben Östlund (*Triangle of Sadness*, Palme d'Or at Cannes 2022), Claire Denis (*35 rhums*), Ulrich Köhler (*Sleeping Sickness*, *Gavagai*), Léonor Serraille (*Un petit frère*, in competition as part of the official selection at Cannes 2022) and also Patrick Mario Bernard and Pierre Trividic (*L'angle mort*, in the Acid category – Cannes Festival, 2019). As a theatre actor, he has worked with Élise Vigier, Jean Bellorini, Robert Wilson, Jean-René Lemoine and Matthieu Cruciani, as well as developing his own shows. In 2017, he founded his company Chajar & Chams. He wrote and performed *Salade, tomate, oignons*, winner of the Fondation Beaumarchais - SACD Prize in 2018. In 2023, he staged his own text *Sensuelle* at the Comédie de Caen, a theatre at which he is an associate artist. Since 2012, he has been developing a musical style through an alter ego called Tatum Gallinesqui. He released a guitar-and-vocals album, *La Dictature du Violet*, and began exploring computer-generated music: the first album in this style, Tatum Gallinesqui, came out on Craberecords in 2016; the second, Luambo, is an instrumental album; the third is entitled *Vie et Mort d'Isidjiom de Cinkabourg*. In 2024, he published his first novel, *Benoît Blues* (éditions Mémoire d'encrier), about a disillusioned generation.

Wilhem Latchoumia

Wilhem Latchoumia regularly performs on the biggest stages in France (Auditorium de Radio France, Opéra Comique, Cité de la Musique, Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord) and in prestigious international festivals such as La Roque d'Anthéron, Piano aux Jacobins in Toulouse, Musica de Strasbourg, Lille Piano(s) Festival. Abroad, audiences can enjoy his performances at London's Barbican Centre, at the BOZAR in Brussels, as well as in New York, Buenos Aires, Berlin, Shanghai and Beijing. He has performed as a soloist with leading French and international orchestras, including the Philharmonic Orchestra of Radio France and the National Orchestra of Lyon.

Wilhem Latchoumia's commitment to contemporary music has earned him the favour of composers such as Pierre Boulez, Gérard Pesson, Jonathan Harvey and Francesco Filidei. His recordings have been acclaimed by the critics: *Extase Maxima* (La Dolce Volta, 2014), his portrait of Manuel de Falla (5 Diapasons, Télérama's top rating of FFFF), and several other opus have received a 'Choc' by *Le Monde de la Musique* and a 'Diapason d'or' – distinctions awarded by the specialist music press. He recorded *Three Extended Pieces For Four Pianos* incluant *Evil Nigger*, *Gay Guerilla*, et *Crazy Nigger*, with Melaine Dalibert, Stéphane Ginsburgh, Nicols Horvath (Sub Rosa Label). Pieces they also performed together in concerts.

A student at the Conservatory of Music in Lyon (where he was unanimously awarded First Prize), he then went on to study with Yvonne Loriod-Messiaen and Pierre-Laurent Aimard. He won First Prize in 2006 at the Orléans International Piano Competition. Today he also teaches piano at the Hochschule in Berne.

SPIRITE

Pôle international de production et de diffusion

In 2025, the cluster of theatres formed by La Comédie de Valence Theatre and Bonlieu, scène nationale d'Annecy, alongside Malraux, scène nationale de Chambéry and La Comédie de Clermont-Ferrand Theatre, was named an International Production and Distribution Hub by the Ministry of Culture for five years. The project of the hub, made up of these four venues based in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, is entitled (in French) SPIRITE, setting out the terms for a structure of international production and research into inclusion, interdisciplinarity and environmental responsibility.

SPIRITE's aim is to provide a tool facilitating international cooperation so as to invent and produce new forms that promote an aesthetics of – and made for – encounters (hybridization, light and easy-to-tour formats, large-scale gathering events). By imagining new modes of encounter between performance spaces and artists, SPIRITE develops, via commissions, a repertoire of emblematic new works of which inclusion, environmental responsibility, multilingualism or new narratives are one of the driving forces.

For the 26-27 season, two new works are supported by SPIRITE. The first, *Silence* by Lucie Antunes and Mathilde Monnier was premiered at Bonlieu Theatre, Scène nationale Annecy, in April 2026 and reprised at the 2026 Avignon Festival. The second, Clara Hédouin's *Les Vagabondes* will open at the Comédie in May 2027 as part of the Parcours À Facettes programme. In 27-28, Penda Diouf's upcoming new show, *C'est dans l'obscurité qu'on discerne le mieux*, will benefit from the support of SPIRITE.



LES CRÉATIONS 26-27

L'Inconnu du Vercors

Marc Lainé
Création le 19.01.27

Les Vagabondes

Clara Hédouin
Création le 21.05.27



ÉGALEMENT EN TOURNÉE EN 26-27

..... CYCLE LILIANE ET PAUL

Nos paysages mineurs / En finir avec leur histoire

Marc Lainé
Création le 21.09.21 / le 11.09.24

La Chambre de l'écrivain

Marc Lainé
Création le 02.10.25

LES CRÉATIONS À VENIR

C'est dans l'obscurité qu'on discerne le mieux

Hommage à Julius

Penda Diouf
Création en 27-28



une splendeur

Sarah Delaby-Rochette
Création en 27-28

Une Histoire Mondiale de l'Inconscient

Marc Lainé
Création en 28-29

Woyzeck ou la vocation

Georg Büchner / Tünde Deak
Création le 24.02.26

Nos Empereurs

Vie et mort d'Armand Lamarque

Guillaume Cayet
Création le 21.04.26

Silence

Lucie Antunes, Mathilde Monnier
Création le 23.04.26



La Vie invisible

Guillaume Poix / Lorraine de Sagazan
Création le 22.09.20



En 2025, le pôle constitué par La Comédie de Valence et Bonlieu Scène nationale Annecy, auquel sont associés Malraux, Scène nationale Chambéry Savoie et La Comédie de Clermont-Ferrand Scène nationale, a reçu pour cinq ans l'appellation PIPD de la part du ministère de la Culture. Le projet, constitué par ces quatre lieux basés en région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, s'intitule SPIRITE: Structure de Production Internationale et de Recherche sur l'Inclusion, la Transdisciplinarité et l'Écoresponsabilité.

SPIRITE a pour objectif de constituer un outil de coopération internationale pour inventer et produire de nouvelles formes qui promeuvent les esthétiques de la rencontre (hybridation, formats légers et mobiles, grandes formes rassembleuses). En imaginant de nouveaux modes de rencontres entre les maisons et les artistes, SPIRITE développe un répertoire de créations emblématiques dont l'inclusion, l'écoresponsabilité, le multilinguisme ou les nouveaux récits sont un des moteurs.



**Centre dramatique
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