



The Piccolo, a letter for professionals in the fields of performance for young audiences, dedicated a page of its January publication to the director Valentina Arce and her 2020 production: *Le Bleu des abeilles* (The Blue of Bees)

## **Valentina Arce, Language as a Homeland**

**This artist born in Peru chose French culture for her own. She adapted Laura Alcoba's autobiographical novel *Le Bleu des abeilles* (The Blue of Bees, not translated) for the theater.**

Her play *Le Bleu des abeilles* (The Blue of Bees) premiered a few short days before the first confinement (in March 2020) performed at and coproduced by the Théâtre Halle Roublot in Fontenay-sous-Bois and then performed at the Théâtre aux Mains Nu in Paris. Since then, she has been unable to perform but has recently begun rehearsals again and hopes it will soon be onstage in its new adaptation. The show has upcoming dates in February in Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, then in Reims for the Méli'môme festival, which was postponed from last year to March 2021.

Valentine Arce is Franco-Peruvian. Born in Peru, she discovered France through its culture when she started attending a Franco-Peruvian school at 6 years old. A second cultural identity began to emerge for this artist who "*was already immersed in a multi-cultural family, with my father from the Amazon having very different roots from my mother who was from the Andes*". As a child, she already loved the theater. This love only grew when she arrived in France where she enrolled in University of Paris (Paris 8) as well as the Charles-Dullin Theater School. Later she would join the INSAS (National Institute of Performance Art) in Brussels, Belgium, where she began to study directing. Her first professional experiences were with a company working with children from La Plaine in the Parisian suburb Seine-Denis. There, she found a "*a multicultural world that quickly had me asking myself questions about what I wanted to say to these young people, what I wanted to pass down, as a person of mixed cultures*". Together, they began to dig for the things that are often hidden when a person comes from another country, the parts of themselves linked to

their ancestral culture, maybe even tinged with the fantastical or the supernatural, parts kept deep inside and unexpressed.

*"I have strong memories of all the legends that my Amazonian grandmother told me. Fairytales and legends came easily to me as a way to share with these children."*

#### Article méli'mômes

Valentina Arce s'exprime sur le sujet de l'exil et la façon dont on en parle aux enfants au théâtre... Magazine du Festival Méli'mômes 2021, projet imaginé par Nova Villa, pour pallier la nouvelle annulation du festival Méli'môme.

Valentina Arce speaks about exile and the way we communicate with young audiences through theater... Méli'mômes Festival Magazine 2021, project created by Nova Villa to compensate for the second cancelation of the Méli'môme Festival.

#### Talking About Exile

In the villages of the Amazon, in the native language, the *shabano* is a canopy underneath which all the daily activities take place; but it is also, where, in the evening, the elders tell stories to the children. Valentina Arce's Shabano Theater, represents this meeting place. After a first experience working with child immigrants in Saint-Maur-les-Fossés, Valentina Arce, still based in the Ile-de-France region, started to look for a text that would allow her to talk about exile, about culture shock, about the experience of arriving in a new land, perhaps a long-dreamt-of arrival. A friend recommended *Le Bleu des abeilles* (The Blue of Bees, published in French by Gallimard, 2013) by Laura Alcoba, the story of a young girl whose parents send her to France to protect her from the ruling dictatorship in Argentina in the 1970s. Thirty years later, as an adult, she finds letters that her father wrote to her when he was a political prisoner. *"I feel like there is something supernatural in this text, or at least in my reading of it. To me, it is these letters that give the woman her voice, that allow her to tell the story of her childhood. That's why we made them into puppets in my direction of the play, relying heavily on paper as a medium"*, Arce explains. Onstage, a duo of actor-puppeteers, manipulate the small paper silhouette of young Laura and take turns playing the role of adult Laura telling her story.

#### The World of Tomorrow

*"What interested me in Laura Alcoba's novel was the way that she presents language as a homeland. For her, the French language become at the same time a refuge and an inheritance. Our land is not just a physical thing, underneath our feet, but also something deep inside each of us. I love her tenderness when she speaks about French's silent "e", for example"*. The theater company has collaborated with a number of local communities on projects around this play, in Villeneuve-Saint-George, for example, with the financial support of the Crédit Mutuel Bank Foundation. Children will learn to manipulate paper figurines like the puppeteers and will study filming techniques with La Lucarne, a partner in the project.

They will also, of course, have a chance to see the *Bleu des abeilles* in the theater. This season Valentina Arce is working with teenagers on a new project that will premiere next season: *Le monde d'après: le bateau de Thésée* (The World of Tomorrow: Theseus' Boat). This project engages teens in a "philosophical reflection, a sort of agora of dialogue that 13 and 14-year-olds can engage in. The question we are asking is simple: What kind of world do we want for our future?" This new project gives voice to a diverse group of young people, allow them to share their cultures and hopes for the world to come. This is Valentina Arce's calling.