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📅 24–27 May  
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**COPRODUCTION**

**WORLD PREMIERE**



# **ALL ABOUT EARTHQUAKES**

**Christopher Rüping**

after bell hooks and Heinrich von Kleist

Christopher Rüping is renowned for productions that turn apparently complicated issues into forceful and entertaining actors' celebration in which emotion and intelligent analysis of our times underpin each other. In *All About Earthquakes*, the German director is now bringing together Heinrich von Kleist and the American feminist, philosopher and author bell hooks. While Kleist first creates and then dismantles the democratic utopia of a classless Garden of Eden in his novella *The Earthquake in Chile*, bell hooks describes love as a tool of action to permanently overcome the trenches and injuries of modern society in her bestseller *All About Love*. With a large ensemble of 14 actors and one live musician, *All About Earthquakes* dares to attempt to create loving togetherness across boundaries. But can we even stand paradise?

🗣 German

CC English surtitles

🕒 2 hrs. 15 mins.

♿ barrier-free access

Q&A

25 May, following the performance

# 'BEGIN BY ALWAYS THINKING OF LOVE AS AN ACTION RATHER THAN A FEELING'

– bell hooks: *All about Love*

**Direction** Christopher Rüping **With** Elsie de Brauw, Danaï Chatzipetrou, William Cooper, Martin Horn, Stacyan Jackson, Risto Kübar, Ole Lagerpusch, Moses Leo, Benjamin Lillie, Abenaa Prempeh, Matze Pröllochs, Damian Rebgetz, Nina Steils, Romy Vreden **Stage design** Jonathan Mertz **Costumes** Lene Schwind **Music** Jonas Holle, Matze Pröllochs **Dramaturgy** Angela Obst **Direction assistance** Albrecht Schroeder **Stage design assistance** Ingrid Pons | **Miras Costumes assistance** Una Güth, Lara Türkcü **Direction internship** Simon Friedl **Stage design internship** Isiah Mruck **Costumes internship** Lilith Kürten **Dramaturgy internship** Josephine Wolf **Language coaching** Roswitha Dierck **Stage management** Jonas Kissel **Prompting** Arian Schill **Surtitles** Holger Rademacher, Kristina Ahrens

**Production** Schauspielhaus Bochum **Coproduction** Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

**executed by** the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

**World premiere** May 2025, Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

# BABY, DON'T HURT ME

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHER RÜPING

**Angela Obst:** Our work began with a desire to address love as a political, socially influential force. Now your production is titled *All About Earthquakes*. Did we get lost?

**Christopher Rüping:** Not at all. Love as understood by bell hooks is related to earthquakes: it is a tremor that causes a change. In Kleist's novella *The Earthquake in Chile*, a society of love is sketched out for a limited period of time (about 24 hours) outside of Santiago de Chile. During an earthquake, the ground – the stable base we blindly trust – is shaken. I believe that Kleist and bell hooks are shaking the ground of our society.

**What is so upsetting about bell hooks' thoughts?**

For her definition of love, she turns to Erich Fromm and essentially says that love is a practice that attempts to let the loved opposite grow, make them bigger – not in the sense of heroisation, but by expanding one's own spirit and becoming so attuned to the other person that they will also expand. The potentially revolutionary approach of bell hooks is to invalidate the social norms that guide us – our social structures, which are shaped by capitalism and patriarchy, which are always about dominating the opposite and leaving them behind in competition.

**In Kleist's novella, two lovers, Josephe and Jeronimo, face death because their love is condemned by the patriarchal order of family, state and church. An earthquake reduces the**

**city to rubble, but at the same time offers salvation to these two, albeit only for a brief period of time. Later, the earthquake is interpreted as a punishment from God during a thanksgiving service that culminates in a bloodbath. The disaster opens up a complex discussion. What does *disaster discourse* mean?**

*Disaster discourse* investigates how art, media, dinner conversations address (natural) disasters and what that in turn says about us. Every Hollywood disaster film says something about our society with its mega tsunami or comet hitting earth, its collision of planets or eternal frost. The extreme circumstances serve as a petri dish to observe how people behave in the face of this disaster.

While an earthquake as an event in itself is neither good nor evil – it has no aim –, we will interpret and evaluate it differently. For many in Kleist's novella, the earthquake results in death and suffering. For others, such as the main characters Josephe and Jeronimo, the earthquake offers salvation. Then a society that is essentially free of hierarchy and violence, liberated from the desire to dominate, emerges outside of the city for twenty-four hours in response to the earthquake. It seems – Kleist suggests – as if humanity had won as much as it lost by the earthquake. He offers us a range of possibilities of telling different stories with the very same natural event. *Disaster discourse* is so decisive for our work because it is what Kleist engages in the entire time.

**Kleist's novella brims with violence. Nobody will forget it once they have read how a mob bludgeons the people declared as the scapegoats to death during the thanksgiving service in church, how a baby is smashed against a wall. Is Kleist a pessimist author?**

Kleist is definitely an author who knows about those forces in himself and in society that are in opposition to a bell hooks utopia, and an author who gives room to these forces. I believe he is startled by the utopian potential of his own text, the radical demand for change that is entailed therein – to such a degree that he puts it to paper with utter violence, literally beats it down. Kleist is a torn author. The violence with which he bludgeons utopia in retrospect makes the utopia even greater, because it is perceived as dangerous by certain regressive powers.

**The escalation of violence is directed at a couple who transgress class boundaries. Jeronimo was a tutor in Josephe's family. This couple is played by Elsie de Brauw and Moses Leo in our production. How were they cast?**

We thought about what was so provocative for society about the relationship between Josephe and Jeronimo. In Kleist's play it is the class difference, which we – considering it from an intersectional point of view – supplemented with two other factors: the relationship between Jeronimo and Josephe in our adaptation is an interracial relationship, and there is a notable age difference between the two.

She is 25 years his senior and this – in that combination – still makes it a talking point in our society, especially when the two have a child together. We looked for two actors who made a beautiful couple and at the same time would easily trigger resentment among the usual reactionary forces. Because the sorry truth of the matter is that violence is always aimed at the most vulnerable groups.

**Originally, Josephe and Jeronimo wanted to leave after their salvation, but they decide to go to the thanksgiving service together with the others. Back into the city that locked them out, that prepared their death.**

The community who formed outside of Santiago is fleeting. The question is: What next? I think that the two will return to the city, aware that this means that they are endangering themselves, because they want to live the utopian exceptional circumstances that they had experienced outside of the city as normalcy. They were under pressure from the outset, the world is against them. Their decision for each other has nothing to do with *falling in love*, stumbling into something, being overwhelmed. They think long and hard and then take a decision for each other. They keep grappling with this, their decision is not set in stone. Returning to the city is the most definitive decision they take in the course of the entire evening. They have to believe that things will get better.

I am finding it extremely hard at the moment to advertise utopias, because I

am seeing our present day as maximally dystopian. Every complete utopia on stage seems jaundiced to me. But what else is the maxim of action? I believe that grappling with decisions that are proper, that I can stand by later on, are regaining relevance. For Jeronimo and Josephe, it is the proper decision not to retreat to safety, not to flee, but to stand up for each other and for their love. That is why they go to the church, and seek to be out in the open. Even if it kills them in the end.

**Haddaway's *What is love?* plays an important role in the production. Why this song?**

This song, a Eurodance staple, is one of the great anthems of the early 1990s. I was not yet consciously a part of this time after the (perceived) end of the Cold War, but I associate it with images of chains of people, peace marches, the establishment of the European Union, and also with the Rostock-Lichtenhagen and Mölln attacks, the resurgence of Neo-Nazis and Fascists. This particular historical era in Europe that is represented by the song creates an interesting double exposure once it is transposed over Kleist's text. And then combining Haddaway with bell hooks might make us consider the lyrics 'What is Love? Baby don't hurt me' in a much more political light than Haddaway had intended. Suddenly, Kleist, bell hooks and Haddaway are intertextually interwoven.

You once asked where they suddenly get the clubs from in the church in Kleist's play. I think they already had them in paradise. They simply always have clubs on them.

**In this production, you work with 14 actors – more than in any previous work of yours. Why so many?**

We wanted to tackle community, not just as content, but also as a process, a structure. The challenge is to transfer these fourteen people into a productive collaboration on stage. We have scant resources – in our case the time the actors have to shape on stage. What principles guide its distribution? Obviously everybody has to abstain. We are constantly busy with the question of how this community, who are too few for a society but too many for a family, interacts on stage without letting the desire to dominate over others become a structuring principle. And thus we tackle bell hooks and her ethics of love during every rehearsal. bell hooks is implemented in the essence of this production. And I hope that this resonates, inspires this evening.

**What thoughts or feelings would you like the audience to have after the performance?**

I would love it if after this evening the audience had the feeling of having been somewhere that they weren't quite able to categorise, that they don't find direct words for. That it feels as if the blood was coursing differently through their hands, their cheeks reddened. Like a shared concert experience.

The interview was conducted by production dramaturg Angela Obst in Bochum around the rehearsals for the production in May 2025.

# BIOGRAPHY

**Christopher Rüping** was born in Hanover in 1985 and studied directing at the Hamburg Theatre Academy and the Zurich University of the Arts. He directed his first productions in Hanover, Hamburg and Frankfurt. His productions are tender and exuberant at the same time, giving the actors free rein to engage with each other and the audience. He was in-house director at the Münchner Kammerspiele in Munich from 2016 to 2019 and held the same position at the Schauspielhaus Zürich until 2024. Critics of the theatre magazine Theater heute voted Rüping Young Director of the Year in 2014 and 2015 and Director of the Year in 2019 and 2021; further awards followed, most recently the Berlin Theatre Prize 2025. To date, he has received five invitations to the Berlin Theatre Meeting: in 2015 with his production of *Das Fest* based on the film by Thomas Vinterberg and Mogens Rukov (Schauspiel Stuttgart), in 2018 with Bertolt Brecht's *Trommeln in der Nacht*, in 2019 with the ten-hour ancient period project *Dionysos Stadt* (both Münchner Kammerspiele), in 2021 with *Einfach das Ende der Welt* based on Jean-Luc Lagarce (Schauspielhaus Zürich) and in 2022 with *Das neue Leben* based on Dante (Schauspielhaus Bochum). In 2022, Rüping's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was on show at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen).

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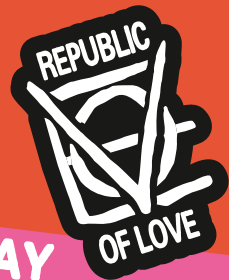
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