

NEANDERTHAL

HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE VIII

BACK TO BACK THEATRE



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NEANDERTHAL

HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE VIII

Produced by Back to Back Theatre
Co-commissioned by Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna
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Berliner Festspiele, Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Culturegeest Lissabon, and others
World Premiere May 2027, Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

ABOUT HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE

Histoire(s) du théâtre is a 10-part series and playful long-term investigation of humanity's oldest art form, a search for the core of the human condition and a celebration of the power of theatre. The series opened in 2018 with *La Reprise* (Kunstenfestivaldesarts) by Swiss director Milo Rau. Since then, the play has toured the world. This was followed by Histoire(s) du Théâtre II by choreographer Faustin Linyekula (NTGent, 2019), a re-enactment of a performance by the Congolese National Ballet from the 1970s with some of the original performers. Part three *Liebestod* (Festival d'Avignon, 2021) by Spanish radical performer and director Angélica Liddell and part four *ONE SONG* (NTGent, 2022) by Belgian artist Miet Warlop were both internationally acclaimed as highlights of the Festival d'Avignon. The fifth part was created by Tim Etchells, director and founder of the legendary theatre company Forced Entertainment, with *How Goes the World* (NTGent, 2023). *No Yogurt for the Dead* (NTGent, 2025) by Portuguese director and artistic director of the Festival d'Avignon Tiago Rodrigues celebrates with part six the power of theatre to find joy even in the saddest moments. For Histoire(s) du Théâtre VII, American choreographer Trajal Harrell created the solo work *Music Music* (Vienna Festival, 2026) in which he reflects his engagement with music in dance by revisiting and re-choreographing a catalog of significant musical pieces he has previously worked with.

NEANDERTHAL

In 2027, the renowned Australian theatre company Back to Back Theatre will create a new major work with the working title *NEANDERTHAL*, co-commissioned by Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) as part eight of the Histoire(s) du Théâtre series.

NEANDERTHAL is an exploration of "otherness". While science has refuted many preposterous theories, 'science-based claims' have supported discriminatory policies and practices. Our distant relative, the Neanderthals, have not just been dismissed, they have been recruited as epitaphs on the basis of their shortcomings. The parallels with disability, through history and within contemporaneous perceptions, are the starting point of Back to Back's new work.

NEANDERTHAL is a work as much about nationalism as it is about ableism. How and why do we distinguish difference? Our immersion into an increasingly polarised political environment where immigration, community and culture itself has been weaponised allows *NEANDERTHAL* to offer a poetic and unapologetic provocation into the diabolical need to categorise our humanity.

Our history with the Neanderthal features a willingness to believe in ideas that are not correct, and to leverage that conviction into a feeling of superiority over other people. Why do modern humans persist in our keen attention to borders? What the real surprise of new discoveries has been is not the competence of the Neanderthal, but how low our expectation of them has been. *NEANDERTHAL* is a bridge between the convention of a concert and social commentary generated by a group of artists with disabilities whose lived experience is as rich as their artistry.

BACK TO BACK THEATRE

© Jeff Busby



BIOGRAPHIE

Based on Wadawurrung Country in the Victorian regional centre of Geelong, Back to Back Theatre is widely recognised as an Australian theatre company of national and international significance. The company is driven by an ensemble of actors who identify as having an intellectual disability or as neurodivergent.

We don't like labels.

Our ideas start as shapes. Then they form into symbols. And then they form into words.

We do everything it takes to make great art.

We go to the gym on Thursday mornings.

We work with guest artists and different people.

We are fearsome.

Our aim is to make art that speaks back to the audience.

Back to Back Ensemble

From 2009 to 2025, the company has undertaken 88 national and 130 international seasons of its work. This includes presentations at the world's pre-eminent contemporary arts festivals and venues such as the Venice Biennale, The National Theatre of Norway, Edinburgh International Festival, London's V&A Museum and The Barbican, Vienna Festival, Holland Festival and Theater der Welt, the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, the Public Theater in New York, Festival Tokyo, West Kowloon Cultural District Authority in Hong Kong, and Buenos Aires International Festival. Since 2009, Back to Back has delivered community and education workshops to over 34,000 participants, with a focus on artistic excellence and inclusive practice.

Back to Back Theatre has received 23 national and international awards including the 2024 Venice Biennale Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Theatre, the 2022 International Ibsen Award, a Helpmann Award for Best Australian Work, an Edinburgh International Festival Herald Angel Critics' Award, two Age Critics' Awards, a New York Bessie and the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Group Award for our long-standing contribution to the development of Australian theatre.

BRUCE GLADWIN

© Christine Fahd



BIOGRAPHIE

Bruce Gladwin is a director and performance maker whose interest is in devised theatre making processes. He has been the Artistic Director of Australia's Back to Back Theatre since 1999. Works for the company include *Mental*, *Dog Farm*, *Small Metal Objects*, *Soft*, *Food Court*, *Ganesb Versus the Third Reich*, *Super Discount*, *Lady Eats Apple*, *The Democratic Set*, *Entity* and *The Shadow Whose Prey the Hunter Becomes*.

In 2015, Bruce Gladwin received the Australia Council for the Arts' Inaugural Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatre. Most recently he has completed filming a large-scale re-enactment of the battle scenes of Henry V with workers at a waste recycling factory in North Geelong. boration avec Sandra Calderan.

CONTACT

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