

life

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OffStage

The rookie who set the stage on fire

Lee Jian Xuan

French theatre practitioner Jean Lambert-wild will don his clown get-up to perform a series of roles in the show *Le Clown Des Marais* (Swamps Clown), from Shakespeare's *King Richard III* to the character Lucky in Samuel Beckett's existentialist play *Waiting For Godot*.

It is a work devised by him and Singapore-based French playwright-director Marc Goldberg for the *Voilà! French Festival* this year.

Lambert-wild is the artistic director of French theatre company *Theatre de l'Union*. He has written, directed and acted in his own plays, staging them at arts festivals in countries, including Japan, Hungary and Canada. The 44-year-old is married to fellow theatre practitioner Catherine Lefeuvre and they have a son, 16, and daughter, 14.

What was your first performance on stage like?

Even though I had been on stage as an amateur, the defining moment for me was my first professional role, a soldier in *Redemption Island*, a show by Matthias Langhoff, at *Theatre de la Ville* in Paris. I was wondering what I was doing there, as was my character, who was staring at everything as if he was a stranger to everything.

How do you prepare for a show?

First of all, I try to relax. I listen to music, I drink a glass of rum, I grumble a little. Then I put on my make-up. Being on stage is like being in an arena. Each time, you put your life at stake and you ask yourself whether it is worth doing it. You have to be aware of your inconsistency to overcome it.

What do you do when you make a mistake on stage?

There are no mistakes on stage, only breakthroughs. You just try to get something out of them.

What's the funniest or most memorable thing that's happened to you while you were on stage?



Clowning around: Jean Lambert-wild will perform a series of clown roles in the show *Le Clown Des Marais*. PHOTO: TRISTAN JEANNE-VALES

I was a rookie who was happy to play any role to get some experience. I was hired in Nevers, at the opera house, for a small part. I was playing a soldier, so I wore an armour, a helmet, holding a halberd, there were stairs on stage and rows of fake ancient columns.

Everything was fine during rehearsals. One night, I was late, so I rushed into the dressing room to get ready and grabbed the helmet on my way out.

As I was walking down the stairs, my helmet tipped over my eyes and I could not see. I stumbled and my

halberd got stuck into one of the columns. I pulled it out, but it threw the column off balance. The column fell, destabilising another column and all the columns fell one after another and it started a fire.

I ran away from the opera house and drove away from Nevers forever. From that day, I knew I would become a clown.

How did you deal with the harshest review of your work?

The worst thing I have ever heard was: "You really achieved something there." I would be dead if it were really the case. My reaction is to call everything into question.

You wear many hats as a theatre maker. You're a playwright, a director and a performer. Which role do you enjoy the most?

I am also a stage designer. These hats are like organs from a single body. It is hard to tell which organ you prefer.

Of course, you can live without an arm, but it is the sum of these parts which allows me to create. I consider them as members of one family. I love them all.

If you experience post-show food cravings, where do you go?

Acting feeds me and fulfils me. The only thing I need when the performance is over is the love from the people I love.

BOOK IT / LE CLOWN DES MARAIS (SWAMPS CLOWN)

WHERE: 72-13 Mohamed Sultan Road

WHEN: Friday and Saturday, 8pm; Sunday, 3pm

ADMISSION: \$25 from Sistic (call 6348-5555 or go to www.sistic.com.sg)

INFO: Go to voilah.sg/clown-des-marais/