

Mélissa Von Vépy
// Cie Happés

PIANO RUBATO

MÉLISSA VON VÉPY & STÉPHAN OLIVA

AN AERIAL AND MUSICAL PIECE // PREMIERE 2023

[November 18, 2026]

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PIANO RUBATO // 02



Mélissa Von Vépy, an aerial artist, and **Stéphan Oliva**, a musician, invite you on a journey aboard a piano-boat of which only the outlines remain—like a skeletal framework on the edge of the tangible.

This ghostly vessel could be that of the Flying Dutchman, the boat from Böcklin's: «The Isle of the Dead», or the one that, in ancient Egypt, carried souls to the Other Shore.

The passengers of this living sculpture—brought to life by Mélissa Von Vépy's breath and Stéphan Oliva's notes—explore a mysterious, transitional space, from the World of the Living to the Other World.

A journey where the elements of air and water merge, giving way to the invisible and to silence, until all that remains is sound, breath, and movement.

PIANO RUBATO
Paris l'été Festival, Cour de la Monnaie de Paris, July 2023
© Julie Mouton

PIANO RUBATO

AN AERIAL AND MUSICAL PIECE

Premiere in January 2023 at Culture Commune, the National Theater of the Pas-de-Calais Mining Basin

Duo / suitable for all ages / the show is 45 minutes long
Can be performed in various settings : theaters or non-traditional venues such as outdoor spaces, halls, abandoned sites, arenas…

Concept and Performance: **Mélissa Von Vépy**
Music Composition and Piano: **Stéphan Oliva**
Set Design: **Neil Price**, **Mélissa Von Vépy**
Artistic Collaboration: **Julia Christ**
Sound design: **Jean-Damien Ratel**
Lighting: **Sabine Charreire**
Costumes: **Catherine Sardi**
Technical director: **Cédric Cambon**
Administration: **Hélène Garcia**
Booking: **Hélène Chenelot**

→ **Teaser Piano Rubato** : https://vimeo.com/774675405
→ **Snapshot Piano Rubato open pit :** https://vimeo.com/861742329

PARTNERS

Production: Cie Happés // Mélissa Von Vépy

Coproductions:
Culture Commune, Scène nationale du Bassin Minier du Pas-de-Calais
Le Sirque, Pôle national cirque Nexon - Nouvelle Aquitaine

Residency Grants:
Le Théâtre d'Arles
La Cigalière, Théâtre de Sérignan

Support:
Ministry of Culture - DRAC Occitanie
The Occitanie, Pyrénées–Méditerranée Region
The Gard Departmental Council
This production receives support from Occitanie en scène

Special thanks and acknowledgments:
Amadeus: development of a custom electroacoustic system; Cédric Cambon: electronic design; Jean-François Tobias - Piano Historique association; Emmanuelle Grobet, Raphaële Von Vépy et Andy Steiner

The Cie Happés // Mélissa Von Vépy is Franco-Swiss.
She is under contract with the Ministry of Culture—DRAC Occitanie.



This ship floats on dry land; it is a vessel of sound.
It sways on an endless journey, all the way to the other world.
An attempt to draw closer to the invisible,
to the souls of those who, before us, have departed.
The captain is music, the woman is wind,
her breath brings this strange piano-boat to life;
All three, instruments of passage,
inextricably linked transmitters and receivers.

RUBATO [an Italian musical term, literally: “to fly or steal”, but in music: to play rhythmically with all the freedom available to a performer—their share of free will.]

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Piano as a Starting Point

A piano—a moving vessel, a scenic and musical object.
It is Stéphan's instrument as much as it is mine. We also wanted it to exist in its own right, like a sculpture.
The piano lid, disproportionately elongated, is like a ship's sail 5 meters high.

It is my breath, linked to a counterweight swinging inside the hull, that sets the movement in motion;
a sort of slow flapping of wings that allows me to move above and below it, as if I were a scuba diver: as I exhale, the ship sinks, allowing me to skim the ground, while inhaling lifts me into the air.

The design of stage structures closely interwoven with the dramaturgy is one of the defining characteristics of the Happés Company.
For the creation of this "boat-piano," I continued my collaboration (since 2011) with set designer and builder Neil Price.
This stage prop presented numerous technical challenges;
While it must immediately capture the audience's imagination through its evocative power, this stage prop is also designed to be a high-quality musical instrument—with sound engineering by Jean-Damien Ratel and the exceptional support of "Amadeus Sonorisation"—and, of course, it must serve as an "apparatus," supporting my aerial movements.
Added to this extraordinary design is the structure's movement: it rotates 360° on its own axis and swings 180°; the electronic design linked to my breathing was created by Cédric Cambon.

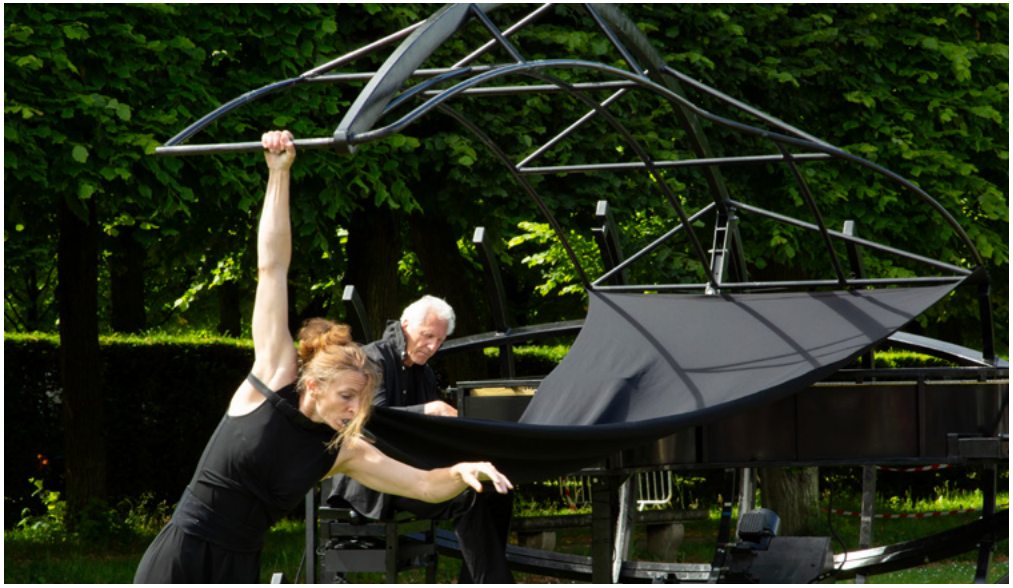
A Musical and Visual Immersion

For this piece, I wanted to delve into the essence of my aerial practice, as well as those of Butoh and Qigong, to compose—together with Stéphan Oliva—a score that is both auditory and visual.

Through resonances or in counterpoint to Stéphan's notes, I make this piano-boat dance, melting into the air, physically embodying—without emotion—through my breath and muscles, a woman-wind.

Here, the piano has become a craft, a vessel, a ship. By extrapolating its intrinsic potential, the music transports us inward. That is why we conceived this performance as a journey on the open sea—at times calm, at times stormy, on the surface or in the depths—calling at islands of unique shades.

Mélissa Von Vépy





PIANO RUBATO

← Sceaux Jazz Festival, june 2024
© Julie Mouton

↙ ↓ Villeneuve en scène Festival, july 2024
Cloître de la Collegiale
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PRESS // EXCERPTS

TTTT «The apparatus, swaying along with the performers, is like an open cocoon from which dreams of flight escape. Wonderful.»
Stéphanie Barioz ▪ **Télérama**

«Piano Rubato invites you on a metaphorical journey through both calm and turbulent waters. The aerial artist's graceful movements complement the jazz composer's virtuosity. The magic happens. The journey is beautiful. Just like in a dream, time slows down and then stands still.»
L'Oeil d'Olivier

« An aerial performance combined with a musical and visual immersion—this is the challenge successfully met by the duo Mélissa Von Vépy and Stéphan Oliva, who, in this acrobatic concert, offer an unforgettable moment of poetic grace.»
Sceneweb

« Here, the woman is the wind—when she isn't a siren emerging from the strings of an extraordinary piano; the captain is music. As they traverse the space with breathtakingly beautiful, ethereal movements, making the stage vibrate to the rhythm of enchanting notes, the two seem to be sailing on the open sea—at times calm, at times stormy. And we are immediately overwhelmed by emotion.»
Léna Martinelli ▪ **Les Trois coups.**

« Piano Rubato is a wordless and intriguing work (...) as beautiful as it is mesmerizing. The movement and the quality of the dancing body and the music come together and respond to one another. The breath of one and the rhythm of the other find each other, guide each other, and echo one another.»
Mathieu Dochtermann ▪ **Toute la Culture**

Read the full press review on the company's website here

PIANO RUBATO // 09



PERFORMANCES

• **January 12 and 13, 2023: World Premiere** ▪ **Culture Commune**, **Scène nationale** du Bassin Minier du Pas-de-Calais Commune, Loos-en-Gohelle

• January 17 ▪ **Le Prato**, National Circus Center, Lille

• April 15 and 16, 2023 ▪ **Les Franciscaines**, Deauville—as part of SPRING, the international festival of new forms of circus in Normandy

• June 2 and 3, 2023 ▪ **Les Soirées c/o Cie Happés**, Aigues-Vives

•July 23, 2023 ▪ **Festival L'été du Grand Jardin**, Joinville

• July 25 and 26, 2023 ▪ **Festival Paris l'été**, Cour d'Honneur de la Monnaie de Paris

• September 29 and 30, 2023 ▪ **Espace culturel de La Hague**

• November 18, 2023 ▪ **Temps de cirque Festival**, Espace La Faire Alais in Saint-Martin-de-Valgagues / By La Verrerie, National Circus Center, Alès

• June 16, 2024 ▪ **Les Gémeaux**, Sceaux National Theater

• July 6–13, 2024 ▪ **Villeneuve en Scène Festival**, Villeneuve-les-Avignon

• August 13 and 14, 2024 ▪ **Multipistes Festival, Le Sirque**, Nexon National Circus Center – Nouvelle-Aquitaine

• September 19 and 20, 2024 ▪ **Le PALC** – National Circus Center, Châlons-en-Champagne

• September 28, 2024 ▪ Opening of the cultural season, **Mauguio-Carnon**

• November 15, 2024 ▪ L'**Agora**, National Circus Center of Boulazac

• December 19, 2024 ▪ **Beaulieu Danse**, Poitiers

• January 31, 2025 ▪ **Le Cube - C3**, Douvres-la-Délivrande

- March 8, 2025 ▪ **Le Boulon**, National Center for Street Arts and Public Space, Vieux-Condé
- March 13–20, 2025 ▪ **Théâtre de la Cité internationale**, Paris
- May 18, 2025 ▪ **La Croisée des Arts, Provence Verte** Cultural Center, Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume
- May 24 and 25, 2025 ▪ **Théâtre de la Renaissance**, Oullins, in partnership with the **UtoPistes Festival**, Oullins
- June 15, 2025 ▪ **Comédie de Genève**, Switzerland
- June 19, 2025 ▪ **Fillinges**, Haute-Savoie
- June 27 and 28, 2025 ▪ **Teatro Rivoli Porto**, Portugal
- July 5, 2025 ▪ **Beauvallon – Festilac** with **the Train Théâtre**, Portes-les-Valences
- August 22–24, 2025 ▪ L**es Romanesques Festival**, Sauve
- April 10 and 11, 2026 ▪ **Lunel Community of Communes**, Saint-Just
- May 31, 2026 ▪ City of **Genas**
- June 7, 2026 ▪ T**héâtre Le trait d'Union**, Mont-lès-Neufchâteau
- June 23, 2026 ▪ **Théâtre des Quatre Saisons**, Gradignan
- July 28, 2026 ▪ **La Déferlante, Saint-Gilles-Croix-de-Vie**
- July 30, 2026 ▪ **La Déferlante, Pornic**
- August 29, 2026 ▪ **Itinérance - Corps en mouvement**, Poitiers
- September 13, 2026 ▪ **Scènes Vagabondes**, Meudon

PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS

Can be performed in various settings: theaters or non-traditional venues such as outdoor spaces, halls, abandoned sites, arenas…

Suitable for all ages
Running time: 50 minutes

- Minimum of 2 performances (possibility of 2 performances per day—to be discussed)
- 4 people on tour; please contact us for pricing details.

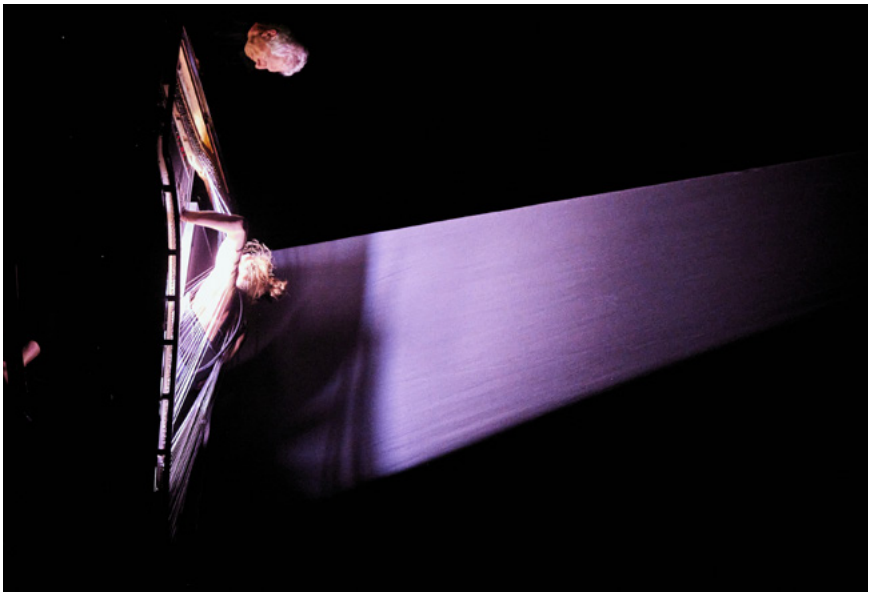
TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Minimum dimensions of the performance space:
A circle with a diameter of 10m (flat floor—load capacity: 500kg/m^2), height under the grid or ceiling: 7m.

Note: For performances outside theaters, we require an electrical outlet (16A) and a lighting truss stand.
Otherwise, we are entirely self-sufficient, transporting our own sound and lighting equipment (LED projectors).

→ **See technical rider**

PIANO RUBATO // 13







TEAM



MÉLISSA VON VÉPY // CIE HAPPÉS • Concept - Performance

Born in Geneva in 1979, she began her circus training at the age of 5 and later enrolled at the CNAC, from which she graduated in 1999 as a trapeze artist.
Through her company, Happés, she creates performances that blend her work in aerial arts, dance, and theater.
The set designs she creates are an integral part of the dramaturgy of her pieces, which are always grounded in aerial expression: the physical and inner dimensions of Gravity.
Together with her long-time artistic collaborators—Sabine Charreire, Pascale Henry, Sumako Koseki, Stéphan Oliva, Neil Price, Jean-Damien Ratel, Catherine Sardi, and others—Mélissa Von Vépy has been exploring, for some twenty years, the infinite metaphors of our vertical movements.

PREVIOUS SHOWS:

2025: ***Aspirator*** (duo) Premiere in October 2025
2023: ***Piano Rubato*** (duo)
2021: ***Les Flyings*** (quintet)
2018: ***Noir M1*** (solo)
2017: ***L'Aérien***, a talk-and-flight performance (solo)
2015: ***J'ai horreur du printemps*** (concert-performance with a jazz quartet)
2013: ***VieLLeicht*** (solo)
2009: ***Miroir, Miroir*** (duo for mirror and piano)
2009: ***Dans la gueule du ciel*** (duo)
2007: ***Croc*** (solo, co-directed by C. Ikeda)

Co-directed with Chloé Moglia:
2007: ***En suspens*** (quintet, co-directed by C. Moglia)
2005: ***I look up, I look down...*** (duo) / SACD Circus Art Award – 2007
2003: ***Temps Troubles*** (trio)
2001: ***Un certain endroit du ventre*** (duo)

AS A PERFORMER

«Talk Show» (2017) by Gaël Santisteva, «Ce qui n'a pas de nom» (2015) by Pascale Henry, «Hans was Heiri» (2012) by Zimmermann & de Perrot, «UCHUU-cabaret» (2008) by Carlotta Ikeda, «Les Sublimes» (2003) by Guy Alloucherie.

EDUCATION AND ARTISTIC ADVISOR

Mélissa Von Vépy regularly leads workshops and master classes on aerial arts and is invited to serve as a collaborator and artistic advisor by several companies.
She co-directed «**Plonger**» (premiered in December 2023) by Sarah Devaux / Cie Menteuses, as part of her mentorship program with Cie Happés.



STEPHAN OLIVA • Composer, pianist

Born in France, jazz pianist, improviser, composer (film, theater, and live performance music), and performer of classical and contemporary music, Stephan Oliva has forged a unique path, shaped by his passions, his emotions, and the people he has met.
From the legacy of Bill Evans (whose live concert first drew him to jazz) to the voices of Susanne Abbuehl, Linda Sharrock, and Hannah Schygulla (whom he accompanies); from the austere style of Lennie Tristano (revisited with his collaborator François Raulin) to the trapeze (his duo with “aerial dancer ” Mélissa Von Vépy), from Paul Motian (whom he reveres and invited to perform) to film scores (which he composes), Stéphan Oliva is decidedly an atypical and multifaceted pianist and musician.
Having emerged on the jazz scene in the early 1990s, following a solid classical education, Stéphan Oliva immediately joined an informal group of musicians of his generation (Claude Tchamitchian, Jean-Pierre Jullian, Bruno Chevillon, François Merville...) who shared the same artistic aspirations. They quickly became the rising stars of French jazz and remain leading figures on the European scene today.

4** jazzman (1992 - 1999 - 2002 - 2008 - 2010-2019)**
“**Grand Prix**” for **Jazz Album fromAcadémie Charles Cros 2017**
France Musique’s choice 2010, 2012 et 2013, 2017 and 2019

Listen
Stéphan Oliva - ***Cinéma invisible*** - Bonus track #1 : **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_K6am_mB7Qw**



NEIL PRICE • Set designer, builder

Neil Price was born in Hemel Hempstead, England, where he studied engineering.
At the age of 20, he set out on a tour of Europe as a street performer and settled in France, where he has lived ever since.
He met L'Estock Fish, a street theater and circus troupe, with whom he created several shows.
In 2004, he joined Les 3 points de suspension / Dakota, a Franco-Swiss company.
He designed the sets, created the props, and performed with them as an actor and technical director. («Voyage en bordure du bord du bout du monde», «Nié Qui Tamola», «Looking for paradise», «Bains publics», «Ostrea Odulis», «Squash»).
Since 2011, he has designed the sets for Mélissa Von Vépy / Cie Happés for each of her plays («VieLLeicht», «J'ai horreur du printemps», «L'Aérien», «Noir M1», «Les Flyings»).
An exceptional structural engineer, Neil Price works closely with directors to bring their ideas to life, always striving to serve the play's message and its unique aesthetic vision, while adhering to precise safety and practicality specifications.
For the past decade, numerous performing artists have called upon his expertise to bring their set designs to life (Sumako Koseki, Ana Ventura, Thomas Guiral, Mathilde Jaillette, Olivia Csiky Trnka, Sarah Devaux…).
He is currently collaborating with Mélissa Von Vépy—«Piano Rubato», La Cie du Prélude—«Littoral», and Charlie Moine—«Le comité des fêtes».

PIANO RUBATO
Villeneuve en scène Festival, july 2024 →
Cloître de la Collegiale
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Sceaux Jazz Festival, june 2024 ↓
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