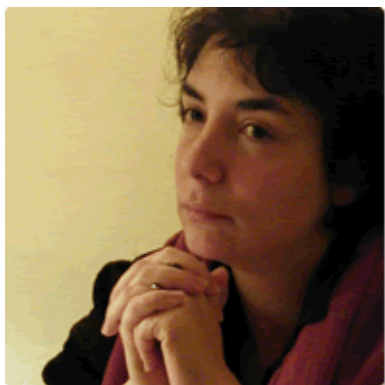




Mr. Vincent Baudriller, general artistic director of the Avignon Festival



Ms. Hortense Archambault, assistant director of the Avignon Festival

Festival d'Avignon

<http://www.festival-avignon.com/>

## Presenter Interview プレゼンターインタビュー

### The Avignon Festival reborn Talking about subjects like the Festival's new Associate Artist program

新生アヴィニヨン・フェスティバル  
新たにアソシエイト・アーティスト制度を導入するなど話題

After France's performing arts workers (Intermittent) strike forced the cancellation of the 2003 Avignon Festival, doubts were cast on the future of this world-famous international performing arts festival. Those doubts were soon dispelled, however, when the Festival returned to a highly successful 2004 holding under the direction of Vincent Baudriller, who assumed the post of general artistic director for the Festival in 2002, while still in his thirties. We had the pleasure of interviewing Mr. Baudriller and the Avignon Festival's assistant director, Ms. Hortense Archambault, when they visited Japan for the first time last November.

(Interviewed with Shintaro Fujii, Waseda University)

Mr. Vincent Baudriller, general artistic director of the Avignon Festival

Ms. Hortense Archambault, assistant director of the Avignon Festival

Looking back now that the first Avignon Festival under your direction is over, it seems that the program centering on French, German, Dutch and Flanders productions put together with your Associate Artist, Thomas Ostermeier, received very high acclaim from the people involved and the critics as well. Could you tell us about this Associate Artist concept?

Baudriller: We invite a new Associate Artist for each year's festival. For this position we have chosen people who have a very strong and highly unique artistic world of their own, from which have emerged works or productions that we love. In 2004 it was Thomas Ostermeier of Berlin and for 2005 it is Jan Fabre of Antwerp, Belgium. For 2006, we have already decided on France's Joseph Nagi and in 2007, also from France, Frédéric Fisbach. Choosing a different artist every year in this way will also bring great variety in terms of the temper of each festival. We have already begun discussions with Nagi and Fisbach about the directions the Festival will take in their respective years, as of course we did with Fabre.

In each festival we include several productions by the Associate Artist and other artists they are closely connected with, and besides such works we also include readings, exhibits and talks by writers, philosophers, sociologists and the like, as well as holding discussions, etc. In this way we are able to give a larger, multifaceted experience of that artist's unique world.

The actual process involves a series of discussions with the artist about the basic direction of the festival program. Then we discuss actual contents and specific names of the other artists to be invited and works to be staged. Finally we discuss the peripheral programs and other details. Although I am the one who has overall responsibility for the final program decisions, the associate artists are involved with us in all aspects of the program formation and preparations for each festival.

## Presenter Interview

The Avignon Festival reborn  
Talking about subjects like the Festival's new  
Associate Artist program

新生アヴィニヨン・フェスティバル  
新たにアソシエイト・アーティスト制度を  
導入するなど話題

What about the Avignon Festival audience? For example, about what percentage of the audience are professionals?

Baudriller: We had a total audience of about 100,000 for the 2004 festival and roughly 15% of them were producers, journalists, directors and other people involved in the performing arts. The large majority of the audience is from the general public, coming from all parts of France as well as the surrounding countries to enjoy a few days of very concentrated and rich theater experience. One of the things that makes this festival so enriching is the open curiosity and sensitivity of this audience.

Archambault: I believe what makes the Avignon Festival unique is not only its concentration on new works that was started by the festival's founder, Jean Vilar, that makes it such a contemporary festival, but also the fact that it is open to such a large and varied audience, not just people of the theater world.

It seems that the 2004 festival and also the festival for this year have a very strong European orientation ....

Baudriller: The contents of the festival are different every year, depending on the Associate Artist we choose. So, there is no intention to center the festival's program on any particular country or region. Still, it is true that Europe is naturally the framework of the world we actually live and work in. Working with theater people from Germany for the 2004 festival, we were greatly surprised at how different French and German theater is. We found that everything was different, from the organizational and structural aspects to the way works are given expression, the role of the actors and the way they perform, the roles of the scenographer and the playwright—it was all so different. We believe that it is the mission of the Avignon Festival to create the opportunities and the venues to bring France in contact with and to make us confront these kinds of cultural uniqueness, individuality and differences.

Archambault: As Europe becomes more united and the European Union expands eastward (in May 2004 EU membership expanded from 15 to 25 countries) and we begin to rethink our cultural policies, I think it is very important for us to seek out the kinds of cultural differences that Vincent has just mentioned.

Baudriller: We are constantly lobbying, talking to politicians not only France, Germany and Belgium but all around Europe, to encourage their governments to recognize the importance of providing ongoing public services in the cultural realm, to support artists and creative activities. Culture has to remain outside the realm of capitalism; it should not be subjected to market forces. That is the only way to protect Europe's cultural identity.

## Presenter Interview

The Avignon Festival reborn  
Talking about subjects like the Festival's new  
Associate Artist program

新生アヴィニヨン・フェスティバル  
新たにアソシエイト・アーティスト制度を  
導入するなど話題

Since you mention public services, the Intermittent (union of freelance workers in the performing arts and audio visual entertainment field, professional actors, dancers and technicians) protests forced the 2003 Avignon Festival to be cancelled. Both of you were working in the Festival's administration at the time. Can you tell us how you felt?

Archambault: The Intermittent problem is directly tied into the question of how artists can exist in society, how they can make a normal living. France's unemployment system is not run directly by the government. It is run by the employers, unions and workers' representatives. The unemployment insurance paid to Intermittent (which system is said to be heavily in the red) is paid for not only by the people in the performing arts and audio visual field but by all the workers. The government believed that reform of the unemployment insurance system, which for example would involve a reduction in unemployment compensation, was not an important cultural policy problem. However, that reform was something that put the people working in the performing arts and the movie industry in an unstable financial situation and brought a sense of crisis in the theater world. Even if unemployment insurance is not by nature an issue of the Ministry of Culture, I hope that the administrators of the system or the Ministry of Culture can present a solution that will be acceptable to all the people involved.

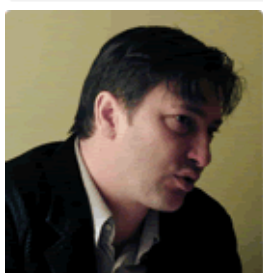
In 2003, the Intermittent staged strikes and strong protests because they felt that their livelihood was being threatened. While we felt sympathetic with their cause and wanted to show solidarity, we also felt that striking and canceling festivals was an impulsive and inappropriate strategy for achieving their goals. That was the first time the festival had been cancelled in its nearly 60-year history. Although the unemployment insurance problem has still not been solved, when we consider the importance of festivals like this for the artists' careers, I don't think they will force the cancellation of their own festivals again. This is because I believe that, like other arts, or even more so, theater depends on people for its existence. You could even say that the people are its very existence, and I believe that the artists understand this.

Baudriller: While it is true that the unemployment insurance reform was not one that fit the realities of the theater world, shutting down the festival was not the best means to oppose it. Since then, we have gather representatives from the parties involved and provided opportunities for serious ongoing discussions to try to get some kind of agreement. Soon a new reform proposal should be made and we hope that it will be a satisfactory one.

## Presenter Interview

The Avignon Festival reborn  
Talking about subjects like the Festival's new  
Associate Artist program

新生アヴィニヨン・フェスティバル  
新たにアンシエイト・アーティスト制度を  
導入するなど話題



You both worked under the Avignon Festival director Bernard Faivre d'Arcier until 2003 and then took over the directorship after he left. Can you tell us about the events leading up to this change?

Baudriller: Faivre d'Arcier served as director of the Avignon Festival for two terms and during that tenure he helped make it an even more professional and international festival. As you surely know, he organized an excellent Japanese-centered program in 1994. But, the Minister of Culture (at the time Jean-Jacque Ayagon) decided not to renew his tenure. After that, we drew up a proposal for continuing the management of the Festival and suggestions for new directions for the future.

The Avignon Festival is run by a non-profit association and its administrative committee has the power to choose the succeeding directors. Representatives of the government (Ministry of Culture), and the festival's other supporting bodies on the regional, provincial and municipal level sit on this committee (among which the voice of the Ministry and the Avignon municipal government are especially strong). We made our presentation before this committee and were chosen to succeed as directors.

What do you feel you have inherited from Faivre d'Arcier? And is there anything you will be doing differently from the course followed under his direction?

Baudriller: In the sense that we will make our festival one dedicated to new creation and aimed at a diverse audience, I think our work will continue to be an extension of the Avignon Festival's long tradition. But, one important thing that will be different is that we will not continue the policy of focusing on a different country with each festival. Instead our programs will center on our chosen Associate Artists. Many of the artists we invited in 2004 are ones who have also performed or directed at Avignon in the past. So, in this sense it is clear that we have not made any drastic changes in the nature of the festival. Since its founding by Jean Vilar in 1947, The Avignon Festival has a 57-year history. I believe it is our responsibility to make sure that this tradition continues long into the future

Archambault: We have also strengthened our support program for organizing tours of the productions that have debuted at our festival. There are no productions that the Festival produces alone. Although the types of involvement may be different, all the works performed at the Festival are joint productions of some form. We have established a department in our organization that is in charge of tour coordination for the productions after the Festival.

Avignon has a 57-year tradition and is one of the largest performing arts festivals in the world. Don't you feel some amount of pressure having been appointed to direct this festival at such a young age?

Baudriller: Jean Vilar was 35 years old when he founded the Avignon Festival. Fevel Darchier was also 35 when he was first appointed director of the Festival. So, I guess we are just the right age (laughs) (Baudriller was 36 and Archambault 34 at the time of this interview). Youth can be a strength. The performing arts are living arts, and I believe that in this sense they are arts of youth. We want the Avignon Festival to be even more open to being a festival of today's artists performing with today's modes of expression to today's audience.

## Presenter Interview

The Avignon Festival reborn  
Talking about subjects like the Festival's new  
Associate Artist program

新生アヴィニヨン・フェスティバル  
新たにアソシエイト・アーティスト制度を  
導入するなど話題

One of the complaints heard in recent years is that the Festival's tickets are too expensive (23 ~33 euro for general tickets to main productions). Although the prices are much less than in Japan, for a person like me who saw over 20 works during the course of a week at the 2004 festival, you have to be prepared to pay a considerable price for that privilege. The lack of lodging facilities and difficulty of getting reservations are also limitations that prevent the gathering of larger audiences, aren't they?

Archambault:Of course we are aware of these problems of accessibility. We make efforts to help make the stays of people coming to the Festival as inexpensive as possible. Almost since the Festival began, we have gotten public facilities like schools to make lodging space available to young people coming to the Festival, and we are lobbying the city of Avignon to make even more lodging available. As for the price of the tickets, we have support that helps us keep the prices fairly inexpensive. However, it is true that you will be paying quite a sum if you try to see as many productions as possible during a whole week (laughs).

Baudriller: Still, when you consider the cost that goes into the productions, I think the ticket prices are cheap. If you go to the Aix-en-Provence music festival you will find that the tickets there are several times more expensive. Also, as a new measure started in 2004, we set quite inexpensive student and youth discounts on tickets. Thanks to this we sold a lot more tickets. It hurt us in terms of revenue, but the increase in number of tickets sold is good news for the future of our project. We also noticed a considerable increase in the number of young people in the theater audiences. I think it is another strength of the Avignon Festival that you can see people from three, or even four generations in the same theater audience, including people who have continued coming since the very first Festival in 1947 to young people coming for the first time.

Archambault:We have worked set a youth and student discount price of 12 euro and also made several productions free or with a minimal charge of 5 euro. If you asked us to do more, I think we have already reached the economic limits (laughs).

## Presenter Interview

The Avignon Festival reborn  
Talking about subjects like the Festival's new  
Associate Artist program

新生アヴィニヨン・フェスティバル  
新たにアンシエイト・アーティスト制度を  
導入するなど話題



Would you tell us about the makeup of the public funding you get? What is the ratio of national and local government funding? This involves problematic questions that many festivals have to deal with, like the question of what audience the festival is ultimately for.

Baudriller: We receive funding from the national, regional, departmental and arrondissement governments, but 60% of the financial support we get is from the national government. The rest of the breakdown is 21% from the city of Avignon, 10% from the departmental and 9% from the regional governments. The relationship with the local audience is a very important question. We moved our offices from Paris to Avignon. We have a tradition of the Festival being closely tied to local venues like the interior garden of the Papal Palace, the Calme Monastery and the Bourbon Quarry. Thus, it is important that our artists come and see the actual venues and discuss how they will be used and also to talk directly with people from the local audience. Some 35% of our festival's audience come from the local areas.

Archambault: In the past, the support from local government was equal to that of the national government. But, as the costs of mounting the Festival have increased, the municipal funding has remained the same while the national funding has continued to increase to the point that the amounts are quite a difference now. In terms of the Festival's finances, we maintain a balance of income and expenses, except in unexpected cases like the recent cancellation. We have a good relationship with both the national and local governments&mdash;really (laughs). They give us a lot of artistic freedom. We are never forced to listen to outside comments from supporting bodies about the artistic content of the Festival.

In the past there was criticism that Avignon municipal government gave more financial support to its little-known opera theater than to its internationally famous performing arts festival. Is that still the case?

Archambault: Yes, it is.

How do the two of you work together? What are your individual roles in the running of the Festival?

Baudriller: We work together side-by-side very well (laughs). I am mainly responsible for the artistic aspects and the programming.

Archambault: I am responsible for the administrative, financial and personnel aspects. If Vincent's job is envisioning dreams, I guess my job is turning dreams into reality. Vincent is the one who says "Oui" and I am the one who often has to say "Non" (laughs).

I believe that what we need more than anything in Japan's cultural scene today is that kind of good balance between dreams and reality. Thank you very much for talking to us today.

### Note:

Both Joseph Nagi and Frédéric Fisbach are known to have strong associations with Japan. In the 2006 festival we plan to include in the Avignon program a new joint international work with French and Japanese dancers and Japanese musicians to be produced in cooperation with the Setagaya Public Theater. This will be the first time that Japanese artists will perform on the inner garden stage at the Papal Palace, and it means we will realize performances in both France and Japan with expectation.