

# Press review

## Le Monde

Françoise Limoge

There are a couple of knowing smiles to be spotted from the people who have got it, but most of the crowd watching are hanging on to wait and see, clearly disturbed by these “animal-men”, with mixed feelings of both shame – “and why isn’t the animal protection society coming to do something about this?” – and also fear – oh, what utter terror on the faces of some people when one of the creatures managed to break out of its cage later in the day! This production aims to excite curiosity and get people talking in the street. And there is no denying that *The Squames* is a performance which manages to do precisely that.

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## Diário da Região (Brasil)

The make-up is so convincing and the acting so sharp, that it gives the audience the impact of realism. “Today’s society doesn’t accept differences, whether cultural, religious or racial. People are developing cutting-edge technology, and yet their states of mind aren’t developing at nearly the same rate. We want to show how people should accept things as they are. We want to spark off discussion, and get people thinking and commenting, in a bid to move towards greater tolerance.” Barthélemy Bompard is feeling edgy before his first performance in Brazil; a mixture of excitement and apprehension. “We don’t know how the audience will react. We know the history of slavery in Brazil and our show deals with that very subject.”

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## L’humanité

*The Squames* was a mind-boggling display of ape-like men locked up in a cage that was parked in the middle of the Jardin des Carmes for a whole afternoon. A parody put on by the Kumulus theatre company.

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## Télérama

*The Squames* is heavy duty, laden with history. The show is now 20 years old, and the performance is worthy of Kumulus - as grand-scale as what the company has become today.

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## Le Parisien

G.D.

“What the hell are they?” one woman asked as she walked past. The female cage guard walked up to answer her: “Well actually, they’re Squames.” “Squames?” “It is an endangered species, half-animal, half-man. There are only a few specimens left alive in Romania,” she

went on to explain. “And so who are you?” another bystander asked. “We are employed by a research centre that is working on a study project to analyse them. We are putting them in the public eye like this so as to raise awareness about their fate.” “Ah..., I see.” An offended woman suddenly had an angry outburst: “It’s outrageous to put on them on show like this in such a degrading fashion!” An old man suddenly broke through the crowd, laughing out: “They are monkeys dressed up as men!” A few young girls approached the cage, shaking with nerves. “Don’t be scared, it’s only theatre!” someone burst out. Indeed it is: the Kumulus theatre company acting up again.

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## **Le Figaro**

“Hey, look, prehistoric men!” – “Looks like it. They walked and talked like that. I bet they are trying to show how man has descended from the ape.” - “Yes, that’s right, first there came the ape, and then came man.” - “Come on, let’s go!” - “You’re not scared are you?” - “No, it’s just they’re so ugly they’re freaking me out.” - “They’ve wheeled out a bunch of nutcases.” - “They really shouldn’t. It’s far too scary.” - “The guards are prison wardens, so no need to be scared.” Yesterday, during The Squames, the performance was out on the street. But the best actors were the people out and about wandering through Lyon, who hadn’t had a chance to talk to each other like that since the public transport strike.

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## **24 heures (Switzerland)**

Everybody knows that when you go to the zoo, you are not really sure who is looking at whom: is the animal inside, or outside the cage? Although it is quite rare for a human being to be compared to a hippopotamus, and far from pleasant, being compared to a monkey is undoubtedly very frequent, and indeed disturbing.

Once or twice one of the squames managed to get away, but was quickly grabbed by one of the guards. Yet the crowd seemed more worried and inquisitive once these creatures were locked up behind bars. Some people stayed for two, three or even up to five hours in front of the cage. Come nightfall, the audience was totally captivated, surprised, and even fascinated, but above all utterly struck by the strangeness of the show, and the rigorous performance of the actors. Others hung around for only a few minutes before walking off, finding the whole thing stupid, or at the very least anecdotal. This looked nothing like a happening, but rather it verged on an urban event, extremely well crafted, and increasingly inventive as each day went by. You can go to the zoo fifteen times, you can look at yourself in the mirror every morning, but no matter how often you do so, you are never left indifferent ...

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## **Ecrits dans la Marge**

**J.M. Lachaud / M. Maleval**

There is a double audience here. The spectators are either in the know, or they’re not. They are either there to watch, or just passing by. If they are there to watch, then they get to see a ‘total’ show, both inside and outside the cage, as they look on with amusement and sometimes worry at other people’s reactions in the audience. If they are just passers-by, then they end up getting doubly taken advantage of, not just by the actors, but also by the stare of all the people

who are 'in on the joke'. You could even argue that the audience itself unwittingly ends up being part of the performance too, coerced into acting out the story as defined and agreed by the Kumulus Theatre Company.

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## **Sub-Rock**

**Bernadette Bayonnette**

We are treated to an aesthetically shocking spectacle, as if watching deadly violence being exorcised. The focus is on dressing up different forms of racism and genocide that are linked to the theme of the fear of others, that we can all have curled up festering inside us. It's possibly a more lucid and useful angle than just staying with the softly-softly approach of a humanist and educational denunciation, which often comes out having a perverse effect.

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## **L'Anjou laïque**

**Jean Louis Grégoire**

Intrigued by the description of the *The Squames* in the festival programme, I decided to make my way to the Place de la République where it was due to be shown. Things were taking longer than expected for the show to get underway, before finally someone from the theatre company came forward to announce that the Mayor of Angers had decided that the performance would not be going ahead at all. The mayor's decision was a clear case of censorship in the true sense of the word as defined in the Petit Larousse dictionary:

"Censorship : control exercised by government, authority over the press, over performances, etc .... intended for public consumption." In fact, the reason given to explain the ban only served to further reinforce it. Does it only take "certain members of the audience" to be "shocked" by the show for the mayor to impose a ban? And is he really the person to be championing accepted standards of behaviour? Did he at any stage look into whether these "certain members of the audience" were actually capable of understanding the meaning of what was to be shown?

Did he go to any lengths to find out what the writer was aiming to convey through this production? And had he ever actually seen the show? Or did he not in fact draw a link – an obvious one indeed – between this show and the exhibition currently being shown at the Angers Natural History Museum, entitled "Human Zoos : Creating Savages". Fundamentally, this decision by the council raises the issue of the very nature of the festival itself, as well as the creative freedom of expression of modern culture.

## ***Bis repetita***

Only a few weeks after the event, which had certainly left a deep impression on people's minds, the local council suddenly struck again. The city hall issued an order to take down two of the twenty panels put on display by the Kel Imenas Association, depicting images of the crisis in North Mali, and life in the refugee camps. Two acts of censorship in the space of only two weeks.