



ROYAL
DE LUXE NANTES

The true History of France

Creation 1990

The History of France is a great tale. This is the first true story that is ever told to children : it is the story of great ones told to little ones .

The engravings in our history books have shaped the collective imagination and given faces to Charlemagne, Louis XI, Vercingetorix and Napoleon. Amidst this profusion of images and “legends”, only a few things remain stuck in our memories later on : Joan of Arc on the stake, Roland and his sword, the Guillotine, the Crusades, King St. Louis under his oak tree, the Lazy Kings, etc. ... In this way, History becomes much more surreal and, regardless of the unfilled gaps between these snap-shots, everyone makes these images and stories their own.

The tale we will be telling is of these characters, these snap-shots, which inhabit our memories. Our History of France will be the one everyone knows. That's why we call it "The True History of France."

We felt it necessary to put these characters, drawn from the iconography of historical textbooks, back into in their own environment - books.

Our show takes place in a book. This book is about 7 meters by 4 and 1.70 meters thick. It contains a dozen pages. The whole story is told in the style of these children's books, where each page has articulated collages, which unfold in three dimensions. This is quite a complex scenic system considering each page is 24 m² and weighs nearly 300 kg. It is reminiscent of the huge painted opera backdrops or those large theatrical set machines.

The show begins when the book is placed in the square. It takes a crane to unload it, it weighs nearly 8 tons. It is bound like an old book and you can read "The True History of France" engraved on the spine. During a whole day, all the props are placed around the book and the special effects are being prepared. Our long costume rail, where Richelieu mingles with Napoleon and Marie Antoinette, is placed next to the book, whilst the sound technicians' stands are being installed. As with all previous shows at the Royal, the construction takes place as you go along for several hours, about fifteen people are busy working around the book.

The story begins when the Gauls open the book from within, lifting the cover page like a lid. The turning of the pages will punctuate the show and on each of these pages one period brushing the previous one away. The turning of the pages is difficult but these are magical set changes.