

“*Shame must change sides.*” With these words, as well as with her decision to make her trial public, Gisèle Pelicot has become a symbol in the fight to end violence against women. The rape case examines and reveals how, in this small town in southern France, ordinary men of all ages and social backgrounds are capable of committing an inhumane crime: the repeated rape of an unconscious woman.

The Martin E. Segal Theatre Center/The Graduate Center CUNY in collaboration with the Judson Memorial Church, Skirball NYU, supported by the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York presents in New York City a special performance of the *The Pelicot Trial*, a production by Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen), co-produced by the Festival d’Avignon — by renowned Swiss director Milo Rau and Servane Dècle. Supported by the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York. This unique presentation features readings of the trial proceeding in the newly translated American adaptation of the sensational *The Pelicot Trial*, with the World Premiere at the Vienna Festival in 2025, later presented by the Avignon Festival—regarded by many as the highlight of the festival.

Milo Rau and Servane Dècle’s extraordinary “Theatre of the Real” oratorio examines the Gisèle Pelicot case in a four-hour afternoon performance with readings of documents retracing and examining this groundbreaking historic trial—a watershed event that deeply entered the psyche of the French nation. The New York version of *The Pelicot Trial: Tribute to Gisèle Pelicot* will take place at the historic performance art venue Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village in New York City. Judson Church still serves also as a diverse, vibrant place of worship with its own congregation—creating a spiritual community through the pursuit of justice actions, talks, family events, sermons, social justice actions, creative expression, and contemplation.

Livestreams via HowlRound Theatre Commons at howlround.com.

Check www.festwochen.at/en/pelicot-trial-world-tour for world tour of *The Pelicot Trial—Tribute to Gisèle Pelicot* in Paris/France, St. Gallen/Switzerland, Milan/Italy, Bergen & Oslo/Norway, Copenhagen/Denmark, Belgrade/Serbia, Sarajevo/Bosnia and Herzegovina, Stockholm/Sweden, Warsaw/Poland, Lisbon/Portugal, Avignon/France, and Vienna/Austria.

Supported by the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York

Special Thanks to Claire Montgomery & Jim MacGregor



The Martin E. Segal Theatre Center is home to theatre artists, scholars, students, performing arts managers, and the local and international performance communities, providing a supportive environment for conversation, open exchange, and the development of new ideas and new work. www.TheSegalTheatre.org

Frontispiece Image by (c) Patryk Różycki

THE PELICOT TRIAL

... a scenic oratorio

by MILO RAU & SERVANE DÈCLE



Sunday, March 29
6:00 PM - 10:00 PM

JUDSON CHURCH, NEW YORK CITY
55 Washington Square South

The Pelicot Trial is undoubtedly one of the most publicized and discussed public trials—and therefore also most symbolic of our time. As in a sociological study, it shows that in a perfectly normal Western European city—the small town of Mazan in the south of France, close to Avignon—perfectly ordinary men from all social classes and age groups are capable of perhaps the most extreme crime: the repeated rape of an unconscious woman. “Shame must change sides”: Gisèle Pelicot’s decision to make her trial public made her the symbolic figure of a possible turning point. THE PELICOT TRIAL pays tribute to an ordinary woman who became an icon of resistance against the sexual and sexist violences committed by men.

Excerpts of an interview with Milo Rau & Servane Dècle

by Natalie Assmann, March 16, 2025

N.A.: How did the idea for this evening come about?

M.R.: I have been to the Festival d’Avignon with my work many times. Court cases, trials and processing them in theatre are an essential part of my artistic identity, so I naturally followed the trial closely. After the trial—that took place in Avignon—we realized that no one was addressing this case artistically for the upcoming festival. It just felt wrong to go there in July and not engage with it in any way!

N.A.: The trial itself lasted for over three months. How did you approach this enormous amount of material? You mentioned that it was not allowed to make audio recordings in the courtroom in Avignon.

S.D.: We have been working with journalists’ notes from nearly 600 hours of hearings. Then we started having personal conversations: with journalists, researchers, lawyers, feminists from Avignon who attended the trial and others. We might not be able to fully reconstruct the Pelicot trial, but our goal is to give voice to what happened.

N.A.: So, would you describe this as an attempt to reconstruct the case – which in itself would already be a political act of remembrance?

M.R.: Exactly! We decided to stage the reading in a sacred space, as an allegory to the Stations of the Cross. We deliberately chose a simple format for this evening because in my experience that is the most convincing way to tell this story. It’s about disentangling the story from the couple Gisèle and Dominique Pelicot—turning it into a story that belongs to all of us and at the same time to none of us.

N.A.: What does the figure of Gisèle Pelicot mean for the feminist movement in France and for you personally, Servane?

S.D.: By bringing the trial into the public eye, Gisèle Pelicot achieved an unbelievable shift and we want to pay tribute to her. But we also want to question how media treats an icon like her. What does a constant emphasis on her ‘impeccable’ lifestyle mean? What if, for example, she had preferred unconventional sexual practices? Would that have made the crimes committed against her any less cruel? We want to question our disturbing need for ‘innocence’ when it comes to feeling empathy.

N.A.: From an activist perspective, it is often criticized that the depiction of violence normalizes the actual act of violence for a privileged audience. How do you respond to this criticism?

M.R.: The depiction of real events has always been somewhat problematic. This concerns not just the depiction of sexualized violence, however, but of violence and trauma in general. There are questions that inevitably arise when violence is brought to the stage: Why is violence being portrayed? Who watches it? And for what reason? It’s a paradox: by speaking about pornography, we are simultaneously producing pornography.

S.D.: In the specific case of Pelicot, however, there was so much support from the people involved that we felt it was the right thing to do. Gisèle and her lawyers fought for the videos to be shown in public during the trial. So, politically, I think we are doing the right thing. Psychologically, it is certainly challenging. But I feel that theater is the best way to gather and face complex questions.

M.R.: We are in fact facing an anthropological question: Who are we really? Can we ever become human on this planet – can we ever be humane? This makes me think of Peter Weiss’s oratorio *The Investigation*, which is essentially about demystifying the Holocaust. He described ordinary people doing things they knew were wrong but doing them anyway. In that, I see a parallel to the Pelicot case.

THE PELICOT TRIAL

... a scenic oratorio

with

KATHLEEN CHALFANT (*Opening and Closing*)

NICOLE ANSARI COX, MACONNIA CHESSER (*Narrators*)

MORGAN MASTRANGELO (*Countertenor*)

and

OTOJA ABIT, ORSON ANSARI COX

DAVID BECK, WINSOME BROWN

MICAH BUCEY, JOAN JULIET BUCK

TANIA BURGUERA, ISAAC BUTLER

ROBERT CUCCIOLI, MAŠA DAKIC

ANOOP DESAI, JOSLYN DEFREECE

SYLVAIN GUYOT, NEAL KATYAL

TRIAN LONG SMITH, DAVID RASCHE

ALYSIA REINER, KATE RIGG

LAILA ROBINS, RICHARD SCHECHNER

TANYA SELVARATNAM, CHRIS SMALLS

MOLLY STERN, KACIE SWAFFIELD

EMILY TUCKMAN, V (FORMERLY KNOWN AS EVE ENSLER)

DANA WATKINS and VAUGHN WINTON

NEW YORK TEAM

Dramaturgy and Direction: MILO RAU & SERVANE DÈCLE



Live-Stream Direction: MILO RAU

Production Dramaturgy: NASTASIA GRIESE

New York Casting: NICOLE ANSARI

Judson Church: MAGGIE GOLDNER, GREGG BELLÓN, MICAH BUCEY

Consulate General of Switzerland: NICULIN JÄGER, ELENA BÄNNINGER

Vienna Festwochen: MONIKA HUBER, JUDITH STAUDINGER

NYU Skirball Center for the Performing Arts: JAY WEGMAN

Live Stream Tech: LEANNA KEYES www.TranscendStreaming.com

Camera: MATT KOHN

Outreach/PR: BLAKE ZIDELL & ASSOCIATES

Segal Center Assistant: MOLLY LAMBERT

Producer: Segal Theatre Center, FRANK HENTSCHKER