



TEXT FANNY BRITT  
DIRECTED BY MARIE-JOSÉE BASTIEN  
& SIMON BOUDREAU  
SET DESIGN LOÏC LACROIX HOY  
PUPPETS DESIGN RICHARD LACROIX  
LIGHTING DESIGN MYRIANE LEMAIRE  
MUSIC ARIANE MOFFATT

# 176 STEPS

PUPPETEERS  
AUDREY PERREAU  
OLENA KHOMYAKOVA  
PIERRE-LOUIS RENAUD  
MARTIN VAILLANCOURT

## SUMMARY

Octave loves music and plays the piano wonderfully, but feels so paralyzed by fear of the unknown that he hardly ever leaves the sumptuous estate where he lives with his mother and his aunt Simone. For Delphine, it's just the opposite: she swims, fishes, explores, and works for her fishmonger parents, when she's not happily squabbling with her four brothers. In her eyes, life is a perpetual adventure... except at school! One day, Delphine and Octave cross paths, and an unlikely friendship is born. Is Delphine as daring as she appears to be? What conflict in Octave's past makes him so fearful of the outside world? Will they be able to help each other live freely at last? A moving fable about the different faces of anxiety, *176 Steps* celebrates, first and foremost, the transformative power of friendship.



## TURNING POETRY INTO A STRENGTH

### INTERVIEW WITH SIMON BOUDREAUULT, CO-DIRECTOR

After Olivier Kemeid's *Furioso*, Simon Boudreault asked playwright Fanny Britt to create a play for puppets. Each time, the assignment is clear: "Write what you would like to tell your children." Fanny Britt worked for two years, during the pandemic, on this luminous text about childhood anxiety and fears. But are these fears really specific to children? We live in a society that engenders fear: fear of the other, fear of difference, fear of not measuring up, eco-anxiety, anxiety about the future.

"Children are like sponges, and subject to anxiety," says Simon Boudreault. "We talk to them about climate issues at an early age. But for them, whose awareness of the world is not as developed as that of adults, it's a lot to deal with." As Fanny Britt writes, there's no miracle cure for anxiety. One has to tame it, learn to live with it, understand that fears are part of being human. We can help children to feel less afraid by encouraging them to take action, to realize that they're not the only ones to feel this way. Simon continues: "Knowing and recognizing another person's anxiety combats the feeling of loneliness. Being anxious can make you feel abnormal. What I particularly like in this text is that it doesn't attempt to get rid of things that aren't going well. Our fears are part of us and that's not necessarily a bad thing."

The play also deals with friendship, which can exist between two completely different beings: "There's something beautiful in this difference between two people."

## AN EXCEPTIONAL CREATIVE TEAM

Simon Boudreault invited the actor and director Marie-Josée Bastien to direct *176 Steps*. Deeply moved by the text, she wondered about her ability to work with puppets. Hence the proposal to co-direct. With the designers another pairing was formed, with Richard Lacroix designing the puppets and Loïc Lacroix Hoy the set. They worked on a concept based on origami, an element inspired by the character of Aunt Simone: "Origami becomes the symbol of the imaginary, the contrast between the real and the invented."



Octave is a pianist. His piano represents a place of refuge, a bulwark against the outside world, which frightens him. Simon Boudreault asked singer-songwriter Ariane Moffat to compose the play's two songs, *Seule et Brille Soleil*. With great generosity and enthusiasm, she offered to write all the music for the show. The piano is her preferred instrument, the one with which she began, like Octave, to make music. She explored various aspects of the piano, in terms of its percussive qualities, colours, and registers. She also used a Mellotron, recognized as one of the first samplers to produce sounds of the violin and flute, and synthesizers, to show Octave's dreamy, imaginative side. Thanks to her sensitivity, Ariane Moffat understood who the characters are, what they are going through, and the feelings that inhabit them. In this way, she was able to create a world that reflects them.



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**PUPPETRY, THE ART OF FREEDOM!**  
**INTERVIEW WITH FANNY BRITT, PLAYWRIGHT**

With 176 Steps, playwright Fanny Britt makes her first incursion into the wonderful world of puppetry. Well, not quite, since she collaborated on two shows, adapting them for Théâtre la Petite Marée and Théâtre de Sable, some twenty years ago.

For the playwright, puppetry is synonymous with freedom. "It can suggest immense worlds in miniature," says Fanny Britt. "Theatre is already an art of possibilities, where evocation is very powerful, but with puppetry it's tenfold." This allowed her to make humans and animals interact, and to imagine paper sculptures, without worrying about the constraints of production.



With illustrator Isabelle Arsenault, Fanny Britt has written two graphic novels for children: *Jane, the Fox and Me*, and *Louis Undercover*, both bestsellers. She has discovered a connection between the act of illustration and that of puppetry: "There's this very sensitive, very moving aspect of illustration that I've also found in the realm of puppetry," explains Fanny Britt. "From the outset, there's a gentleness that allows for silence. In graphic novels, I can be more allusive, while in my writing for adults I'm more effusive. With puppetry, I can explore an economy that's very appealing, something I really enjoy."



## EVERYONE HAS FEARS

The play 176 Steps tackles the subject of anxiety. It's a theme that touches the playwright personally: "I was an anxious child, and now I'm an anxious adult," admits Fanny Britt. "In the 1980s, there was very little discussion of mental health issues with children. I didn't hear people talking about anxiety, I didn't know what was going on inside me. It took me years to realize that I wasn't the only one and that anxiety has many faces, which helps one understand and accept it. We don't all fear things to the same degree: that's one of the keys to understanding anxiety. Some people have phobias about things that might seem harmless to you. Becoming aware of others' fears cultivates empathy and openness. I wrote this play during the pandemic, a time of great anxiety!"



The Aunt Simone character says: The thing about fear is that with some effort, you can shrink it until it fits in a little pocket. And how do you ward it off? "It's a constant process," replies Fanny Britt. "Fears change with age, but it always involves an aversion to uncertainty. Fear in itself isn't so bad, that's what I'm learning. I chose this image because I didn't want to kill off fear, I prefer to bring it to light so that it shrinks, so that it appears to us as something vulnerable, fragile, tender." Something reassuring, like the friendship that is born between the two children, Octave and Delphine. Although they have different fears, they will nevertheless meet and forge an emotional bond that develops through their being present, attentive, and curious about each other.

Everyone has fears, says Aunt Simone, and it's important to say that to children. In a dangerous situation, fear can be a good guide, provoking reactions and reflexes. "To ward off your fear," concludes Fanny Britt, "you need to hold it in your hands, talk to it, joke around with it."



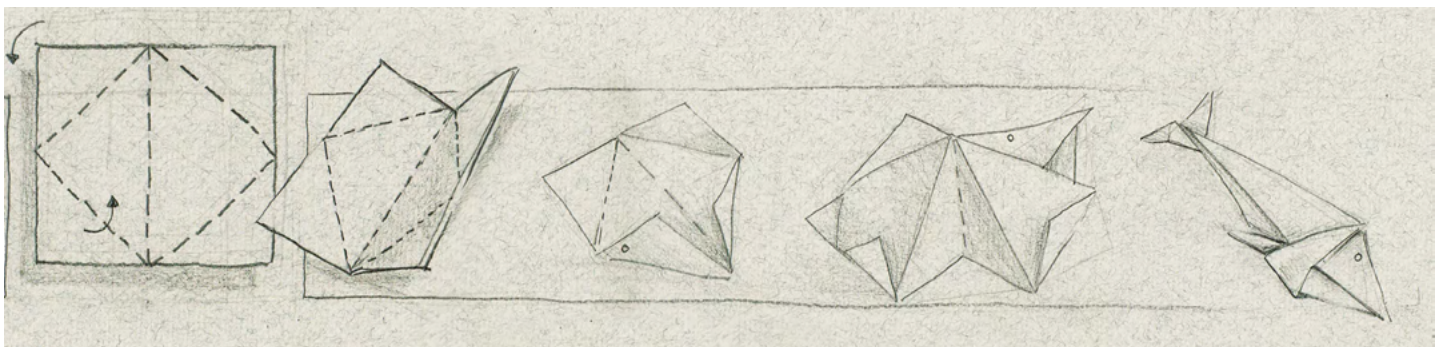
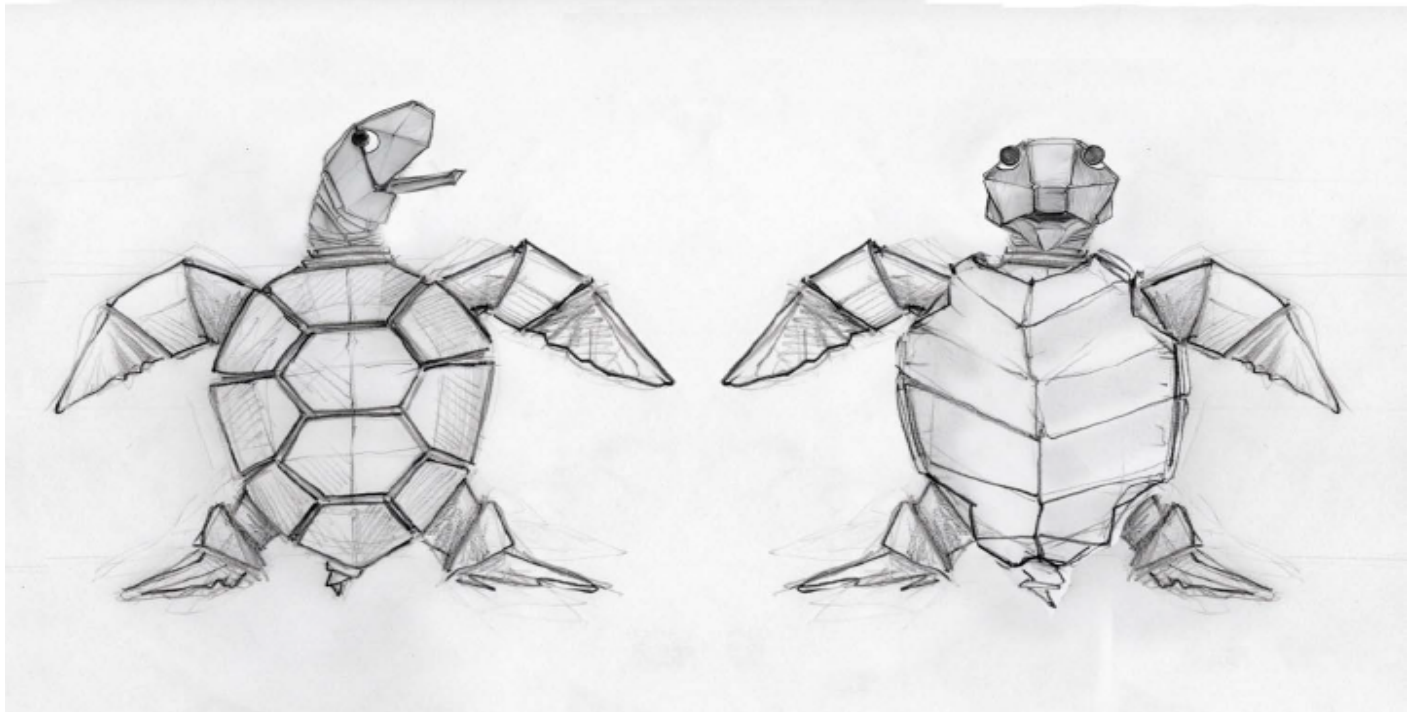
## THE ILLUSION OF PAPER

### INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD LACROIX, PUPPET DESIGNER

Set designer with Théâtre de l'Œil since 1986, Richard Lacroix has designed the puppets for sixteen shows.

Each time, he approaches this work with renewed creativity and enthusiasm. He plunges into the text and sketches, giving his imagination free rein, creating characters to whom he becomes attached and about whom talks with great tenderness.

While the play is not set in a particular time, Simon Boudreault and Richard Lacroix opted to place it in the 1920s, a suggestion unreservedly adopted by Fanny Britt. The two children, Octave and Delphine, are played by bunraku puppets. Octave is a little plump, a little pale, since he spends all his time at the piano. When he goes outside, he protects himself with an umbrella. Delphine, on the other hand, is a daring little girl who lives outdoors and wants to have fun. The mother and Aunt Simone are represented by large puppets with floating bodies and arms animated by rods. These slightly idealized characters contrast with the children. To symbolize the mother's tragedy—her husband's drowning—her shawl and costume are evocative of the sea and foam on the waves. "I imagined the sisters as twins," says Richard Lacroix, "a little like yin and yang: one withdrawn into herself and the other extroverted and more flamboyant."



## ORIGAMI, A MAJOR INSPIRATION

Delphine loves telling stories, like the one about the little girl who can't walk, but is an excellent swimmer. "We made her a mermaid," says Richard Lacroix, "half-realistic, half origami. We spent a lot of time in the workshop figuring out how to create the illusion of folded paper using fabric and thermoformed material. Everything that gravitates around the two children, everything that appears on stage, whether objects or animals (fox, turtle, fish, birds), is made to look like origami, and has the appearance of paper."

The members of Delphine's family—her brothers, parents, grandparents—are represented by flat-figure puppets, lined up around the dinner table. A simple structure, so that a single performer can play all of the characters. They are animated in stop-motion: each change of position alternates with a few sentences of text.



The set designed by Loïc Lacroix Hoy depicts a coastal village, by the sea. He imagined a large island made of wharf timbers, in which he integrated all of the scenic elements. The wharf becomes the piano, which rises up, extends outwards, and is transformed into a dining table, a tree, and a daybed for the mother. In this ingenious set, which suggests the sea's infinite horizon, origami animals, and props contribute to the creation of a dreamy, surreal world.



## CREATORS' BIOGRAPHIES

### FANNY BRITT, PLAYWRIGHT

Playwright and translator Fanny Britt has written a dozen works for the theatre, including *Hurlevents*, *Chaque jour and Bienveillance*, which won a Governor General's Award in 2013. She has also translated and adapted some thirty texts for the stage. Her debut novel, *Les maisons* (2015), was a finalist for the Prix littéraire France-Québec and the Prix littéraire des collégiens. Her second novel, *Faire les sucres*, won the Governor General's Literary Award in 2021. She has also written two essays on motherhood, *Les tranchées* and *Les retranchées*.

In children's literature, in addition to the Félicien series, she has produced two graphic novels, with illustrator Isabelle Arsenault: *Jane, le renard et moi* (*Jane, the Fox and Me*), translated into a dozen languages and winner of several awards, and *Louis parmi les spectres* (*Louis Undercover*), which in 2017 won the Prix Alvine-Belisle and the Prix de la critique ACBD, awarded by the Association des critiques de la bande dessinée.



### SIMON BOUDREULT, CO-DIRECTOR

A playwright and director, Simon Boudreault is also a well-known actor and improviser. He appeared with the Ligue Nationale d'Improvisation for nearly ten years, winning numerous awards. In 2005, he founded his own company, Simoniaques Théâtre and produced a number of memorable shows, including *Comment je suis devenu musulman*, *D pour Dieu?*, *Gloucester*, *As Is*, *Sauce brune*, and *Je suis un produit*.

For Théâtre de l'Œil, he was puppeteer in *Le Jardin de Babel*, a show created in 1999; playwright of *La Félicité*, in 2002; and co-writer with Richard Lacroix for the show without words *3-Legged Tale*, in 2010. Appointed artistic director of Théâtre de l'Œil in 2020, he directed two shows: *Furiosos*, a drama written by Olivier Kemeid, and *Perruche*, a poetic fable by Virginie Beaugard.



### MARIE-JOSÉE BASTIEN, CO-DIRECTOR

Director of some thirty shows, performer in over fifty theatrical creations and productions, and playwright of numerous works, Marie-Josée Bastien is an artist entirely devoted to the theatre. Having taken over as artistic director of Théâtre Niveau Parking in 2016, after holding that position with Théâtre Les Enfants Terribles, she also teaches in various theatre schools throughout the province. She received the Prix d'excellence des arts et de la culture de Québec for five of her productions, including *On achève bien les chevaux* (2007), *Incendies* (2018) and *Exercices de style* (2020). She has also written some fifteen plays, among them *Éclats et autres libertés*, for Théâtre le clou, which was awarded the Prix Louise Lahaye in 2010. As an actor, she has appeared in various productions in Québec and in Europe, among them *Mort prématurée d'un chanteur populaire dans la force de l'âge*, by Wajdi Mouawad and Arthur H, at Théâtre de la Colline in Paris, in 2019.



*176 Steps* is the first production she is co-directing, with Simon Boudreault, for Théâtre de l'Œil.



## 176 STEPS AND COUNTING

2023-2024

Maison Théâtre - **Montréal, QC**

Focus Québec - **Montréal, QC**

Théâtre jeunesse Les Gros Becs - **Québec, QC**

L'Arrière-Scène - **Beloeil, QC**

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For all 176 pas performance dates, visit our website :

<https://www.theatredeloeil.qc.ca/en/calendar/>

You want to promote 176 Steps ?

Contact our Market Development Manager, Vikram Basistha :

[Vikram@theatredeloeil.qc.ca](mailto:Vikram@theatredeloeil.qc.ca) | 514-278-9188

## 176 STEPS

Age: **6 years old and up**

Duration: **55 minutes**

Story: **Fanny Britt**

Stage Direction: **Simon Boudreault and Marie-Josée Bastien**

Puppet Design: **Richard Lacroix**

Set Design: **Loïc Lacroix Hoy**

Music: **Ariane Moffatt**

Lighting: **Myriane Lemaire**

Production Staff: **Jean Cummings, Ève-Lyne Dallaire, Antoine Lefebvre, Myriane Lemaire, Richard Morin, Aidan Sparks, Heidi Turcot, Martin Vaillancourt et Clémentine Verhaegen**

Puppet Workshop Supervisor: **Richard Lacroix**

Set Workshop Supervisor: **Loïc Lacroix Hoy**

Puppeteers at the creation: **Pierre-Louis Renaud, Audrey Perreault, Olena Khomyakova et Martin Vaillancourt**

Produced by **Théâtre de l'Œil**



**Simon Boudreault** - Artistic Director

**Joël Losier** - General Manager

**Vikram Basistha** - Market Development Manager

**Solène Rochepeau** - Communications Manager

**Frédérique Simard** - Accounting Technician

**Myriane Lemaire** - Technical Director

911, rue Jean-Talon Est, bureau 211B, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H2R 1V5

Phone: 514-278-9188

[info@theatredeloil.qc.ca](mailto:info@theatredeloil.qc.ca) / [www.theatredeloil.qc.ca](http://www.theatredeloil.qc.ca)

French Writing **Michelle Chanonat** / Translation **Denise Babin** / Layout **Marie-Laurence Marleau** / Cover **Ève-Lyne Dallaire** / Drawings **Richard Lacroix** /

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