It is a great pleasure to report on L’Avant-Scène’s exceptional 17th Season that ended very recently with the performance of *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* by Jacques Demy in the Forum of the Lewis Center for the Arts Complex. The year was filled with exquisite productions and exciting events marking the semester-long visit by French actor and director Guillaume Gallienne from the Comédie-Française. It saw the rise of a new generation of talented students from the classes of 2019, 2020 and 2021.
The year started with the sixth edition of Seuls en Scène, Princeton French Theater Festival whose lineup included recent hits from the Avignon Theater Festival and French national theaters. We welcomed major artists who had previously visited Princeton such as Pascal Rambert, Nicolas Bouchaud, Arthur Nauzyciel, Judith Henry, and Guillaume Vincent, and prestigious guests who were making their debut at the festival such as Oliver Py, Tiago Rodrigues, Dorothée Munyaneza, Marina Hands, and Pierre Maillet. After five years, the festival is now well established. Students, faculty, and community followers flocked to the performances that were nearly all sold out.

“Interview” by Nicolas Truong opened the festival the first weekend after classes had resumed. “L’Art du Théâtre & Le Début de L’A.” (P. Rambert) along with “By Heart” (T. Rodrigues) and “Prométhée enchaîné/Les suppliants” (O. Py) followed during the first week of classes. The last week of the festival featured artists Dorothée Munyaneza, Maurin Ollès, and Pierre Maillet as well as Guillaume Vincent and his cast of up-and-coming actors.

Spectators praised the offerings of the festival; especially “By Heart,” “Prométhée enchaîné/Les suppliants” and “Unwanted,” and enjoyed the opportunity to meet artists at the end of each performance. L’Avant-Scène students met our guest-artists in intimate settings for master class sessions or in class directly.

As always, the festival helped launch our season and start it on a high note in various campus venues and residential colleges. Once more it celebrated the spirit of partnership between various departments and centers on campus. The list of sponsors and contributors has continued to grow and we couldn’t have hoped for a better lineup to mark the fifth anniversary of Seuls en Scène. The
Department of French and Italian, Lewis Center for the Arts, Council of the Humanities, Rockefeller College and Cultural Services of the French Embassy provided key support to make this sixth edition a great success.

Once the festival ended on September 30, students resumed rehearsals to prepare for L’Avant-Scène’s first events of the year. Marc Decitre 18 translated “Phèdre” by Jean Racine when he took a year off in 2015-2016. We chose to feature Marc’s translation as part of our invitation to participate in the Festival of the Arts organized by the Lewis Center to celebrate the opening of the new campus Arts Complex. On Saturday October 7th, the Donald Drapkin Studio filled to capacity for our staged reading of “Phaedra.” Marc Decitre 18 and four other L’Avant-Scène fellow actors together chose to highlight a few key moments in the play. Marc’s translation was praised by all in attendance and we now look forward to the full production of Marc’s translation at the Lewis Center next year. Certificate student Justin Sansone has chosen it for his thesis project and we couldn’t be more thrilled.

Most students in the troupe started work on Molière’s “Le Bourgeois gentilhomme” a popular Molière play that we had never done. Rehearsals intensified in November for the December 7-9 performances at Whitman College Theater. To stage the Comédie-Ballet “Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme” we sought the help of baroque musicians who brought magic to the stage playing the famed Lully score. A group of 11 L’Avant-Scène students participated in the project. They had initiated the project themselves at the conclusion of the 16-17 academic year. Newcomers Nick Shahskini 21, Joseph Prentice 22, Will Griffith 21, Ben Lawton 18 and Ellie Maag 19, joined fellow actors Caroline Stafford 18, Kali Radu, James Facon 20, Donald Della Pietra 20, Jivahn Moradian 20, and Isabel Leigh 19. The play drew large crowds to Whitman College Theater during the final weekend of the fall semester and made for an ideal Holliday Season play! We were thrilled to receive support from the Lewis Center for the Arts for the show as we were able to borrow costumes from the 2013 production of “The Bourgeois Bigwig.”
Thanks to a new David A. Gardner 69 Magic Grant, and for a second consecutive time, L'Avant-Scène traveled during fall break to visit theater schools abroad. Last year, the troupe had visited Berlin, Strasbourg and London, and their world-renowned drama schools. This year L'Avant-Scène made it all the way to Tokyo, Japan for the very first time for L'Avant-Scène in Tokyo program, an eight-day immersion trip into Japanese culture and its fascinating traditional and contemporary performing arts.

In the months of October and November, guest-artists Marie Vialle, Jeanne Balibar, Bernard Faivre d’Arcier, Victor Lenoble, Jean-François Peyret and Joël Maillard visited campus to offer master classes and benefit from short-term residencies at L'Avant-Scène. They enjoyed sharing findings of their residencies with students. Having a short-term residency at L’Avant-Scène served these artists very well for their upcoming French productions and projects. As always guest-artists raved about the opportunity to visit campus and work with students.

FRE/THR 211 brought together a remarkable group of students, many of whom decided to join L’Avant-Scène in the spring semester. Students presented their works at Rockefeller College in mid-December. They presented scenes by Marivaux, Hugo, Corneille, Molière and Racine.

The fall was particularly festive and joyful. At ceremonies in October and December, at the French Embassy in New York and Princeton, Florent Masse received La Médaille d’Or du Rayonnement Culturel and the insignia of Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by Cultural Counselor Bénédicte de Montlaur and Consul General of France in New York Anne-Claire Legendre. The Order of Arts and Letters (Ordre des Arts et des Lettres) was established by the French government in 1957 to recognize eminent artists and writers, as well as people who have contributed significantly to furthering the arts in France and throughout the world.
When 2017 came to a close, we welcomed Guillaume Gallienne from the Comédie-Française on campus. Guillaume Gallienne arrived early to settle for his semester as Visiting Lecturer in the Council of the Humanities and Belknap Fellow in French and Italian. The spring semester had never looked so promising and a range of exciting events was in the works.

In early January, students started rehearsing for our two main spring productions: Feydeau’s “Un fil à la patte” to mark Guillaume Gallienne’s visit (For 5 years, Gallienne performed two roles in the play at the Comédie-Française) and Corneille’s “Médée,” a project initiated by Fiona Bell 18.

A small group of students traveled to Paris for the fifteenth L’Avant-Scène in Paris program during intersession. A wonderful lineup of plays and events awaited them upon landing in Paris. We spent a great deal of time enjoying productions at the Comédie-Française such as “Les Fourberies de Scapin” in the impressive mise en scène by Denis Podalydès, “Le Petit Maître corrigé” by Marivaux directed by Clément Hervieu-Léger, “J’étais dans ma maison et j’attendais que la pluie vienne” by Lagarce, and “La tempête” by Shakespeare. At the Odéon National Theater, we saw “Macbeth” directed by Stéphane Braunschweig, and “Saigon” by Caroline Guiela Nguyen, a production students thoroughly enjoyed. We also saw a delightful “Le jeu de l’amour et du hasard” by Marivaux at the historic Théâtre de la Porte Saint Martin (where Edmond Rostand created “Cyrano de Bergerac” in 1897).

As always, mornings and some afternoons were spent at the Paris National Conservatory for Dramatic Arts attending acting, mask and movement classes. Students directly participated in some dance and acting classes joining in exercises and improvisations. The interactions they make with Conservatory students are invaluable and often constitute highlights of their intersession week in Paris. Along with attending plays in Paris national theaters, and classes at the Conservatory, we met several actors and directors for conversations, as well as the cast of some of the plays we saw. We took memorable strolls in the city, visited museums, and also reunited with Paris alumni and friends who offered great Parisian hospitality.
When we returned to Paris, classes started and spring productions’ rehearsals resumed in full gear. During her junior year, Fiona Bell 18, who had been a member of L’Avant-Scène since freshman year, discovered the myth of Medea in a Slavic course. She naturally proposed the play at the end of the 16-17 academic year. Playing the lead role in Corneille’s version was a formidable opportunity for Bell. Around Bell, the cast brought together rising L’Avant-Scène stars Jianing Zhao 20 and James Tralie 19. Newcomers Michael Smilek 20, Jane Sul 20, Julien Laks, Darina Kamikazi 21 and Paul Gauthier complemented the cast. The difficult play by Corneille necessitated much work on the text and significant effort by the students, who rose to the occasion during this production. The Art Museum proved a perfect backdrop for performances in early March and we enjoyed a memorable run of the play on March 8-9, 2018. Performing at the Art Museum is always very special. With “Médée,” our 15th project at the Art Museum, we also celebrated ten years of spectacular collaborations.
During Medea’s rehearsal process, the rest of the troupe was at work preparing a shortened version of Feydeau’s “Un fil à la patte” in honor of our distinguished visitor Guillaume Gallienne. In early March, Gallienne led a master class for students in the cast to help them prepare for the upcoming mid-April performances. Gallienne, a four-time Césars winner (French Academy Awards) for “Les Garçons et Guillaume à table” (2013) has been a member of the Comédie-Française since 1998.

Students presented a full run-through of the play’s first act and Gallienne gave them constructive notes afterwards. Gallienne had performed in a popular version of the play at the Comédie-Française, directed by Jérôme Deschamps. It had played at the Salle Richelieu six consecutive years from 2010 to 2016.

After spring break, work for “Un fil à la patte” intensified. We presented the first two acts, and omitted the third one to keep the production close to the 1h40 mark. The same students who had acted in “Le Bourgeois gentilhomme” participated in our version of “Un fil à la patte.” It was mesmerizing to see their progress in comedy throughout the year. Newcomers Julien Laks, Philippa Marks 20, and Carlotta Plate 21 joined Caroline Stafford 18, Nick Shashkini 21, Jivahn Moradian 20, Will Griffith 21, Isabel Leigh 19, Kali Radu, Adnan Sachee 19, and Joseph Prentice 22. For the single April 12, 2018 performance, we successfully transformed the common room of Rockefeller College into a theater space. This was the first time that L’Avant-Scène had presented a full play in the Rocky common room. Everything worked well in the space. It was a joyful evening. Students surpassed themselves and held a frenzied and fast-paced rhythm throughout the two acts.
After spring break, another production got its start: “Juste la fin du monde” by Jean-Luc Lagarce. Macs Smith, a sixth-year graduate student who had been acting at L’Avant-Scène since the beginning of his third year, chose, cast and directed the play. This was the second time a student in L’Avant-Scène had directed one of our major productions of the season. Macs gathered an exceptionally talented cast around Julien Laks, a new actor in the troupe, who played the lead role. Seasoned actors Fional Bell 18 and Marc Decitre 18 joined the cast as well as Elizabeth Macksey 21. One single riveting performance took place on Saturday April 28, 2018 in the Rocky-Mathey theater. Everyone who was fortunate to attend the production praised Macs Smith’s direction and bold ideas. Julien Laks excelled in the role of Louis. Fiona Bell and Marc Decitre were at their best in the roles of Catherine and Antoine, and newcomer Elizabeth Macksey offered a very convincing performance of Suzanne.
In early March, L’Avant-Scène partnered again with the Italian section of the Department of French and Italian to launch a fourth project with Il Laboratorio Teatrale. Launched in 2014, Il Laboratorio Teatrale, a creation of L’Avant-Scène with the help of Italian Lecturer Elisa Dossena, offers undergraduate students in Italian courses the chance to perform in Italian. Its first project, in the spring of 2014, was a staged-reading of “Gli’nnamorati” by Goldoni. It was followed the same year, in the fall, by excerpts from “La Malattia della famiglia M.” by Paravidino. In 2017, a small group of students participated in scenes from “La Bottega del Caffé” by Goldoni.

![Poster for La Caduta degli Dei by Visconti May 2018](image)

In the spring of 2018, a new group made of 13 students formed and took on the challenge to present a staged version of “La Caduta degli Dei,” a 1969 film by Luchino Visconti. Elisa Dossena and Florent Masse used the staged adaptation by theater extraordinaire Ivo Van Hove as model for this version. The play brought together students from virtually all Italian classes offered by the Department in the spring. Students made excellent progress in language and acting and on May 10, 2018, they presented a memorable performance in the Rocky-Mathey theater, filled to capacity for the occasion. “La Caduta degli Dei” was also presented in conjunction with Guillaume Gallienne’s visit. Gallienne has played one of the lead roles in Van Hove’s Comédie-Française production. He offered sincere congratulations to the cast, and in particular to Matteo Russo 20, who played his role. Gallienne told Russo that his performance was inspiring him for the future. Gallienne is set to resume acting the character Friedrich Bruckmann in the summer of 2018 and during the 18-19 season at the Comédie-Française.

In the last few weeks of the semester L’Avant-Scène took on its last project for the year: the production of its very first musical comedy: a staged adaptation of “Les Demoiselles de Rochefort,” Jacques Demy’s most popular film that features music by Michel Legrand. Faculty and community members joined L’Avant-Scène students for this unique end-of-year project. In barely four weeks,
L’Avant-Scène managed to be ready for its May 18, 2018 performance in the Forum of the Lewis Center for the Arts Complex.

The group worked on a reduced version of the film, lasting 1h25mn. Solène Le Van 18 and Sarah Le Van 18 starred in the production as les demoiselles de Rochefort and helped transcribe the musical score for jazz musicians: Phillip Taylor 21, Daniel Strayer 21 and Ben Alessio 21. Inès Aitsahalia 22 joined the cast and served as choreograph. Professors Sophie Meunier from the Woodrow Wilson School, and André Benhâim from French and Italian generously participated in the production. Set and costume design was in the hands of members of the Community Atelier Sophie Orloff and Corine André-Hessig* and Adam Oklin, a senior from Princeton High School bound to study tech at NYU Tisch School of the Arts, took charge of sound. Nick Shashkini 21, Jane Sul 20, Jianing Zhao 20, Michael Smilek 20, Julien Laks, Nicolas Chapuis, Gabriel and Noah Killian-Benhaïm complemented the cast. It was a true pleasure to produce the musical at the Lewis Center for the Arts and to see all the hard work come together for the single May 18 performance.

With “Les Demoiselles de Rochefort” L’Avant-Scène ended its season on a festive and musical note! There were understandably some challenges along the way: producing a musical in four weeks is no small feat! But the show was an excellent experience and enabled an exceptional collaborative effort by all involved. Audience members rejoiced at watching the musical. Everyone,

* The Community Atelier is a group of community members who closely follow the offerings of L’Avant-Scène: organizing an annual reading group of L’Avant-Scène plays, helping with props, sets and costumes for the productions and participating in community outreach workshops when they’re offered.
cast and audience members alike, hopes that L'Avant-Scène will have the opportunity to stage other musicals in the future.

In the spring semester, Gallienne, a Visiting Lecturer in the Council of Humanities and Belknap Fellow in French, co-taught FRE 311/THR 312, “Advanced French Theater Workshop,” with senior lecturer Florent Masse. In the class students explored “le sentiment amoureux” in French theater. For students in the Lewis Center for the Arts, Gallienne taught a co-curricular acting workshop on Chekhov. He also taught a reading course for a theater certificate student. Gallienne enjoyed time off from the Comédie-Française and his film acting and directing career, and thoroughly enjoyed teaching and training undergraduates. This was his fourth visit to Princeton and his second in the Council of Humanities and the Department of French and Italian.

L’Avant-Scène helped produced end-of-semester works by Gallienne: first “Motifs” a collection of scenes by Chekhov with 10 student-actors in the Lewis Center for the Arts, and “Travaux d’Acteurs VI” the works by students enrolled in FRE 311/THR 312.

After 25 years performing various scenes and plays by Chekhov, and working with leading French director Alain Françon, and renowned translator André Markowicz, Gallienne realized that Chekhov wonderfully helps an actor work on his fundamentals. These masters specifically taught him that Chekhov invented a theater that’s not centripetal but centrifugal – what’s at stake is a recurrence of the same motifs. Acting Chekhov is similar to being part of a democratic choir; there is no center in Chekhov. In Three Sisters, one discovers that the question of work is a recurring motif, as well as a certain idea of love and couples’ unhappiness. Gallienne wished to work on these motifs by putting aside the narrative progression of Chekhov’s main plays in order to create bridges between them. Why can’t Trofimov meet Irina or Platonov? And Lyubov meet Treplev to discuss these themes? The workshop met every Tuesday and Thursday in the spring semester. It was a unique opportunity for students.
“Motifs” was presented on May 1, 2018 in the Kerr Studio at the Lewis Center for the Arts. It concluded a wonderful semester of acting Chekhov. Gallienne thoroughly enjoyed coaching and training students on the side of his formal teaching.

In the Advanced French Theater Workshop FRE 311/THR 312, “In Love” students rehearsed and performed excerpts from the works of Racine, Marivaux, Rostand and Claudel. In doing so, they focused on love, passion, and desire, as unifying themes in French Theater. The course shed light on being in love in the theater and questioned how to represent love on stage. Students crossed four centuries, from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, and doing so through the prism of *le sentiment amoureux* in all its variety. This exploration served as a means to be here and now, and also necessitated bodily contact between the actors who were at times asked to interact physically and intimately with fellow actors. Students in the course presented their works on the occasion of the May 9, 2018 “Travaux d’Acteurs VI” performance in the Chancellor Green Rotunda. The fifty-minute performance was an exquisite journey in *le sentiment amoureux* in francophone theater. Students excelled and capped off an exceptional semester of theater with Master Gallienne!

Many other events marked Gallienne’s outstanding semester at Princeton: on February 22, 2018, the Department of French and Italian proposed a conversation between Masse and Gallienne entitled “An Evening with Guillaume Gallienne” and together with Rockefeller College and L’Avant-Scène, the Department produced a film series featuring films by and with Gallienne. Four films were screened between early March and late April 2018, the last of which, “Cézanne et moi” got a special screening at the Garden Theater in conjunction with the Princeton University Art Museum exhibit on Cézanne’s paintings.
The academic year ended with Gallienne being honored at NYU on May 22, 2018 at the annual Gala Benefit Dinner for the Maison Française and Center of Excellence. Along with French Ambassador Araud and Elizabeth Stribbling, chairman of the Board of the French Heritage Society, Gallienne received The Medal of Honor of the Center for French Civilization and Culture.

The year came full circle with a new award ceremony; honoring Gallienne this time. It was an extraordinarily productive and successful season. With 25 active members in the troupe L’Avant-Scène had never been so large and it almost produced an event every other week. There will be much to look forward to in the new 2018-2019 academic year: L’Avant-Scène will host a new exceptional long-term visitor: French playwright and director Pascal Rambert, will produce the seventh edition of Seuls en Scène, and select new exhilarating plays highlighting and serving the many talents of its student-actors.


L’Avant-Scène dedicated its last play of the season to former Professor and French Senator André Maman (1927-2018) a long-time generous friend and supporter of the program.