It’s a great pleasure to write a report on L’Avant-Scène’s 2021-2022 season, its 21st! We were thrilled that in person theater resumed in the fall of 2021, which enabled us to produce a quasi-normal season of theater. The new academic year marked the twentieth anniversary of the creation of L’Avant-Scène in September 2001; a wonderful milestone that will soon be celebrated at it should with alumni and current students.

After the disruptions brought by the pandemic, and a full academic year spent on Zoom, L’Avant-Scène produced all its events in person during the 2021-2022 season, except for Seuls en Scène, Princeton French Theater Festival, that remained virtual in September 2021. We presented three full-length plays, and two student presentations of works, one at the end of the fall semester, the other at the end of the spring semester. Finally, we were able to bring our first international guest in more than two years. French actress Audrey Bonnet joined us for a week in early April 2022. She offered invaluable advice and encouragement to the students. They were delighted to work with her for a week.
The twenty-first season of L’Avant-Scène started with the tenth edition of Seuls en Scène, Princeton French Theater Festival, which took place again virtually but with audience members in person. Since artists still could not travel to the United States, we decided to produce a new virtual edition of the festival but instead of streaming content online, we screened video-recordings of their plays at the Wallace Theater of the Lewis Arts Complex. It felt as if we were back in person at the festival. Everyone enjoyed this edition of Seuls en Scène that lasted three days from September 17 until September 19, 2021.

On average, we screened two plays each day of the festival. Like in 2020, we could rely on our network of contemporary artists to agree to let us screen their work in front of a masked audience. With the works of celebrated contemporary theater makers Marion Siéfert, Gisèle Vienne, Dorothée Munyanzea, David Geselson, Tiago Rodrigues, Pascal Rambert, and Tania de Montaigne, we presented a mix of dance, theater and documentary theater. This new edition of the festival was envisioned with the new course on diversity on the French stages in mind (FRE-THR 390 Race in French Theater). During this edition of the festival, we continued the collaboration with Festival d’Automne. We are delighted to announce that in the fall of 2022, Seuls en Scène will become Seuls en Scène, Princeton French Theater Festival, Festival d’Automne à Princeton, strengthening its collaboration with the renowned festival.
One of Seuls en Scène’s highlights this season was the screening of La Cerisaie by Chekhov directed by Tiago Rodrigues, which had just made the headlines at the 77th Avignon Festival. We were delighted that the Avignon Festival had accepted our request to screen the show recorded in the Courtyard of honor of the Palace of the Popes, in July 2021. Other highlights included screening the dance piece Crowd by Gisèle Vienne, and _jeanne_dark_ by Marion Siéfert. Both shows will be part of the French Institute Alliance Française Crossing the Line Festival next fall in New York City.

At the end of the festival we were extremely pleased. Turnout was very good for most performances. Students enrolled in FRE-THR 211 French Theater Workshop, and FRE-THR 390 Race in French Theater, particularly enjoyed the offerings as part of their coursework. It was still challenging to produce a festival, but the chosen format proved very successful. We particularly appreciated the opportunity to bring back audiences to the theater. It felt wonderful to bring our dedicated spectators back in person to the festival!
Earlier in September 2021, the troupe started work on its main production of the fall semester: *Méphisto Rhapsodie* by Samuel Gallet, a stage adaptation of Klaus Mann’s novel *Mephisto*. The performance took place at the Whitman College Class of 1917 in early November (November 4-6, 2021). Set in our time, the play tackles current political issues and the world of French theater. It’s a brilliant adaptation for the stage of the novel in contemporary France. Students played provincial theater makers, critics, up and coming actors, directors, and leaders of an extreme-right party about to seize power... They thoroughly enjoyed performing these characters.

The playwright Samuel Gallet visited us virtually at the end of the rehearsal process, attending a run-through of the play via zoom, and discussing it with the students. It was immensely useful to receive his feedback, guidance and support. Audience members praised the acting of the cast. It felt wonderful to be back in action, and in person! Numerous students, colleagues and community members attended the series of performances; they
were eager to return to the theater and support us after the virtual hiatus. The entire troupe partook in the project, which proved ideal to resume in person theater. We also realized how important it is to present contemporary theater, and we look forward to continuing presenting more contemporary theater in future semesters.

The fall semester ended with Fragments XXI by FRE-THR 211 students at the Godfrey Kerr Studio of the Lewis Arts Complex. Students presented their classical scenes on December 2, 2021. They offered very strong performances of their scenes. It was exhilarating to resume training students in person in the core course of the program.

Throughout the semester, students were able to rehearse and perform without their masks on. In the last week of the semester, with COVID cases rising, they had to test more times per week in order to be allowed to perform without their masks.
When students returned from winter break, at the end of January 2022, Covid cases were still on the rise. We kept our masks in rehearsals and hoped for better days ahead. At the very beginning of the semester L’Avant-Scène started work on Marivaux’ *Les Fausses confidences*, our principal spring production. New students joined the troupe to complement the cast. We recruited students from FRE-THR 211 French Theater Workshop of the fall semester, and also recruited senior students from the Departments of French and Italian, and Neuroscience. The enlarged troupe worked steadily in the first weeks of the spring semester, dodging covid, and deepening its appreciation for the theater of Marivaux. In less than seven weeks, students were ready to present the play. They performed it during the weekend of March 19-20, 2022. In the winter months, L’Avant-Scène would typically perform a play in the Sterling Gallery of the Princeton University Art Museum. With the museum being in construction for a new opening in the fall of 2024; we performed in its alternative spaces, downtown Princeton, on Hulfish Street. The new space proved perfect for this minimalist production of Marivaux. We thoroughly enjoyed rehearsing there and collaborating once more with the ever generous staff of the Art Museum. We highly value their partnership and always look forward to our annual performance in their spaces. We plan on continuing to use the Gallery of Hulfish Street for future performances in 2023 and 2024, and already look forward to the new spaces on campus when the museum reopens!

Students impressed everyone in attendance with their exquisite performances and mastery of the text, considered very complex. It was the fourth performance of a Marivaux play by L’Avant-Scène after *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*, *La Surprise de l’amour* and *La Double inconstance*. We had carefully chosen this play in conjunction with the graduate seminar offered by Prof. Flora Champy in the spring of 2022, and FRE 311-THR 312 Advanced French Theater Workshop, in which students studied the theater of Marivaux for half of the semester.
Celebrated French actress Audrey Bonnet, who was scheduled to visit us as Belknap Fellow in the Humanities in the spring of 2021, was finally able to come to campus the first week of April. She attended rehearsals of the last production of the year by L’Avant-Scène: *Soeurs* by Pascal Rambert (featuring two sophomores who had just joined the troupe). During the week of her visit, Audrey trained students in both FRE 227-228 Contemporary French Theater, and FRE 311-THR 312, Advanced French Theater. With FRE 227-THR 228 students she worked on a very recent play by Sabine Garrigues: *La terre n’est rien qu’un morceau de pierre*. With FRE 311-THR 312, Audrey worked on the theater of Pascal Rambert, of which she is an expert having created multiple roles in his plays of the last fifteen years. It was a treat for students to work directly with Audrey Bonnet. Their last scene in the course was a scene by Rambert; the experience was very instrumental for them.

At L’Avant-Scène, Audrey Bonnet participated in all of the rehearsals of *Soeurs* scheduled during the the week of her visit. To have Audrey join us was truly magical for Sandra Chen ’24 and Lana Gaige ’24. Audrey had created one of the two roles of the play in the fall of 2018. She was particularly excited to share insight on the production and on Pascal’s text. This opportunity served as a great incentive. In barely three weeks, Sandra and Lana were ready to present their work and perform *Soeurs* in its quasi-entirety. A feat when one considers the level of complexity of the text with that has no indications nor punctuations.
The rest of the troupe honored Audrey during a *Tribute to Audrey Bonnet*, a surprise prepared by the students of L'Avant-Scène for Audrey only. On the second day of her visit on campus, at night, I brought her to the Lewis Center for the Arts pretexting to show her one of the studios. We entered the studio where almost all of the students of L'Avant-Scène were standing still. I led Audrey to a chair and they started performing a selection of scenes from her career repertory spanning twenty years! Audrey was moved by the tribute. Students rejoiced meeting Audrey that night and were grateful to perform a scene from her impressive repertory in her honor.

Audrey conversed publicly at the end of her one-week visit. She reflected on her stellar work on the European stages, and her week at Princeton. Some audience members asked questions about her performance in *Trois Annonciations* by Pascal Rambert which was part of *Seuls en Scène* 2021. We came full circle at the end of the academic year and were truly delighted that Audrey could join us.
On April 21st, 2022 Lana Gaige ’24 and Sandra Chen ’24 performed Soeurs at the Godfrey Kerr Studio of the Lewis Arts Complex. All their efforts paid off. They offered the audience unforgettable performances, mastering the text to perfection and playing it in the moment. We couldn’t have hoped for a stronger play to finish the season.

In addition to presenting Soeurs by Pascal Rambert in late April, L’Avant-Scène presented Travaux d’Acteurs by FRE 311-THR 312 students: a public presentation of scenes by Marivaux and Musset on April 26th. The season concluded with the return of Il laboratorio teatrale and a performance, in Italian, of a stage adaptation of the film Buongiorno Notte by Marco Bellochio devised by Italian Lecturer Elisa Dosena with the help of L’Avant-Scène’s director.

Despite the challenges of Covid cases on the rise this year, it was a great season! New students joined L’Avant-Scène during the year. The troupe promises to be robust at the beginning of next academic year.

It’s been very special to resume in person theater this year and we already look forward to the projects in the next academic year 2022-2023. In the fall semester, the troupe will produce a new contemporary play and an abridged version of a timeless classic around Christmas. In the spring, we’ll probably present a play by Musset followed by a play by Koltès. In 2022-2023, we also hope that international travel with students in Paris will return.
L’Avant-Scène in Paris had shaped generations of Princeton students who had raved about their time discovering French theater in situ. It will be particularly thrilling to resume the program, and also bring back artists on campus for the festival marking 10 years of professional French and Francophone theater at Princeton.

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