Robert Wilson
Mikhail Baryshnikov
Willem Dafoe
The Old Woman

Direction, set design, lighting concept
Robert Wilson
with Mikhail Baryshnikov
and Willem Dafoe

By Daniil Kharms
Adapted by Darryl Pinckney
Music Hal Willner
Costumes Jacques Reynaud
Light design A.J. Weissbard
Associate set design Annick Lavallée-Benny
Sound design Marco Olivieri
Assistant directors Lynsey Peisinger / Charlie Otte
Dramaturg Tilman Hecker
Stage Manager Jane Rosenbaum
Technical director Reinhard Bichsel
Lighting supervisor Marcello Lumaca
Stage technician Chris McKee
Follow spots Roberto Gelmetti / Elisa Bortolussi
Assistant costume design Micol Notarianni
Assistant stage manager Louise Martin
Make up Marielle Loubet / Natalia Leniartek
Company manager Simona Fremder

A Baryshnikov Productions, Change Performing Arts and The Watermill Center project.
Commissioned and co-produced by Manchester International Festival, Spoleto Festival dei 2Mondi, Théâtre de la Ville-Paris/Festival d’Automne à Paris, deSingel Antwerp

SYNOPSIS
Scene 1 / Hunger poem
Scene 2 / An old woman holds a clock that has no hands. The writer asks for the time. The old woman tells him the time.
Scene 3 / The writer meets his friend on the street. He tells him about women falling out of the window.
Scene 4 / At home, the writer tells his friend about the young lady. He couldn’t bring her home because he remembered he had a dead old woman in his room.
Scene 5 / Dream poem 1
Scene 6 / The writer meets a young lady at the bakery. They decide to go to his place.
Scene 7 / At the bakery, the writer tells him about the young lady. He couldn’t bring her home because he remembered he had a dead old woman in his room.
Scene 8 / The writer comes home to find the old woman crawling on the floor. He wants to kill her with a mallet.
Scene 9 / Dream poem 2
Scene 10 / A nightmare about the murder of the old woman. The writer puts the old woman into a suitcase.
Scene 11 / The writer gets on a train with the suitcase. The suitcase disappears.
Scene 12 / An old woman holds a clock that has no hands. The writer asks for the time. The old woman tells him the time.

Epilogue
MESSAGE FROM THE CENTER

Over the last year or so, Los Angeles audiences have been rich in opportunities to experience the iconic and unique creative vision of Robert Wilson, one of the most revered directors in American contemporary theater.

The triumphant and long-awaited performances of *Einstein on the Beach*, Wilson's seminal collaboration with Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs happened last October and were met with sold-out performances populated by engaged and enthusiastic crowds of audience goers that shattered known demographics of opera audiences. We were proud to partner with the LA Opera to bring this work to the Los Angeles stage. And we held on to Robert Wilson after the curtain fell on *Einstein*, bringing him to Royce Hall for John Cage’s *Lecture on Nothing*, a challenging piece performed by Wilson himself and which was met with awe and appreciation.

Over the last two seasons we have been committed to showcasing his exceptional artistry as one of the Center's inaugural Artist Fellows and we’re proud to once again bring a Robert Wilson work to the Royce Hall stage with *The Old Woman*.

There's been a great deal of excitement and buzz around this particular piece, thanks in part to the two incredible performers—Mikhail Baryshnikov and Willem Dafoe—who have collaborated so closely with Wilson to bring this unknown work of absurdist Russian literature to vivid life and thereby cementing Daniil Kharms, an often-forgotten writer of Russian absurdist literature into American theater canon. It is a work of passion that would not be possible without the complete creative investment of many artistic visionaries, those who you will witness on the Royce Hall stage tonight, and those behind the scenes.

Robert Wilson is a profoundly important theater maker. He also is a profoundly generous “permission giver” when it comes to artistic possibility.

He creates a fertile and intricately crafted field of study that is unnatural and often bizarre. But in the bizarreness, in Wilson's exactly manufactured specifications of movement, sound, style and color, there is also a freedom—a freedom to explore the concept of absurdity, of perception, of reality and unreality.

The medium of theater, the ephemeral nature of the art form, lends itself to framing a safe space for us all to explore the unknowable, the gloriously unnatural. It is an invitation and an exclamation simultaneously. No one harnesses those sensibilities better than Robert Wilson.

We thank him for this work, we thank the performers and crew and staff who work tirelessly to build it for us, for just a moment in time.

We thank you for being here to share it.

MUSIC CREDITS

“Arvo Paet Spiegel Im Speiegel”

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“Innocent When You Dream” by Tom Waits.

“Here’s Charlie (Charlie Bratton)” by Benny Davis, Jackie Gleason and Murray Mencher.
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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ROBERT WILSON

*The New York Times* described Robert Wilson as “a towering figure in the world of experimental theater and an explorer in the uses of time and space on stage.” Born in Waco, Texas, Wilson is among the world’s foremost theater and visual artists. His works for the stage unconventionally integrate a wide variety of artistic media, including dance, movement, lighting, sculpture, music and text. His images are aesthetically striking and emotionally charged, and his productions have earned the acclaim of audiences and critics worldwide.

After being educated at the University of Texas and Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute, Wilson founded the New York-based performance collective “The Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds”

In the mid-1960s, and developed his first signature works, including *Deafman Glance* (1970) and *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1974-1975). With Philip Glass he wrote the seminal opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). Wilson’s artistic collaborators include many writers and musicians such as Heiner Müller, Tom Waits, Susan Sontag, Laurie Anderson, William Burroughs, Lou Reed and Jessye Norman. He has also left his imprint on masterworks such as Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*, Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Brecht/Weill’s *Threepenny Opera*, Büchner’s *Woyzeck*, Jean de la Fontaine’s *Fables* and Homer’s *Odyssey*.

Wilson’s drawings, paintings and sculptures have been presented around the world in hundreds of solo and group showings, and his works are held in private collections and museums throughout the world. Wilson has been honored with numerous awards for excellence, including a Pulitzer Prize nomination, two Premio Ubu awards, the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale, and an Olivier Award.
He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters and France pronounced him Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres.

Wilson is the founder and Artistic Director of The Watermill Center, a laboratory for performing arts in Watermill, New York.

MIKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV
A native of Riga, Latvia, was born in 1948 and began studying ballet at the age of nine. As a teenager he moved to Leningrad where he entered the Vaganova Choreographic School, graduating from student to principal dancer of the Kirov Ballet in 1969. In 1974, he left the Soviet Union to dance with major ballet companies around the world including the New York City Ballet where he worked with George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins.

In 1980 he began a decade-long tenure as artistic director of American Ballet Theatre, nurturing a new generation of dancers and choreographers. From 1990 to 2002, Baryshnikov was director and principal dancer with the White Oak Dance Project, which he co-founded with choreographer Mark Morris and which performed at BAM in 1997, 2000, and 2001. White Oak was born of Baryshnikov’s desire “to be a driving force in the production of art,” and, indeed, it expanded the repertoire and visibility of American modern dance. In theater, he has performed on and off-Broadway in Metamorphosis (Tony nom., Drama Desk Award), Forbidden Christmas or The Doctor and the Patient (Lincoln Center Festival), Beckett Shorts (New York Theatre Workshop), In Paris (The Broad Stage, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Spoleto Festival, Lincoln Center Festival, and International Tour), and Man in a Case (U.S. tour). His work in film and television include The Turning Point (Oscar nom.), White Nights, and various television shows, including three Emmy award-winning specials.

In 2005, he opened the Baryshnikov Arts Center (BAC), a creative space for presenting and nurturing multidisciplinary artists from around the globe. Under his leadership as artistic director, BAC programs serve approximately 700 artists, and more than 22,000 audience members each year. Among Baryshnikov’s many awards are the Kennedy Center Honors, the National Medal of Honor, the Commonwealth Award, the Chubb Fellowship, the Jerome Robbins Award, and the 2012 Vilcek Award. In 2010 he was given the rank of Officer of the French Legion of Honor.

WILLEM DAFOE
In 1979, Willem Dafoe was given a small role in Michael Cimino’s Heaven’s Gate from which he was fired. His first feature role came shortly after in Kathryn Bigelow’s The Loveless.

From there, he went on to perform in over 90 films, in Hollywood (Spider-Man, The English Patient, Once Upon a Time in Mexico, Clear and Present Danger, White Sands, Mississippi Burning, Streets of Fire, American Dreamz) and in independent cinema in the United States (The Clearing, Animal Factory, The Boondock Saints, American Psycho) and abroad (Theo Angelopoulos’s The Dust of Time, Yim Ho’s Pavilion of Women, Yurek Bogayevicz’s Edges of the Lord, Wim Wenders’s Faraway, So Close, Nobuhiro Suwa’s segment of Paris, je t’aime, Brian Gilbert’s Tom & Viv, Christian Carion’s Farewell, Mr. Bean’s Holiday, and the Spierig brothers’ Daybreakers, Daniel Nettheim’s The Hunter).

He has chosen projects for diversity of roles and opportunities to work with strong directors. He has worked in the films of Wes Anderson (The Life Aquatic, The Fantastic Mr. Fox, The Grand Budapest Hotel), Martin Scorsese (The Aviator, The Last Temptation of Christ), Andrew Stanton (Finding Nemo, John Carter) Spike Lee (Inside Man), Julian Schnabel (Miral, Basquiat), Paul Schrader (Auto Focus, Affliction, Light Sleeper, The Walker, Adam Resurrected), David Cronenberg (Existenz), Abel Ferrara (444: The Last Day on Earth, Go Go Tales, New Rose Hotel), David Lynch (Wild at Heart), William Friedkin (To Live and Die in L.A.), Werner Herzog (My Son My Son What Have Ye Done), Oliver Stone (Born on the Fourth of July, Platoon), Giada Colagrande (A Woman, Before It Had a Name), and Lars von Trier (Antichrist, Manderlay, Nymphomaniac).

Mr. Dafoe was nominated twice for the Academy Award (Platoon, Shadow of the Vampire) and once for the Golden Globe. Among other nominations and awards, he received an L.A. Film Critics Award and an Independent Spirit Award. Recent films include Josh Boone’s The Fault in Our Stars, Anton Corbijn’s A Most Wanted Man, Abel Ferrara’s Pasolini, and David Leitch and Chad Stahelski’s John Wick. Mr. Dafoe is one of the original members of the Wooster Group, the New York-based experimental theater collective. He created and performed in all of the group’s work from 1977 through 2005, both in the United States and internationally.

Since then, he worked with Richard Foreman in Idiot Savant at New York’s Public Theater and most recently Robert Wilson’s The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic and The Old Woman.

DARRYL PINCKNEY (WRITER)

JACQUES REYNAUD (COSTUMES)
Jacques is a French-Italian costume designer. Since graduating from New York University he has worked in Europe and in the United States, at the Teatro alla Scala in Milano, the Salzburg Festival, the Berliner Ensemble, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Lincoln Center in NY, Thalia Theatre in Hamburg, La Monnaie Opera in Brussels and many other venues. His debut as a costume designer was in 1993 in Peer Gynt directed by Luca Ronconi with whom he also collaborated in 2001 at Nuovo Piccolo Teatro in Milan. Jacques has collaborated with Robert Wilson on numerous productions including Leonce and Lena, Winter’s Tale, Shakespeare’s Sonnets, LuLu and Peter Pan at the Berliner Ensemble, L’Orfeo and Il Ritorno di Ulisse in Patria at Teatro all Scala, The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic at MIF 2011.

HAL WILLNER (MUSIC)
Hal Willner is a music producer working in records, films, television, theatre and live events. He is best known for having conceived, as well as produced many concept albums beginning with Amarcord Nino Rota in 1981 and his over three-decade stint providing “sketch music adaptations” for Saturday Night Live. The Old Woman is the sixth project that Willner has collaborated with Robert Wilson on as music adaptor/producer. The others include A Night at
Koi Pond (Nagoya, Japan), The White Town (Copenhagen), Lulu (Berlin), Homer’s The Odyssey, (Athens) and The 30th Anniversary of Solidarity Celebration (Gdansk Poland). In the late 1970s he apprenticed for record producer Joel Dorn, credited as Associate Producer on Leon Redbone’s albums Double Time, Champagne Charlie, Rahsaan Roland Kirk’s The Vibration Continues and The Neville Brothers’ Fiyo On The Bayou before venturing out on his own. Willner has since produced albums for Marianne Faithfull, Lou Reed, Bill Frisell, William S. Burroughs, Gavin Friday, Macy Gray, Lucinda Williams, Beaver Harris & Don Pullen, Laurie Anderson, Allen Ginsberg & David Sanborn among others. He has also edited and compiled audio sets highlighting the life’s work of Lenny Bruce Let The Buyer Beware, Allen Ginsberg Holy Soul Jelly Roll, Charles Mingus 13 Portraits and Carl Stalling (The Carl Stalling Project). Credited as being “the father of the modern tribute record,” his multi-artist concept records include Amarcord Nino Rota (1981), That’s The Way I Feel Now: A Tribute to Thelonious Monk (1984), Lost in the Stars: The Music of Kurt Weill (1985), Stay Awake: Various Interpretations of Music from Vintage Disney Films (1988), Weird Nightmare: Meditations on Mingus (1992), Rogue’s Gallery: Pirate Ballads, Sea Songs, and Chanteys (2006), and Son of Rogue’s Gallery (2013). Artists that have appeared on these records include Sun Ra, Tom Waits, Michael Stipe, Ringo Starr, Yma Sumac, Ken Nordine, John Zorn, Bono, Van Dyke Parks, Wynton & Branford Marsalis, Carla Bley, Muhal Richard Abrams, Bill Frisell, Steve Lacy, Jaki Byard, Deborah Harry, John Zorn, Peter Frampton, Sting, Charlie Haden, Bill Frisell, Vernon Reid, Henry Rollins, Keith Richards, Charlie Watts, Don Byron, Henry Threadgill, Leonard Cohen, Diamanda Galas, Chuck D and Elvis Costello.

Willner’s film work as music producer/supervisor/composer include Robert Frank/Rudy Wurlitzer’s Candy Mountain, Robert Altman’s Short Cuts and Kansas City, Greg Ford’s Night of the Living Duck, Gus Van Sant’s Finding Forrester, Win Wenders’ Million Dollar Hotel, Abel Ferrara’s Chelsea on the Rocks, Martin Scorsese’s Gangs of New York, Matt Piedmont’s Casa De Mi Padre, Adam McKay’s Talladega Nights and John Hillcoat’s Lawless. Willner was music producer of the legendary music series Night Music which was hosted by David Sanborn and executive produced by Lorne Michaels. In addition to having his own concept shows at the Sydney Opera House, Royal Festival Hall (UK), Arts At St Anns, Celebrate Brooklyn, Central Park Summerstage, Barbican Center (UK), Poetry Project at St. Marks, Issue Project Room, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and others. Willner also served as Artist in Residence at UCLA Arts at Royce Hall in the 2004/05 season. He has released one album under his own name: Whoops, I’m an Indian, on Pussyfoot Records which featured audio samples from 78 room records from the early-mid 20th century. Willner also recently co-hosted “New York Shuffle” with the late Lou Reed, a weekly program on Sirius Radio/XM.

ANNICK LAVALLEE-BENNY (ASSOCIATE SET DESIGNER)
Annick was born in Québec where she first studied set and costume design. After a few years of practice in Montréal, she engaged into contemporary performance making at the Norwegian Theatre Academy where she completed a degree in scenography. She was awarded the Gold Medal for Most Promising Talent at the Prague Quadrennial 2011 in recognition of a site specific large scale installation project. Now alternating basis between Montréal and Berlin, she works as a freelancer at the meeting point of architecture, visual arts and theatre. She has collaborated on several productions with Robert Wilson in the recent years, including Monteverdi’s cycle at La Scala and Opéra National de Paris, Verdi’s Macbeth produced between Sao Paolo and Bologna and Life and Death of Marina Abramovic created for MIF 2011.

A.J. WEISSBARD (LIGHTING DESIGNER)
Based in Rome, American lighting designer A.J. Weissbard has worked worldwide designing for theatre, video, exhibition, permanent architectural installation and special events. His collaborations include projects with Robert Wilson, Peter Stein, Luca Ronconi, Daniele Abbado, Bernard Sobel, Peter Greenaway, William Kentridge, Fabrizio Plessi, Giorgio Armani, Pierluigi Cerri, Richard Gluckman, Matteo Thun, Fabio Novembre, Shirin Neshat, David Cronenberg, Martha Graham Dance Company and more. His work has been seen presented in major opera houses, festivals, theatres and other sites in more than 40 countries including Opera Garnier, Théâtre du Châtelet, Teatro alla Scala, Teatro San Carlo.
Royal Opera House Oman, Lincoln Center, BAM, the Guggenheim NY/Bilbao, Venice Biennale, Aichi World Expo, among many others. He was recently awarded the first IFS Arts award for Lighting Design.

MARCO OLIVIERI (SOUND DESIGNER)

Sound designer and composer, Marco has collaborated with many musicians and artists both for the live stage and for studio recordings. Amongst other he has worked with Patty Smith, Lou Reed, Goran Bregovic, Modena City Ramlers, Noa, Eugenio Finardi, Elio e le Storie Tese, In theatre he has collaborated in several multimedia projects with artists such as Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Eimuntas Nekrosius, Pippo Del Bono, Alvis Hermanis, Cesare Lievi, Roberto Andò, Elio De Capitani.

REINHARD BICHSEL (TECHNICAL DIRECTOR)

Reinhard Bichsel collaboration with Robert Wilson include The Knee Plays America part of The Civil WarS, The Forest by Robert Wilson and David Byrne, Persephone with music by Phil Glass, Relative Lights, Tre Syster at Stockholm Stadsteatern, Samuel Beckett, Krapps Last Tape, and the Berliner Ensemble Shakespeare Sonette, Die Dreigroschenoper and Lulu. Production credits include work with Committed Artists of South Africa Sarafina by Mbongeni Ngema and Maggie at 4 a.m. He also works steadily with Groupe F pyrotechnie and realises shows worldwide. Additional credits include works for Vivace, vom Leichtsinn der Schwerkraft, Trillion Dollar Company Berlin, Germany, Tricodex by Philippe

INVISIBLE KHARMS

by Darryl Pinckney

Daniil Kharms was born in St. Petersburg in 1905, the year of the bloody massacre in front of the Winter Palace, and he died in what was then called Leningrad in 1942, when the city was under blockade. They say he may have died of starvation in his cell. In certain photographs, he looks like what Mayakovsky would have ended up looking like had he not killed himself.

To look at certain photographs of Kharms, gaunt and wild-eyed, is to remember that he had been having a difficult time long before he was imprisoned in 1941. Kharms had been arrested before, in 1931, when Soviet authority criminalized the avant garde in the arts. Mayakovsky had shot himself in 1930, signaling the end of an artistic experiment under the Revolution.

The following year, Pasternak mourned “the black velvet of his talent” in Safe Conduct and retreated from Stalin on the other end of the wire. Kharms, too, made his retreat, into children’s literature, he who is said to have despised children. The disguise didn’t work; his last decade was harassed.

If there was war all around him when he died, he also had friends in the besieged city. One of them dragged a suitcase of his manuscripts from his apartment and kept it hidden until the 1960s. In the 1920s, when the civil war ended, Kharms had been a dandy, a young man of small, rapid flamboyant acts about town.

His presence was a sort of performance art. Kharms came of age in that last moment of cultural freedom, when there was still some optimism about the revolution, because although Bolshevik violence had been transformed into state power the commissars hadn’t entirely figured out what to do with culture. The sheer high spirits of being young pushed away World War I and its legacy of carnage. The absurdist mood saved artists like Kharms from the cynicism that was making the Jazz Age desperate for so many across Europe. But, then, the lightness of Kharms, his deft, noiseless style, perhaps came from his inner knowledge about what was coming. After all, he’d grown up with Russia history.

His father had been a member of The People’s Will, the terrorist group that assassinated Alexander II in 1883. The Imperial government executed thousands of terrorists in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, just as the terrorists executed thousands of imperial officials in the same period. Kharms’s work only seems innocent and comic—-all those freak accidents and all that slapstick-like violence.

Underneath, he knew something about the murderous impulse, sudden and senseless. His stories and poems are not overtly oppositional or even coded protest, but his writing is rather like stalks grown up in the cracks of the sidewalk—-there, in spite of everything, starting with the heaviness of human traffic. His stories are brief, often mere paragraphs, and what happens in them can be nonsense, over and over.

Everything about them is improvisational in feeling, random, unreliable, as fragile as life itself. These works are not necessarily portraits of the individual deformed by totalitarian rule. They are not Kafka; they don’t have his interest in systems.

Instead, they speak of the helplessness of being alive, of the properties of consciousness, of how the mind goes on thinking and willing and living, even in the middle of nightmare.

LYNSEY PEISINGER (ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)

Lynsey Peisinger is a Paris-based choreographer and performer. She has cast and trained performers for Marina Abramovic in Moscow, Los Angeles and Basel and she helps Ms. Abramovic coordinate and facilitate The Abramovic Method. She is working on The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic and Zinnias: The Life of Clementine Hunter, both directed by Robert Wilson, as prompter and assistant director respectively. She recently presented performance works at Robert Wilson’s 2nd Annual Berlin Benefit 2011, Hyeres Fashion and Photography Festival 2012, and Kunstfest Weimar 2012. She received her MFA in choreography from the Dance Conservatory at Purchase College.

CHARLES OTTE (ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)

Charles Otte is a multimedia director/designer whose work crosses multiple platforms. He is currently a senior creative director with Thinkwell Group in Los Angeles. His productions have been seen at BAM, Lincoln Center, Seville Opera, LA Opera, Carnegie Hall, Ohio Theatre, the Sundance Institute, Odyssey Theatre, Open Fist Theatre, A&E TV, HDTV, and Universal Studios Hollywood, and can currently be seen at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, the Texas State History Museum, Universal Studios Singapore, the Louisiana State Capitol Museum, and others. Otte has worked on numerous productions assisting Robert Wilson in The Knee Plays,
The Golden Windows, Monsters of Grace, and most recently as directing associate for the world tour of Einstein on the Beach. He is honored to be working with the amazing artists involved with The Old Woman. He plays the violin and is married to Christine Sang.

TILMAN HECKER (DRAMATURG)
Tilman Hecker was born in Karlsburg, Germany in 1980 and studied architecture and scénographie in Berlin and Paris. During his studies he started working with Robert Wilson and Achim Freyer as assistant director and collaborator. Recent productions with Wilson are the Odyssey at the National Theatre of Greece and Lecture on Nothing at the ruhtriennale Festival. Hecker made his directorial debut with the Mozart opera Mandy’s Baby at Berlin’s Radial System V in July 2009. Other directing credits include Narcissus and Echo by Jay Schwartz (Salzburg State Theatre and musicadhoy festival Madrid), La Finta Giardiniera by Mozart (Wuppertal Opera), The Masque of Alfred by Thomas Arne (Pocket Opera Company Nuremberg), Songbooks by Cage (Berlin State Opera Werkstatt), The Secret Marriage by Cimarosa (Nordhausen opera). In 2014 he will direct a creation for the Deutsche Oper Berlin / Tischlerei, based on texts of Jean Genet composed by Birke Berteilsmeier.

JANE ROSENBAUM (STAGE MANAGER)
Jane Rosenbaum is a freelance stage manager who has worked with Mr. Wilson on Snow on the Mesa, The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic, Einstein on the Beach, and Zinnias: The Life of Clementine Hunter. Previously she was the Production Manager for The Martha Graham Dance Company and Island Moving Company. She received her MFA in Theatre Practice from the University of Exeter, UK.

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Change Performing Arts. Established in 1989, Change Performing Arts is an independent production company based in Milan, and active worldwide in the fields of live performance, including theatre, dance, opera, traditional performing arts, classical and contemporary music, and in the visual arts, including installations, exhibitions and cultural events. Constantly devoting its efforts to creating new relationships with established and young artists, the company explores and encourages the way the various arts forms can be combined to create new and original means of expression in realizing provocative events of the highest quality. www.changeperformingarts.com

Baryshnikov Productions (BPI) is designed to bring the distinctive voices of innovative directors, choreographers and artists to the world's most well respected stages. Under this umbrella, BPI has produced and toured the White Oak Dance Project (1990-2002), Forbidden Christmas or The Doctor and Patient (2004-2006), Beckett Shorts (2007), In Paris (2010-2012) and Man in a Case (2013-2014).

Théâtre de la Ville is dedicated to the cultures of the world and its artistic achievements in theatre, dance and music. under the direction of Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota since 2008, it has developed a wide panel of programmes for young people, conceived a new festival (Chantiers d’Europe) dedicated to young artists, created an international competition (Danse Elargie) and built a network of local, national and international partnerships. Its goal is to promote the idea of a great popular theatre in its multi-artistic and its international dimension – a great theatre of the world. theatredelaville-paris.com

The Spoleto Festival dei 2Mondi is an annual summer music and opera festival held each June to early July in Spoleto, Italy, since its founding by composer Gian Carlo Menotti in 1958. It features a vast array of concerts, opera, dance, drama, visual arts and roundtable discussions on science. Recently revived by artistic director Giorgio Ferrara, the Festival is the most prominent Italian summer festival, producing and hosting international projects. www.festivaldispoleto.com

The deSingel International Arts Campus in Antwerp presents and produces theatre, dance, music and architecture, and makes it available to a broad, art-loving public. As a contemporary and internationally-oriented arts campus, we are concerned with permanent education in the arts. The organization’s large-scale infrastructure comprises a medium-sized concert hall (966 seats), a large hall for theater and dance (803 seats), an exhibition space, a music studio (150 seats) and a theatre studio (270 seats). www.desingel.be
I heard Bob Wilson say recently that one thing he’s learned through the years is ‘to enter the rehearsal room with no ideas, with a blank book’. Rather than trying to make what’s in his head, he prefers to see what is in the room, hear the text, listen to the music, play with the space light and scenic elements, create a structure for the actors. As refined as his theatre is, there is nothing pedantic about his approach.

Of course, Willem Dafoe, an incredibly arresting and layered actor, made it easier for me to decode Bob’s almost painterly approach to the creative process. He’s worked with Bob before and taught me a lot about a certain kind of patience.

I think Daniil Kharms “The Old Woman” is a brilliant piece of absurdist literature. In the hands of Bob Wilson and his talented creative team, along with an extraordinary fellow actor (I am the rookie in this mix), all we need is the audience and we’ll see what we have.

I thought Darryl Pinckney would be the perfect person to adapt it. Darryl has been a friend and artistic collaborator for many years, and he knows my work very well. He agreed to do it, and had a first translation and dramatic text adaptation in a little more than three months. Change Performing Arts and Baryshnikov Productions agreed to produce the work and MIF commissioned and produced it, partnering with the Spoleto Festival in Italy, the Théâtre de la Ville/Festival d’Automne in Paris and deSingel in Antwerp.

In summer 2012, we held a workshop at the Watermill Center for a few days to find a direction for the production and to help Misha and I understand each other’s ways of working. Then, in spring this year, I started rehearsals in Spoleto with almost no idea of what to do: I hadn’t decided who would speak which text, or even what the stage would look like. I began to shape the piece in terms of light, scenary and movement, and slowly began to add text. I worked on all the elements at the same time.

I generally start with the light first and then the movement, adding text and audio elements later. I sketched a scene, then go to the next scene and see what differs from what has gone before. Eventually, once I have a draft for the whole work, I go back to the start, then begin to make alterations and add more detail. Finally, I work with make-up and costumes, and define the time-space construction. I often move things around until the parts seem to support or complement one another. Since there is no single narrative, one is allowed a certain freedom to construct and deconstruct.

I have chosen the two actors, Misha and Willem, because I think they complement each other with their different personas. I think of the two as one: the writer. And during the course of the play, they change: A becomes B and B becomes A, because A and B are one whole, not two.

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Robert Wilson portrait by Hsu Ping.

Willem Dafoe portrait by Mark Abrahams.
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