

ARTS

Theatre & Dance

Brume de Dieu, Ménagerie de Verre, Paris

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Going to see a Claude Régy production means cutting yourself off: from the outside world, the march of time, expectations of what normally happens on a stage. This veteran director, now 87, doesn't do easy. His work is austere, distilled, abstract, philosophical, transcendental – and completely absorbing.

The title *Mist of God* came from Régy's most recent production (Pessoa's *Maritime Ode*) but the text is an adapted extract from Tarjei Vesaas's 1957 novel *The Birds*. Régy has long been drawn to Norwegian authors who go beyond the confines of the rational to explore the light emanating from darkness. Here the shadowlands revolve around Mattis (Laurent Cazanave), the idiot savant who speaks of himself in the third person, communes with birds in flight and flounders in the fast-moving world of men. His apparently artless monologue unfolds in halting fragments, bathed in Rémi Godfroy's shimmering, hallucinatory lighting.



Transfixing: Laurent Cazanave in 'Brume de Dieu'

Cazanave emerges from darkness as if walking on water and holds the audience transfixed for 90 minutes. His first phrases are almost incomprehensible, as if testing syllables and cadences on a tongue not used to human speech. Gradually he draws us into Mattis's inner world, taut with concentration, shining eyes fixed on imagined horizons. The presence of unseen sister Hege hovers, working her fingers to the bone to support him, clumsily kind, trying to shield him from her depression. He tries in his desolation to empathise. "It's you who keeps me alive. That's important. Isn't it?" As water fills his leaky fishing boat, fear releases memories of the father who abandoned him, and the mother who died young. His frantic bailing fuses with the water's gloopy bubbling.

A Régy-directed actor is instantly recognisable. But for all the stylistic hallmarks, the 22-year-old Cazanave invests Mattis with exceptional emotional resonance. This is an immensely disciplined performance, poignant without sentimentality. His hands hang slack, rise up with the threatening waters, reach out to an ineffable presence. The animal shriek for his sister to help him has the terrifying desolation of that cry from the cross: Father, father, why hast thou forsaken me? (★★★★★)