



Press release

Pôle International de la Marionnette – Jacques Félix

Charleville-Mézières, 5 December 2024

The Petits Comédiens de Chiffons and the Institut International de la Marionnette, two leading associations in the world of puppetry, are to merge on 1 January 2025 to form a single entity: the Pôle International de la Marionnette – Jacques Félix.

For audiences, artists and scholars alike, puppetry is Charleville-Mézières and vice-versa.

Initially, the **Petits Comédiens de Chiffons**, a group of artists founded by Jacques Félix in 1948, supported his puppet shows. From 1961 onwards, it became the venue for the Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes, the world's largest artistic gathering for the puppet arts. The Festival was held irregularly at first, then every three years from 1976 and every two years since 2009.

In 1981, 20 years after the Festival, Jacques Félix set up the **Institut International de la Marionnette** to extend the pleasure of encounters, the dialogue between cultures and the reunion of tradition and modernity. Its mission was to provide a permanent home for artists and researchers from all over the world who were interested in the puppetry arts. The Institute began by designing a professional training programme of international renown. Then it created a school like no other: **ESNAM – Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette – Margareta Niculescu**.

The gradual recognition by the Ministry of Culture and local authorities of the **recent structuring of the field of puppetry arts** has reshaped its landscape. On this occasion, the coexistence of two driving structures of the same sector in Charleville-Mézières, sometimes partners but nevertheless distinct despite their unique founder, was questioned.

The report on the situation of the two structures, commissioned in 2021 from Frédéric Maurin by Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot and submitted in May 2022, concluded: *“We need to give new meaning and ambition to the presence of puppetry in Charleville-Mézières - that’s the challenge for the coming years. On the one hand for the puppet sector, and on the other for the preservation and sustainability of this wonderful adventure, which could collectively become one of the major institutions of tomorrow’s cultural landscape”*.

The Ministry of Culture and the local authorities involved in the two projects - the Région Grand Est, the Département des Ardennes, the Communauté d'Agglomération Ardenne Métropole and the City of Charleville-Mézières - then proposed that the Petits Comédiens de Chiffons and the Institut International de la Marionnette should join forces to form a single entity.

The Pôle's prefiguration committee insisted that **the merger of the two structures, thanks to the fine-tuning of their complementary missions, should lead to the extension and reinforcement of the projects in new actions at the service of the discipline and the territory.**

On 1 January 2025, thanks to the dialogue between their respective directors and the work of the management team already in place, the two associations will merge into a single entity: the **Pôle International de la Marionnette – Jacques Félix**.

The name is simple and natural, but carefully chosen:

- **Pôle**, first of all, which the French dictionary notes is *“borrowed from the Latin *polus* (c. 1220), itself taken from the Greek *polos*, which designates the fulcrum on which something turns”*.
- **Jacques Félix** is jointed to the name of the structure. Just as ESNAM paid tribute in 2021 to its founder Margareta Niculescu by incorporating her patronymic into the school's name, and just as certain theatrical utopias attach the name of their founder to themselves, such as the Théâtre du Peuple - Maurice Pottecher in Bussang, it seemed natural to pay tribute to the living memory of the man with whom puppetry took off in Charleville-Mézières.

In his play “La réunion des deux Corées” (The Reunion of the Two Koreas), imagining the happiness of an imaginary rapprochement between the two neighbouring countries, Joël Pommerat wrote: *“It was a party, we felt that we were linked and that it had been a very long time”*. It is in this joyful spirit that the teams of the Petits Comédiens de Chiffons and the Institut International de la Marionnette, united within the Pôle International de la Marionnette – Jacques Félix, wish to **perpetuate and amplify the legacy of Jacques Félix, in the service of the puppetry arts and artists, in the service of a territory and its inhabitants.**

The Pôle International de la Marionnette – Jacques Félix is chaired by **Frédéric Maurin**.

It can draw on the expertise of its vice-presidents, **Géraud Spire** and **Philippe Choulet**, former presidents of the Institut International de la Marionnette and the Petits Comédiens de Chiffons.



The Pôle International de la Marionnette team ©Christophe Loiseau

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