

CUBe

CUBe association | Christian UBL



WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

Creation 2026

CUBe - Christian UBL (FR/AT) & Rode boom – Kurt DEMEY (B)

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

We met in 2019, brought together by SACD and the Avignon Festival who invited us to create a show together for “Vive le sujet!”. From this experience, we birthed Garden of Chance, a piece that intertwines dance and mentalism, played over sixty times in very varied contexts. We wanted to continue this collaboration and deepen the connections between dance and mentalism in the encounter with the audience.
Are you ready to follow us?!



NOTE OF INTENTION

With **What Did You Expect?**, we draw inspiration from chaos theory, particularly the butterfly effect and the chain reaction principle, to generate situations that merge physicality and mentalism. On stage, the butterfly effect materializes as a chain of events that follow one another, each influencing the next. We start from seemingly insignificant events at the beginning of the chain, which can ultimately lead to something very different: surprising, funny, illogical, or even disturbing. This succession of events, actions, gestures, and bodily situations constitutes the foundation of our stage language and narrative choreography. Each choice will provoke a chain reaction that, through mentalism, leads to unexpected outcomes. The show aims to be a playful and poetic experience that unveils a hidden order of the relationships that bind us. The spectators are active participants in the device and are invited to join us in an exploration of chaos theory that is both physical and mental.

MENTALISM, DANCE, AND CHAOS THEORY

Today, chaos theory is a fascinating and expanding field of research, concerned with numerous phenomena that heavily depend on their initial conditions.

- * While chaotic behavior may seem random and unpredictable, it nonetheless obeys strict mathematical laws.

- * Chaos theory shows that even a tiny modification of the initial conditions can radically transform outcomes: this is the butterfly effect.

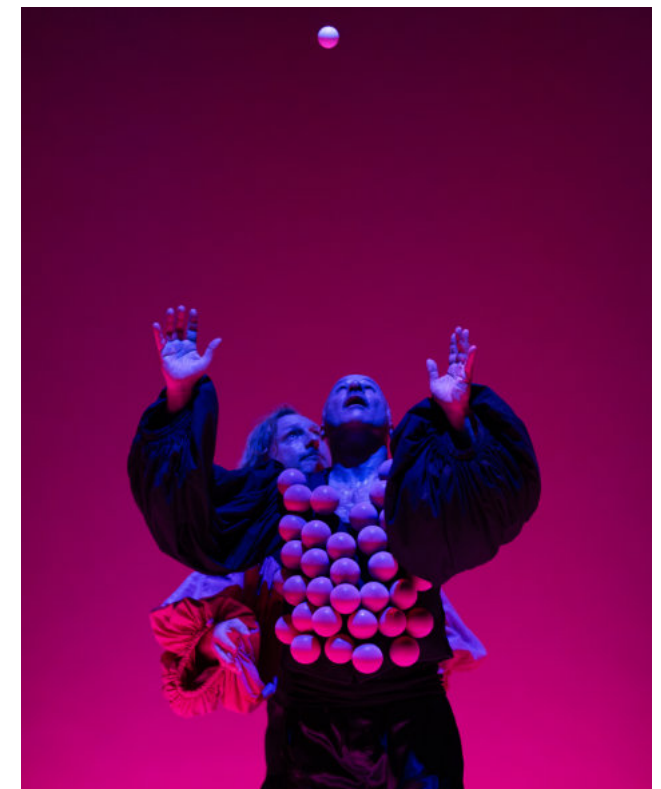
- * Within chaos, underlying structures exist, such as fractals, repetitions, feedback loops, or self-organization. According to chaos theory, systems thus obey strict mathematical laws, yet their behavior seems random. These laws often remain invisible or very complex, creating an impression of chaos.

These concepts inspire the choreography, dramaturgy, and magical effects. The show does not aim to scientifically explain these theories. Their artistic translation leads us instead towards poetic images, humor, and surprises. Mentalism is an illusion technique that gives the impression that the mentalist possesses

extraordinary abilities such as mind reading, telekinesis, or future prediction. In this creation, the aim is not to imitate these powers but to use mentalism techniques to reveal the magical and hidden properties of chaos theory. For *What Did You Expect?*, Kurt has devised several illusions that perfectly illustrate this confusion: spectators remain surprised and incredulous when chaos is suddenly revealed to be very organized!

In the way of Alfred Jarry's pataphysics, we seek imaginary solutions that play with logic, reality, and scientific conventions. And mentalism proves to be a particularly fertile technique here. The mental processes of the piece are not isolated: they are constructed from dramaturgical and choreographic elements that set the performers and sometimes the audience in motion. For in *What Did You Expect?*, mentalism is, as much as possible, placed in the hands of the audience. It is the spectators who make decisions, supply data for the experiments, and get lost in an apparent chaos. At the moment when everything seems completely random, they suddenly discover an order they could never have imagined. The

fourth wall then completely disappears, and a simple and direct relationship is created between the performers and the spectators. Therefore, it is not about seeing a dancer and a mentalist on stage, but two characters who have opened their practices and travel through each other's artistic universe, inviting spectators to join them.



BODY & SPACE

We chose to work with the notion of a spiral: a perpetual chain of actions and reactions based on a triggering gesture to lead our two bodies into a circular and interdependent motion. This figure recurs in various forms throughout the show and evokes the butterfly effect: the flutter of a butterfly's wings in one place can provoke a hurricane elsewhere.

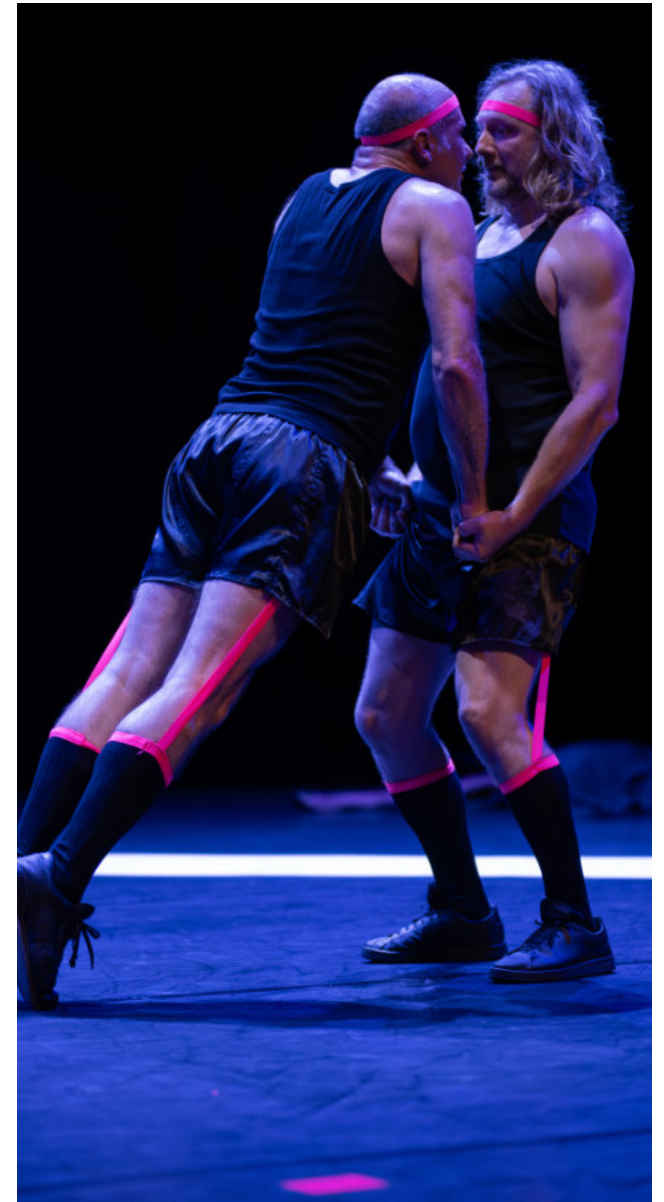
A blackboard - in the form of a slate - is one of the communication tools on stage: writing with chalk and then erasing is also reflected in the choreographic material, where some gestures appear and disappear to make way for others. The chain reactions follow one another.

Patterns and repetitions, characteristic of chaotic systems, have also led us to develop a choreographic sequence based on juggling. Practiced with visible balls, it evolves into abstract and danced movements from which the balls have disappeared. The result is a hypnotic and playful mixture of dance and circus.

The set design consists of a black floor, white lines, and pink lighting—a radically different aesthetic from the usual realm of mentalism.

The white lines take various forms throughout the show. They initially create an abstract space. Then, they transform into a pentagon that highlights the center of the stage. This figure becomes particularly relevant when five spectators are invited to join the stage...

We have deliberately chosen the color pink as an aesthetic leitmotif, even though we are two men on stage. Symbol of love, the color supposedly favored by little girls and widely associated with femininity, pink was a symbol of masculinity in the Middle Ages. We wanted to play with these contradictions to open the imagination. The costumes participate in this construction. They mix period pieces gathered from sales at the Comédie Française with more contemporary outfits, creating indeterminate and fanciful spaces and times. The color pink thus traverses the entire piece: lighting, objects, and costumes create both strangeness and visual unity.



EXAMPLES OF EXPERIENCES

Words and elastics

A spectator thinks of a word. The two performers play a game: they place an elastic around their heads and take turns stating letters. The elastic is stretched.

If the letter is not in the spectator's word, the elastic is suddenly released. The scene then becomes a moment of tension, dance, and humor. Then, while dancing, the performers eventually guess the exact word the spectator is thinking of. This experience is inspired by the principle of progressive anagrams: a hidden system at the heart of apparent chaos. And what follows exceeds all expectations: the performers then write a word on the slate without the audience being able to see it... and the audience still manages to find it.

Aprons and Numbers

Several spectators are invited on stage. Each receives a pretty apron indicating the movement they must perform:

- Spectator A swims in a circle and counts their movements
- Spectator B jumps for joy and counts their jumps
- Spectator C cleans the air and counts their gestures
- Spectator D grabs imaginary clouds and counts them
- Spectator E stirs the earth and counts their actions

When someone in the audience shouts "stop," the participants stop. The numbers obtained for each action are multiplied: $A \times B \times C \times D \times E$. We then obtain a large number. The participants then turn their aprons around: each reveals a digit. Together, these digits reconstruct exactly the result of the multiplication. And as if that weren't enough, the number turned around forms a word...

This experience reveals, in a poetic and surprising way, a mathematical order at the heart of chaos.



A word from Christian UBL on his practice and this collaboration

I perceive the creative act as a form of resistance, weaving essential social ties. In my choreographic project, I pursue a scenic research questioning dance, the presence and absence of a body in action, and the place of the spectator and their participation. My journey, from Austria to France, enriches my approach, blending figure skating, Latin dances, and contemporary dance, with a reflection on identity and origins. Today, I propose a hybrid artistic approach and thus create a world where the body and other artistic practices meet. Since 2023, I have been interested in the butterfly effect and chain reaction principles, translating these concepts through moving bodies and creative thinking, notably inspired by the film *Der Lauf der Dinge* by Fischli & Weiss. For this new collaboration with Kurt Demey, I wish to pursue this research and explore how objects can trigger movements and create unexpected situations. My wish is to surprise the audience with situations that are both poetic, concrete, disturbing, and illogical, awakening the sensitivity and curiosity of spectators through innovative choreographic writing intertwined with mentalism. I advocate for a generous dance, open and rich in emotions and questions.



A word from Kurt Demey flemish mentalist on his practice and this new collaboration

In my work, I seek to capture the intangible through poetry and symbolic images. Themes of chance, reality, synchronization, and illusion constitute the core of my artistic research. Illusion techniques are for me like paint for a painter: a tool that allows me to take the audience into a new reality. My performances are always interactive: audience participation is an integral part of the experience. When I met Christian Ubl in 2019—in a sort of artistic "blind date" for the Avignon Festival—our universes seemed very different. But it is precisely this difference that made the collaboration stimulating. Thus, Garden of Chance was born. After several years on tour, the combination of dance and mentalism now appears as an obvious one and opens new perspectives for continuing this exploration.



Biography – Background



Christian UBL – **Austrian choreographer and dancer based in Marseille**

Christian UBL was born in Vienna, Austria. He was initially trained and introduced to his art by sports, notably figure skating and Latin dances practiced at a very high level for 10 years. He completed his training in contemporary dance and composition at the Cellule d'Insertion Professionnelle Coline in Istres for two years and then in Vienna at a private school. In 2005, he obtained a degree in theater at the University of Lyon. He has worked as a performer with many choreographers in France and Europe: Les Carnets Bagouet, Michel Kelemenis, Thomas Lebrun, Daniel Dobbels, David Wampach, Christiane Blaise, Abou Lagraa, Ireland dance Theater, Cie Linga, etc. He has led his own choreographic work within CUBe since 2005, having created sixteen choreographic pieces, including Shake it out, which was a winner at the (R)econnaissance competition. In each of his creations, he develops a strong research axis articulated around notions of identity and origin. The goal is to create a language centered on the body to provide poetic and transversal responses to contemporary questions; to provoke an artistic effervescence as an imaginary ornament speaking to today's spectators. He has been an associate artist at L'Hexagone, Scène nationale de Meylan, then at Briqueterie CDCN du Val-de-Marne, at the Maison de la Danse, and at the Pôle d'Expérimentation et de Création Chorégraphique "PE2C" in Istres. Besides stage pieces, he creates several pieces for young audiences and develops other types of projects such as participatory projects, poetic hikes, balls... He also works with dancers in professional training—recently for Coline in Istres, CNSMD in Lyon, and the School of the National Ballet of Marseille.



Kurt DEMEY – **Mentalist based in Brussels**

Born in Belgium in 1974, he obtained his master's degree in fine arts at Sint Lucas Antwerp in 1997. He continued his career in various artistic disciplines (sculpture, painting, movement theater, art in public spaces and circus arts). In 2006, Kurt took a 2-year course in art in public space at FAI AR Marseille. Thanks to literature and various masters around the world (America, India, China, Nepal, England, France, among others), he immersed himself in the art of illusion and mentalism. In 2015, he became Belgian champion of magic and won the first prize for mentalism at the championships in the Netherlands. In 2017, Kurt again won first prize for his stage act at the Belgian Federation of Magic. Between 2000 and 2002, he won several awards for his artistic work in public spaces. Kurt Demey's artistic work has a personal style imbued with surrealism and symbolism. He uses the techniques of the world of illusion and mentalism as an artistic palette. In 2008, Kurt created his first show based on illusion techniques (Horned Man), which has toured the world (375 times). Then he created La Ville qui Respire (2010, 216 performances), Dans l'Air (2021, 176 performances), Evidences Inconnues (2014, 587 performances), Nous sommes possibles (2019, 75 performances), Réalités (2021, 37 performances). From 2021, the company Red Tree has obtained structural subsidies.

Team & partners

Christian Ubl | choreographer, dancer, and set designer

Kurt Demey | mentalist, visual artist, and performer

Laurie Fouvet | lighting designer

Jean-Philippe Bouretz | touring light designer

Pierre Canitrot | costume design

Guillaume Guilherme | sound editing

Thibaut Boislève | touring sound set up

Gaëlle Gillieron, Emilie Cornillot, Claudine Bertomeu | artistic advisors

Cécile Vernadat | production and development CUBe

Pascale Baudin | administration CUBe

Anne Elst | production Rode Boom

Stefan Gevaerts | administration Rode Boom

Production | CUBe association (F) & Rode Boom (B)

Co-production | Châteauvallon-Liberté Scène nationale Toulon,
Centre des Arts Enghien les Bains, Les Hivernales CDCN Avignon,
PERPLX – Courtrai (B)

With the support of Klap Maison pour la danse – Marseille,
Théâtre Jacques Carat - Cachan, Scène Méditerranée – Marseille,
Studio Ex Nihilo - Cité des arts de la rue Marseille

Creation

May 5, 26 | preview – Centre des Arts Enghien les Bains

June 24, 26 | premiere at Klap Maison pour la Danse - Marseille

July 10-20, 26 | We also dance in the summer – Les Hivernales
CDCN d'Avignon, Festival off d'Avignon

Format and Duration

The show is created on stage, frontal.

Capacity of about 350 people.

Duration: 65-70 minutes. The piece integrates audience participation at several moments, which can vary the duration of the piece.

Outdoor/off-site version: to be considered on a case-by-case basis depending on the contexts. Please do not hesitate to contact the production.

In images and action

[Teaser](#) What Did You Expect?

[Teaser](#) Garden of Chance

Press – about Garden of Chance

“With this new opus, funny, whimsical, subtly participative, this advocate for ‘an open, sensitive, and universal dance’ is bound to shake up what we think we know about contemporary dance.”

by Rosita Boisseau - *Le Monde*, July 18, 2019

“For this Garden of chance, pure magic crosses contemporary dance. Honestly, on paper, it’s a strange mix! And yet, from this performance, which we can’t reveal anything about, we understand that candor is a quality.”

by Amélie Blaustein Niddam - *Toute la Culture*, July 17, 2019

“Never will a roll of the dice abolish chance! Magic, deadpan, a stunning game of chance where the audience is invited to perform with the two protagonists, Kurt Demey and Christian Ubl.”

by Geneviève Charras - *L’amuse-danse!*, July 21, 2019

“This duo, particularly around synthetic grass— is succulent. The two accomplices will make the audience interact, and it’s effective... prodigious. A beautiful meeting, and magical, too!”

by Emmanuel Serafini - *Inferno magazine*, July 18, 2019



CONTACTS



CUBe association

Artistic Direction | Christian UBL

christian.ubl@cubehaus.fr

+33 6 13 04 77 82

Administration | Pascale BAUDIN

cubeasso@cubehaus.fr

+33 6 83 58 89 70

Production/Distribution | Cécile Vernadat

production.diffusion@cubehaus.fr

+33 6 38 80 28 67

Registered Office

CUBe association

Cité des Associations

93 La Canebière

BAL 361, 13001 Marseille

SIRET : 439 998 311 00047s

Intracommunity VAT FR3043999831100047

www.cubehaus.fr



RODE BOOM

Artistic | Kurt DEMEY

info@rodeboom.be

+32 472 46 43 52

Production | Anne Elst

anne@rodeboom.be

+32 496 89 53 22

www.rodeboom.be



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