FRANÇOISE NAHON – DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Provided exclusively to Riviera Buzz, translated from French

Seventeen years after it was founded, the *Femmes en Scènes* Festival continues to champion a conviction that is dear to me: art is not there merely to entertain us. It can move us, make us laugh, make us angry, challenge us, and sometimes help us see what we thought we knew in a different light.

That is precisely what I look for in the festival's programming. I am an actress and director, and I have always been drawn to theatre that speaks to as many people as possible—work that dares to tackle difficult subjects without sacrificing humour, emotion, or freedom of tone. A popular theatre, in the noblest sense of the term, capable of holding tears, laughter, and anger together.

It is in that spirit that I created *Femmes en Scènes*: to offer women artists a space in which to express their worlds, their experiences, and their ways of seeing the world. This is not about defending a single voice or presenting a uniform vision of women. On the contrary, what interests me is the plurality of voices, forms of writing, bodies, and sensibilities.

For this 17th edition, running from 7 November to 4 December 2026, we have chosen to shine a particular light on works and journeys by women—often intimate ones—that speak to us of freedom, resilience, human relationships, and the place each of us can occupy in society.

Some productions confront us directly with violence and relations of domination. Others explore more intimate subjects: fragility, life's accidents, or paths towards rebuilding. But all of them, each in their own way, invite us to pause, listen, and feel.

I am thinking in particular of **Girls & Boys** by Dennis Kelly, performed by Fabienne Gardon. Behind the apparent ordinariness of a romantic encounter, the story gradually brings to the surface power dynamics, the fragilities of intimacy, and the violence that can upend a life. It is a

text that draws us into a story whose stakes are revealed little by little, forcing us to question our assumptions and what we believe we know about human relationships.

I love theatre's ability to take us somewhere we did not expect to go. It does not tell us what to think: it places us before a situation, a voice, a reality, and leaves us to experience its full complexity.

With **Fragmentée** by Jennifer Maria, we are likewise faced with a profoundly human quest: that of a woman confronted with loss and searching for a path towards consolation. How do we keep moving forward when everything is falling apart? How do we find our breath again, a connection with the world? These are universal questions, explored here through an intimate, sensitive, and singular journey.

These productions capture what matters most to me: enabling artists to tell stories that touch us personally while also resonating with collective realities.

Les Frottements du cœur: a closing night devoted to resilience

I also want to highlight the closing production, **Les Frottements du cœur**, written and performed by Katia Ghanty and directed by Éric Bu.

This one-woman show won the 2026 Molière Award for Best Solo Performance. It is a fitting recognition for a work that plunges us into an extraordinary journey through life.

At 29, a young woman falls ill. What at first seems ordinary worsens until it becomes a medical emergency. What follows is a passage through the fragility of the body, fear, the need to survive, and the return to the world—an experience as harrowing as it is unexpected.

What moves me about this piece is the way it addresses resilience without glossing over how difficult the journey is. It is about life, fragility, courage, and love, but also about the capacity to find one's place in the world again after confronting the unthinkable.

The power of the stage lies in its ability to transform an individual experience into a story that concerns us all. We do not need to have lived through the same ordeal to be moved by this

account. That, for me, is also what makes live performance so rich: the encounter between someone who opens themselves up and an audience that receives, feels, and lets those words resonate with their own story.

Closing the festival with this production therefore carries particular meaning. After several weeks of new work, encounters, and overlapping perspectives on women and society, we find ourselves before a story of resistance and rebuilding. It is a way of reminding us that fragility does not preclude strength, and that even in the hardest moments, something can bring us back to life.

Femmes en Scènes is not limited to productions that explicitly denounce violence or inequality. Women's freedom is also told through humour, dance, music, poetry, life stories, and works that explore human relationships.

That is why I care so deeply about diversity in artistic forms and offerings. The festival welcomes different worlds: established artists as well as creators developing singular projects; works that shake us up, and others that do us good.

This year, the presence of Noëlle Perna, our festival patron, also brings that spirit of freedom and irreverence that is dear to me. Humour can be a powerful way of shifting perspectives, stripping away masks, and addressing serious subjects without losing the pleasure of sharing a performance.

I firmly believe that we need spaces where speech can circulate freely, where differences are not obstacles but sources of richness, and where we can laugh, be moved, debate, and not necessarily agree.

This 17th edition takes place, for the first time, across a period running from November into December, in connection with the international days of action around 25 November for the elimination of violence against women.

That calendar gives our approach a particular resonance. Violence against women cannot be reduced to a single date in the year, but this period of mobilisation is essential for continuing to denounce it, raise awareness, and remind everyone that we all share responsibility.

Art cannot replace the work of associations, support for victims, or the political and social responses that are indispensable. But it can help shift the way we see things. It can make visible realities we would sometimes rather not see, open up conversations, and foster a form of empathy that brings us closer to one another.

It is this complementarity between artistic creation and engagement that continues to give meaning to my work.

After seventeen editions, I am more aware than ever that a festival also rests on a collective adventure. Nothing would be possible without the artists, companies, partner venues, local authorities that support us, volunteers, and everyone who helps bring this project to life.

I am deeply grateful to them. Keeping an independent festival alive, defending artistic choices, and enabling demanding work to find its audience require energy, perseverance, and shared trust.

If *Femmes en Scènes* continues to exist, it is because that need is still there.

I hope audiences will come to discover the productions with curiosity, allow themselves to be surprised, laugh, be moved, and sometimes question themselves. Above all, I hope they leave with something: an image, a phrase, an emotion, or a question that stays with them.

I believe the stage can heal, bring people together, and provoke reflection. Of course, it cannot fix everything, and it cannot erase injustice. But it can offer a space where voices exist, where experiences are shared, and where each of us can feel a little less alone.

That is what I want to continue to defend with *Femmes en Scènes*: a festival where art gives full place to the diversity of women, their creative freedom, and their ability to make the world heard differently.

So that the spotlight continues to illuminate our stages—but also the realities we must never stop facing.