

## **Q & A The Return**

**Ellie Stewart**

### **Why did you write this play?**

I've been intrigued by the story of Martin Guerre since I first heard it in Toulouse about twenty-five years ago. It's a true story about a man who leaves his village and family without warning, then seems to return seven years later. It's been told in different ways over the years, and I've always been interested in the pivotal role of his wife Bertrande. The story resurfaced for me recently when I returned to the Pyrenees and was bombarded with sensory memories. My starting point for the writing was to explore the story from Bertrande's point of view.

### **It's an historical story. What do you think might interest a modern audience?**

As I was writing I was thinking about people who are seeking refuge in our times, and about the challenges of relationships and parenting. And of course, it's a love story. Some things are timeless. Perhaps human instincts, emotions and behaviours haven't changed that much over the years.

### **How did you do your research?**

I pillaged two books for tiny sparkling details on story and on history: Nathalie Zemon Davis's 'The Return of Martin Guerre' and 'Montaillou: The World Famous Portrait of Life in a Medieval Village' by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. It's a cracker ... a bit like a Medieval soap-opera. But that was definitely a starting point. I've taken some liberties with the recorded truth of the story.

The research for the emotional truth is much more linked to real life: friendships, absences, loves, landscapes, and parenting. And the research continues in the rehearsal room; honey, whistling, music, dance and shepherding all feature.

### **What's the writing process like for you?**

This was a play I really wanted to write. There was definitely an element of obsession at play, so I just got on with it and had as much fun as possible. Fun's important, as is sleep. Climbing and pilates help to balance the more static days at the computer.

It's not been a linear or solo journey, and I've been very lucky to have support and feedback from many skilful people along the way; crucially from Philip Howard the Director.

### **Why should people come and see it?**

To see the work of our extraordinarily talented team and performers, and to be transported to another time and place by an intriguing story.