

The Best (and Worst) Theater in Europe in 2022

The Times's three European theater critics pick their favorite productions of the year — plus a turkey apiece for the festive season.

By Matt Wolf, Laura Cappelle and A.J. Goldmann

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Matt Wolf

Four favorites from The Times's London theater critic



From left, Samira Wiley, Ronke Adekoluejo, Sule Rimi and Giles Terera in “Blues for an Alabama Sky” at the National Theater. Marc Brenner

“Blues for an Alabama Sky”

National Theater, London

When the American writer Pearl Cleage's 1995 play crossed the Atlantic this fall, it was the high point of a variable year for the National Theater, England's flagship playhouse. Set in adjacent apartments in 1930s Harlem, the play takes an unsparing look at a cross section of Prohibition-era Americans yearning for release from the racism and homophobia that mar their daily lives. An expert Anglo-American cast was led by Giles Terera (“Hamilton”) and the Juilliard-trained TV actress Samira Wiley as roommates who talk of packing up and moving to Paris; at the helm was Lynette Linton, making a terrific National Theater debut with a production that embraced freewheeling comedy as well as deep sorrow.



Daniel Fish and Jordan Fein's reimagining of “Oklahoma!” at the Young Vic. Marc Brenner

“Oklahoma!”

Young Vic Theater, London

Tiago Rodrigues, the incoming director of the Avignon Festival, was on a roll in 2022. He brought several revelatory productions to Paris this fall, none more so than “Catarina and the Beauty of Killing Fascists” at the Bouffes du Nord. The unlikely subject of the play, which Rodrigues also wrote, is a fictional Portuguese family that hunts down and kills fascists, following a tradition passed down through generations. Is that an honorable contribution to society, as most of the family members believe, or is doing harm always unacceptable, even when fascists threaten democracy? Rodrigues and his cast walk a fine line to avoid caricature, yet the conversations that result onstage — starting with the youngest daughter, who experiences doubts about her right to kill — are consistently thoughtful and engage the audience critically, without feeling forced.



The cast in “One Song,” developed by the Belgian artist Miet Warlop. Christophe Raynaud de Lage/Avignon Festival

“One Song”

Avignon Festival

Some of the best shows to debut in France in the past year brought unclassifiable feats of virtuosity onstage, like “One Song,” which played at the Avignon Festival. Created by the Belgian artist Miet Warlop, it was another idiosyncratic entry in the “History/ies of Theater” series that the Belgian playhouse NTGent has developed in collaboration with the festival. In “One Song,” a group of musicians/competitors perform a single song on a loop while doing an extreme workout. (A violinist plays while doing squats and leg lifts on a high beam.) Throughout, as the performers thoroughly exhaust themselves, a male cheerleader and a group of fans take turns encouraging and booing them, while a referee mumbles incomprehensibly in the background. The instant standing ovation in Avignon wasn’t merely a way to reward the performers for their efforts: “One Song” lingered in the mind as a wild, exhilarating study in absurdity.



Pierre Guillois and Olivier Martin-Salvan in “Fat People Skate Well. A Cardboard Cabaret.” Gestuelle

“Fat People Skate Well. A Cardboard Cabaret”

Paris l’Été Festival

Another oddball success, “Fat People Skate Well. A Cardboard Cabaret” won a number of awards in France this year, and they were thoroughly deserved. The show’s two actors and directors, Olivier Martin-Salvan and Pierre Guillois, tell their story almost entirely through dozens of cardboard objects. Words written on the signs and boxes, of various shapes and forms, explain what each represents — including a “fjord” and a “fly swatter” — and with the help of assistants, Guillois, a lithe, clownlike figure, in boxer shorts