



Returns department

A circus-theatre production for young audiences, by The Kif-Kif Sisters

Twin sisters welcome you to the Returns Department, where merchandise returned to the store by disgruntled customers is inspected. They discover all sorts of dysfunctional objects and manufacturing defects on their conveyor belt. For them, dealing with complaints is like opening a box of chocolates. Little by little, the temptation to play with the merchandise takes hold, but the objects themselves play some tricks of their own!

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With Chaplinesque humour and inspired by comic books, the Kif-Kif sisters take a playful look at the world of work in this show, transforming it into jazz composed of trinkets and knick-knacks. They make some 200 objects dance on a factory conveyor belt. Characters climb onto the conveyor and deal with its mobile surface as they eat, juggle and cook. With these non-functional and defective products, they discover a space of freedom, a means of expressing their creativity as they invent, explore and evolve. Combining physical theatre, magic and robotics, The Returns Department is a light-hearted comedy that makes you want to whistle while you work!

General informations

Original creation: Les soeurs kif-kif (www.kif-kif.ca)

Audience : For general audiences, ages 4 and up. Ideal for families and schools.

Duration: 55 minutes (flexible)

Ideal capacity: 330 people

Genre: Physical comedy, circus, magic

Dimensions: 22' x 18' x 10' (flexible up to 17' x 12' x 8')

Touring team: 2 artists and a technical director

Set-up: 4 hours, Strike: 1.5 hours (flexible)

Rider: [In theater](#) or [Outdoors](#)

Credits: Conceived and produced by: The Kif-Kif Sisters

Performed by: Josette Lépine and Françoise Lépine

Artistic advisors: Michoue Sylvain, Michel Dallaire, Avner Eisenberg, Louis-Dominique Lavigne, David Fiset, Marcelle Hudon

Set design advisors: Xavier Bélanger-Dorval, Sara-Claude Lépine

[Webpage](#)

[Trailer](#)

Full length video: On request

[Educational kit \(translation on request\)](#)

[Download space \(Photos HD, videos and more\)](#)



Les soeurs kif-kif

The Kif-Kif Sisters

We are identical twins. Since 2007, we have been creating colourful, tender, absurd and inventive shows, for both the stage and outdoor public spaces. They have been presented in several festivals in Europe, Asia, North America and Latin America, over 1000 presentations in 20 countries. Our creative approach is based on proximity to the audience, exploring the unusual, and playing with everyday objects. Our works are playful, with humour that is both tender and intelligent, accessible to children and adults alike. Multidisciplinary, our works weave together theatre, music, circus arts, robotics and performance. Our inspirations are many, from visual artists as Claudie Gagnon, John Cage and Mika Rottenberg, to old cartoons, city squirrels and the Roaring Twenties.

Mandate

We bring families together in a moment of shared laughter. Our shows help give children a desire to experiment, to make their ideas take concrete form, to see themselves later on as adults who will continue to play and explore.

Press: <http://www.kif-kif.ca/press.html>



Other creations from The Kif-Kif Sisters:

- 2020 The Billy-croquettes
- 2018 En équilibre - Commission by Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec
- 2012 Dada - with Théâtre de l'Aubergine
- 2009 Passion incandescente - collaboration with Québec-Art-Cité, Fogorasto
- 2008 Jam Side Up!

Also sisters in real life

Born on the same day, as a duo we are very attached to the theme of twinship. Our definitive life experience has been as a walking, talking case of mistaken identity. Twinship is its own realm, a microcosm of tenderness and synergy. Our work does not demystify the world of twins, but introduces the audience for a brief moment to that carefree realm of secret intrigue, muffins cut in half and cars with two steering wheels.



So many things in life are
better together.

Creative team



Josette Lépine

Josette studied piano at the Conservatoire de musique in Rimouski. After her studies she became an accordionist and a street performer in 2001. That versatile instrument allowed her to work with all kinds of artists and actors. As she pursued the performing arts she developed skills in physical theatre, dance and the circus arts, including at the École de Cirque de Québec, while also completing a Master's degree in physics. Her multidisciplinary acts feature playful and enveloping atmospheres. Twinship and interactivity are key to her creative process. ([Curriculum vitae](#))



Françoise Lépine

This multidisciplinary artist studied cello at the Conservatoire de musique in Rimouski. She and her sister Josette created their theatre company in 2007. It has led her to perform in many national and international events. She studied theatre and circus arts, notably with Avner Eisenberg, Aitor Basauri and Francine Côté. Curious and interested in many different subjects, in 2009 she completed a Master's degree in theoretical physics at the same time as her twin sister. This experience has nourished her creations, which always attempt to stimulate your logic as much as imagination. ([Curriculum vitae](#))



Michoue Sylvain

During her theatre career (1988 to 2008) as an actor and stage director she also honed her writing skills, writing seven plays for young audiences that were produced and broadcast on television. In 2008 she was approached by the Cirque du Soleil to work in its creative department, a position she held for 12 years. She was involved in a dozen Cirque productions, designing clown and acrobatic acts, and creating leading characters. Over the years she worked with Robert Lepage, Michel Lemieux and Victor Pilon, Diane Paulus, etc.

Some key points about Returns Department

- Official selection, Marché International du Cirque Contemporain 2022, CAM en tournée 2022-2023, and ROSEQ 2022
- Very simple and technically flexible. Can be adapted to almost any stage.
- The artists have extensive touring experience, organizing and performing shows in some 20 countries. We regularly obtain travel grants.
- The show may be translated in any language.
- The show developed with input from several internationally renowned artists such as Avner Eisenberg (USA), Michel Dallaire (France-Quebec) and Michoue Sylvain of Cirque du Soleil.
- The show is very accessible, almost wordless. Through its simplicity and humor, it can reach a wide range of people of all ages, cultures and educational levels.
- In places where a theatre is not accessible, the show can also be presented in public spaces. We have the technical autonomy and flexibility to reach atypical clienteles in their own environments (hospitals, homes for the elderly, daycare centres, remote schools).
- The company focuses on environmentally responsible production and touring. All material and equipment is designed to be dismantled in an ultra-compact way to fit into a hybrid station vehicle.
- Our teacher's kit emphasizes the creative arts and responsible consumption.
- In Returns Department you will see:
 - More than 200 props, including a real factory conveyor, that we use to innovate in juggling and acrobatics.
 - A fusion of disciplines: Circus arts, robotics, visual arts, puppetry and feminine humour, very much the style of the Kif-Kif sisters.
- A show appreciated by presenters:
 - "My favorite!" Mélanie Charbonneau, programming director, Maison de la culture du Plateau Mont-Royal.
 - "My son's reason for living ever since he first saw The Returns Department. All he wants now is to see one of your shows again." Janie Boucher, cultural assistant, Maison de la culture de Rosemont.
 - "I had a wonderful time. This show is full of humour and delightful flights of fancy." Marie-Claude Tremblay Belzile, programming director, Théâtre Outremont.

Word from the Artists

Françoise Lépine:

Children's creative space is reduced when their toys have only one function. Likewise for adults, our objects usually have a single function. We are, in a way, creators that the industry turns into consumers. In the ideal factory of the kif-kif sisters, the opposite happens. We juggle with toys, we tear paper with a helicopter, we draw on a conveyor belt. We reclaim a world where everything has been preconceived for us.

Department of Returns is a cabinet of ordinary curiosities, a playful look at the absurdity of modern life. Let's hope it will invite spectators of all ages to remember that the human being precedes the object, that we can play with objects as we please.

Josette Lépine:

For me, Returns Department offers a realm of living play, a state of mind that many people have little access to in their daily lives. By means of the complicity between the sisters, the show proposes a way of approaching life through play and laughter. Some enjoy it as a moment of freedom, a brief jubilation and another way of doing things, while others appreciate the intelligence underpinning the candid humour and invention. The play as a whole, however, serves as a healing device. Before we know it, we're busy inventing and having fun, just like when we were little.



A few more words about our creative process

The origin of this project is a questioning about objects. What is a dysfunctional object? Is an object functional when it meets consumer standards? In all our works we like to hijack conventional expectations about familiar objects. Here we have created manufacturing defects and exaggerated the poor quality of certain objects in a whimsical way. We invent "useless" objects (waterproof soaps, smoke-tinted monocles, steel-capped slippers, etc.) and objects that are only suitable for a small number of users (very long clothes rack for small people, double tools for twins).



The project was also inspired by our childhood fascination with manufacturing plants. We loved the hypnotic repetition of the same object created over and over, and their somewhat magical movement along conveyor belts. We dreamed of the catastrophes that these machines can cause and the (supposed) inability of adults to stop them. In Returns Department, as we created with a conveyor belt, we were inspired by the comic books of our childhood and by the lightness of bodies as they jump from one panel to another, enhancing the fantasy of the stories. We have created an ideal factory, colourful and cottony, where things have no weight and where, magically, nothing falls down in this waltz of objects.

The conveyor belt is a gold mine for creating clownish situations that delight young audiences: loss of control, blunders, devastation, disobedient machines, etc. It is also an innovative juggling tool where the movement of objects thrown into the air harmonizes with the slipping and sliding of those still on the conveyor belt. We modified the motor controls by adding robotic elements, turning it into a dancing, unpredictable practical joker of a machine. At one point in the show it "goes haywire," starts making its own decisions, and becomes a third character who disrupts the tempo of the piece.

Some reactions during a first lab in September 2019:



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