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>> hundred people at the opening night of Krall's New York cabaret debut, but that 20-years-later "we were there" feeling doesn't mean much anymore. For one thing, "discovering" talent is greatly overrated—only an idiot could have failed to see Savion Glover's potential, or Cecilia Bartoli's, or, for that matter, Krall's. And for another, word of mouth in the jazz world has been touting Krall as "the next big thing" for months. But what we *can* do in 20 years is listen to a new young singer-pianist and say she reminds us of the legendary Diana Krall.

—Ross Wetzsteon

Transformations

Theatre de Complicite Comes to Lincoln Center

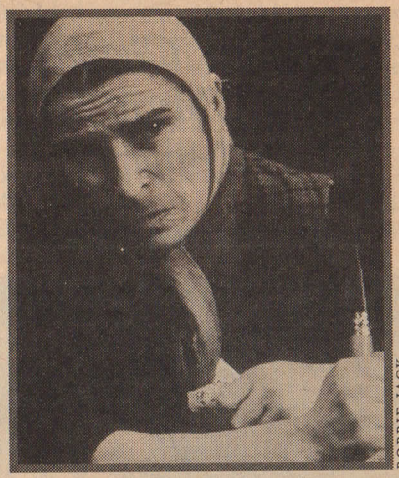
BY GERARD RAYMOND

A few months ago in a pub in London, Theatre de Complicite's artistic director Simon McBurney talked about the group's current production, *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol*. Snacking on an order of olives, he pointed to the bowl on the table and remarked, "How delightful when you can look at something like this bowl of olives and it becomes something else." Of course the object in front of us never changed during our conversation, but there's no telling what it might have become had it been a stage prop in one of McBurney's productions. Magical transformations are a hallmark of Complicite, which New York audiences will get their first opportunity to see at Lincoln Center Festival '96.

Adapted from a short story by John Berger, *Lucie Cabrol* chronicles the 70-year life of a peasant woman born at the turn of the century in the Haute Savoie region of the French Alps. Playing Lucie, a dwarfish misfit who suffers the scorn and hatred of her village, actress Lilo Baur deftly portrays the character from infancy through death and beyond. Reveling in the art of make-believe, the performances of the rest of the cast are equally remarkable. Nothing human, animal, or mineral seems beyond the range of Complicite. In addition to their performances as various peasants, you'll see the six other actors play branches of trees laden with berries, free-range chickens, cows in their stalls, and even the earth in the fields (they roll over as the land is plowed).

With his sharp features and impish look (described on occasion as rodentlike), the 38-year-old McBurney looks a bit like a young Roman Polanski. A graduate of Cambridge, he began his career as an actor and a comic. At the 1979 opening of the Comedy Store in London, he was the only comedian who performed an act without words—eating an orange onstage, peeling it with a pair of scissors, while Emma Thompson provided sound effects. "Even then I was interested in what you *see* onstage, the visual and what that implies in terms of the imagination of the observer."

After spending two years in Paris studying at the Jacques Lecoq School (he left England to "escape Thatcherism"), McBurney returned to his native country, and together with his Cambridge friend Annabel Arden and two fellow Lecoq students, Marcellio Magni and Fiona Gordon, founded Theatre de Complicite in 1983. "I had a teacher in Paris who used to say that he always wanted real *complicité* between people," says McBurney. The word in French is much less pejorative than in English, where complicity usually means partnership in an evil action. "But I thought that was appropriate too," adds McBurney with a sly grin. "There's something subversive about theater. You can cross any boundary with a piece of theater."



ROBBIE JACK

Theatre de Complicite's *Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol*

Like Cheek by Jowl, another innovative British company also founded in the early '80s, Complicite is a touring company, and with 24 productions under its belt has acquired a international following. "The principles are the same whether you're doing your own or somebody else's work," says McBurney. The important thing is finding the appropriate language for the text. With *Lucie Cabrol*, the challenge was to "represent the poetry of the peasants' life and respect the sparsity and austerity of Berger's prose." The vocabulary for this particular story is established in the show's opening image of a row of boots. "Since we launch our language in that moment, the audience understands from the beginning that the shoes represent the feet of the peasants, and that they are symbols as well," says McBurney. "So by the end,"—when a few beams representing the walls of a house collapse—"it means you are looking through the roof, and at the same time looking at the wreckage of somebody's life." ❖