

# ***Tonight...Piaf***

**A musical and dramatic reenactment of Edith Piaf's final 1961 concert in New York**

**Starring:** Joëlle Rabu

**Written by:** Joëlle Rabu and Ted Galay

**Symphony Arrangements and Orchestrations:** Nico Rhodes

*Tonight...Piaf© starring Joëlle Rabu is available for presentation with full symphony orchestra. Instrumentation and stage plot upon request. For more information contact [Caline Artist International](#)*

## **AUTHORS' NOTES:**

**TONIGHT...PIAF©** was written by Joëlle Rabu and Ted Galay in 1989. The authors had seen several theatrical presentations of Edith Piaf's life and felt that the question of why this woman sang the way she did was never truly answered. **The time had come, they felt, to offer a new generation an in depth look into the heart and soul of one of the world's most passionate songstresses.** Through a great deal of research and a small degree of poetic license, the writers decided to build a musical play on an actual event in order to offer the most honest and intimate portrayal of this great singer and formidable person.

**The concept of time, venue and circumstance in which the play takes place is real.** This concert actually happened, and Edith Piaf was, in fact, in very poor health. However, the many people who saw Piaf in her final years all state that her last shows were the most poignant, dramatic, emotional and honest ever. Therefore, the reason for choosing this concept as a dramatization of Piaf's life became clear.

**The setting is the ballroom of New York's Waldorf Astoria: the year is 1961.** Edith Piaf is scheduled to appear in concert to a sold-out crowd. The crowd is seated and awaiting her entrance on stage. The stage is set for a full orchestra and the lights over the audience dim slightly in anticipation of a start. However there is a slight delay, which creates a realistic feeling of concern from the audience.

**At this point in time Piaf is 45 years old** (she died at 47 years of age in 1963) and has just spent one week in a New York hospital undergoing her 4th stomach operation. After checking herself out of the hospital, against the advice of her doctors and manager Lou Barrière, Piaf has arrived backstage wanting to start her concert. The Waldorf's MC is also backstage, on microphone, having started his speech about the cancellation of the show due to Piaf's illness. An argument ensues between Piaf and her manager, which can be overheard by the public. After much hesitation and several tense moments, the MC's voice returns with "Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome Edith Piaf!"

Piaf's entrance on stage is still hindered by confusion for her pianist had previously told the guest orchestra to leave, believing there would be no show. He is left with a smattering of musicians who scramble to get on stage as an undeterred Piaf launches into song.

**This entire beginning of confusion and tension sets the stage for an evening of intimacy, as the public has now become part of the show.** By the middle of the first song, the full orchestra is on stage and has regained composure.

Throughout the concert, Piaf has her emotional highs and lows for she is under the influence of morphine for the pain. She performs her songs like never before in order to prove that she can get through it but most importantly so that she can cleanse her soul of the ghosts that have haunted her all her life. With a

thick French accent and endearingly amusing grammar, Piaf talks to her audience in anecdotal style. The public shares in her laughter, her life, her tribulations and she damns the press more than once for their inaccuracies and lies about whom she really is. Tonight, Piaf is wanting to set the record straight and give her entire self, unashamedly, to the people who mean the most to her: her public.

### **TONIGHT...Piaf© A bit of history**

**Joëlle Rabu's portrayal of Edith Piaf is not an impersonation.** The critics have hailed her as being Piaf in voice and style. However, Joëlle believes there was only one Piaf and considers it a privilege to perform her songs and be accepted by the public who knew Edith. Joëlle's upbringing offers many components necessary in understanding the character she plays. Her parents are from France, French is her first language and her father led very much the street life that Piaf did. Joëlle was brought up "à la française", with a lust for life and *joie de vivre* that can only be understood by living it. The songs of Piaf were engraved in her heart at a very early age and the stories from Joëlle's gypsy-like parents only enhanced her curiosity of that very special era.



**1989 Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver premiere of Tonight...Piaf©**

*photo credit: The Province newspaper*

**TONIGHT...PIAF© premiered in June of 1989 at Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Theatre** with Joëlle's long time trio J. Douglas Dodd, Charlie Knowles and Tom Neville. The success of this show is largely due to the uniqueness of the team that created it. The combination of: Joëlle's passionate voice, her profound knowledge of the life of Piaf, her skillful acting; the beautiful arrangements; the sensitive clarity of (co-writer) the late Ted Galay's words, and the late Ray Michal's focused direction, made **TONIGHT...PIAF© a show that has astounded the public and media alike time and time again.**

### **THE PRESENT**

In 2015, twenty-five years after Joëlle first wrote TONIGHT...PIAF© while pregnant, she shared the stage with that very baby, her son Nico Rhodes who orchestrated the entire show for full symphony orchestra and played the role of Piaf's pianist/arranger. As a child, Nico toured with his mother and father and musical entourage from coast to coast to coast. The songs of Piaf as well as his mother's voice and words were carved in his heart and mind from a very young age. It is no surprise that this remarkable young musician has undertaken the colossal task of scoring this stunning piece of theatre and nudging its life into another musical realm.