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## A classic is born

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Ετικέτες: Theater

Very few of us can be present when history is made, when a new work makes such a deep impression that it is clear to everyone that a classic has been born. The world premiere of Dimitra Trypani's "Amiliti/The Silent One" in Paxos on September 9 was such an occasion, a defining moment in Greek, and international, music-drama.

I imagine that in Ireland, the first performance in 1904 of J.M. Synge's "Riders to the Sea" would have had the same visceral impact on its audience, or in Russia, the November 4, 1943 premiere of Shostakovich's "Stalingrad Symphony."

Closer to home, the Athenian audiences for Sophocles' "Antigone" or Euripides' "Medea" would have discovered, for the first time, the truths of civic and personal betrayal, of conscience and silence, transfigured into art.

Dimitra Trypani is the most vital musical intelligence whom I, after a lifetime in the music business, have had the privilege of knowing. The impetus for "Amiliti" came from within Trypani's own family history in the Mani: In the 1840s a young bride, "Milia" (the Voice), is rejected by her husband as "damaged goods" and is condemned by her father and brothers to be buried alive, in order to redeem their family from dishonor.

The sordid truth is that this secret, exhumed from the silence of Mani, is a universal given: the violence that comes from emotional poverty, the blindness to beauty and vitality.

Through her magnificent, relentless exploration of the emotions, Trypani articulates the silence of this buried history. It is a unique coalescence of her technical skills as a composer, her sheer humanity and personal warmth, evoking the secret lying within her memory.

Watching Trypani in rehearsal one starts to understand how she is driven to realize the work: She is demanding, forceful, explosive, drawing out of her musicians not only their professional commitment to a work of extreme technical difficulty but their sympathy with

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With no disrespect to the other actors, one must identify Sophia Ketentzian's portrayal of Milia not only as the central character but as a tour de force in its emotional, spiritual and musical intensity.

As in the west of Ireland, where at that time family honor was paramount, life is won from the stony ground, the inhospitable place to which they are condemned by birth. Their relationship with the earth is like a difficult marriage: misgivings and suspicion, dreams of a life not lived. Maybe people who live on stony ground are born with stony hearts. Trypani's Milia has glimpsed a forbidden life; this, and the life she knows from birth – an arranged marriage, procreation, the ordinary – are taken from her.

The acclaim in Paxos was equally for Trypani's music and staging and for the libretto by Pantelis Boukalas. When Boukalas was asked to provide a text, he called the commission "a burning coal"; the result is certainly like walking through fire.

The ritual is elemental. Like any religious occasion, it invokes the unknown and the supernatural and makes them real presences. This is the unforgiving vigor at the center of the work, where Trypani and Boukalas shine a brave light on dark places and take us into an "other" state of mind.

The setting is minimal, but completely at one with the earthed emotions of the work. Katherine Wise's slender, tender sculptural evocations of fragile femininity hang like hope over the heads of the actors.

Technically, Trypani achieves, through simultaneous speech and singing, and a medieval form of chant coupled with dissonance, a polyphonic world in which we can each hear our own voice. Its linear musical drive takes us towards, and beyond, tragedy. So often I found myself missing a heartbeat – missing several heartbeats, as if Trypani had stolen my heart, only to restore it, but changed.

I was not alone. I do not know of anyone at that Paxos performance who was not profoundly affected by this spiritual experience. Even those who, like me, have an imperfect understanding of the Greek text, were palpably overwhelmed by the waves of emotion carried on the voices and acted out in the controlled gestures, utterly convincing us that a most fundamental ritual was taking place.

"Amiliti" succeeds in involving its audience in a mourning, a lament for whatever is lost, buried within ourselves, as we – actors and audience – gather around this girl who saw, all too briefly, a possible, beautiful, other life.

From Thebes, Sophocles' Antigone speaks across 300 kilometers and two-and-a-half millennia to her sister in Mani. Antigone says: "My crime was love... Men are leading me to my death... Men will place me in a black hole among the rocks. Men will deny me light... My love kills me... Buried alive, victim of love, victim of law" (I am quoting from the version of "Antigone" by the Irish poet Brendan Kennelly). She predicts the fate of Milia because their tragedy is timeless.

This work teaches us that if you cannot exorcise the ghosts of memory, you can perhaps accommodate them within, rather than without, your self. When it reaches the stage of the Stavros Niarchos Cultural Center on October 11, I hope that audience reaction and critical acclaim will bring the news from Athens to the world. This work deserves to be witnessed wherever there are dark corners in the human psyche.

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Richard Pine was voted "Critic of the Year" in the 2018 Irish Journalism Awards. He lives and works in Corfu, and is the author of "Greece Through Irish Eyes."

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