

 RICHARD PINE

Challenging received wisdom

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Composer Dimitra Trypani (l) with sculptor and stage designer Katherine Wise. The production in Athens is co-produced - with Paxos Festival - by the Alternative Stage of the Greek National Opera [Photo: Katerina Michopoulou].

Ετικέτες: [Eye of the Xenos](#) , [Theater](#)

There are silent truths and there are silent lies. Silent truths are usually so self-evident (“night follows day”) that we don’t need to articulate them. Lies of silence are more potent. They are easier to tell but more painful when they come to light. We know they are there, but we don’t admit it. Often they bear witness to the same self-evident phenomena: love, fear, anxiety, which make up the DNA of most animals, ourselves included.

This is the territory where we find Dimitra Trypani, an avant-garde Greek composer who has embarked on a series of unorthodox explorations of the human psyche with, at their center, a deep concern for the wounds, melancholy, confusion, fear and instability that humans inflict on one another and – perhaps more importantly – on themselves. They are reflections of a society that she sees as still dominated by patriarchal values and procedures of gender identity.

A new work, “Amiliti/The Silent One,” in collaboration with Pantelis Boukalas and Katherine Wise, is an exciting challenge to received wisdom and musical norms.

The “poetic text” is by the distinguished poet Pantelis Boukalas who is also a columnist at Kathimerini and a two-time winner of the Greek State Prizes for Poetry and Criticism. Boukalas has published many volumes including “Epitafios” and “The Blood of Love” – themes which are close to those of “Amiliti.”

Trypani is interested in “violence as the emotional condition of man, physical force as the power that leads to brutality. It is much deeper

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family. She is condemned by her father and five brothers to be buried alive in order to cleanse the family from their dishonor.

Trypani's work focuses on the darkness of those who are emotionally wounded. The tectonic plates of truth and untruth, of the said and the silent, meet in the burial in Mani. This explains why the father and brothers in "Amiliti/The Silent One" are wounded in their psyche as much as the buried girl. They lament the girl because they realize that they themselves have become emotionally dead through their action. The terrible nature of this deed is the humus of their own graves.

Boukalas describes Trypani's request for a text as being handed a "burning coal" – a new experience for him, especially since the nature of the work opened up "the immense pain hidden inside it." He and Trypani "besieged this hard, tragic nucleus" until a resolution emerged into a single unified language of music and poetry.

Boukalas recognized in Trypani's story "a drama so far back in time yet so familiar," the form of male dominance where the norms and traditions of the micro-community make "the woman" into "her husband's and her father's possession, a victim."

Boukalas' knowledge of Greek folk song had already made him familiar with "the undeniable way in which love mates with violence," where the "offense of honor" constitutes the core of the drama.

Like Trypani, the internationally celebrated sculptor Katherine Wise (a resident of Corfu) attempts to make sense of a nonsense world. "I want to express creatively what I absorb, hear and experience from the world in which we live. Often confounded at humanity's way of being in the world, I resolve to use the creative process to reconcile the tremendous harmonies and disharmonies there are."

Wise's response to the raw, elemental quality and inner energy of her material attracted Trypani, who recognized this as "very feminine and passionate" and saw that this "esoteric female force" could be a totemic way of preserving Milia's vulnerable soul in a form of "holy sculpture."

So "Amiliti" will be an articulation of a Greek myth that is universal in its archetypal, ubiquitous fault-lines. Quite apart from its unspoken history in Trypani's family, "Amiliti" could be regarded as an allegory of so much buried memory in modern society – Greek or Irish, rural or urban. "Buried alive" is also a code word for other kinds of suppression, such as homosexuality and censorship.

The work features "Tiresias," a reference to the blind bisexual of Greek mythology, and thus to the ambiguities, ambivalences, half-truths, half-lies, potent and impotent possibilities. The denial of the obvious, deaf ears to the songs of the dispossessed, blindness to the leprosy on the face of politics.

What most impresses me in this work is that Trypani is wise. Her emotional intelligence, in partnership with the honesty of Boukalas' text and the "holy sculpture" of Wise's decor, makes a beauty out of the harsh brutality of human nature. There is light in the depths of darkness, a window of opportunity if Trypani and her actors can climb to it and release the ghosts of memory.

"Amiliti" will have its premiere at the Paxos Festival in September and transfers to the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center in Athens in October.

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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