

PRESS FILE

GRIEF & BEAUTY

MILO RAU / NTGENT

PREMIÈRE 22/09



photo: © Michiel Devijver

NTGent

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Text MILO RAU & ENSEMBLE

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Grief & Beauty is a **production of NTGent in coproduction with** Tandem Scène Nationale Arras-Douai, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm Frankfurt, Romaeuropa Festival / Teatro Nazionale di Genova

PREMIERE 22 SEPTEMBER 2021, NTGENT

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1. GRIEF & BEAUTY

How do we face death in life and at its end? How can we grief and farewell? Can death be represented on stage? With 'Grief & Beauty' Milo Rau presents the second part of his 'Trilogy of Private Life'.

In their new play Milo Rau and his team are tackling a theme that has been at the heart of Rau's work for many years: the question of farewell, grieving and death, but also of memory and solidarity in the face of the final moments. Four actresses and actors accompany a woman who decides to proceed euthanasia, and share their personal stories about farewell and rebirth, art and love, memory and forgetting. A radical and tender production that goes to the limits of what can be represented on stage.

In the first part of 'The Trilogy of Private Life' – *Family* (2020) - Milo Rau used the collective suicide of a family to show Western society on the brink. Apart from the terrible ending there is nothing on stage but an ordinary evening: a study of small things, the beauty and banality of the daily life. With *Grief & Beauty* Milo Rau continues his study of the private: We look into a normal apartment, an experimental room in which the actresses and actors approach the most incomprehensible of every life, the end, and the limits of the representation of death, grief and beauty.

»BECAUSE IN THIS SHARED AND
YET SOLITARY REFLECTION, IN
THIS TALKING AND LISTENING,
SOMETHING EMERGES THAT
COULD BE CALLED THE BEAUTY
OF SHARED CONCERN, THE
BEAUTY OF LISTENING«
-- MILO RAU

2. TOUR DATES & TRAILER

@NTGENT

22, 23, 24 & 25/09

24, 25, 26 & 27/11

ON TOUR (BEL.)

03/11 – CC Leietheater, Deinze

10/11 – De Warande, Turnhout

20/04 – Stadsschouwburg, Brugge

ON TOUR (INT.)

12/10 & 13/10 - Douai/Arras (Tandem Arras Théâtre)

22, 23 & 24/10 – Amsterdam (ITA)

5/11 – Rotterdam (Schouwburg)

16, 17 & 18/11 - Villeneuve-d'Ascq (NEXT Festival)

24, 25, 26 & 27/02 – Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt

02/04 – Stadsschouwburg, Utrecht

23/04 – Stadsschouwburg, Groningen

[Check the webpage for the latest updates on tour & credits](#)



[→ Click here to watch the trailer of 'Grief & Beauty'](#)

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3. TRYING TO SHARE SOMETHING THAT IS NOT SHAREABLE

Milo Rau in conversation with Carmen Hornbostel about a dramaturgy of everyday existence, euthanasia and sustainable art production.

CH: Your new play - after *Family* the second part of your 'Trilogy of Private Life' - is titled *Grief & Beauty*. Two words that embrace a lot and in their combination could seem romantic to some, paradoxical to others. What connection do you see between grief and beauty?

MR: Well, the title is indeed paradoxical, but it describes the paradox of the human: being able to think the infinite, intellectually and emotionally, and yet being finite, having to die. Every human being is the first and last human being, everyone is unique, with every human being life itself dies. That is what is so crazy about life. One can see it romantically and say, for example: the beauty of the earthly lies in its transience. In the *Trilogy of Private Life*, we use a maximum of concreteness against the transience, a kind of dramaturgy of everyday existence.

The Guardian wrote about *Family* that it was a "dark, secular mass", and that is also fitting for *Grief & Beauty*. But *Family* has also been criticised for the extreme banality of its procedures on stage....

» THE WHOLE PIECE, YOU COULD SAY, IS
ONE RITUAL: AN INTIMATE, PRE-
POLITICAL CELEBRATION OF
THE COLLECTIVE«

It is strange and of course also significant that beauty - especially in avant-garde art - is often equated with elitist abstraction. The performer Princess Bangura makes fun of this in our piece: at theatre school she learned how to move a lamp as minimally as possible, how to stare into the audience, how all these pretentious performance rituals work. I like sincerity, on the other hand. I like it when someone just drinks coffee, when someone tells a story from their life.

Grief & Beauty shows the last day of a person's life who will proceed euthanasia, and in the course of these two hours, four people reflect on the two words in the title of the whole evening. What is crucial is not the content, but the space that is created. Because in this shared and yet solitary reflection, in this talking and listening, something emerges that could be called the beauty of shared concern, the beauty of listening.

During the research for *Grief & Beauty*, the team not only met undertakers, caregivers, doctors and people grieving, but also spoke with Alzheimer's patients, environmentalists and experts in endangered languages. What role do their knowledge and experiences play in the production?

During the initial research, we noticed something strange: It seems as if the repression of one's own death, of one's own own creatureness

- which we already examined in *Everywoman* created last year in Salzburg - is an individual reflection of a much larger repression: of global dying, of the epochal disappearance of life, of the so-called "Sixth Mass Extinction" in the Anthropocene. It is almost as if not only a disappearance but an amnesia is taking place: Those who are young today do not even know what we have lost, having never known the birds, insects, landscapes that have disappeared. *Grief & Beauty* thus tries, I think, to establish a connection between different forms of disappearance and grieving: the disappearance of animal species, of life environments, of languages, of individual memory and existence. All this in concrete stories that we experienced and told each other during the research and rehearsals.

» BEAUTY IS ULTIMATELY
INCOMMUNICABLE, AND
GRIEVING – AS ANYONE WHO
HAS LOST SOMEONE KNOWS -
IS THE LONELIEST WORK«

From the reality hospital series in the afternoon, followed by the latest statistics of Covid deaths in the news, the images of war and catastrophe victims: isn't our everyday life full of images of death, aren't we completely numb to it? What can theatre do to counter this?

When we did *Family* we were accused of the play being unusually long, of looking impassively at this family that kills itself at the end. How the children learn English, how they eat dinner, watch television. But that is precisely my intention in the Trilogy of Private Life: to reach a zero point of the dramatic, so to say. To overcome the numbing effect of drama, of high numbers, of permanent alarmism. To sharpen the eye for the concrete, for the other that is there. Film can edit faster, literature can be more intellectual, but only theatre can do this: to make community truly real, in one place, in one evening.

During the Covid pandemic, the call for forms of collective grieving has become louder again. What rituals does theatre offer? What can we expect: consolation, aestheticization or a new culture of remembrance?

Theatre is a strange, a totalising place. In theatre, the individual and the general, the banal and the aesthetic, memory and existence, the played and the truthful, all come together in the best case. Heiner Müller said somewhere: 'Theatre is the place where the living enter into dialogue with the dead'. I think that's true, and I think all my plays are about this dialogue - about this Orpheusian desire to overcome death through singing, you could say.

» IN THE 'TRILOGY OF PRIVATE LIFE',
WE USE A MAXIMUM OF CONCRETENESS
AGAINST THE TRANSIENCE, A KIND
OF DRAMATURGY OF EVERYDAY
EXISTENCE«

Family is about the bottomlessness of our society, about the transcendental lack of ritual in the face of the catastrophic turn of times we are in. I think that *Grief & Beauty* is, in a way, a response to *Family*. The whole piece, you could say, is one ritual: an intimate, pre-political celebration of the collective. For example, in the important role that music and sounds in general play: It is as if the everyday - the water of a bath, the sound of a coffee machine, the tinkling on a piano, the howling of wolves - begin to 'sing' together.

Grief as well as beauty appears in the most varying moments and appearances. The cast of *Grief & Beauty* reflects this - it consists of professional and non-professional actresses and actors of different ages and backgrounds, and with their own personal experiences of grief and beauty. What did you look for in the castings?

I am an obsessive caster. I sometimes think I just do plays to meet people. Listening to someone, watching someone - it's like washing your soul. I'm not looking for anything in particular, and as you say, we have young and old people in this cast, professionals and non-professionals. I think it's just a basic sympathy, an intellectual or just human harmony that happens or doesn't happen. A "being able to think together", stagewise or in words. And so, over the weeks, the ensembles arise of their own accord.

» IT SEEMS AS IF THE REPRESSION OF ONE'S OWN DEATH, OF ONE'S OWN CREATURENESS IS AN INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION OF A MUCH LARGER REPRESSION: OF GLOBAL DYING, OF THE EPOCHAL DISAPPEARANCE OF LIFE«

Your film *The New Gospel* was recently released - a film set in southern Italy with the first black Jesus. 'What would the social revolutionary preach today in the face of the exploitation of refugees on the tomato plantations', you ask in this film, which has a social scope and could not be more up to date. Death, and I would now also argue to experience grief and true beauty, are the most intimate feelings and at the same time the loneliest moments that

a human being experiences. What does it mean to want to tell a theatre audience about these moments? What "revolution" are you hoping for?

The Trilogy of Private Life is obviously a counter-project to projects like *The New Gospel* or the debate series *School of Resistance*, which work with huge networks, are activist and often, as in *Antigone in the Amazon* or *Orestes in Mosul*, question the great myths of humanity. In *Grief & Beauty* there is no collective called beyond those present. There is no myth, only a very small, childlike one: the story of *The Little Prince* and his journey through the universe, which is mentioned a few times in the play. Beauty is ultimately incommunicable, and grieving - as anyone who has lost someone knows - is the loneliest work. The "revolution" that emerges in the radical intimism of the trilogy is therefore precisely this: to try to share something that is not shareable. Grief, death, existence, beauty, a song, a memory. Or simply two hours of time.

The production *Grief & Beauty* is the first at NTGent to follow the guidelines of *The Green Book* for sustainable production in theatre. What influence does it have on the work of the team and your artistic ideas to consider sustainability from the beginning?

We had to start somewhere. It would have seemed absurd to me to talk about the extinction of species in *Grief & Beauty* - and also in the *School of Resistance* - and not get down to work in a very practical way at the same time. The main problem in huge processes like climate change is that one's own contribution and thus one's own behaviour is considered completely irrelevant. A theatre project - a collective work over weeks and months, from the journey to the catering, the stage design, the stage technology to the touring - is a small but very comprehensive experiment in sustainability. It's a collective work but done by every individual. In this production we make the experience that it is easier as we

thought, once we all took the decision together to make this venture and think it naturally along from the very beginning.

Finally, a personal question: For the play, we accompanied a woman who choose for euthanasia. What did this mean to you? Have you already prepared for your own death? In Switzerland, where you come from, but also in Belgium, assisted suicide or euthanasia is legal. Would you set the day of your death?

It's interesting that we only come to the subject of euthanasia at the end. Because just as it was said that *Family* would be about suicide, *Grief & Beauty* will probably be said to be a play about euthanasia. Yes, we met various doctors and nurses who know about euthanasia in the course of working on *Grief & Beauty*, and some people who chose for it. To accompany one of them, Johanna, during the whole process impressed me immensely. I don't think I've ever had such respect for an act as when someone says: Tomorrow at this exact time I want to die. I don't know if I could do that. I doubt it. But seeing Johanna, her relief, her serenity, I start to understand it.

4. CAST

ARNE DE TREMERIE

Born in 1992 in Ghent, Belgium is an actor. He appeared in the feature films "Coffee" (2016) and "Bastaard" (2019) and in the television series "L'aquila – grandi speranze" (2018) and "Black-out" (2020). In theatre, he has performed in productions by, among others, Lies Pauwels, Berten Vanderbruggen and Siona Houthuys as well as the young collective Camping Sunset.



ANNE DEYLGAT

Is a former veterinarian and food auditor. She created and presented the well know animal tv-program "Allemaal beestjes", different radio shows on birds and wrote regularly for newspapers about nature. After her retirement she started working for NTGent as dogsitter for the performance *Family*.



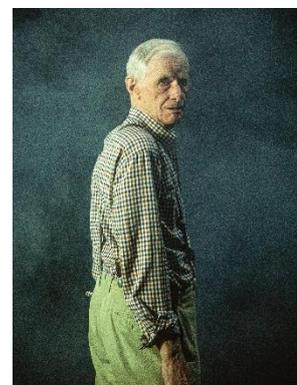
PRINCESS ISATU HASSAN BANGURA

Born in 1996 in Sierra Leone, is a performance artist. Her performances are musical and cinematic in nature, and rich in images and colours. Working from memories, she blends her deep West African roots with her experiences in the Western world. Inspired by religion and spirituality, she puts fictional characters and figures centre stage. Princess's performances are mainly about experiencing the moment.



GUSTAAF SMANS

Born in 1949, is the oldest of seven children of a Belgian farmers family. After his military service he worked in factories and became later on bookkeeper. With his retirement he dedicated himself to his great passion of acting. He can be seen inter alia in the tv-series "Code 37".



ARTISTIC TEAM

MILO RAU

Born in 1977 in Bern, Switzerland, is a director and author. He has been the artistic director at NTGent in Belgium since the 2018/19 season. Critics have called him, among other things, the 'most influential' (Die Zeit), 'most controversial' (La Repubblica), 'most scandalous' (New York Times) and 'most ambitious' (The Guardian) artist of our time. His output since 2002 encompasses over fifty plays, films, books and initiatives. Rau has been honoured with many awards, such as the Europe Theatre Prize for his lifetime achievement. His most recent film, "The New Gospel" was awarded the Swiss Film Prize for the best documentary 2021. Alongside his activity as a director, Rau is also a television critic and lecturer.

CARMEN HORNBOSTEL

Born in 1991 near Hamburg, studied psychology at the Georg-August-University of Göttingen and at the University of Seville. Since the season 2018/19 she is a dramaturge at NTGent and since 2017 at the International Institute of Political Murder (IIPM). At NTGent she realized the "Box of Truth" (2018) and is dramaturge of the plays "Familie" (Milo Rau, 2019), "Everywoman" (Milo Rau, Salzburger Festspiele, 2020), of the third part of the line Histoire(s) du Théâtre;,"Liebestod" (Angélica Liddell, Festival d'Avignon, 2021) and co-editor of the book "Why Theatre? " (Verbrecher Verlag, 2020).

PETER SEYNAEVE

Graduated as an actor from the Herman Teirlinck Studio in Antwerp in 1996 and made his debut in the theatre marathon "Ten Oorlog" by Luk Perceval. He worked with companies such as Zuidpool, Laika, Stan and hetpaleis and different makers such as Gerardjan Rijnders, Inne Goris and Lotte van den Berg. In 2006 he made his directorial debut, founding his own company JAN and putting on remarkable productions with children in the leading roles ("As you like it", "Cement", "Betty&Morris", "Je ne comprends pas", "Thierry"). Recently he acted in "Black" and "Yellow" by Luk Perceval and "Five Easy Pieces" by Milo Rau. Seynaeve also teaches and works as a coach on productions by other makers such as Abke Haring, Jan Martens, Benjamin Verdonck and Milo Rau.

BARBARA VANDENDRIESSCHE

Born in 1974 in Roeselare but lives almost 25 years in Brussels. She is a photographer, director and set designer and teaches at the Luca Drama Leuven. She studied theatre direction at the RITSC and holds a post-graduate degree in scenography from POPOK. As a set designer she worked, besides the designs she made for her own productions, with i.a. Domien Van der Meiren and Marc Bober.

ELIA REDIGER

Born in 1985 in Kinshasa, Congo is composer, singer and author and founding member of "The bianca Story" and "Brigade Futur 3". His texts and music deal with irritations, biographical, utopian and utopian-realist themes. In September 2019, he and Dorine Mokha published the mining oratorio "Hercules of Lubumbashi", which was created in Congo; it deals, among other things, with his confrontation with the Swiss raw materials company Glencore. Since autumn 2019, he has been directing the late-night format "Aus dem Hinterhalt: Macht der Künste" at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and for director Milo Rau he took over the composition for "The New Gospel" and "Antigone in the Amazon".