

PRESS FILE



LIEBESTOD – THE SMELL OF BLOOD DOES NOT LEAVE MY EYES JUAN BELMONTE – HDT III

ANGÉLICA LIDDELL & NTGENT

(premiere 13/10/21)

NTGent

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

World-famous Spanish artist Angélica Liddell created 'Liebestod' at the invitation of NTGent. Never before has Liddell, who has been making visually stunning and radical theatre for 30 years, been seen in a Belgian production.

A monologue of almost two hours "quite like nothing else in contemporary theatre", according to [The New York Times](#). "A two-hour trip of in-your-face theatre with a phenomenal performer", according to the Belgian radio station [Klara](#). Or: "A frenzy in words and images, and the one and only big, thunderous success of Avignon 2021" ([Deutschlandfunk Kultur](#)). Welcome to the breath-taking world of '[Liebestod](#)', a performance in which Liddell connects the music of Richard Wagner - *liebestod* is also the finale of his opera *Tristan & Isolde* - with the figure of Juan Belmonte, a legendary toreador who helped bring about the heyday of the arena in the early 20th century. Liddell feels a great affinity with Belmonte and other toreadors.

More than an art, bullfighting was for Juan Belmonte a spiritual exercise, elevating emotions into an infinite space, into eternity. This **ceaseless research for tragic beauty**, an attempt to communicate directly with the sacred, is present as much in the work of the bullfighter as on Angélica Liddell's stage. "I'm always looking for the sublime moment, for transfiguration, for overflowing enthusiasm, for radiance and light, this lyrical transport which takes place when one loves."

"THERE IS NOTHING IN CONTEMPORARY THEATER QUITE LIKE AN ANGÉLICA LIDDELL MONOLOGUE"

--- LAURA CAPPELLE - [THE NEW YORK TIMES](#)

"Bullfighting is about relating to death by presenting it at its most beautiful," Liddell recently said in De Volkskrant. "The poet García Lorca once said this, and so it is. I find the current protests against bullfighting banal. **We no longer recognise the beauty in the bull, we no longer understand why the bull is killed in the arena, to ward off our own fear of death.**"

Liddell is alone on stage during 'Liebestod', apart from a special cast of extras, telling intense, personal stories in a setting that looks like a mighty arena, complete with two stuffed bulls. Nevertheless, 'Liebestod' is not an epic about bullfighting, it is above all a sacrifice, a rite, a search. But it is also a **criticism of the present time, that is increasingly losing touch with spirituality and transcendence in favour of a culture that focuses on reconciliation and consensus.**

ABOUT ANGÉLICA LIDDELL

The world famous Spanish performance artist Angélica Liddell has been making theatre for 30 years and is known for her radical and visually stunning works. Ten years ago, she made her international breakthrough at the Avignon Festival with her company Atra Bilis. Last summer, [she shocked the southern French city again](#) with the premiere of the NTGent production 'Liebestod'. According to critics, her work is "**brilliant, taboo-breaking and uncompromising**" and her imagery "exuberant and excessive" ([De Volkskrant](#)).

Angélica Liddell is sometimes easily called 'the Spanish fury' or 'the monster from Madrid', nicknames that indicate her total surrender on stage, which is a sacred place for her. "Onstage, I'm allowed to kill myself over and over again. That possibility allows me to avoid real suicide, real madness" she said recently in [The New York Times](#). "**I don't perform, I undergo a transformation.**" Earlier, she said, "I try to turn pain into beauty."

Liddell wants to scrape off - by force if need be - the lacquer layer of civilisation. "I find our times repugnant: everything is about likes. I don't want to show the best of myself during a performance. I want to show my ugly sides, show that I can be a monster too."

ABOUT BELMONTE & WAGNER

Juan Belmonte (1892-1962), the "divine stutterer" from Seville, is considered to be the inventor of the spiritual bullfight. His slightly deformed legs obliged him to develop a new fighting technique: upright and almost motionless, he fought dangerously close to the bull's body and became the greatest matador of his time, in legendary competition with his rival Joselito, who died in the bullring. Belmonte's assertion that "The way you fight the bull is the way you are" sums up his philosophy. His suicide speaks of "being no longer able to live" captured by the philosopher Emil Cioran at the height of his own despair. Sick with lung cancer, Belmonte took his life with a pistol in 1962.

Liebestod, the title of the climax of Richard Wagner's 1865 opera *Tristan und Isolde*, literally means "love death". The composer wrote the music for his own poetic rewriting of the medieval Celtic legend. The word 'Liebestod' refers to the theme of the eroticism of death or of "love till death", with the idea that the consummation of the couple's love takes place in death, or even after it.

Angélica Liddell brings both references together in her new work: Belmonte's tireless search for tragic beauty and holiness and Wagner's tragic consummation of love in death. Liddell conjures up the figures of the bull and the bullfighter and is reflected in both: she is simultaneously the lover and the beloved, confronting her darkest abysses, her furious passion and longing for death, insulting her audience and contemporary culture which has lost its connection to myth and transcendence. Liddell herself and her texts, in which she screams, stutters and whispers at love and death, are centre stage. With visually striking references to a Spanish bullring and the rituals of the Catholic church, the production is structured like a rite of incantation.

ABOUT 'HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE'

Liebestod is het derde deel van de reeks [Histoire\(s\) du Théâtre](#). Voor die reeks nodigt NTGent telkens een andere regisseur uit om middels een nieuwe voorstelling te reflecteren over de wortels van haar/zijn theater. De reeks opende met het bejubelde [La Reprise](#) (2018) van Milo Rau, gevolgd door [Histoire\(s\) du Théâtre II](#) van de befaamde Congolese choreograaf Faustin Linyekula.

(TOUR) DATES

@NTGENT

- 13/10 (premiere, 8PM)
- 14 tem 16/10 (8PM)
- 17/10 (3PM)

ON TOUR (INT.)

- 15 & 16/11 – Douai/Arras ([Tandem Théâtre](#))
- 10 & 11/12 – Orléans ([CDNO](#))

PAST DATES

- 11-14/07 – Festival d'Avignon 2021
- 23-25/07 – Grec, Barcelona
- 07/10 – FIND, Berlin

[CHECK THE FULL CREDITS ON NTGENT.BE](#)



[--> Watch the trailer here](#)

PRESS LINKS

INTERVIEWS & PORTRAITS

02/07/2021 – The New York Times (ENG)

[For Angélica Liddell, Each Performance is About Survival](#)

16/09/2021 – De Volkskrant (DUTCH)

[Bloed, zaad, pis en tranen: de beeldtaal van Angélica Liddell is uitbundig en excessief](#)

11/07/2021 – Libération (FR)

[Angélica Liddell : «Je suis nostalgique des confrontations»](#)

REVIEWS (PDF OP AANVRAAG)

[Les Echos \(FR\) - Philippe Chevilly](#)

"The Spanish artist makes a strong comeback at the festival of Avignon with 'Liebestod'. A passionate artistic manifesto in which she is both torera and bull, Tristan and Isolde, God and devil. **Sublime images and music, a message that shocks and provokes... Angélica Liddell no longer makes theatre, she is theatre.**"

[Scèneweb \(FR\) - Vincent Bouquet:](#)

"The performance has the beauty of a confession on stage: **profound, essential, and unmistakably political**, in the noblest sense of the word. Angélica Liddell rarely stripped so little, yet she was rarely so naked. Without make-up or artifice. In a word: heartbreaking."

[DeutschlandFunk Kultur \(DUI\) - Eberhard Spreng:](#)

"Because the only real, great, resounding success is at odds with everything that German theatre and social debate have given us in terms of consensus in recent times (...) 'Liebestod' is a frenzy in words and images, but above all it is a confession of the necessary failure of the artist in an Apollonian culture of reason. It is the eulogy to an exceptional artist and, in the [Histoires du Théâtre](#) series initiated by director Milo Rau, the most personal, the most important contribution to date."

[Libération \(FR\) - Anne Diatkine:](#)

"'Liebestod' is the brightest and most direct show of the radical Madrilenians discovered at the festival in 2010 (...) Angélica Liddell stands alone on an empty stage, golden and huge, and her presence is insane."

[El Pais \(SP\) - Alex Vincente:](#)

"The director presents a wild play inspired by the bullfighter Juan Belmonte, which was received with a standing ovation at its premiere at the same theatre festival that gave her fame ten years ago (...) The most admirable thing is that the performance ends with cheers, perhaps because no one but herself gets the heaviest blows: 'Who will go and get your ashes? You are an old whore and you have no one who loves you. You are here to seek love from these strangers'."

[La Libre Belgique \(BE\) - Guy Duplat:](#)

"Angélica Liddell's dazzling 'Liebestod' makes Avignon shake and tremble like a bull in front of a bullfighter (...) Playing in the arena of life and death, in this exquisitely beautiful 'Liebestod', she seeks the sacredness of man in birth, sex and death."