

PRESS FILE

MEDEA'S CHILDREN



MILO RAU & NTGENT
APRIL 18 TO 21 @ NTGENT SCHOUWBURG

NTGent

SYNOPSIS

Eight years after the groundbreaking play 'Five Easy Pieces' about the Belgian child murderer Marc Dutroux, acclaimed director [Milo Rau](#) takes a new, deep look at the role of children in theatre in '[Medea's Children](#)'.

A real criminal case is again the starting point: the case of a mother who, in total despair after a separation, decides to kill her children and take her own life - but she survives. Swiss director Milo Rau, house artist at NTGent, interweaves this modern tragedy with the classical tragedy *Medeia*, the most infamous case of relationship conflict and infanticide in Western literature.

A group of children take this bloody crime case, perhaps the darkest origin story of European culture, as an opportunity to reflect on themselves: on family history, first love and first encounters with death, on desires for the future and fears of the end of the world that haunts us all.

"Even when I was studying Ancient Greek, I was surprised by the silence of children in ancient tragedies," says Rau. "However, families are central to all tragedies. So I decided to change that, radically as always."

***Medea's Children* has its world premiere on April 18 in Ghent, Belgium, and start its extensive tour shortly after with performances in Amsterdam, Douai, Vienna and Venice this spring.**

Can humanity's tragic decline be stopped? And what better heroes are there to do so than... children? How does a child deal with the divorce of its parents? With injustice, the breaking of friendships, the pressure at school? How do they deal with the radical power of Medea - with tragedy in general? The children, condemned to silence in the classical tragedies, finally have their say.

The cast of *Medea's Children* consist of six children between the age of 8 and 14. Actors [Lien Wildemeersch](#) and [Peter Seynaeve](#) complete the cast. The play is the final part of a trilogy of radical adaptations of Greek tragedies by Milo Rau, and the follow-up to *Orestes in Mosul* and *Antigone in the Amazon* (currently on world tour).

Medea's Children includes a scene in which five children are murdered by their mother. The six young actors on stage re-enact the murders themselves.

Explicitly reenacting violence on stage has long been a trademark of the Swiss director. In an interview (see below), he explains why. "It's never about the violence itself," says Rau. "It's about its deeper meaning. By mirroring emotions in radical acts, you create a deeper understanding. As an artist, I want to create an opening to still be able to talk about what is completely incomprehensible at first sight. We all live in a reality that's much more cruel than what we show on stage."

"Being abandoned by someone you love can be harder to cope with than a loved one dying," says Rau. "You have to say goodbye to someone who is still there but no longer wants to be with you. What Medea is experiencing, is perhaps harder than death. Killing herself and her children feels to her simultaneously like an escape and an act of revenge."

"The play creates an extra layer of meaning because the children perform the violence," continues Rau. "They know childhood love, but they have never felt the deep pain of being abandoned by a loved one. We talked to them extensively and they can't understand how a mother would do such a thing."

The children on stage have been extensively supervised during the creation process: two child supervisors were appointed and present at every rehearsal, and there is close cooperation with a psychologist. Because of the explicit violence, *Medea's Children* was given clear trigger warnings, which can be found on [NTGent's website](#).

ALL GREEKS FESTIVAL

The world premiere of *Medea's Children* is part of NTGent's Greek season, which culminates from 1 May to 23 June in [ALL GREEKS FESTIVAL](#): a free city festival in which all 32 remaining Greek tragedies will be performed in numerous forms, from small-scale interventions to (adapted) performances by renowned artists such as Milo Rau, Tiago Rodrigues, Kris Verdonck, tg Stan & Olympique Dramatique / Toneelhuis, de Roovers, VOETVOLK and BERLIN.

All performances take place outdoors, in public spaces all around the city, and in the (early) morning, as the ancient Greeks did it. Art first, work second. In that order of importance.

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DATES

- April 18, 2024, world premiere NTGent (8pm)
- April 20, 2024 - NTGent (8pm)
- April 21, 2024 - NTGent (3pm)
- October 18 & 19, 2024 - NTGent (8pm)
- October 20, 2024 - NTGent (3pm)
- February 13, 14 & 2025 - NTGent (8pm)

ON TOUR (preliminary list)

- May 10, 11 & 12, 2024 - ITA Amsterdam (NL)
- May 24 & 25, 2024 - Tandem Scène Nationale, Douai/Arras (FR)
- May 31 / June 1 & 2, 2024 - Wiener Festwochen, Vienna (AUST)
- June 29 & 30, 2024 - Biennale Venice (IT)

CREDITS:

WITH: Peter Seynaeve / Lien Wildemeersch, Anna Matthys / Juliette Debackere, Emma Van de Castele / Ella Brennan, Jade Versluys / Bernice Van Wallegem, Gabriël El Houari / Aiko Benaouisse, Sanne De Waele / Helena Van de Castele, Vik Neirinck / Elias Maes

CONCEPT & DIRECTION: Milo Rau / DRAMATURGY: Kaatje De Geest

DECOR DESIGN: ruimtevaarders (Karolien De Schepper, Christophe Engels)

VIDEO DESIGN: Moritz von Dungern

SOUND DESIGN: Elia Rediger

LIGHT DESIGN: Dennis Diels

COSTUME DESIGN: Jo De Visscher

PROP DESIGN: Joris Soenen

ACTING COACH: Peter Seynaeve / Lien Wildemeersch

CHILD SUPERVISOR: Dirk Crommelinck

PRODUCTION: NTGent

COPRODUCTION: Wiener Festwochen, La Biennale de Venezia, ITA - Internationaal Theater Amsterdam, Tandem - Scène nationale (Arras Douai)

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INTERVIEW

**“BEING LEFT BY SOMEONE YOU LOVE, IS
HARDER THAN A LOVED ONE DYING”**



In his brand new theatre play ‘Medea’s Children’, provocative Swiss director Milo Rau tackles the darkest origin story of western culture, the Greek tragedy ‘Medeia’ by Euripides in which a mother kills her two children. Rau opted for an adaptation with children on stage, killing and being killed. “Mirroring emotions into a radical act creates a deeper understanding.

In 'Medea's Children' a cast of six non-professional actors between the age of 8 and 14, play both the roles of the children and the adults. Why did you decide to bring children on stage again, eight years after 'Five Easy Pieces', your play about the Belgian paedophile Marc Dutroux?

Milo Rau: "In Greek tragedies the children are always condemned to silence. Even though the concept of family is pinnacle to these stories. In *Medea's Children*, I decided to undo this wrongdoing, as always in a radical way. The play voices the opinions of children on 'adult' themes like love, separation, death and the end of the world. And what better way to do this, than by having children on stage instead of adult actors."

Is Medea a criminal in your play or a victim?

"Neither. I refuse to judge the story or the characters in it. In *Medea's Children*, we combine *Medeia* with a real criminal case from recent Belgian history. My challenge is to combine the two stories in such a way that you gain more insight into the unknown. Mirroring emotions everyone knows into a radical story can create a deeper understanding."

"We portray Medea with a lot of compassion, even though she did the most horrible thing a mother can do. But being left by someone you love, is harder than a loved one dying. What Medea is experiencing, is more than death. And killing herself and her children feels like an escape and a revenge at the same time."

"On top of that, we create an extra layer of meaning because children are executing the violence. They know child love, but they have never felt this deep pain of being left by a loved one. We talked with them extensively and their take is very clear: a mother would never kill her children."

The killing of her children by Medea is shown explicitly in 'Medea's Children'. Staging extreme violence is one of your trades. What is the importance of this?

"It's not about portraying the violence itself, it's about the deeper meaning of it. We live in a very violent society. Our reality is far more radical and violent than what I show on stage. In creating *Family*, a crucial question appeared perhaps for the first time in my career: When you believe you are at the verge of what seems to be a pointless, senseless society, when you feel like a cartoon figure floating over an abyss, knowing you will fall but without knowing exactly when, why would you want the next generation to go on?"

"When we discussed this with the children in *Medea's Children*, they understood this very well, they understood for example that it would be better for the survival of the planet if humanity would end. Only, they said, they would prefer it to happen after they are dead."

“The children have very grim thoughts about the future, but at the same time they are convinced that their own generation will escape. That they will barely still make it. This is how we think about the future: we know the world is going to end, but not yet, we foolishly hope.”

‘Medea’s Children’ is a prologue to the ALL GREEKS FESTIVAL in which all 32 remaining Greek tragedies are performed in the morning all over the city of Ghent. How excited are you about this festival?

“It is a childhood dream of me. The funny thing is that, apparently, I had to leave NTGent as an artistic leader for this dream to be fulfilled (laughs).”

“The first play I can remember I saw, *Les Femmes Savantes* by Molière, was outside. In the evening. The sun set during the play. Around us, the city was full of life. Outside is where theatre was born. Later, I was walking in a park in Paris in the morning when Shakespeare was performed. For the first time, I understood every word.”

“I’ve been trying to turn things upside down for a long time. We should start the day with art instead of work. Art has to be more than a form of leisure in the evening after a long day of work. To some it might feel childish to perform theatre outside in the morning, but to me it makes sense in so many ways. After I wake up, I have more clarity of mind than later in the day.”

“Perhaps only five nerds, five theatre students and five people from the neighbourhood might show up to these early morning performances, but even then, it will be something very pure. We are still very Christian in our understanding of what a ritual means. We associate it with a passing, but the Greek ritual is not meant to do anything besides connecting people. That’s it. There’s no extra bourgeois, mystical layer.”

What is it about these ancient texts that still makes them important to tell?

“Of course, the conception of what western civilisation is, started with the Greek culture, for example the realisation that politics means antagonisms. Man versus nature, female versus male, conscious versus unconscious, the group versus the individual, power versus knowledge... all the antagonisms of our current day democracy were born as rhetoric in ancient Athens.”

“On the one hand, it is obvious that these ancient stories are the basis of how we think, of what we think even. On the other hand, of the 32 Greek tragedies remaining, many are not relevant anymore. Only five to ten are still staged frequently, the others are merely used as a toolbox because they are filled to the brim with outdated views.”

“Many plays or parts of them are unusable. The way king Kreon is talking to Medea for example in *Medeia* by Euripides... his views on women and migrants are very archaic and simplistic. We had to leave it out of the play, it’s simply not interesting.”

What makes some tragedies stand out then?

“The development in style from Aeschylus to Euripides is amazing when you realise it took place in a period of merely 50 years. The Greek tragedies evolved from very poetic, epic texts - in line with the political purpose at their origin - to dramas delving into the individual psychology of the characters. In the beginning, they are like Racine, in the end like Ibsen.”

“The closer you get to the oeuvre of Euripides, the more the Greek tragedies pay attention to individual psychology. Medea kills her children but not because she is evil or cursed - but because she has been betrayed by her husband and seeks a way out of the suffocating and rotten household she lives in.”

"WE ARE STILL VERY CHRISTIAN IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF A RITUAL, BUT THE GREEK RITUAL IS NOT MEANT TO DO ANYTHING BESIDES CONNECTING PEOPLE"

Is there something we can learn from the Greek tragedies on how to overcome what seems to be our fate: the end of the world?

“In the well-known book *The Death of Tragedy*, it is written that since the time of Ibsen, we believe that we can solve our constant societal crisis with for example more social welfare. In the Greek tragedies, there's no such optimism. Our civilisation is one of drama, the Greek one was one of tragedy. In their wars, you either won or lost, meaning all men were killed, women and children were enslaved, and the city was destroyed.”

“The tragic mind means in the best way that you accept and understand death. From there, we might be able to move on. We still have an Ibsen kind of view on the climate crisis. We still believe that we will somehow manage it without the necessary shift of mind.”

“When I worked with the militants of the MST, one of the biggest social organisations in the world, for the creation of *Antigone in the Amazon*, a quote struck me deeply. We re-enacted a bloody massacre in which militants were brutally killed by the Brazilian state police. It's a shame our friends died before having a piece of land, survivors said. The collective, or a collective goal, can save the individual. Exactly like the ancient Greeks believed in something bigger than themselves: the polis for example.”

“There's a nuance though. Collective resistance and powerful protest is based on the insight that society doesn't exist as a given. The good has to be executed to exist. Power is not born out of knowledge but out of experience when individuals join forces and stand up together. If we do, things can change much faster than we are made to believe. As long as we are prepared to realise that our arbitrary consumption and survival benefits are not a democratic right in the general frenzy in which our world finds itself.”

--- interview by Jonas Mayeur / photos by Michiel Devijver

PRESS QUOTES

ON 'ANTIGONE IN THE AMAZON' (2023):

■ "Masterful (..) Not one video that doesn't hit the mark. Not one word that does not enhance the images. Not one movement on stage that does not resonate with the images. The realisation sets in that theatre, when it moves so far out of its comfort zone, makes one experience and understand something that is so much bigger than itself, and that we are."

--- Le Monde (FR)

■ "“Rau has perfected the art of bringing real events onstage by laying bare the process and inviting audience members to think along” --- The New York Times (USA)

■ "“It is much, full, inventive, at times radically political and activist theatre, and finally quite depressing (...) Rau has brought the Greek resistance fighter of the past to the present, and turned it into unflinching theatre art.” --- Volkskrant (NL) ****

■ "“While in circles with politically correct rubbish and cultural segregation, Rau's Antigone in the Amazon is scorned as culturally imperialistic, the evening plunges one into a strangeness that defies any accusation of cultural appropriation. Here, as with Montaigne, it is a matter of self-criticism in conflict. With Rau, this means: art can transcend violence, no matter where.”

--- Die Welt (GER)

ON 'THE LAST GENERATION, THE 120 DAYS OF SODOM' (2023):

■ "“Powerful and intriguing” --- The New York Times (USA)

■ "“No abuse but strong social criticism (...) An unexpectedly humorous piece that raises ethical questions and stings when it needs to.” --- De Standaard (BE)

■ "“Milo Rau has made probably his best piece in five years at NTGent (...) A punishing blow, this play”--- Pzazz (BE)

ON 'THE INTERROGATION' (2022):

- "A meticulously directed monologue that portrays two young men and shows them in their vulnerable trying, failing, scoring." --- Knack Focus (BE) ****
- "From the small form emerges a grand spectacle, wonderfully carried by actor Arne de Tremerie." --- Médiapart (FR)
- "Milo Raus' simplest, most intimate and best performance in recent years (...)
The naturalness with which Arne De Tremerie shapes Édouard Louis' alter ego is stunning."
--- De Morgen (BE) ****