

**FREIE
REPUBLIK
WIENER
FEST
WOCHEN**

 **28 May – 1 June**
 **Akademietheater**

Tiago Rodrigues
**NO YOGURT
FOR THE DEAD**

COPRODUCTION

**Histoire(s) du
Théâtre VI**

For the sixth episode of the *Histoire(s) du Théâtre* series, Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues looked to his father for inspiration. Rogério Rodrigues was a renowned journalist. Just before his death, while in hospital, he began working on his final article – about his life as a terminal patient. Every day, he took notes in a small booklet. After his father's death, Tiago Rodrigues opened the notebook. It only contained a few lines and dots, like a toddler's abstract drawings. In *No Yogurt for the Dead*, Rodrigues is now imagining the unwritten pages. He fashions a play from memories, songs and fragments of his father's writings, wishing to celebrate a small victory over death. In a surreal landscape with hospital beds gliding across an icy sea, every scene becomes a playful variation on the theme of partings. It is also a celebration of the theatre and its power to find joy even in the saddest moments.

🗣 Dutch, Portuguese

CC German and English surtitles

🕒 100 mins

♿ barrier-free access

Q&A

29 May, following the performance

'RODRIGUES' DRAMATURGICAL CRAFT AT FULL DISPLAY'

– New York Times (US)

Text, Direction Tiago Rodrigues **With** Lisah Adeaga, Manuela Azevedo, Beatriz Brás, Hélder Gonçalves **Artistic Collaboration** André Pato **Dramaturgy** Kaatje De Geest **Direction assistance** André Pato **Light design** Dennis Diels **Decor design** Sammy Van den Heuvel **Costume design** Ilse Vandenbussche **Sound design** Frederik Vanslembrouck **Music** Hélder Gonçalves **Translation** Lut Caenen (Dutch), Igor Metzeltin (German), Helen White (English) **Surtitles** Jeroen Vanluyten

Production NTGent **Coproduction** Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna, Culturgest Lisbon, Piccolo Teatro di Milano – Teatro d'Europa

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

World premiere January 2025, NTGent

A SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT VICTORY OVER DEATH

SHORT INTERVIEW WITH TIAGO RODRIGUES



Rogério Rodrigues

No Yogurt for the Dead is based on your father's last weeks in hospital and the question what his final article would have looked like. Is the play an homage to your father?

My father Rogério was a journalist for forty years. What was the article he wanted to write in his last weeks before his death? [...] This question haunted me for weeks. Until I realised that I had to finish what he started. Not as a journalist, but as a theatre maker.

However, we mix facts with fiction, so I don't consider it an homage. Above all, the play aims to find warmth, humanity and even joy in remembering loved ones. The great Heiner Müller said: 'When we do

theatre, we are in dialogue with the dead.' For this piece, I am working together with my father. The same way I have worked before with Chekhov or Tolstoy or Virginia Woolf.

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How would you describe your father as a person?

(hesitates) He was born in 1947 and grew up in a fascist dictatorship. He fled from persecution by the police and emigrated to France. His brother died in the colonial war in Africa. He grew up poor and in a small village ... all these life events gave him a very strong sense of loyalty, honesty and courage. The fact that the rest of the world was not composed of equally honest, almost heroic people could make him bitter. He would often be introverted, severe but with a lot of great qualities. For one, he was very knowledgeable and cultured.

How was your relationship with him?

We had a troubled relationship at times. Expressing love was not his strong suit, which made it hard for me growing up. My father very much belonged to a generation for whom being able to express your emotions was not a top priority in children's upbringing or education.

Yet our story is also one of reconciliation. [...] I do feel blessed that his time in hospital gave us the chance to deal with our past struggles. To realise that which we might have hated about each other were only mere details. We got to ask the tough questions and I'm glad we did. After all, coming to terms with his life, what a dying person has to do, is unimaginable.

As the play is based on your personal experience with your father. What role do the actors play in your work process?

For one, I write during rehearsals. What I write is inspired by the actors, by their ideas, struggles and suggestions. Outside of rehearsals, I have no discipline and no pleasure in writing, I don't even do it. But once I get to connect and experiment with the cast, my head explodes.

When I direct, I never tell actors exactly what to do. I listen, I suggest, and I come up with ideas if no one else has any. But it's always a dialogue. Inside a space of

freedom and contribution. We work towards a joint imagination, not just towards mine.

**I LIKE THE IDEA
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Three members of the cast of No Yogurt for the Dead are Portuguese artists who compose or sing. How important is music in this performance?

I like the idea of finding the lightness in things, finding joy in even the saddest stories. Music helps a lot with that. The soundtrack is inspired by an old-school, fado-like tradition. We use the strategy of creating a very precise atmosphere with the simple combination of an electric guitar and a voice.

On stage, we have Helder Gonçalves, who is one of the great composers of modern music in Portugal, Manuela Azevedo, who is very well known in Portugal as a singer

BIOGRAPHY

I USE FICTION BECAUSE TELLING STORIES IS MY WAY OF PARTICIPATING IN THE WORLD. BUT I ALSO NEED REALITY BECAUSE I HAVE AN AMBITION, AN URGE TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD, EVEN IF IT'S JUST A LITTLE BIT

but also an amazing actress, and Beatriz Brás, known as an actress, but also a great singer. The Belgian actress Lisah Adeage complements them perfectly.

Lisah Adeaga is the narrator in the piece. She also plays the character of the nurse who took care of your father in hospital. He nicknamed her 'the worst nurse in the world'. My father could be blunt. His nickname at the newspaper was 'the torpedo'. But it was also his taste in humour. When he went to hospital for the last time, he said to the nurse: 'I respect you as a human being and perhaps you are a very nice person. But as a nurse, you are the worst.' She didn't like him less after that remark, by the way, she liked him more. I have always found it a funny and endearing anecdote.

Mixing different layers of fact and fiction is an essential part of your work. What do you gain by this?

Enrique Vila-Matas, a great Spanish writer, stated that everything sits between reality and fiction. And he's right. Even the truth is. So mixing fact and fiction is necessary to make a truthful piece while at the same

time leaving enough space for the audience to imagine, to co-create.

I use fiction because telling stories is my way of participating in the world. But I also need reality because I have an ambition, an urge to transform the world, even if it's just a little bit. With *No Yogurt for the Dead*, I am trying to write the article my father never finished. Something will change from the premiere onward. The article will be written. It will exist. It's a very small, but for me a very significant victory over death.

Tiago Rodrigues, born 1977, is a Portuguese theatre director and since September 2022 the artistic director of the Festival d'Avignon. With his company Mundo Perfeito, co-founded with Magda Bizarro in 2003, he has presented his works in more than 20 countries and is regularly invited to all important theatre festivals. Since he started as an actor, 25 years ago, Rodrigues has always looked at the theatre as a human assembly: a place where people meet, like in a cafe, to confront their thoughts and share their time. His pieces, whether rewriting classics, adapting novels or mixing true stories with fiction, are deeply rooted in the idea of writing for and with the actors and searching for a poetical transformation of reality through theatrical tools.

Some of his most notable works are *By Heart* (Wiener Festwochen 2016), *Sopro* (Wiener Festwochen 2019), *Catarina and the beauty of killing fascists* (Wiener Festwochen 2021) and *Hécube, pas Hécube*. In addition to his stage work he has also written screenplays, newspaper contributions and literary texts and taught at different art institutions. From 2015 to 2021, he was the artistic Director of the National Theatre Dona Maria II in Lisbon. Rodrigues gained international recognition and a number of national and international awards.



TO STAY IN LIFE

A CONTRIBUTION BY TIAGO RODRIGUES TO THE BOOK *WHY THEATRE?*
(VERBRECHER VERLAG, 2020)

Not dying. Above all, not dying. Staying in life. Facing a doctor who pronounces the diagnosis with careful tenderness, like Tiresias at the beginning of the tragedy, and confirming that we were right every time we said that the fundamental things in life are invisible. We were right even when we doubted what we were saying because we always doubt what we are saying and we know that the silence between each word that we utter is not called silence, its name is doubt. If in doubt, stay in life. Facing the idea of death, to reaffirm the reason we participate in life: the mystery of the future. Knowing how to say no to death's kind invitations, which show us a place to sit waiting for the world to come to us, that ask us to accept the world just as it is, unconditionally while we wait for the hour of death, with the impotence of the vanquished. To refuse death and go and meet the world, be a nomad, discover what's hidden beyond the mountain journey to the other side of the night. Perhaps even transform the tiniest bit of this world or never manage to. To be beaten, maybe, but beaten by life. And, above all, not to die.

To know that the idea of death is with us in the tiny space of the doctor's office when Tiresias foretells the terror, to feel that death's elbow rubs against our elbow and even then to stay with life because

only those that live can imagine the wanderings of death translate them into a story that serves us in life. That's it: writing or reading about our enemies, making or seeing theatre about the forms of death that haunt us but never swelling the ranks of deadly compliance. Rescuing old words and images, or inventing new ones, or mixing them up some weird way as if you put things in a bag in a hurry to get out of a house in flames, gasping for air, doing what you can to stay in life. And all of this may seem like a collection of big ideas, vaguely political, intended to ease the conscience, or animate the spirit but those who choose to stay in life know that it's something as concrete as the sound of crickets on a summer's day. It is, above all, not dying. Savouring the delicious difficulty of staying in life, through the hard times and also the others, but never the easy times, because we know very well that the easy times don't exist.

And every time they tell us that the easy world is possible, knowing that it's death that speaks to us and that we are the others, the ones who fight it. And this is why we must preserve the public places and the underground places where we can stay in life. We must preserve the moments in which we dedicate ourselves to the mysteries, in which we meet and say: here we are, we may be few, but we're cer-

tain that in the face of the prospect of death, we choose to stay in life. And whispering instead of shouting, refusing the noise of the world, listening to the breathing that emerges from the silence and that was always there even when we didn't want to hear it. To preserve the places where we can hear the wind, the whispering of thought, the spirit of place, the brief and unrepeatable moment when we see ourselves for the first time. And above all, not dying.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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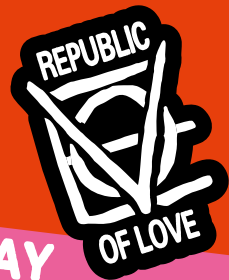
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