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📅 12–14 June
📍 Halle G MuseumsQuartier

A person wearing a golden mask with closed eyes and a serene expression. They are draped in a red sequined shawl with long gold fringe. They hold a large red cloth with a gold floral pattern. The background is dark, and the lighting is warm, highlighting the gold and red.

GOODBYE, LINDITA

Mario Banushi

Goodbye, Lindita is about a fundamental human experience: the loss of a loved one. Inside a house, a family is grieving in silence, until a series of strange events opens a window to a world in which memory mixes with imagination and reality blends with dreams. This is the first time shooting star director Mario Banushi, born in Tirana in Albania in 1998, is presenting his work in Austria: *Goodbye, Lindita* creates stirring, intimate images to process the death of his stepmother – entirely without words, and with the emotional force of a Greek tragedy for the present day. Without ever hearing the characters speak, we bear witness to an inner journey in this visually powerful and personal play. How do we bid farewell to the persons we love most?

 75 mins.

Q&A

13 June, following the performance



Concept, Direction Mario Banushi **With** Chrysi Vidalaki, Babis Galiatsatos, Helene Habia Nzanga, Erifyli Kitzoglou, Katerina Kristo, Mario Banushi, Eftichia Stefanou, Alexandra Hasani **Set, Costume design** Sotiris Melanos **Music** Emmanouil Rovithis **Lighting design** Tasos Palaioroutas **House dramaturg** National Theatre of Greece Aspasia-Maria Alexiou **Assistant direction** Afroditi Kapokaki, Theodora Patiti **Photography** Theofilos Tsimas **Video** Nikos Pastras **Production management** Efi Panourgia **Stage management** Efi Christodouloupoulou **Stage engineering** Thomas Kazantzidis, Panos Koutsoumanis, Vassilis Stavroulakis **Lighting technicians** George Athanasiou, Georgios Kalantzis, Haris Vasilopoulos **Sound engineering** Dimosthenis Livitsanos **Props management** Michalis Adamis **Painters and sculptors for scenery** Mais Polyzos, Thenia Verikouki, Vladimiros Mitropoulos, Stavros Paneras, Dimitris Touris, Thanasis Fotinias **Wooden constructions** Michael Kostas, Simos Kazantzidis, Periklis Kalogiannis, Ilias Kalivas, Georgios Kandalepas, Ilias Plastiras **Metal constructions** Stavros Komninos, Panagiotis Panagopoulos, Labros Stafilas **Sewing** Efi Karantasiou, Theodora Vestarxi, Despoina Moutafi, Maria Spiliopoulou, Martha Charalabidou

Production National Theatre of Greece (Athens)

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

World premiere March 2023, National Theatre of Greece (Athens)

I THINK SOME MOMENTS ARE SO IMPORTANT THAT THEY CANNOT BE PUT INTO WORDS

INTERVIEW WITH MARIO BANUSHI

***Goodbye, Lindita* is the second part of a trilogy and premiered at the National Theatre in Athens in 2023. You started the trilogy in 2022 with *Ragada*. The third piece is *Taverna Miresia – Mario, Bella, Anastasia*, which premiered at Athens Epidaurus Festival in the summer of 2023. All three parts deal with family, love and grief. What is the connection between grief and theatre? How do you deal with grief in your work?**

I learnt a lot about grief with my play *Goodbye, Lindita*, as it is about my life, my family and my memories. For me, this play is like a funeral at which I want to honour the memory of my stepmother. I remember how the audiences' congratulations after the performances felt awkward, almost like a eulogy at a funeral. I remember that I really struggled with these feelings at first. I went home with a very heavy heart and cried a lot in the first weeks after the premiere. That is when I understood that risk of sharing my most intimate feelings on stage. But I also understood that this very act of sharing can also be beautiful. I like taking risks and leaving my comfort zone – artistically and personally. Although it was a very difficult and intense time for me, I realised that it was what I wanted to do. I want my work to be personal and I wouldn't want that to change in the future, even if it makes me vulnerable. In Greece, there is a

saying: 'Don't hide things under the carpet.' Because while they will obviously disappear, they will reappear at some point. By sharing my feelings and my sadness with the audience in the theatre, I found a way of not hiding. It's happened a lot in the past that members of the audience came to me after a performance to share their own stories with me. There is something in my works that seems to touch people and bring them to also want to share their feelings with others. That is beautiful to see, and it makes me proud. For me, the theatre is a space in which we can grieve together, where we can share our feelings as well as images and words.

There are certain recurring elements in all three works of the trilogy. For example, there are no characters in the classic sense, nor is there a continuous narrative. I would describe your work as visual theatre, an atmospheric experience, a tableau. Does that chime with you?

Yes, of course. Although I myself never really know how to describe what I do. Sometimes I call it theatre, sometimes physical theatre and sometimes dance, because I frequently work with dancers and we work a lot with movement and body language. I simply try what occurs to me as an artist and I don't want to limit my practice. I like being a director, but

I also like working with my hands – for example, pottery. I also draw a lot. I like the combination of various forms of artistic expression.

The trilogy makes do without language. Theatre without text is something we rarely see. Can you describe what the spoken word means for you and why you don't use it in your pieces?

I think that words are very important – especially those we share with people we love or at important moments of our lives. It is not that I think words are unnecessary. Of course they are important. In my life, in my country and in my community, however, I get the feeling that we talk a lot but don't allow much space for the feelings. We don't provide for physical communication. Especially after Covid, we lost that sense of connectedness. There are many reasons why I don't use texts in my works. One reason is that I experienced grief without words in my family. It was expressed by crying, touching, hugging, eating and mourning, by just being together. We hardly spoke.

I think that some moments are so important that they cannot be put into words. In the most decisive moments of life it often feels too easy to say something. I'd rather look someone in the eyes and keep silent. In my personal life I also prefer not speaking too much. I give interviews and take part in Q&A sessions. But I often prefer letting a moment speak for itself instead of relying on words that we were taught to use by schools, parents and universities. I resist being pigeon-holed: that also applies when I speak. I try to express myself genuinely, as Mario, not as what others expect of me. These are some of the reasons why I don't use spoken text in my works. That is not a decision that

I would have taken a such, but something that developed naturally. Since my childhood I have loved drawing and images in general. I remember looking through my family's photo albums and each time bringing these visual memories back to life. The dresses worn by my mother and grandmother in these pictures are alive before my inner eye. I was able to sit with these albums for hours and become utterly absorbed in these pictures, these captured moments. I value what we can see and smell more than what we can express with words.

The first time we met and spoke about your work I had only seen a recording and you said that video cannot represent your work at all. That I would have to feel and smell your work in order to understand it.

Yes, sensory elements – especially smell – are pivotal to my work. It is very important to experience my work with all senses. In the entire trilogy, I use a particular scent. It is the smell of frankincense that is frequently used in churches in Greece and various parts of the Balkans. It evokes an atmosphere of churches and religions. These are topics that are naturally very much at the fore of my works. I also associate the smell with a family tradition to burn some incense at home on Sundays, to bring good luck. This scent has poignancy, not only for people from the Balkans. I work with smell in order to be able to establish a special connection with the audience.

I enjoy creating moments in which the play remains present via the smell even when the lights are off and there is nothing to see. For example, when I work with ceramics on stage, the audience can smell the combination of dust and water, this earthy smell that I love so much. That

which is perceptible in the dark – hearing and smelling – it just as important to me.

Another recurrent element in your plays is nudity. We see naked bodies of all ages, often women, and time and again there are scenes in which a body is washed on stage. Can you tell me more about that?

Nudity is not a conscious decision, it occurs naturally in the process. My team and I discuss and decides together. I find it important to create a room where everyone feels comfortable and that nudity is not just there for the sake of it. I don't exploit it, and I don't think that it shocks the audience to see a body undressing on stage. As a child, I often drew women, because I was raised by women – my grandmother, stepmother, mother and my sisters. The men in my family were less present. Until this day, I feel more comfortable and more familiar surrounded by women. That is one reason why I often work with female performers. And also with female nudity. Nudity, like the sense of smell, connects us to something primal and earthly and reminds us of how we came into this world. My work aims to remove the layers of society and return to the basics: earth, nudity, birth, smell, touch and hugging – these essential experiences of our lives.

Another interesting aspect of your work that seems to be a core element is the interweaving of the domestic and the supernatural. Do you want to draw our attention to the magic of our everyday lives?

Precisely. I believe in the energy of objects and their history. I love the objects in my

house and I like remembering their stories. The objects had lives before us and I value this connection to another time. This interest in objects and their own lives also translates into my own work. The movement of a curtain in the wind, for example, carries something magical and symbolic for me. The air that is moving the curtain symbolises the invisible forces that influence our lives. In my performances, the objects have an important role to play next to the performers; they create an exchange between the tangible and the surreal.

What is it like for you to appear in your own plays?

It is strange because it never feels like I am playing a role. I really feel like myself, like Mario. I watch my family, my memories and the things that I have seen in my life on stage. That started with *Ragada*, the first play that I created and that was very home-made. I had no budget to employ someone to take care of the music and the lighting. So I did everything myself – I performed, played music from my phone and controlled the lights. It was like a one-man-show. I decided to appear as myself throughout the trilogy. I enjoy being on stage, watching my family and letting memories come back to life. That is how I approached the trilogy: as Mario, as director and artist, inextricably entwined in the memories that are at the same time my work.

The interview was conducted in person in the spring of 2024 by curator Lea Loeb (Theaterspektakel Zurich) and was slightly adapted and abridged for this programme booklet.

BIOGRAPHY

Mario Banushi, born in 1998, grew up in Albania before relocating to Athens, where he studied acting at the conservatoire. During his studies he collaborated with Euripides Laskaridis as a production assistant in the performance *THIRÍO* (Athens Biennale 2018). After his graduation in 2020, he directed the short film *PRANVERA* (presented at TIFF 2021) and participated as an actor in the performances *Marcel Duchamp* by Nova Melancholia and *City Lights*, directed by Amalia Bennett. An extract of his first performance *Ragada* was presented at the exhibition "Performance Rooms 2022" at Kappatos Gallery. The complete version was staged at Teatro sti Sala. In his productions, Mario Banushi connects his own biography with the archaic elements of Greek tragedy. His theatrical language is characterised by the courage to use powerful intimate images and renouncing spoken language. In the spring of 2023, his play *Goodbye, Lindita* premiered at the Experimental Stage for New Creators of the National Theatre in Athens, and in the summer, his third directorial work titled *Taverna Miresia – Mario, Bella, Anastasia* was presented as part of the Athens Epidaurus Festival. The works were invited to Fast Forward Festival in Dresden, to Radikal Jung Festival in Munich, to Theaterspektakel in Zurich, to Great Britain, Canada and Australia, and more. Mario Banushi was an Onassis AiR Fellow for the 2023–24 season. In February 2025, his most recent work, *MAMI*, premiered at the Onassis Centre in Athens; it will be on show at Festival d'Avignon in the summer.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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