

PERFORMANCE WORLD PREMIERE COPRODUCTION

DAS TRAGISCHE SCHICKSAL DER SONATE NR. 2

THE TRAGIC FATE OF SONATA NO. 2

LINA MAJDALANIE & RABIH MROUÉ

PIÈCE COMMUNE



T
V
H
OLKE
E S A
T
VOLKSTHEATER
BEZIRKE

FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

15 May – 21 June
At 13 venues across
the city of Vienna

The Tragic Fate of Sonata No. 2 focuses on the close ties between classical music and power: When Chopin composed his *marche funèbre*, he could hardly have suspected that it would one day be played at the funerals of leaders from utterly different ideological backgrounds, such as British prime minister Margaret Thatcher and secretary-general of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah. Is it not the music itself that is buried in such moments, robbed of its freedom and instrumentalised to glorify leaders? With inimitable acuity and fine humour, Lina Majdalanie and Rabih Mroué dissect the interplay of power, death and music. The artists, who are from Beirut and now live in Berlin and whose works are shown across the globe, are bringing a *pièce commune* that is as humorous as it is politically charged to the Republic of Gods.

Language
German,
without surtitles

Duration
approx. 60 mins


barrier-free access

“We don’t tell stories. We think together. [...] We’re interested in what underpins events – the social, economic and political infrastructure.”

RABIH MROUÉ, *THE NEW YORK TIMES* INTERVIEW

Direction Lina Majdalanie, Rabih Mroué **With** Augustin Groz and Claudia Kottal **Dramaturgy** Julia Engelmayr **Collaboration costumes** Tina Schmitsberger **Musical arrangements** Benjamin Wuthe **Assistant Direction** Jonas Endris, Sabrina Werner **Head of production and Touring** Barbara Luchner, Julia Pacher **Production assistance** Anna Hutter **Thanks to** Linda Gao-Lenders, Maximilian Zahn

Production Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna, Volkstheater Wien

executed by the teams of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna and Volkstheater Wien

World Premiere May 2026, Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

A JOINT PROJECT OF THE VIENNA FESTIVAL (WIENER FESTWOCHEN) |
FREE REPUBLIC OF VIENNA AND THE VOLKSTHEATER WIEN

CUT OFF FROM EVERYTHING THAT MIGHT SCRATCH

INTERVIEW WITH LINA MAJDALANIE AND RABIH MROUÉ

JULIA ENGELMAYER: Could you please describe the scene that served as the inspiration for the performance?

RABIH MROUÉ: It started from a scene in Beirut during the funeral of Hassan Nasrallah, the chief commander of Hisbollah who was killed by the Israeli army. Chopin's funeral march was played during his funeral. That came as a surprise for us – Hisbollah playing Chopin –, because they have a history of banning music. It's against their ideology. This inspired us to research Chopin's funeral march: the history of where it has been played, what it means. That led us further to other layers, like the relationship between classical music and power in general. We discovered that this piece has been played for different leaders, presidents and official figures from all over the world. What is this magical thing that makes them like it, that they want it to be part of their image? Is it because it's so majestic, and also prestigious?

MAXIMILIAN ZAHN: What do you think makes this piece of music so special?

RM: Chopin composed fantastic compositions with characteristic tender melodies. They look very simple and easy to learn off by heart – but when

it comes to analysing them, they turn out to be complicated and well thought out. This specific funeral march is very emotional. It really is more fitting for a representation of death, of mourning, of loss, and so on, than any other funeral march.

MZ: One of your research tools was YouTube – you listened to many different versions of the *marche funèbre* being played at many different funerals. What did you observe?

LINA MAJDALANIE: In this performance, we did make the choice not to use 'academic' research – no books or theory. Instead, we chose to turn to YouTube, and social media in general. We wanted particular information that we would be able to find there nowadays. If, for example, you want to find out how the funeral of this or that person was, you will find recordings on YouTube. We also went to these sources because the particularity of this *marche funèbre* is that even people who are not into classical music know it better than any other classical work. And we wanted the little anecdotes they share in the comments, which you won't necessarily find in 'academic' research. These anecdotal little stories are very significant, because they contain so many political dimensions

that are interesting to consider and to put one's finger on.

JE: What is the relationship between fiction and truth on stage?

RM: Of course it is all based on facts. All of it. But we are making the facts subjective. By that I mean that the interpretation of some facts becomes fictionalised, if you want. So the fiction enters into the facts, but it doesn't change the facts. It just adds another layer.

JE: Do you think staged collective memory, like in these funerals, has a significant impact on individual memory?

RM: In fact, collective memory can in some way censor individual memories; it can restrict them. It doesn't welcome individual memories to enter it unless that suits the official narrative of the community. Collective memory is therefore a selective memory.

MZ: The march is something that everybody can agree on. It goes beyond ideologies. One could say that it's beautiful that a piece of music has such power to unite. But you disagree and say that it's tragic. Why is it tragic?

LM: There are so many examples in history and today of pieces of music being refused, censored or rejected because they don't reflect the spirit of the ideology or of the regime. Here, however, there's a subtle, invisible effort that polishes the music and makes it seem

innocent. We forget the original subversive dimension of that music – as if it was entirely free of any political and social charge. In other words: it can only unite after it's been cut off from everything that might scratch. Sometimes power hides the political aspects of a work and sometimes it invents political meanings for a work. Power over-politicises some works and it de-politicises others.

RM: It is a tragic destiny for any music to be appropriated against its meaning – against its principles. This is a truly tragic destiny and I don't think there is anyone anywhere who would like their music or text to be misused by whoever ...

LM: Nazis, for example

RM: ... by fascists or by religious fundamentalists.

LM: When Chopin composed his *marche funèbre*, he made something very intimate and personal. We don't know if he had somebody in mind – a friend or a member of the family – but we do know for certain that he did not compose the piece for a king or a queen, as Purcell, for example, did when he composed a funeral March for Queen Mary. That is why knowing that this piece has been appropriated to be used and played for big politicians is sad.

JE: You usually perform your pieces yourselves. In what way does working with actors provide other possibilities or perspectives?

RM: I think maybe it's easier to perform

our pieces ourselves, but it's much more interesting and challenging to work with more people, with performers. This is especially so in this piece, because we (Lina and I) wrote it as if we were the performers. So there is a role for Lina and a role for Rabih – and we then gave these roles to Claudia and to Augustin to play. So now it's very interesting to see how the performers will play us, although it's not really us because each of them plays the role in their own way. Remember that we also want them to play themselves on stage, so there are these two layers. They represent us and they represent themselves and they are not themselves and they are themselves. It's all intertwined.

LM: What is also very interesting is the creative contribution the actors made in improvisations, during discussions, by contributing ideas ... They brought a lot to the work and pushed us out of our habits.

MZ: The performance is produced in the framework of *pièce commune*/ *Volksstück*, and *Volkstheater Bezirke*. It's a particular format: a light piece that tours easily. Did this affect you in any way when you approached the piece?

LM: Yes and no. Most of our work is very minimalist. The only difficulty is that we usually have projections in our works and therefore need a screen. So we said to ourselves, okay, this time no images on stage. We eliminated that so

that we have fewer tools. And why not, it's interesting. It definitely took us to something a little bit more theatrical than we're used to. So the format was in our minds but it was not a difficulty for us. Because we never have a scenography to construct, or a lot of big objects. In one of our projects we had a piano, that's the biggest thing we have ever put on stage.

MZ: Beirut and the Lebanon are important reference points in your work. But you moved away from Beirut quite some time ago. Did it change something, not to be there anymore?

LM: What's interesting is that when you are confronted with other political, social, historical contexts, you have to adopt them into your thoughts, into your critique. So it added a lot, but at the same time that didn't mean a separation because the whole world is connected. Anything that happens anywhere has a lot of impact. And Lebanon, which is such a small country, also has an impact on a lot of other countries. So when you think about anything that is the reality all over the world, almost. But you definitely don't see things only from the particular context of Lebanon: a new context has been added. And you struggle with that new context, no longer having only the Lebanese context.

MZ: Like another layer?

LM: Another layer in interaction with the other layers: a lot of commonalities, contradictions, oppositions, yes.

BIOGRAPHY

Lina Majdalanie and **Rabih Mroué**, born in Beirut and based in Berlin, have been working together since 1990 as theatre directors, performers and playwrights. At the core of their work lies the question of how societies and individuals deal with truth, witnessing and the ideologies that shape political and social realities, particularly in contexts of conflict, war and contested histories.

Majdalanie and Mroué frequently juxtapose documentary material with performative, video or staged elements in order to challenge audiences' perceptions of what is factual, what counts as testimony, and how narratives of truth are constructed or manipulated.

Both were fellows at the International Research Centre: *Interweaving Performance Cultures* at Freie Universität Berlin. Together as well as individually, they have curated numerous events, taught at universities worldwide, and received several international awards; most recently, they were awarded the Theatre-Award-Berlin in 2026.

Their works include: *Four Walls and a Roof* (2024), *Hartaqāt* (2023), *Second Look* (video series, 2020), *Sunny Sunday* (2020), *Borborygmus* (2019), *Do I Know You?* (2017), *33 rpm and a Few Seconds* (2012), *Photo-Romance* (2009), *Appendix* (2007), *I Had a Dream, Mom* (video, 2006), *Biokbraphia* (2002), among others.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

Owner, Editor and Publisher Wiener Festwochen GesmbH, Lehnárgasse 11/1/6, 1060 Wien, T + 43 1 589 22 0, festwochen@festwochen.at | www.festwochen.at **General Management** Milo Rau, Artemis Vakianis **Artistic Direction** (responsible for the content) Milo Rau, Artistic Direction **Picture Credits Cover** © Pauline Viardot-Garcia **Produced by** Print Alliance HAV Produktions GmbH (Bad Vöslau) **Design** SIRENE Studio **Layout** Valerie Eccli

15 MAY –
21 JUNE 2026

REPUBLIC
OF GODS



MAIN SPONSOR



PUBLIC FUNDING BODY



CITY DISTRICT PARTNERS



SUPPORTED BY



Mit Unterstützung des Institut
Français d'Autriche.