

THEATRE COPRODUCTION

SEPPUKU

EL FUNERAL DE MISHIMA

o el placer de morir

SEPPUKU
MISHIMA'S FUNERAL
or the Pleasure of Dying

ANGÉLICA LIDDELL



FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

11 – 13 June
Volkstheater Wien

Spanish radical artist Angélica Liddell and Japanese writer Autor Yukio Mishima share their quest for a fusion of beauty, eroticism and death. Seppuku, also known as harakiri, is the ritualistic suicide of the Samurai and the point from which Liddell's most recent work sets out. This reflection on death and suicide is born out of an extreme will to live. It is a farewell poem that unites pain and beauty. With a humorous touch, Liddell sets the performance apparatus in motion in order to liberate it from its role as entertainer and the moralising weight it has to bear, reverting to the age-old experience of theatre as ritual.

The first part of *SEPPUKU* took place off stage – it was an appeal, an open call: 'We ask for the garments of the dead; to receive and adore them.' What follows now is a ritual for the dead and the living. Together with performers from Japan who have long been companions of Liddell, she confronts death with lust and beauty, and life with its finite nature. Art as an expression of the desire for ecstasy.

Languages
Spanish, Japanese

Surtitles
German, English

Duration
2 hrs


barrier-free access

Q & A
12 June, following
the performance

We, the company, would like to express our sincere gratitude to all persons who contributed to this production by donating their loved ones' garments. We are also grateful for their enormous generosity in sharing their most valuable memories with us. Thank you.

Direction, Text, Stage design, Costumes Angélica Liddell **With** Angélica Liddell, Gumersindo Puche, Alberto Alonso Martínez, Masanori Kikuzawa, Kazan Tachimoto, Ichiro Sugae **Light design** Javier Alegría **Technical direction** Maxi Gilbert **Light operation** Francisco Jesús Galán **Sound** Antonio Navarro **Machinist** Fernando Díaz **Stage management** Elena Galindo **Set construction** Alfonso Reverón Díaz **Logistics** Micaela Ferrer **Production** Gumersindo Puche **Assistance Production** Jaime Del Fresno **Translation subtitles** Birgit Weilguny (German), Mike Roberts (English) **Subtitles** Birgit Weilguny **Doctors** Lara Moser, Carlotta Lüdke **Extras** Moreno Murinni, Jonny Winkler, Fabian Ziegler, Milan Zoltner

Production Compagnie Atrabilis Teatro / Iaquinandi, S.L. **Coproduction** Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna, Festival Temporada Alta, Théâtre National de Strasbourg, Festival Grec, Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe **Supported by** the community of Madrid

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna
World Premiere November 2025, Temporada Alta (Girona)

ALPHABET-BASED INTERVIEW WITH ANGÉLICA LIDDELL

S for Sex [or Suicide]

‘Sex is a splendid tomb,’ said Mishima. Only sex and death are capable of confronting us with our body’s limitations. It’s the only way of knowing we are alive amidst the tedium of everyday life. In illness and in war, we need sex; we need to break out of the funeral parlour and head straight for the brothel. I recall Maurice Pialat’s *La Gueule ouverte* [The Mouth Agape], Bernanos’s *Mouchette* and *Under the Sun of Satan*, and Céline’s *Voyage to the End of the Night*.

E for Elegy [or Energy]

I draw on the energy of the end of life. Suicide is a moment of maximum vitality. An elegy is a poem of lamentation, and in this work I evoke the end of life; I claim suicide as part of the fine arts. This work is therefore anti-elegiac. I wish to complement the artwork with the end of life.

P for Performance

I always struggle with this term inasmuch as my ‘representation’ is intimately linked to an inner sincerity, an inner need, to the idea of death – just as Mishima, time and again, ‘represents’ his suicide. The starting point for my work is not the idea of ‘performance’ but that of ‘representation’ as desire. Representation as desire, as a deep, abyss-like desire.

P for Poetry

One of the things I find the most astonishing about ritual suicide is the composition of the farewell poem in the moments that precede death, the Jisei no ku. I’m not talking about a simple suicide note, but about a desire to express oneself as transcendently as possible, i.e. ratifying a mystical state through words: the necessity for beauty to exist in order to leave the floating world behind and enter the true world, the world of the dead. Poetry is per se the desire for transcendence, the need for God.

U for Utopia

Utopians envisage the realisation of utopia; they are, in a sense, materialists. I consider myself more of an idealist, an ultra-transcendent being; I am not interested in the real world. What matters, for me, are the shadows cast by the fire in the cave, pure ideas, the non-extant. The beauty of shadows is precisely what makes us hate reality; it's what sustains our dissatisfaction, the feeling we do not belong in this world. That's how I've seen things ever since I was a child. We have been suicidal since childhood; we are idealists; we are those who break ties with every type of society. Utopias don't really interest me; they end up becoming a possibility, and I detest possibility. What counts is pure sensitivity, in and of itself, with no ties to the utilitarian. In short, I don't fight to fit in. I live in a state of disintegration. I live in the world of angels. I live in anger against the real world, like the angels. In a word, I am a hopeless romantic.

K for Kishikaisei 起死回生 [‘resurrection, the act of restoring a normal situation following the destruction or collapse of something or a hopeless situation’]

Without destruction, without sins, without cataclysm, there is no resurrection. We need to sin; we need to self-destruct in order to be resurrected: conscious self-destruction. I remember the character from Sion Sono's *Love Exposure*, the boy who takes to sinning so he can be forgiven. Whoever commits the most crimes will enjoy greater absolution and be the beneficiary of greater love. It's true that, in Christianity, this has miraculous connotations; be that as it may, destruction is necessary. It's the very essence of art: lucidity predicated on cruelty. The need for self-immolation in order to enter Paradise.

U for Ulcer [or for Universal; or for Universal Ulcer]

By the age of 12, I had a haemorrhagic duodenal ulcer and was plagued by it throughout my adolescence. I suppose I somatised the ulcer of a universe that I hated with all my guts. Human beings are scary; the ulcer is rampant.





DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Hagakure means 'in the shadow of the leaves'. It is the spiritual code of the samurai. Its maxim: 'Die at the thought every morning, and you will no longer fear death.' This was Mishima's bedside reading. Since adolescence, Mishima has taught me this indissoluble trinity of eroticism, beauty and death. All is one and the same: erotic death, liturgical death, beautiful death – death as an aesthetic ideal, and the aesthetic as the purpose of life, a romantic longing born of the sexual nature of death, of that brutal lyricism. To Mishima, death was more precious and more beautiful than life. In *Confessions of a Mask*, he wrote, 'I fall in love with everyone who dies,' or 'the artist has no need of recovery; he scorns any enthusiasm directed at restoration and health.' This highly Artaudian maxim, I have, of course, made my own. To me, it is an honour to become a stone discarded in the name of

beauty. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is the book I have read most in my life – nearly a hundred times. Ever since being an adolescent, I have known that all that is beautiful is my enemy and that I would die tortured by roses.

This funeral is a eulogy to suicide, because death is born of an excessive desire to live, an extraordinary sensitivity beyond all judgement and all punishment. Suicide is always an avant-garde act and carries with it a brutal aesthetic component. On 7 January 2024, I witnessed by chance – or by fate? – a woman hurl herself to her death from a rooftop on the Gran Vía in Madrid. She landed right in front of me. The sound her body made as it hit the ground has haunted me ever since, like tinnitus. I still cannot bring myself to walk past that place, and I'm consumed by a hell of fears night after night.

As a child, Ingmar Bergman was told 'If you go to the place where someone has taken their life, you will find out when you are going to die.' So, *Seppuku* is perhaps the unconscious continuation of *DÁMON* [*Dämon. El funeral de Bergman*; Angélica Liddell, 2024]. I have to find the courage to set foot on the exact spot where the body fell.

Seppuku is a farewell poem, a jisei no ku – a death poem – for all those who have died by their own hand, a transference to the body of what has always existed in my spirit: the desire to die. The body only transcends through sex and death, and life is affirmed only through its extinction. The confrontation with beauty leads us to the destruction of form, to a passionate death, a death for the pleasure of death itself, the pleasure of death in itself, to ecstasy. Art is the yearning for ecstasy. Every suicide should be ritual,

clear and radiant. Mishima bequeathed to us forever an unresolvable dilemma: the fierce struggle between life and art, between body and spirit, between dream and flesh. Death was his obsession.

'I want to make a poem of my life,' he said. Yukio Mishima means 'snow on the islands'. When the human imagination projects itself into the future, it does not stop until it reaches death. We all want to go to the very end of ourselves. I am always the first to say goodbye.

– Angélica Liddell

This play uses excerpts from the texts *Patriotism* and *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* by Yukio Mishima, and an adaptation of the Noh Theater play *Hagoromo* (*The Feather Robe*, 14th century).

Yukio Mishima (1925–1970) was a major Japanese author who was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature several times. Mishima's oeuvre is shaped by lyrical, imaginative language that fuses beauty, violence and transience. Both its rhythm and its use of the symbolism of the body as a core pillar of sense and identity lend a poetic quality to his prose. Mishima supported reactionary cultural beliefs. In 1970, he committed ritualistic suicide (*seppuku*) in the course of a failed attempt at a coup d'état in which he and four members of his private militia occupied a state building and demanded a return to pre-war imperial values.

Mishima had previously staged his ritualistic suicide in a short film some years earlier, in 1966. Angélica Liddell was born in that same year. This coincidence fuelled Liddell's fascination with the author's works.

BIOGRAPHY

Angélica Liddell, born 1966, is a Spanish director, author and performance artist. After studying psychology and performing arts, she founded the theatre group Atra Bilis Teatro in 1993.

Liddell's works are radically physical and poetic, breaking with social and theatrical conventions. She works with autobiographical and ritualistic elements and often uses the imagery of Christian iconography, myths and approaches from Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty'. The body is to be cathartically shaken by existential experiences of pain, grief, love or ecstasy: Angélica Liddell continually opens up new, unimagined states of consciousness for herself and her audience.

Since 2011, Liddell has been a regular guest at the Vienna Festival | Free Republic of Vienna with her works, such as *Liebestod* (2024) and *The Scarlet Letter* (2019). Liddell has received major international awards, including the Spanish National Prize for Dramatic Literature, the Silver Lion for Theatre in Venice in 2013, the title of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres from the French Ministry of Culture in 2017 and the Spanish National Theater Award 2025.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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