

MUSIC THEATRE WORLD PREMIERE

THE DAY BEFORE

BRIGITTA MUNTENDORF &
CHRISTIANE JATAHY

Text by Rosa Montero



FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

16–18 May
Odeon

It's the final hours before the outbreak of war. Prophe-
tic voices unite to form a unique chorus about fear,
uncertainty and the hunger to survive. *The Day Before*
brings together audience, actors, percussionists and a
choir of young women to form a community of fate.

The music theatre production sets out from the *Iliad*,
giving a new interpretation and reading from a female
point of view. Composer Brigitta Muntendorf, direc-
tor Christiane Jatahy and writer Rosa Montero put the
ancient heroic epic of male violence to the test and use
the visionary reading of French philosopher Simone
Weil as a guide: Is it possible to have a future without
narcissist warmongers? How is hope retained in the
face of looming demise?

The use of 3D audio, AI voice cloning and live cameras
compacts voices, sounds, movements and images into
an immersive space that places our experience of
reality itself in the spotlight. The looming danger is
juxtaposed with a vibrant energy that questions the
apparently certain future one more time. *The Day
Before* goes beyond addressing the expectation of
catastrophe: it is a ritual that recalls that every tomor-
row is negotiated today.

Languages
English, German, French,
Amharic, Spanish,
Portuguese, Polish,
Mandarin

Surtitles
German, English

Duration
75 mins


barrier-free access

Q&A
17 May, following
the second performance

Resistance Now!

OLD LADY, NEW MONSTERS. ARE THE ARTS STILL
FREE IN AN INCREASINGLY AUTHORITARIAN EUROPE?

Resistance Now! debate with Matej Drlička, Christiane Jatahy &
Milo Rau, 17 May, more info at www.festwochen.at

‘We must stop admiring the courage of warriors and start admiring the courage of those who heal.’

ROSA MONTERO

Composition Brigitta Muntendorf **Direction** Christiane Jatahy **Text** Rosa Montero **With** Sofia Jernberg, Margaux Marielle-Trehöüart, Les Percussions de Strasbourg (François Papirer, Yi-Ping Yang, Tamara Kurkiewicz, Marius Schmidlin), Aduni Guedes, Landesjugendchor Wien and Nika Korenjak, Esther Beckstein, Lilli Kizlinger, Lucia Lukačková, Simón Serra, Marko Jovanovic and Michael Illich **Stage design, Light design** Thomas Walgrave (in collaboration with Júlio Parente) **Photography and live camera** Paulo Camacho **Sound direction** Sebastian Schottke **Dramaturgy** Jana Beckmann, Martin Mutschler **Programming, Live electronics** Lukas Nowok **3D Audio operation** Banu Sahin **Live camera** Joey Lose **Costume design** Fauve Ryckebusch **Translation surtitles** Nina Frey **Surtitles** Susanne Löschner

Commissioned by Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna, Festival Musica (Strasbourg) **Production** Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna, KunstFestSpiele Herrenhausen **Coproduction** Festival Musica (Strasbourg), Les Percussions de Strasbourg

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

A JOINT PRODUCTION OF THE VIENNA FESTIVAL (WIENER FESTWOCHEEN) |
FREE REPUBLIC OF VIENNA AND THE KUNSTFESTSPIELE HERRENHAUSEN

WAR IS A NARCISSISTIC WOUND

INTERVIEW WITH BRIGITTA MUNTENDORF
AND CHRISTIANE JATAHY

To what extent does the statement ‘war is a narcissistic wound’ describe a fundamental theme in *The Day Before*? What are the play’s literary references?

CHRISTIANE JATAHY: The play is about today’s wars, power dynamics and violence across the globe. Men like Trump, Netanyahu, Putin trigger narcissistic destructive wars of genocidal dimensions and do so out of sheer vanity. It’s only about who wins. *The Day Before* asks: Why do we keep returning to this very same issue throughout history? Developing the piece, we set out from French philosopher Simone Weil’s text *L’Iliade, ou le poème de la force*. She experienced three wars and gave herself up to stand up for human rights. The Spanish writer and journalist Rosa Montero brought the sources together in her libretto and added an investigative perspective to the project. She interlaces the Iliad legend, Simone Weil’s *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force* and the role of women who are not only objects and trophies in wartime, but also warriors.

Cassandra is the key figure: prophet, time traveller and symbol of a collective memory. What warning is she sounding today?

CJ: Cassandra draws a line from the myth to the present day. We chose the female voices from the *Iliad*: Cassandra, who we are listening to, whose knowledge, prophecies and witnessing have not been believed throughout the centuries. Also Briseis, who is played by dancer and actor Margaux Marielle-Trehoüart in our piece. She never even has a voice in Homer’s writing and therefore essentially spits out what she has to say after such a long silence. We want to open our ears for voices that have gone unheard for centuries. Sofia Jernberg, who is taking on the role of Cassandra and has an Ethiopian background herself, uses her voice to shift and broaden the boundaries of associations that have been shaped by the West: it is an illustration of our ignorance of the perspectives of the global South, which she is highlighting for us in this context.

How would you categorise the soundscape of *The Day Before*?

BRIGITTA MUNTENDORF: There are some lines in the libretto that sound like headlines. They take apart what it’s all about when we speak of war: human beings lose their dignity and become faceless numbers in the reporting. In

terms of the music, it is important to me that the core statements become imprinted in memories by repetition and variation, like refrains. In *The Day Before*, the genre of contemporary music reaches out even to dance music, connecting different scenes. The club becomes a refuge for a community of fate who finds strength in making music together.

The installation-style situation of the music theatre production includes everyone who is there in the community of fate. What would you like the audience to experience?

BM: The party is already going on when the audience enters the room. It is the final party, one day before the looming onset of war. A thirst for life, speculation studded with fear and hope all intermingle, embodied by the girls' choir as those young women who are going to war tomorrow and who are filled with fear about the future and at the same time intent on celebrating this unique moment. We start with dance music that transforms more and more, adopting relics from the past as well as from a potential future into an incessant current.

CJ: Being right in the middle of it changes our accountability. Everyone keeps taking on new, individual perspectives and is free to decide whether to go closer, become part of the movement, or to remain outside. We continue to ask, together with Simone Weil: 'How much time do you spend thinking each day?' Meaning: What degree of responsibility can I take on? Immersion does not effect invisibility but instead an understanding

of everyone's own presence, their own choices – amid a community. Existing power structures can only be met by collective strength.

How does the use of cinematographic perspectives influence the individual freedom of perception?

CJ: The layer of film stresses the fact that we could always also choose to take a perspective that is new to us. The final cut is always made by each person individually, constructing the story. While the camera follows Briseis as she is looking for Achilles, any member of the audience can also choose to watch Cassandra, a musician or indeed the sculpture of the warrior orisha Yansan, who appears at the end. In the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé, she goes to war together with the mortals.

How do power dynamics and experiences of violence enter the music?

BM: I work on three levels in terms of the music. There is the live sound, which is amplified and also altered. Then there is the 3D audio space, which addresses different levels of perception: it gives us the feeling of being nearer, because the voices around us seem even more realistic. At the same time, this level has a monstrous aspect, because there are things happening that do not concur with reality. When the singer is at the front, but her voice is moving around us, we wonder: who is that speaking to us? In another chapter, I work with the phenomenon that the human brain stops being able to locate and process a sound that oscillates

between two points at pace once it has reached a certain speed. That happens in the chapter about violence that isn't visible, such as violence that comes from drones, which we cannot control because we don't have a physical opposite.

How does this technically sophisticated level relate to the analogue sounds?

BM: Both worlds, the acoustic and the electronic, are connected and inseparable. Sofia's voice arbitrates between these two worlds; she can take us into soundscapes that we have never heard before. The role of the Les Percussions de Strasbourg musicians is also flexible: for example, they play on deconstructed drum sets or complement their playing with choreography elements. Aduni Guedes, the fifth percussionist, taught them the rhythms of the orisha deities and they transfer how he plays the Atabaque drums to industrial objects. I am generally interested in the act of striking, the different qualities of how we touch something: do we just hit it or are instruments touched in an entirely different way?

The Day Before leaves a deliberate gap to trigger the imagination: from yesterday's point of view, everything is still possible. What does that mean for utopia?

BM: Obviously, we have inhaled hope and have to believe that it exists and that we can maintain it. But it's not enough to

just name it – we have to make it tangible in all its ambivalence. *The Day Before* oscillates between those poles: hope and machinery, reality and utopia.

CJ: Utopia is an imaginary space, sometimes a space of memory that we protect. We leave it and it is no longer the same when we return. We need utopia because it can move us, just as nutrition enables movement: it gives me faith that I have energy to get going. Not in denial of reality, but believing in change. The increasingly cruel world makes us believe that the actual day has already arrived. We are defiantly imagining 'the day before' in a collective. That says that we still have a chance. If we take to the streets to collectively defend human rights now and celebrate, then those are ways to say no to war.

BIOGRAPHIES

In her works, German-Austrian composer **Brigitta Muntendorf** (*1982) creates a sound cosmos of analogue-digital expression with her often large-format music, dance theatre or 3D-sound projects. She has received numerous awards for her work, including the Composition Prize from the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation. Since 2018, she has been Professor of Composition and Director of the Institute for New Music in Cologne and since 2026, she is artistic director of the KunstFestSpiele Herrenhausen. Her most recent compositions include *ARCHIPEL* (2021), a project with dance company MOUVOIR and architect Sou Fujimoto, and *MELENCOLIA* (2022), a transdigital music theatre for Ensemble Modern. In 2023, she presented *ORBIT – A War Series* at the Biennale di Venezia, a 3D-Audio space oratorium based on Nancy Spero's *War Series* about the wars against the female body for AI Voice Clones and electronics.

Christiane Jatahy (b. 1968) is a Brazilian author, director, and filmmaker who explores the boundaries between artistic disciplines, reality and fiction, and the distinction between performer and character. In 2022, she was awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale: “As a keen observer of the brutal cruelty of our world, Jatahy develops an original, boundary-crossing language that combines the radical power of its poetic dimension with the counterpoint of biting political thought,” said the jury. Jatahy has been a guest at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) six times, including in 2022 with the world premiere of *Depois do silêncio*, a play about the intertwining of racism and capitalism, and most recently in 2024 with *Hamlet – dans les plis du temps*.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

Owner, Editor and Publisher Wiener Festwochen GesmbH, Lehnargasse 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 **Editing** Jana Beckmann, Martin Mutschler **Translation** Nadezda Müngersdorff (wordsmithery) **Picture Credits Cover** © Thomas Walgrave, **AI Produced by** Print Alliance HAV Produktions GmbH (Bad Vöslau) **Design** SIRENE Studio Layout Valerie Eccli

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