

The Challenge of Being Greek in Today's European Theatre

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Greece, a border of both East and West, is constantly in a delicate balance trying to explore issues of identity, historicity, and orientation. Greece has the privilege – but also the great responsibility – of bearing the heritage of the ancient tragic and comic drama as the birthplace of theatre and this is at the same time an obstacle for contemporary Greek theatre as any comparison with its glorious past is always painful.

At the beginning of the 1980s in Greece, in a country re-created at all levels, the conditions for theatrical development were gradually being formed: state grants for independent groups, establishment of Municipal and Regional Theatres, abolishment of the special license for the actors, founding of university theatre departments. Moreover, Greece's entry into the European Union (with all the changes brought about) changed theatrical reality. These new conditions enabled artists and groups to dare approach theatre from new perspectives and move away from the repertory theatres, the protagonists and traditional choices; enabled new groups to be created and then to discover unconventional venues transforming them into centres of creation and research; playwrights to experiment and check their potential moving away from topics that used to be the main themes of the previous decades, such as life in the countryside, class stratification, urbanization, the pursuit of easy success that meant money and social upgrade and of course the dialogue with what is happening worldwide has been strengthened. This

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intense activity, the rise regarding artists, venues, productions and tendencies, brought on stage both classical and modern works, both Greek and non-Greek, and created the need for new, modern texts that would correspond to their era and express their reality.

By entering the 21st century the effort to dissociate contemporary dramaturgy from its national characteristics and to come along with the European reality becomes more intense while groups, theatres and plays are getting more and more numerous.

The economic crisis that theatre experienced at the end of the first decade of the century changed dramatically the conditions of creation, the terms of production and the way theatre activity existed. Within a very short period of time, we witnessed theatre activity to shrink throughout Greece while the number of productions in Athens increased at a dizzying rate, but without a corresponding audience development. In order to respond to the new situation, theatres had to change the way they were working, while the abolition of the state grants – the initiative that had changed the theatrical landscape since its creation in the 1980s – played a decisive role. Therefore, historical theatre companies stopped their activity since they could no longer survive or could bear the risk of remaining open. Moreover, under the excuse of the crisis and the economic uncertainty it brought, working conditions were completely changed, labour rights were violated and collective agreements were abolished.

The unprecedented invasion into our life of Covid-19 created real chaos in Greece as it did in other countries too. Hundreds of theatre houses closed down and hundreds of productions were cancelled. For the first time in Greece's recent history, theatre disappears from Agora, the place where it ontologically and historically belongs.

However, this most unfortunate and violent twist of everyday theatre life, this unexpected pause, forced theatre people to confront and reconsider a number of burning and longstanding problems, usually bypassed in the vortex of everyday life and the struggle for survival. Undeclared work, indifference to the representative institutions and unions, lack of an organized cultural policy plan, inadequate venues were among the hot issues that acquired "visibility".

Therefore, the beginning of the third decade of this century found theatre in Greece wounded by the financial crisis and the pandemic but also eager to make up for lost time. A vast number of productions are presented by the Independent Scene despite the severe financial problems. The number is still extremely high and one can find anything he/she wants to attend: from conventional repertory theatre, to musicals, devised, documentary theatre, puppet theatre, objects' theatre, stand-up comedies, experimental theatre. Big problems remain: the limited funding from state grants that cannot provide a safe base for productions (grants were reactivated in 2017); the artists are obliged to work in parallel in many projects, which means that quality is affected as there is no efficient time to prepare; if something goes well, then it is hard to re-create it, as artists have so many obligations; the rent of a theatre is too expensive. Also, problems in theatre education are an open wound: too many graduates from drama schools seeking to find their own way, conflict between the generations and not enough opportunities.

Along with two state houses –National Theatre and Thessaloniki's National Theatre of Northern Greece – there are all over the country 16 municipal regional theatres most of which fail to function properly with some exceptions. Major Private Institutions such as the Onassis Cultural Centre and Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre – where the National Opera plus the National Library are housed – play an influential part in the artistic life of the country.

The highlight of summer in Greece is of course the *Epidaurus Festival* at the ancient theatre of Epidaurus. The festival dedicated to ancient drama hosts productions of tragedy and comedy for 8 weeks that most of them afterwards tour in the rest of the country. In addition, several festivals are organized all around the country mainly focused on ancient drama while *The Athens Festival* has a very important part producing new productions on one hand and hosting internationally acclaimed productions on the other.

Extroversion is also an issue of great importance. Since the beginning of the 21st century The Athens Festival had made a great opening to contemporary creators, while several invitations to important directors to come and work in Greece with Greek artists had opened up avenues of cooperation and mobility. The big issue was – and still is – the reverse route, i.e. the export of performances and of our artists. Of course, there have always been individual

cases of artists making their way out, but there are no organized and long-term plans. It is of course worth mentioning the unique case of Theodoros Terzopoulos, an important chapter of world theatre.

The National Theatre of Greece and the Athens and Epidaurus Festival have been organizing annual showcases for the promotion of Greek productions for the last two years, while the National Theatre of Greece has also launched an art residencies programme for the first time. Of course, I would be remiss not to mention important private initiatives and the mobility of certain artists who manage to break the borders of the country, either directors or playwrights.

Despite the severe problems that make theatre people uneasy and deeply worried, there is also strength and will that make them also more active, more aware and readier to claim and work for a better future.

During my research on these issues I met eleven influential Greek theatre people and we shared our thoughts and worries on the main questions regarding the present and the future of Greek theatre and its relation with the rest of Europe.

Ioli Andreadi and **Aris Asproulis** have co-authored 14 theatrical plays, which have been staged in Greece, New York, London and Bulgaria, directed by Ioli Andreadi. Last April their show *The Cenci Family*, inspired by the groundbreaking artist and thinker Antonin Artaud, was staged at the Tank Theatre in New York. Aris as director of communication in important theatre institutions has also a well-grounded view of today's theatre activity. **Alexandra K*** is an author, playwright and screenwriter based in Athens. Her play *Revolutionary Ways to clean your pool* has been translated in 6 languages and has gained the EURODRAMA award. **Yannis Kalavrianos** is a playwright, actor and director whose work is presented in Greece and abroad gaining acclaim. In his plays he always starts with a genius idea and he extends his research with a core of actors. The actors retain the archetypal status of storytellers, moving from action to narrative and seeking the active participation of the audience.

The acclaimed director **Stathis Livathinos**, former artistic director of the National Theatre of Greece is the founder of the School for Theatre Directors (2018) and he led one of the most pioneering ensembles at the Experimental Stage of the NTG (2001-2007). **Yiannis Panagopoulos** is a young and very prominent director and actor. His most recent direction is *Heatwave* a text based on short stories by Vivian Stergiou at the Onassis Stegi (2024). He is also an active member of the board of the Hellenic Actors Union.

Elli Papakonstantinou is a performance director, playwright, visual artist and cultural manager. Her most recent work *ALKESTIS* is a feminist rewriting of the Greek myth and was commissioned by the Royal Theatre of Sweden & performed by the Dramaten Ensemble/ Royal Opera of Sweden Ensemble (2022). **Thanos Papakonstantinou** is a stage director and actor and has collaborated with the most important theatre institutions of Greece but also abroad. At the moment he is on rehearsals for Euripides's *Bacchae* which will open in the beginning of August at the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus, in a production by the National Theatre of Greece.

Professor Emeritus and theatre critic **Savas Patsalidis** teaches and writes constantly about contemporary theatre in the USA, Europe and Greece. He was the President of the Union of Theatre and Performing Arts Critics and the editor-in-chief of *Critical Stages/Scènes critiques*, the journal of the International Association of Theatre Critics. **Takis Tzamargias** teaches at the University of Athens and he is a renowned director. He has been artistic director of the Municipal Theatre of Piraeus, he is the president of the committee of the Ministry of Culture for the theatre awards for non-adult audience, and his contribution to the theatre in education field is precious.

Concerning the theatre for young audiences we discussed with the director and child psychiatric **Sofia Vgenopoulou**. Her aim and most important professional aspiration is the creation of a network of artists, educators and mental health professionals, who support powerful, high-quality, contemporary theatre for young people, who recognize the right of every young person to access to the arts, and believe in the value of cultivating empathy amongst the young members of a society.

How would you describe contemporary Greek theatrical reality in a few words?

Thanos Papakonstantinou: We constantly see a burst of spectacles in Athens. In comparison to the population, the number of performances happening around throughout the year is almost excessive. The range also is really wide: one can see from really experimental stuff, to very conformist productions of classical plays with TV stars. For sure, there is creativity, vision, fresh ideas and there surely are good and inspiring artists in all the fields of theatre-

making. Regarding the intentions, I believe that we have nothing to be jealous of what's happening in the major cities around the world. Yet there's the rub: because the country and therefore the market is relatively small, there are certain limits to the funds given to the arts. Plus, there is a notion of giving less to more people, than more to less (or even better: more to more!). This leaves us all mediocly satisfied: we cannot complain but we can barely breathe. We can do our work, but can we evolve?

Andreadi – Asproulis: There is pluralism. Contemporary theatrical practice consists in a big variety – when it comes to the themes as well as the styles. We cannot really say it has an identity at the moment, but rather that it is in the process of searching for one.

Yannis Kalavrianos: It is of great interest. All areas, however, need a supporting structure in order for interesting units to come to fruition. As in science or other arts in the country, there is a trained, hard-working and dedicated human resource, but the overall structure, from education to production and promotion, suffers, which makes Greek theatre cumbersome and almost absent from European stages. Every year we meet interesting cases that soon after seeming weak to take the next more mature step.

Savas Patsalidis: The Greek theatre has many talented artists. It has absolutely nothing to envy in terms of human potential from the rest of European theatre. What is lacking is a more beneficial and substantial assimilation of foreign loans so that at some point it can develop codes that correspond to the real life of the country. The fact that most artists, especially the younger and homeless ones, are in a hurry, this does not leave them much space to reflect more on what they do. While they have interesting and bold ideas, they don't go deeper into them. They touch upon the surface, but they don't get to the roots of their issues.

Yiannis Panagopoulos: Speaking about the Greek theatrical reality we all have to admit that the most significant characteristic of it is the large variety of spectacles that someone is able to see within a season, differentiating within a large spectrum of styles, origins and needs. Nevertheless, this characteristic can

only be justified when someone sees the wider picture. And that picture arrives through the framework that has been created for so many decades by the state, or by the oversupply of drama schools or even by the little (or almost non-existing) theatrical decentralization.



Fig. 1: *Heatwave*, text based on short stories by Vivian Stergiou / Direction: Yiannis Panagopoulos, Onassis Foundation (2024) @Pinelopi Gerasimou

Elli Papakonstantinou: Contemporary Greek theatre production is mostly text-based theatre with some cases of brilliant exceptions. The financial crisis has been ongoing since 2008 and the lack of institutional support and national policies leave small margin to fail and take risks for most artists. Seeking support for their art in the private sector, many artists have very little chances to do research.

Stathis Livathinos: Polyphonic, colourful, heterogeneous, uneven, and not always multi-layered. Showing talented people at the risk of being swallowed up by the need for recognition. Lack of education.

Takis Tzamargias: Theatre in Greece has an astonishing number of productions – performances in an unlimited variety of theatre stages. These performances are characterized by polysemy. This is theatre of multiple trends and directions in representative works of classical and world drama, stage transcriptions of renowned literary texts and contemporary approaches to ancient drama. At the same time, a new generation of writers and directors is emerging in search of its own stamp. Certainly, in many performances there is a post-modern mood and research by the directors, which in some cases is an attempt to attract young audiences.

What is the biggest challenge a Greek theatre creator has to face?

Savas Patsalidis: First of all, it's the economic factor. The money available in the theatre is minimal, so most artists occupy themselves with all sorts of jobs, which leaves them no room or time to devote themselves more systematically and deeply to their art. So, they end up with shows that most of the times do them no justice. There is also a deficit in the area of extroversion. This will help to broaden their artistic and aesthetic horizons. To do this, they need to start travelling more, participate in international projects, and have the global theatre community as their benchmark. Finally, I would add that the fact that most of them are "homeless" is a huge problem, given that companies have no fixed reference space to experiment, to test themselves. Plus, a homeless team is forced to seek financial support in order to be able to cover rent expenses and of course the fees of the collaborators. So instead of rehearsing, they are busy finding sponsors to survive.

Elli Papakonstantinou: I would definitely say that the greatest challenge an artist faces in Greece, is to find the means to produce their work. With scarce state funding, unpaid rehearsals, lack of international networking and infrastructures, Greek practitioners often struggle much to make a living and are forced to work in two or three parallel projects at the same time. Under these circumstances, experimentation, focus and research become very difficult. On top of that, as a female director, like so many other women or people of the LGBTQ+

community, I have often encountered sexual discrimination. Neo puritanism and old patriarchy meet ends and important institutions have not yet adopted percentage against gender inequality to achieve more inclusivity in their programming. Having been privileged enough to receive commissions from institutions like the Royal Theatre of Sweden, Centre G. Pompidou, The BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music, NY), Holland & Romaeuropa Festival, I have pursued a loner's path. It is a tough one-way road for the kinds of me. Being a nonbinary feminist, who loves to "hack" the Greeks in the light of new gender and power narratives, it is almost impossible for me to produce my work without the support of European institutions. It is a great privilege too. What really bothers me is that the sector is still heavily discriminated especially when it comes to the young generation of directors.

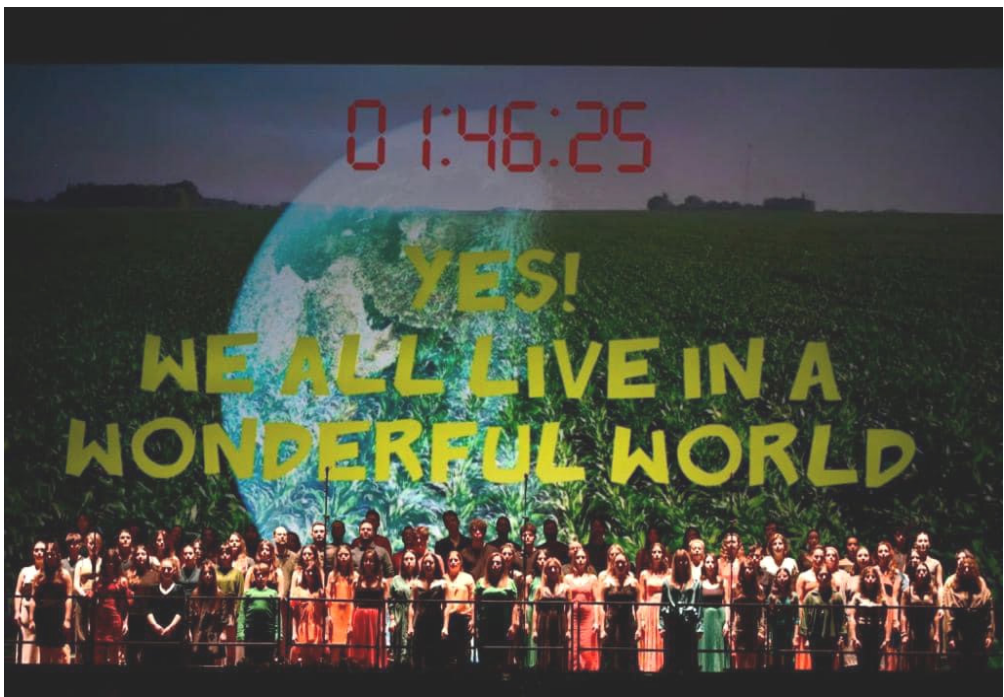


Fig. 2: *Persephone* by Dimitris Maragopoulos, Elli Papakonstantinou / Direction: Elli Papakonstantinou, Co-production: 2023 Elefsis European Capital of Culture - Megaron the Athens Concert Hall (2023) @AlexKat

Thanos Papakonstantinou: I believe that the challenges for an artist in Greece are many. There are really few institutions where one can have real high quality conditions production-wise. Budgets are usually low, high-quality venues are few, people are underpaid and because of this most of them (especially actors) have to do many things together with crazy schedules (sometimes double rehearsals plus performances) which, of course, reflects to their commitment and involvement to every work they do. Sometimes you get through and learn how to think quicker, how to be more inventive and act more spontaneously but, unfortunately, in the most cases everyone gets more easily exhausted and feels prematurely consumed. The Greek state in most cases doesn't offer much comfort (see what recently happened with the infamous decree story) and, though, is often said that "Greece's heavy industry is culture", in a daily basis, being an artist in Greece can be almost a joke.

Takis Tzamargias: The biggest challenge is trying to survive in a crowded theatrical environment that is mainly focused on the capital city with plays that, as important as they are, have to be adapted – squeezed into theatrical spaces that do not meet the requirements for stage development and plus they host two or three productions in the same venue. Also almost all private productions insist on TV actors in order to balance the budget. Government subsidies are largely exhausted in renting the venue for limited performances. Therefore, only state-owned stages allow for a stage development commensurate with the plays.

Andreadi – Asproulis: To be able to make the art he/she feels strongly about while working inside the private sector of theatre, that is run by producers who have theatre-as-entertainment at the core of their work is a big challenge.

Alexandra K*: I will answer as a playwright. To begin with, we are all empirical; there is no formal or informal institution where dramaturgy is taught, except on a seminar level. The state support in our field is literally non-existent; there are no grants, no awards, no translation funding, no residencies, no cultural strategy to promote our work abroad (anyone who states otherwise, feel free to call me). But the main thing is that the playwright has

been kicked out of theatrical practice. If we don't demand to be present during the rehearsals and work together with the director and the actors, we often see our plays for the first time at the night of the premiere. The result of this eviction is that we lose touch with the craftsmanship of the theatre and this has an impact on the quality of our works. You cannot write theatre isolated in a room. Well, you can, but you'd better not.



Fig. 3: *milk, blood* by Alexandra K* / Direction: Yannis Perlangas, Athens Epidaurus Festival (2021) @Vasia Anagnostopoulou

Stathis Livathinos: I'll answer honestly, even if it seems a bit general. The cheapness, the vulgarity, the mediocrity. These are the greatest challenges a theatre creator must avoid.

Yannis Kalavrianos: On a local level, it is the absence of organized, stable and long-term planned state support. With all the consequences that this entails from the choice of plays, actors and venues to the duration of performances or

experimentation with new works and forms. This absence, in the midst of the economic crisis and with the more attractive financial rewards of television, is slowly creating a new landscape of theatre with a more commercial orientation. At the international level a greater challenge is the unequal dialogue with other European theatres.

Yiannis Panagopoulos: You look for a way through the chaos that exists and then struggle to make your own way. I could just mention only some of the problems that we face: Underpaid (or even non-paid) rehearsals, really few and small grants, huge rent expenses, lack of infrastructures, quite often problems with the producers.

How do you feel the relationship of Greek theatre to the rest of Europe?

Stathis Livathinos: I find the relationship incomplete, as I imagine Europe would find it incomplete too if we asked about its relationship with Greek theatre. Obviously, Europe had a relationship with Greek classical drama, which is also important, but we don't have any relation either with experimental theatre or research happening in both Western and Eastern Europe. Usually when we say "Europe", subconsciously we mean the countries around Germany, but that is not the case. We really don't know about the theatre in Poland, in the Czech Republic, and as for Russia, I don't even want to mention it, even though it is one of the most advanced theatrical countries in the world, some people have made sure that we don't have access to that either, unfortunately. We have access to the festival performances but that is not enough. We also have no access to how acting, directing and theatrical discourse is developed. I think it would be good for Greek theatre to import critics for a while. To observe how critics write, if they write more ironically, more seriously. Also, when we say "relation to theatre" I would include opera as good contemporary staging of opera is always good theatre and this has to do with the nature of operatic works that have an inherent theatricality.

Savas Patsalidis: The relationship between Greek theatre and European theatre is not as close as one might expect. Or rather, I would put the issue somewhat differently. While the presence of European theatre in the theatrical life of Greece is very strong, the same is not true of the presence of Greek theatre in the European market. There is a huge imbalance, which becomes even more glaring when the subject is ancient theatre. Despite the international popularity of ancient theatre, we see an almost total absence of productions bearing the signature of Greek directors. It is as if nothing is done. The phenomenon can be explained to a certain extent if one takes into account the volume of productions that require high costs for traveling (and subsequent participation in big festivals), but also the fact that none of these productions are stored, so once they have completed their scheduled course they disappear. As a result, the foreigner has no full view of what is happening in the country and, more importantly, no idea how Greek artists are dealing with this heritage. I could add here the historically entrenched view that classical Greece is largely defined by foreigners. Thus, foreigners imitate or follow their “foreign” approaches to ancient theatre and rarely Greek ones. To improve the situation, many things need to be done in a systematic and coordinated way. E.g. more financial support from the state so that the most successful performances can travel, closer and more productive relations with European institutions, better information on international social media regarding Greece’s theatre life, etc. Greek theatre has quality. What it does not have is an effective way to show it internationally. Postmodern marketing strategies.

Thanos Papakonstantinou: For the artists of my generation, I believe that there was a turning point in 2006 when the Athens and Epidaurus Festival was radically rejuvenated by its director at the time, Yorgos Loukos. We were able to see live cutting-edge spectacles in a massive festival here in Athens and, I feel, in a way, it shaped us all, me for sure. Since then, I feel, it became easier for us to have access to contemporary theatre-making. Athens was inside the map for the touring companies and, in addition, it became maybe easier for other local big institutions to reach to artists from other countries and have them to perform or even to collaborate with Greek artists. As time goes by, I believe that for the time being we are up to date with what

happens around the world and far away from the more “introvert” past decades. The fact that we are up to date as spectators, nonetheless, doesn’t compensate much the fact that Greek artists and especially Greek theatre (apart from a few examples) is very poorly connected with the rest of Europe. We have almost no presence outside our borders.



Fig. 4: *Thyestes* by Seneca / Direction: Thanos Papakonstantinou (Athens and Epidaurus Festival, 2023) @Elina Giouanli

Elli Papakonstantinou: I would say that us Greeks, we balance on two very opposite ideas about ourselves: that we belong to the centre of the Western civilization (due to our linguistic access to the ancient texts) and at the same time, that we belong to the culturally isolated periphery of Europe. In some ways, both assumptions create a disturbing pointless inferiority or superiority complex raising pointless existential questions, such as: “Are we the true “savants”, who like the Sphynx, know it all about the Greeks, or, are we a culturally Western colony that imports artistic movements rather than creates

them? There are, of course, many reasons to justify for this “mistrust” toward Europe, and a finance analyst would point out that cultural relations is also a byproduct of financial relations. So, in a nutshell, I personally find the relationship of Greek theatre to the rest of Europe problematic and having spent more than 15 years of my adult life in London and Berlin only made things worse. My work was often treated as “exotic”, “European peripheral” and “unfamiliar” by both European and Greek drama theorists. This has caused much headache, but when I defy expectations and narratives and just dive into the actual source i.e. the ancient Greeks, things get different. As a writer and director, I have always had a very special relationship to the myths and cherished immensely a playful attitude toward them. To my understanding, Europe nowadays is more than ever in search of the core humanistic values that will propel us to a better future and the Greek mythology provides a warm blanket for the cold days. So, even when we create and produce far away from the mainland cultural industries of the North, in “the periphery”, there is a genuine interest to engage with the European cultural industries that the lack of networks or infrastructures in Greece ignores.

Takis Tzamargias: The relationship of the Greek theatre with the rest of Europe has always been important and it has always managed to absorb and assimilate new systems and contemporary trends in a fruitful and creative way and to compose its own identity from the elements of the Greek reality. European data were redefined in a new reality, where the indigenous and the alien were creatively intertwined. In the last twenty years at least, this relationship has continued to be thriving and dynamic, but with a greater parity. A number of institutions and special projects realized by state theatres and festivals, as well as serious private initiatives, have contributed to this. These promote extroversion both at textual and stage level. Of course, there is more demand and interest from Europe for physical theatre since language is still a barrier to the promotion of important spoken word performances.

Andreadi – Asproulis: Greek theatre is in an open dialogue with European theatre. It is contemporary, communicative, and ambitious, it is borrowing forms, reshaping them. It is hosting performances, taking its own abroad. It is a

very creative theatre inside a very vivid market, of 2.000 different theatre shows per year, a fact that makes Athens one of the top theatrical capitals of Europe, production-wise. However, this does not lead to the creation of an identifiable identity we could call “Greek theatre”, like identities we perhaps meet in other parts of Europe.



Fig. 5.: *The Cenci Family* by Ioli Andreadi & Aris Asproulis / Direction: Ioli Andreadi, The Tank NYC (2023) @The Tank Theatre

Alexandra K*: I feel that generally theatre in Europe moves at two speeds, or rather in two different approaches: the first has playwriting at its core, while the other focuses on breaking free from the text. In Greece, both practices are represented equally, both in what we produce but also in what we import (indicatively, we “consume” many contemporary Spanish plays on one hand, and experimental German performances on the other). Regarding our own productions, I notice that the new generation leans more towards the second approach, that of shaping a rudimentary text only as a “trigger” to then construct a theatrical edifice on it. Their subject matters are in direct dialogue with the European community and its concerns, while artists from all over Europe are often included in their teams. I do feel that the presence of the local element grows weaker, and that there’s not enough attention paid to dramaturgy anymore, but I think that these are symptoms of a continent that

has become gentrified (thus, homogenized) anyway, and of an era that is terribly fragmentary and fragmented. Or I'm just a millennial getting old and maybe irrelevant.



Fig. 6: MEDEA, directed by Yannis Kalavrianos, National Theatre of Greece (2022), credits Elina Giouanli *Medea* by Bost / Direction: Yannis Kalavrianos, @Elina Giouanli

Yannis Kalavrianos: All relations, in order to be mutually fruitful and creative, must be two-way, otherwise they cease to be equal and end up in hierarchical power structures. Greek audiences, spectators and creators alike, are constantly following and keeping up to date with the evolution of theatre on the major European stages, both in terms of writing and dramaturgy, as well as in terms of form and aesthetics. Foreign-language theatre is translated and performed extensively in Greece, but the same cannot be said in reverse for Greek plays. The interest of foreign theatres, which is translated into retransmissions of Greek performances, has so far been limited to mixed theatre and dance shows or to productions not based on language. This is

always the case with the languages of the region, but I think it is high time to radically change this pattern.

Yiannis Panagopoulos: I would describe it as a relationship with some major unbalances. As spectators, here in Greece, we are so often getting in touch with a great number of performances travelling from abroad but unfortunately don't get the opportunity to visit other countries with our own creations.

What do you hope for the Greek theatre?

Thanos Papakonstantinou: I hope for better working conditions, bigger funds for the arts, connectivity with the rest of the world.

Savas Patsalidis: A more generous and systematic financial State support, greater extroversion, more critical self-awareness, and a more substantial, constructive and beneficial "re-visit" of the domestic tradition, in the light of all the changes observed nationally and internationally; and last but not least a more inquisitive, questioning "re-reading" of the concept of reality and the real. At some point Greek artists must understand that the world has become too complex and cannot be substantially grasped, interpreted in terms of the left and right. This is an oversimplified binarism, that leads nowhere. Nowadays these early dichotomies are indistinguishable and this requires that Greek theatre practitioners cultivate new, more versatile (re)presentational, performative modes and codes so that the world they create on stage meets the world off stage.

Elli Papakonstantinou: I wish that the national Institutions will become more inclusive and also that the Ministry of Culture puts together an effective strategic plan in order to support mobility and research.

Takis Tzamargias: Greek theatre has remarkable potential in all areas and I hope that it will find its stride on paths that connect with its audience so that the stage act triumphs and leaves its imprint on the consciousness of all of us.

Andreadi – Asproulis: To be able to obtain its own “seal” or identity. To be free and encouraged to educate and cultivate its audience. To be supported in more meaningful ways by both the State and the institutions and by the private market. And to open its wings abroad as an equal to the other countries.



Fig. 7: *The Boy with Two Hearts* by Hamed and Hessam Amiri / Direction: Takis Tzamargias, Theatre Alma (2023) @Aikaterini Drouka

Alexandra K*: Recently we had the pleasure of seeing Greek performances travel in Europe (note: performances, not plays yet). The showcases do bring results and it is being proven that Greek theatre indeed has something to offer abroad. I hope that our presence in the international theatrical community will continue and spread, just as I hope that our playwrights will believe more in themselves and their writing identity, so that we too can participate in this dialogue in the future.

Yannis Kalavrianos: To create its own tradition. Not to operate on a case-by-case basis, but to proceed as a whole and in dialogue, both inside and outside the country. To look at the past calmly and envision how it would like its future to be. To deal with the burning issues not with the speed or manner of television, to ignore convenience, to work on language, to seek poetry and to understand that the only way forward is through truth, sharing and commitment.

Yiannis Panagopoulos: I would definitely say faster changes towards better conditions. We all know how things should be and that's the direction we should all work for. And I am not only referring to the State support but also to the private sector that needs to make big changes as well. I would also wish that Greek performances could travel even more abroad and spread their messages to the world.

Stathis Livathinos: That it matures without growing old quickly.



Fig. 8: *King Lear* by William Shakespeare / Direction: Stathis Livathinos, Teatro Kefalinias (2023) @Elina Giounanli

What about theatre for children and youngsters? What is the situation in Greece?

Sofia Vgenopoulou: I think it is very important to state that theatre for young people should and can be an area of study, research and experimentation by accomplished artists; it can have high artistic quality and value reflecting its times, and thus be a significant part of the artistic life in a civilized society. It is also true that children's first theatrical experiences are probably their first encounter with artistic creation, with inspiration and how it becomes life on the stage. And therefore, it is our duty to take care of these first experiences, make them unforgettable for their soul and spirit, so that they can always revisit this refuge that art can be, nurture their imagination and use it to emotionally and spiritually grow. Given all this I would say that there have been significant developments in theatre for young people in the last couple of decades. Both in content, form and aesthetic approach we have managed to leave behind us at least partly certain misconceptions, fears and prejudices even about what might interest the kids, such as how we can keep them interested given that they can't concentrate for long, that we must make sure they are impressed by high tech performances, everything must be quick and "big", that bringing to the stage TV shows are definite successes and therefore the best choices, that we should avoid difficult issues and definitely choose not only happy endings but also make sure there is a clear message there reinforcing what and how they should think, and that any upsetting scene or piece of dialogue has the potential of traumatizing the young audience. I think a lot of that is being abandoned and we have become more daring, more brave I would say to choose both material and a language that reflects the reality of the young peoples' lives, their real concerns and dilemmas, and we have realized that it is important to speak the truth, to challenge them with difficult questions, respect them that they can work their way out of intricate difficulties if we give them space and time to discover their own resources. In my own experience in recent years, either funding from EU sources or the financial, ideological and infrastructural support from major cultural organizations has helped a lot in that respect because we can more easily bypass the danger of our productions becoming commodities. We can depart more safely from educational "aims" and curriculums; we can be more daring in our choices of themes and in our

artistic endeavours. Also, the major cultural organizations of the country have supported a variety of programs where kids experience themselves the joy of theatre. And parallel to this a series of very ambitious programs targeting teachers and professionals have helped educate all of them in TIE, as well as applied theatre techniques, devising, ensemble techniques, all of them very important means in order to introduce kids to the theatre, but also introduce theatre as a very valuable teaching and social cohesion vehicle.

Despite the progress that I just described however, it remains a huge problem that consistency and sustainability of these programs depend on all sorts of circumstances, usually with those of us who do this work finding ourselves often negotiating around production costs, spaces that are appropriate, accessibility, artistic recognition and proper promotion of the work – critics never write about TYP in our country. There is important work that needs to be done regarding making theatre for YP and related educational programs an important and consistently funded part of our cultural life and institutions, in a fruitful dialogue and interaction with the school system. Maybe educating even more young ambitious, talented artists about this genre will also help.

What is the responsibility of a person who does theatre for children and teenagers?

Sofia Vgenopoulou: First and foremost, I try to find stories that need to be told, stories that I care about and that as I listen to the young generation and try to enter their world, I suspect that they will also care about. This is a huge responsibility, but it does pay off. I also believe that I have to take risks, challenge my audience and trust them. No need for easy answers, messages, rosy representations of reality that is not reality in a sense. No need to underestimate them, present a false image that is then proven a lie and leads to them losing their faith in us adults. Actors are my premium material, they are these magical human beings that invent worlds by working together towards a common goal, therefore I always work with ensembles and believe that this process of almost utopian availability to one another in order to collectively write new narratives is something that is reflected in the performance and fascinates and moves kids. It is not only the content that matters, but the ethos of rehearsal and production thereafter that becomes a world that we find refuge in and maybe seek to recreate it when we leave the theatre. Of course,

all this requires an active audience, it becomes an exercise of some sort, but I think it is much needed. I have been haunted especially in recent years by the feeling of helplessness and passive abandonment that a lot of young people share and I truly believe it is a very dangerous feature of our times. As a reaction to this I seek to mobilize kids' emotion and thought process, and propel them to action, just like their heroes on stage, to become protagonists of their own lives, take the steering wheel of their own journey. I believe it is every kid's undeniable right to invent themselves and the life they want to live, so I try to make space for them to discover in theatre their own imaginative powers which is where it all starts from.



Fig. 9: *Border Lines* by Chris Cooper / Direction: Sofia Vgenopoulou, National Theatre of Greece (2023) @Karol Jarek

Having such an experience, what do you think is for and what against an artistic making theatre for young audiences?

I think it is important to say that there is no perfect situation and place to do theatre in general, and much more theatre for young audiences for all the

reasons we have already discussed. Given this we really need to create a niche of trusted and valuable partners and collaborators and really hold on to whatever values guide us, remind ourselves and reevaluate why this work is important and meaningful. We need to take responsibility, act, connect, empower each other, rather than lean towards harsh critique and competition. When the piece of the pie is small, I am afraid the professional arena can become a battlefield and it is true that my country is a ...small pie place! Also, I miss very much the experience of mentoring. We do not have a very established and even formal context of internships, residencies etc. I think this is very unfortunate and takes a lot away from the joy and inspiration of our work. Especially in the area of applied theatre for all and young people included, which is one of my interests we lack teaching, practice, proper design of relevant programs and opportunities to bring them to the right target groups and to the stage.

WHO IS WHO



Alexandra K* (Corfu, 1985) is an author, playwright and screenwriter based in Athens. She was a writer-in-residence at the University of Iowa International Writing Program, has been repeatedly commissioned by the National Theatre of Greece, the Greek National Opera, the Athens-Epidaurus Festival and the National Broadcasting

Company as well as from private cultural institutions. She's a regular contributor in *Vogue Greece* and has been conducting Playwriting workshops at the University of Western Macedonia. Her latest book, *Virgin Mary Smoking in the Bathroom*, (short stories, Patakis, 2023) became an instant #1 best seller in Greece.



Ioli Andreadi is a theatre and performance director, playwright, researcher, Assistant Professor at the University of Western Macedonia specializing in Theatre and Education and **Aris Asproulis** is playwright, Dr. of Sociology at Panteion University, Director of Communication of the Municipal Theatre of Piraeus, the historic Art Theatre Karolos Koun and the Lykofos Productions. They have co-authored 14 theatrical plays (7 original and 7 adaptations) from 2015 until today, which have been staged in Greece, New York, London and Bulgaria, directed by Ioli Andreadi and having received excellent reviews. Ioli Andreadi and Aris Asproulis specialize in creating original theatrical works, based on the study of real events, through research of primary archival material; documents and publications; interviews; books; field work. They also share a deep interest in the Classics (literature, theatre, art), having adapted for the stage a version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, a version of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Euripides' *Ion* and *Helen*. Their work also includes *THE ARTAUD TRILOGY*, three new plays on the life and work of Antonin Artaud: *Artaud/Van Gogh*, *The Cenci Family* and *Bone*. All their plays have been published by Kapa Publishing House. Ioli Andreadi's research books *Anastenaria: Ritual, Theatre, Performance. An Experiential Study* (2020), *Performance: Theory and Practice; Directing, Philosophy and Culture* (2021) and *Theatre and Education: Theory and Practice* (2023) was published by Kapa Publishing House, too.

IRENE MOUNDRAKI



Yannis Kalavrianos was born in Thessaloniki, Greece. Graduate of the Medical School and of the School of Drama-Faculty of Fine Arts, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where he is also a PhD student. He worked as a doctor, playwright, actor and director. He wrote and directed plays presented at the: National Theatre of Greece, Ancient Theatre of Epidauros, National Theatre of Northern Greece, Deutsches Theatre Berlin, Kunstfestspiele Herrenhausen Hannover, Spazio Teatro NO'HMA Milan, CSS Teatro Udine, Theatre tri-bühne Stuttgart, Piccolo Teatro Milan, Heidelberger Stückemarkt, Sarajevo Winter Festival, Centro Dramático Nacional Madrid, Cyprus Theatre Organisation Nicosia, Michael Cacoyannis Foundation Athens, Megaron The Athens Concert Hall, Greek National Opera etc., Athens & Epidauros Festival.

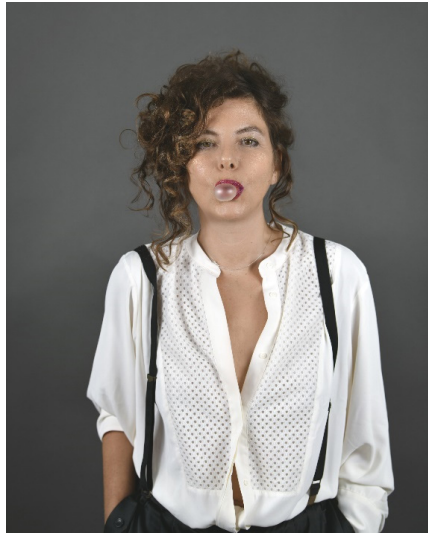


Stathis Livathinos was born in Athens. He is a graduate of the School of Drama Pelos Katselis and of the Department of English Literature of the University of Athens.

He graduated from the Theatre Department at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts (GITIS) in 1990 with a M.A. in Theatre Direction and a M.F.A. in Theatre Acting. In 2001 he became the Artistic Director of the Experimental Stage of the National Theatre of Greece. During the seven years (2001-2007) of his service Livathinos directed several shows and launched the foundation of the first School of Theatre Directing in Greece in 2001. His directions have toured in Europe and overseas (recently his *Iliad* by Homer toured with great success all over the world) and he has been awarded with numerous prizes, among them the Moscow Critics Award for his thesis-performance *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* by Tom Stoppard. He has taught theatre in the University of Patras, the Center of Ancient Drama, Harvard University (A.R.T.) in Boston and most recently at Shanghai Theatre Academy (May 2016). From 2015 to 2019 he was the Artistic Director of the National Theatre of Greece.



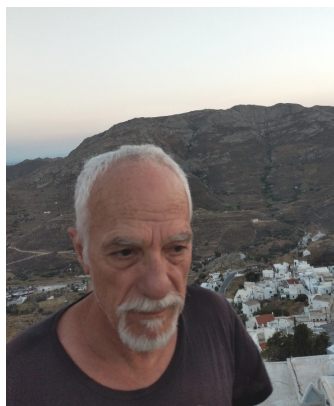
Yiannis Panagopoulos is a graduate of the Drama School of the National Theatre of Greece and the Athens University of Economics and Business, while he is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Theatre Studies (Fine Arts), University of Peloponnese working on his thesis on *Cultural Democracy*. He has worked as an actor and director at the National Theatre of Greece, the Athens Epidaurus Festival, the Athens Concert Hall, the “Karolos Koun” Art Theatre, Kefallinias Theatre and Theseum Theatre, among others. He served as artistic curator at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Special Olympics 2011 in Athens and as Deputy Artistic Director for the candidacy of the city of Messolonghi as the European Capital of Culture in 2021. He co-founded along with Zoe Mylonas and Dimos Klimenof the NOVUS Theatre Ensemble.



Elli Papakonstantinou connects notions of myth and gender philosophy by revisiting the classics and creating immersive experiences. Elli is a performance director, playwright, visual artist and cultural manager. She creates performances with an emphasis on music, and new media. She is the artistic director of the international theatre company ODC Ensemble. Elli has lived in the UK for over a decade and has created and presented her work internationally. The global lockdowns led Elli to experiment with a new form of digital theatre, that she named “theatre of seclusion”. Twice a proud Fulbrighter, in 2019 she spent 4 months researching new technologies in performance at CCRMA (Computer Center for Music & Acoustics), at Stanford University (US), and in 2004, she spent Spring at the Media Lab, at Princeton University with a “Fulbright Artist’s Award” and a “Stanley J. Seeger Visiting Fellowship”. Amongst other achievements, she has been credited with a “First Prize Award” at the Edinburgh Festival (UK) and a “First Prize Award” for the REP, Birmingham (UK), as well as the “Music Theatre Now 2018-19” international competition. Elli has been commissioned by the European Capitals of Culture “Valetta18” and “Eleusis21” and has presented work at the European Parliament of Culture.



Thanos Papakonstantinou is a Stage Director and Actor. As a director, he has collaborated with Athens and Epidaurus Festival, National Theatre of Greece, Pallas Theatre, Megaron – Athens Concert Hall, Kypria International Festival – Nicosia, Greek National Opera, Onassis Cultural Foundation, Bayreuth Baroque Festival, Michalis Cacoyannis Foundation – MCF, Apo Michanis Theatre. Among his directions: *Thyestes* by Seneca (2023), *Iphigénie en Tauride* by C.W. Gluck (2023), *Hope of Homeland* opera by Giorgos Kouropos (2021), *Crude Iron*, opera by Andys Skordis (2021), *Juditha Triumphans* by Vivaldi (2021), *The Free Besieged* by Dionisios Solomos (2021), *Apocalypse* (2019), *The Haunted* musical by Dimitris Maramis (2019), *Electra* by Sophocles (2018), *L'Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi (2018/ 2023), *Colossus* (2017), *Redshift* by Yiannis Mavritsakis (2014-2015), *Macbeth* by W. Shakespeare (2015), *Pedestal* (2013), *Venison* (2012), *Hamlet* by W. Shakespeare (2011).



Savas Patsalidis is Professor Emeritus in Theatre Studies at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where he has taught at the School of English for close to 35 years.

He has also taught at the Drama School of the National Theatre of Northern Greece, the Hellenic Open University and the graduate program of the Theatre Department of Aristotle University. He is the author of fourteen books on theatre and performance criticism/theory and co-editor of another thirteen. His two-volume study, *Theatre, Society, Nation* (2010), was awarded first prize for best theatre study of the year. In addition to his academic activities, he writes theatre reviews for various journals. He is on the Executive Committee of the Hellenic Association of Theatre and Performing Arts Critics, a member of the curators' team of Forest International Festival (organized by the National Theatre of Northern Greece), and the editor-in-chief of *Critical Stages/Scènes critiques*, the journal of the International Association of Theatre Critics.



Takis Tzamargias was born in Piraeus. He studied acting at the Acting School “Piraeus Society” and he holds a Bachelor Degree on the Educational Department of National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. He also holds a Master’s Degree in “Theatre in Education”. He has been working as special academic staff at the University of Athens since 2003. He has also taught in various acting schools in Athens. He was the founder and for 15 years the director of the theatre team of the municipality of Keratsini. He has worked with the National Theatre of Greece, the Theatre Organization of Cyprus, the National Theatre of Northern Greece, etc. He was the Artistic Director of the Municipal Theatre of Piraeus for a 2-year period (2013-2015). He has lectured in many conferences about theatre in education. He has

written many articles and he was part of the writing team of books about theatre in schools. He is the president of the committee of the Ministry of Culture for the theatre awards for new plays for non-adult audience.



Sofia Vgenopoulou is working in Athens, Greece, since 2001 as a theatre director and a practicing child psychiatrist, after 10 years of studies in the USA in theatre, drama therapy and child psychiatry. In May 2017 she became the Head of the Young People's Stage and related educational programs for young people at the National Theatre of Greece, a position she held until January 2024. From 2010 to the present day, she has focused her work on young audiences and has brought forth the importance of active participation of young people in the arts within their educational settings and within major cultural organizations and educational programs created specifically for them. This has included disenfranchised youth and young refugees. She has directed 37 performances by, with and for young people, working at times with professional actors and at times with young people, including multicultural companies of professionals and young refugees. She has designed and coordinated a significant number of educational programs of national calibre in secondary schools funded by the EU and has taught extensively about applied theatre to professional artists and teachers.

IRENE MOUNDRAKI



Eirini Mountraki has obtained a BA, a MA and a PhD in Theatre Studies from the National and Apodyteria University of Athens. She also studied Arts at the University of Milan, Italy on a scholarship. She works at the National Theatre of Greece since 1999 and she is head of Drama, Library, Archive and International Relations Departments. She teaches in the MA Programmes at the Universities of Peloponnese and Athens. She also teaches at Drama Schools. She taught Theatre in the Army and has directed several plays with her students. She is the founder and head of the Greek Play Project, a dynamic platform for the promotion and study of contemporary Greek dramaturgy (greek-theatre.gr). Alongside her work as a dramaturg, she has published books and translations, curated exhibitions, organized and led workshops and seminars and lectured about theatre in Greece and abroad. She is an International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP 2013) Alumnus of the USA and member of the IATC. Among other significant roles, she has been President of the Consultative Committee on Theatre Grants of the Greek Ministry of Culture (2017-2021) and President, Vice President and member of the board of the Hellenic Association of Theatre and Performing Arts Critics (2016-2023). She is a member of the Board of the European Theatre Convention.