



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

WOMAN AT POINT ZERO: A Multimedia Opera

Wiener FestWochen, 24.05.2024 [ENA]

WOMAN AT POINT ZERO, a captivating multimedia opera inspired by Nawal El Saadawi's seminal novel, stands as a formidable testament to the enduring struggles and triumphs of women worldwide. This gripping production, crafted by the collaborative genius of Laila Soliman and Kanako Abe, and composed by Bushra El-Turk, is a profound exploration of exploitation, emancipation, and the relentless pursuit of freedom.

Its acclaim is well-deserved, having won the Fedora Prize for Opera Innovation in 2020 and the Music Theatre Now Competition in 2023. Woman at Point Zero is an indelible mark on the cultural landscape, a compelling voice in the realm of feminist art that demands to be heard. The narrative is both intimate and universal, centering on the poignant encounter between two women in prison: Fatma, a women's rights activist and convicted murderer, and Sama, an ambitious young documentary filmmaker who came to visit Fatma and is determined to tell Fatma's story. Through their interactions, they reveal their memories, emotions, feelings, experiences, life stories, and deepest secrets, weaving a rich tapestry of personal and collective struggles.

This operatic adaptation delves deep into the complexities of what it means to be truly free, challenging the audience to reconsider the boundaries of freedom itself. Can one be more liberated behind prison walls than in the outside world? The opera's exploration of this paradox is both thought-provoking and emotionally resonant. One of the most striking elements of Woman at Point Zero is its innovative multimedia approach. The production seamlessly integrates poetry, documentary testimonies, and genre-defying music, creating a multi-sensory experience that is both immersive and enlightening. The fusion of Western and Eastern musical traditions, masterfully composed by Bushra El-Turk, adds layers of depth and texture to the performance.

El-Turk's music is a brilliant amalgamation of diverse influences, bringing together the soulful strains of Middle Eastern melodies with the structural sophistication of Western operatic forms. This musical synthesis not only underscores the thematic content of the opera but also highlights the universal nature of its message. The staging of Woman at Point Zero is nothing short of spectacular. The set design is both minimalist and evocative, effectively using light and shadow to create an atmosphere that is at once stark and deeply emotive. The prison setting, with its bare, confining walls, contrasts sharply with the rich inner lives of the characters, a visual metaphor for the central theme of inner versus outer freedom.

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Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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The multimedia elements, including projected images and documentary footage, are seamlessly integrated into the performance, adding a layer of realism that heightens the emotional impact. These visual components serve as powerful reminders of the real-world issues that the opera addresses, grounding the narrative in the lived experiences of countless women. The performances in *Woman at Point Zero* are nothing short of extraordinary. The lead roles of Fatma and Sama are portrayed with incredible depth and sensitivity, bringing the characters to life with a raw intensity that is both heartbreaking and inspiring. The chemistry between the two leads is palpable, their interactions charged with a mix of tension, empathy, and mutual respect.

The supporting cast, too, delivers stellar performances, each actor contributing to the rich emotional landscape of the opera. The vocal performances are complemented by the expressive choreography, which adds a dynamic physicality to the production, further amplifying its emotional resonance. A significant strength of *Woman at Point Zero* is its ability to blend personal stories with broader social commentary. The opera tackles themes of gender oppression, social injustice, and the quest for self-determination with a boldness and clarity that is deeply impactful. It does not shy away from the harsh realities faced by women, particularly those in oppressive societies, yet it also celebrates their strength, resilience, and indomitable spirit.

The character of Fatma, in particular, emerges as a powerful symbol of defiance and empowerment, her story a poignant reminder of the countless women who continue to fight for their rights and dignity. The libretto, adapted from El Saadawi's novel, is a masterful work of literary and poetic expression. It captures the essence of the original text while infusing it with new layers of meaning through its operatic form. The dialogue is sharp and incisive, the monologues deeply reflective, and the poetic interludes hauntingly beautiful. This linguistic richness is matched by the emotional depth of the music, creating a harmonious blend of words and melody that resonates long after the final note has been sung.

Woman at Point Zero is a groundbreaking work that redefines the boundaries of opera and multimedia performance. It is a testament to the power of art to provoke thought, inspire change, and forge connections across cultural and geographical divides. By giving voice to the voiceless and shining a light on the dark corners of societal oppression, this opera not only entertains but educates and empowers its audience. It is a call to action, urging us to listen, to understand, and to join in the ongoing struggle for justice and equality.

In conclusion, *woman at Point Zero* is an unforgettable operatic experience that combines stunning artistry with profound social commentary. It is a powerful reminder of the enduring strength of women and the importance of continuing the fight for freedom and equality. This production is a must-see for anyone who believes in the transformative power of art and the vital need to address the injustices faced by women around the world. *Woman at Point Zero* is not just an opera; it is a movement, a manifesto, and a beacon of

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hope in the ongoing quest for a more just and equitable society.

Bericht online lesen:

https://culture.en-a.eu/kunst_kultur_und_musik/woman_at_point_zero_a_multimedia_opera_-89160/

Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:

V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDSStV: Dr. Nadejda Komendantova

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D-85055 Ingolstadt
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