



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Embracing Threshold - THE RISE at Musiktheatertage Wien

Odeon Theater, 23.09.2025 [ENA]

From the moment THE RISE opened Musiktheatertage Wien 2025, it became clear this was going to be more than a show—it was an invitation into a liminal space where gesture, sound, silence, and inclusion converge. Under the creative leadership of Eva Reiter and Michiel Vandeveld, with the Ictus Ensemble, THE RISE is a striking theatrical meditation on life, death, and the spaces in between, built around poetic textures

At its heart, THE RISE rests on a powerful conceit: a deaf narrator, Ruben Grandits, serving as a kind of ceremonial guide leading audiences through the gorge of a volcano—a mythic threshold between the world of the living and the underworld. Here, Reiter and Vandeveld use not only sound but also gesture, choreography, sign language, and spatial design to render this transformative journey. Grandits' sign language is not window dressing: it is foundational, shaping choreography and music into a multi-sensory architecture. This is theatre that doesn't simply aim to include deaf and hearing audiences; it does the bold work of rethinking what inclusion means at a structural, poetic level.

The technical and artistic craftsmanship in THE RISE is exceptional. Music by Eva Reiter—part electronics, part live ensemble—interweaves with lights, dance, and movement (from dancers such as Amanda Barrio Charmelo, Nathan Felix-Rivot, Antoine Roux-Briffaud, Aure Wachter) to create a texture that is at once intimate and expansive. The staging design allows for gesture to move between being visual form, rhythmic element, and meaning-content. The costuming (Tutia Schaad) and the set design provide the glowing but ominous backdrop of a mythic passage, as if the stage itself becomes volcanic rock and echo chamber. The involvement of IRCAM in computer music design also adds depth—melding acoustic and electronic timbres in ways that feel organic

What sets THE RISE apart from many contemporary works is its commitment to accessibility: translation into International Sign, original poetry sign, and the structuring of the piece in ways that both hearing and deaf spectators can access meaning in equal measure. It is rare to see such careful attention to how difference in sensory perception becomes a site of aesthetic invention rather than compensation. Eva Reiter's remark—that accessibility is not purely technical but involves translation across languages, senses, and cultural understandings—is vividly embodied in the production. This is not about “making things accessible” as an add-on; it's about making accessibility intrinsic to the art.

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The emotional weight of THE RISE is felt in the silence between gestures, in the rawness of what is unspoken, and in how small moments—light, breath, movement—echo like pulses. When Grandits signs, when music pulses, when dancers move, the production opens a space for reflection: about mortality, about grief, about what persists when the known world shifts. There are moments of poetic beauty—simplicity of gesture, subtle shifts in light, the tension of sound and its absence—that linger long after the performance ends.

Reiter and Vandeveldel's vision is brave: it refuses to settle into traditional narrative modes or aesthetic safety. Instead, THE RISE roams mythic distances and poetic ambiguity. It unsettles, it questions, it invites—not closure, but ongoing listening. The collaboration with Ictus Ensemble is more proof that ensemble-based contemporary music theatre can deliver innovation with rigor and emotional integrity. THE RISE is a threshold crossed: between life and death, between sound and gesture, between hearing and silence.

As a modern theatre expert, I see in it a luminous example of how performing arts can expand our capacities not only to see and hear, but to feel and understand difference. This is work that doesn't just engage the senses—it elevates them. It doesn't simply ask for empathy—it enacts it.

In its artistry, its ethics, its emotional heft, THE RISE makes a case for what theatre can—and should—be: fearless, inclusive, poetic. A performance that not only inaugurates a festival, but also promises a new horizon for what music-theatre can become.

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