

Antigone in the Amazon review



“Call for a more total approach to activism”

REVIEWS MAY 30, 2023 BY NATASHA TRIPNEY [BURGTHEATER, VIENNA](#)



Antigone in the Amazon at Burgtheater, Vienna. Photo: kurt van der elst (who styles his name in lower case)

Milo Rau’s ambitious collaboration with Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement has some powerful moments

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Brazil’s Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) – in which rural workers fight for land reform and against injustice – is more than just a campaigning group. Its members live together and eat together; it encompasses education and theatre, with art and activism being fundamentally interlinked.

While right-wing politician Jair Bolsonaro was still Brazil’s president, the [MST invited Swiss theatre director Milo Rau to work with them](#). Just as his previous show Orestes in Mosul saw him travelling to the former capital of Islamic State in Iraq, here Rau and his team from NTGent travelled to Brazil to stage Sophocles’ tragedy.

While there, [Rau](#) worked with the MST to re-enact the moment in 1996 when 19 members of the MST were gunned down by military police on the Trans-Amazonian Highway. Rau filmed a group of actors and activists, including survivors of the massacre, as they blocked the highway on the anniversary of the killings and vividly recreated the shooting of their fallen friends. Police came to break up the blockade and stayed to watch.



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Natasha is international editor for The St co-founded Exeunt magazine and regular for the Guardian and the BBC.

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The resulting video footage forms a core part of this show. Alongside it, performers Frederico Araujo, Sara De Bosschere, Arne De Tremerie and musician Pablo Casella talk the audience through the process of making the show and their experiences in Brazil. The indigenous actor and activist Kay Sara was supposed to be present on stage as Antigone in Vienna, but she decided to return home, so Araujo doubles as both Polyneices and Antigone. Although Sara can still be seen on screen, her absence does sometimes leave a gap.

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There were moments in Rau’s earlier work [Orestes in Mosul](#) where there was an uncomfortable power imbalance between the European theatremakers on stage and the performers on screen; here the relationship feels more collaborative. There is even a sequence in which De Tremerie – who plays Haemon – explicitly discusses his own privilege.

The MST movement has clearly inspired [Rau](#) – who takes over as artistic director of the Vienna Festwochen next year – and rehearsing and filming in the Amazon region seems to have been an important experience for the cast, but this doesn’t always translate to the stage.

The scenes in which they perform Antigone with filmed footage as a backdrop feel secondary and, despite the skill and charisma of the performers, they slow the show down. The production is more effective when considered as an act of documentation of the MST or as part of a larger endeavour: a campaign against corporate greenwashing in the region has been launched alongside it.

Still, there are some powerful moments: such as when Brazilian philosopher Ailton Krenak, as Tiresias, offers a warning to the warming world or when Araujo explains that, as a Black member of the LGBTQ community in Brazil, his chances of being killed are high. At its core, the show is a call for a different, more total approach to activism – as a way of living, a way of being.

At Burgtheater, Vienna, on May 25-27 and then touring internationally. For full touring dates click here: ntgent.be/en



Production Details

Production name	Antigone in the Amazon
Venue	Burgtheater
Location	Vienna, and then touring internationally
Starts	25/05/2023
Ends	27/05/2023
Press night	13/05/2023
Running time	1hr 45mins
Author	Ensemble ., Milo Rau
Creator	Milo Rau
Composer	Elia Rediger, Pablo Casella
Dramaturg	Giacomo Bisordi
Director	Milo Rau
Set designer	Anton Lukas
Costume designer	Anton Lukas, Gabriela Cherubini, Jo De Visscher
Lighting designer	Dennis Diels
Video designer	Moritz Von Dungern
Cast includes	Sara De Bosschere, Pablo Casella, Frederico Araujo, Arne De Tremerie, Kay Sara, Gracinha Donato, Célia Maracajá
Technical	Oliver Houttekiet
Production manager	Klaas Lievens
Stage manager	Marijn Vlaeminck
Producer	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra, NTGent

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