



Lemi Ponifasio  
Star Returning

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***Star Returning* is a profound new creation by visionary theatre artist Lemi Ponifasio, created in collaboration with the Yi People of Daliangshan, China.**

**Through his distinctive theatre language, the work poignantly activates and explores the complexities of the human experience, drawing on the timeless narratives of the Yi. Their stories encapsulate themes of existence, struggle, triumph, beauty, and life as a triumph over death.**

## *Star Returning*

Lemi Ponifasio has dedicated over three decades to creating groundbreaking theatre works in collaboration with Indigenous peoples worldwide.

His cosmovision theatre masterfully intertwines contemporary performance with the diverse worldviews of cultures such as the Mapuche of South America, the Māori of New Zealand, the Kiribati of Micronesia, and many other Oceanic traditions.

*Star Returning* is Ponifasio's latest project—a powerful collaboration with the Yi People of China's mountainous Daliangshan region. The work invites audiences to immerse themselves in the Yi narrative of existence, exploring themes of cosmology, origins, and the deep connections to nature, ancestry, and spirituality intrinsic to this culture.

At the heart of *Star Returning* are critical aspects of Yi heritage, such as the Book of Origins, which recounts creation stories, and the spiritual chants of the Bimo, which are integral to rituals honouring the community's connection to its ancestors. The Torch Festival emphasises unity and marks the arrival of summer, reinforcing themes of creation, morality, and the essence of existence.

As with all of Ponifasio's collaborations, this project signifies the beginning of an ongoing journey, guiding both performers and communities to rediscover and reclaim lost fragments of their ancestral cultures. The process and creation offer a profound poetic response, bridging the avant-garde with the ancient through Yi chants, life ceremonies, farming gestures, texts of the Bimo, dances from the Torch Festival, and prayers at burial mounds—each element telling a story that connects the past to the present.

“A tree's roots nourish it and provide stability, while its branches and leaves reach toward the sky. Who we are is ahead of us. The future of the Yi People's culture lies in their past,” Ponifasio states, underscoring the significance of honouring heritage. *Star Returning* is a dynamic convergence of ceremony, philosophy, performance, and visual art, exploring humanity's vulnerabilities and our connection to the cosmos.

The work is enriched by the lyrical essence of Jidi Majia's poetry, which celebrates the spiritual and communal dimensions of existence. In a harmonious fusion of human and divine voices *Star Returning* embodies:

“A praise song for birth and death,  
Invoking sun, stars, rivers, and ancient heroes,  
Summoning deities and surreal forces—  
Thus, departed beings arise anew!”  
—Jidi Majia, Voice of the Bimo

In reimagining the Yi People's cosmovision, *Star Returning* urges us to see ourselves as part of a bigger, interconnected community rather than just individuals or members of specific cultures. It invites us to think about our role in the universe, consider our relationships with each other, and acknowledge our responsibilities towards the more than human world through this ceremony of reentering the womb of mother.

## **Performance Team**

The Liangshan Wocaiyunxia (Colourful Clouds Song and Dance Troupe), is affiliated with the Liangshan Wocaiyunxia Group and is part of a state-owned cultural enterprise in Sichuan, China. The group is a significant cultural institution in Sichuan and a national cultural industry demonstration base. They have played a critical role in promoting Daliangshan culture and contributing to the cultural development of Liangshan Prefecture. The group has received numerous awards for its film and television productions, showcasing excellence in national and international arenas.

## **Creation Team**

Lemi Ponifasio - Concept, Direction, Choreography, Costumes + Set + Sound Design

Helen Todd - Light

Alex Waghorn - Video

## **Co-Production**

International Theatre Institute ITI

China Theatre Association

Liangshan Cultural Tourism Group

Shanghai Theatre Academy

**Executive Producer** - Chen Zhongwen

**AVANT-PREMIERE** - Xichang, China | 8 - 10 November 2024 | Daliangshan Theatre Festival

**WORLD-PREMIERE** - Tunis, Tunisia | 23 - 24 November 2024 | Carthage Theatre Days JTC

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## About Lemi Ponifasio



Lemi Ponifasio (New Zealand-Samoa), is one of the world's leading theatre makers, choreographers, and artists.

Distinctive and with its own unique genealogy, Ponifasio's creations defy conventional definitions. In his artistic universe, Ponifasio orients the modern individual towards new cosmovisions and other dimensions of consciousness by way of the decelerated rhythm of his strict aesthetic - a palette of black, inverted, dreamlike images; the ceremonial, sacrificial body; a visceral space of sound, light, and darkness.

While firmly established within the international avant-garde, Ponifasio grounds his work within local communities, and diverse indigenous cultures, exploring complex forms of knowledge such as oratory, navigation, architecture, dance, performance, music, ceremony, philosophies, and genealogies as a driving force in emphasizing local-oriented arts, indigenous cultural recovery, language, and knowledge, thought and narratives.

Lemi's collaborators are people from all walks of life; the works are staged in factories, remote villages, opera houses, schools, marae, castles, galleries, and stadiums. His projects have included fully staged operas, theatre, dance, exhibitions, community forums, and festivals around the world.

Ponifasio presents and exhibits his work worldwide including the Avignon Festival, BAM New York, Ruhrtriennale, Edinburgh International Festival, Théâtre de la Ville Paris, Onassis Cultural Centre Athens, London's Southbank, Holland Festival, Luminato Festival, Vienna Festival, Berliner Festspiele, Santiago a Mil Chile, Theatre Der Welt Germany, Prague Quadrennial and the Venice Biennale.

Ponifasio is the founder and director of MAU (1995), the philosophical foundation and direction of his work, the name of his work, and the people and communities he works with. MAU is the Samoan word that means the declaration to the truth of a matter as an effort to transform. MAU focuses on arts and culture, avant-garde, and philosophy. MAU seeks to transform the theatre's power source, challenge the authority of theatre, and re-examine and question our current concept of what is human. It organizes the creation of new art, workshops, symposia, and community gatherings; activities to build new systems of knowledge and new cultures, and to develop human consciousness and sentience to the ecological crisis of our time.

Lemi Ponifasio is a High Chief of Samoa. He holds the titles Tuala and Sala. He is a ITI-UNESCO World Theatre Ambassador.



Lemi Ponifasio, *Sea Beneath Skin*, 2024, Luxembourg



Lemi Ponifasio, *A Time Between Ashes and Roses*, 2023, Rome, Italy



Lemi Ponifasio  
*Love to Death*  
2023 Santiago Chile

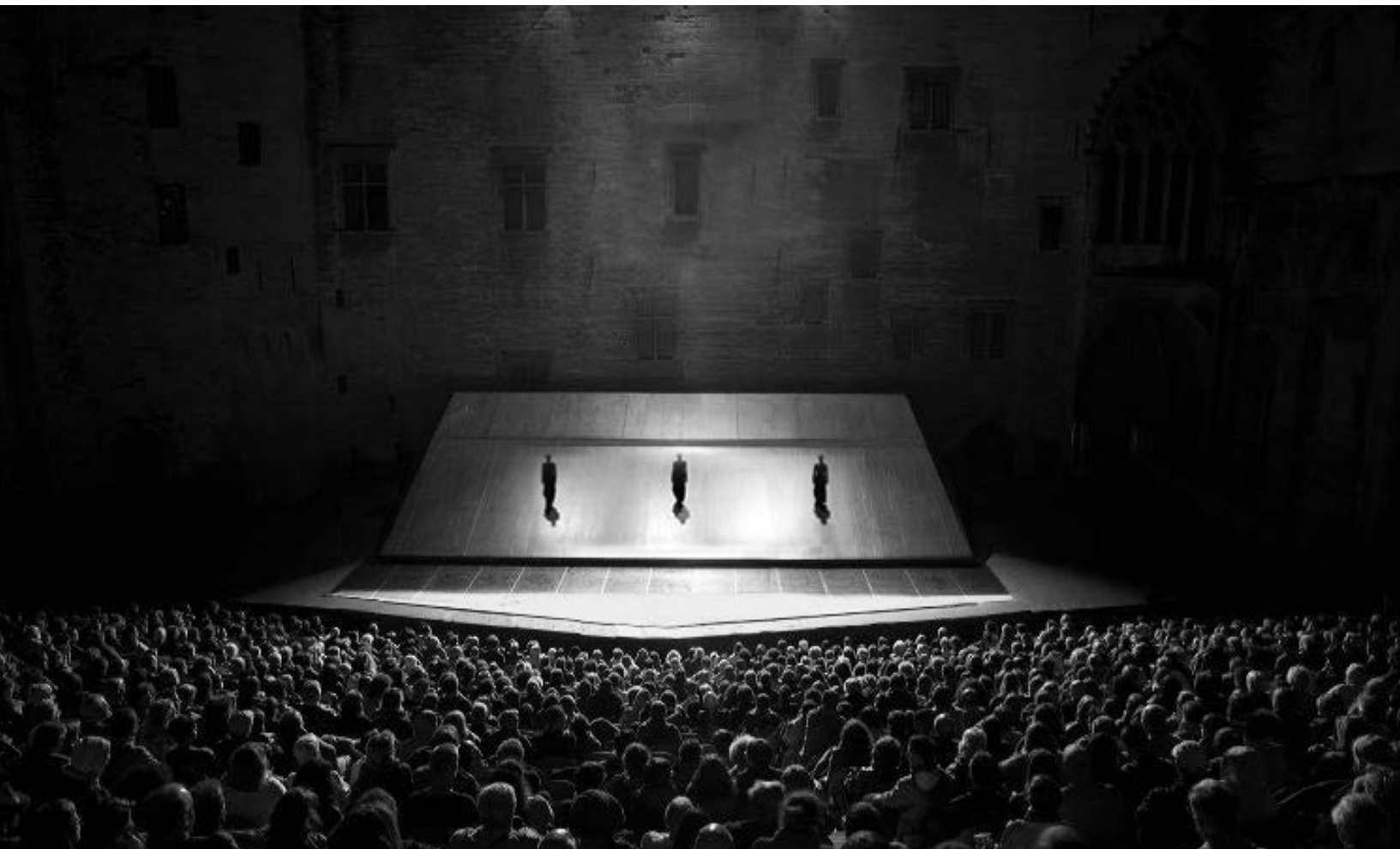




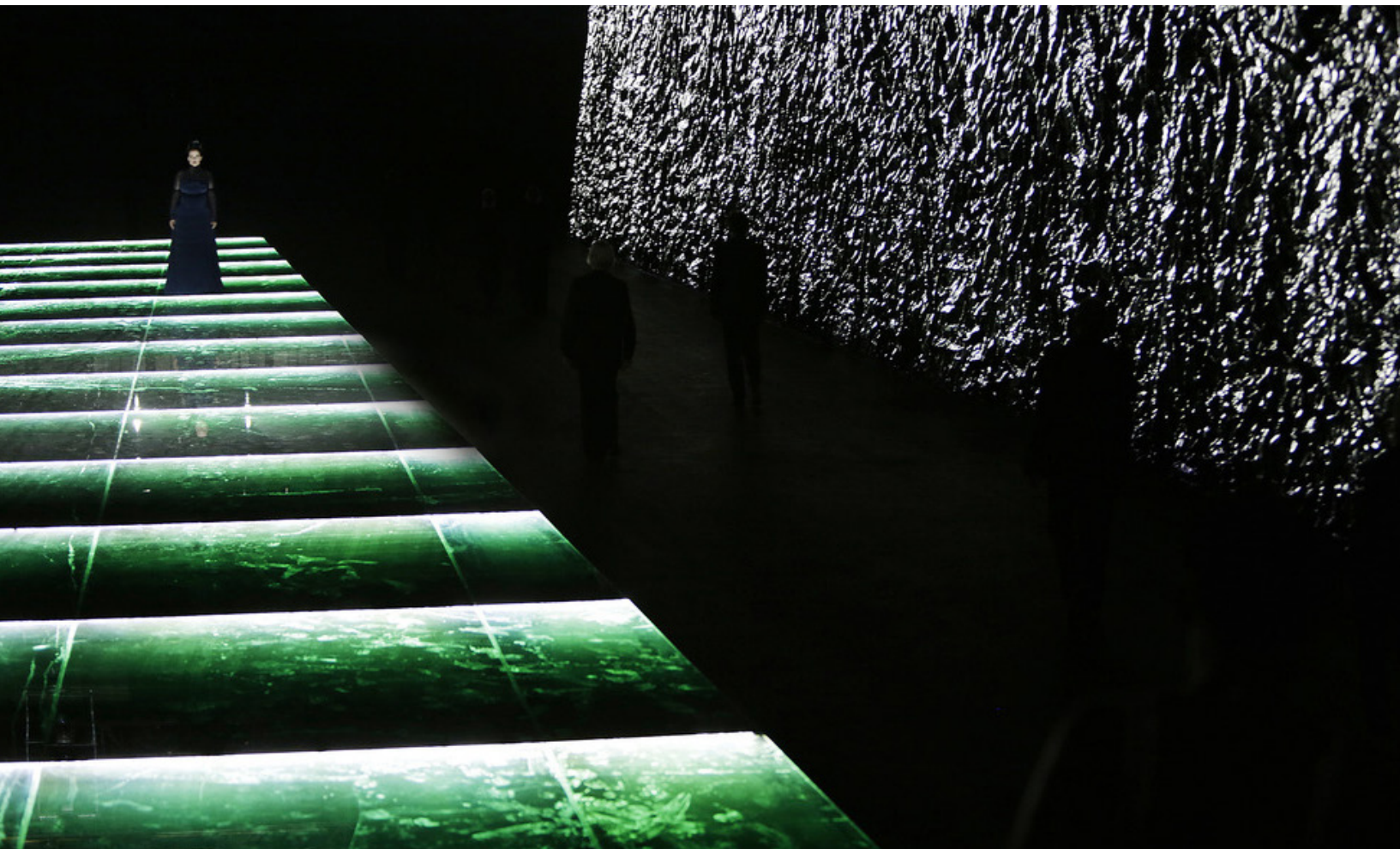
Lemi Ponifasio, *Standing in Time*, Festival d'Avignon 2017, Avignon, France



Lemi Ponifasio, *Die Gabe Der Kinder*, Theater Der Welt 2017, Hamburg, Germany



Lemi Ponifasio, *I AM*, Festival d'Avignon 2017, Avignon, France



Lemi Ponifasio, *PROMETHEUS (Orff)*, Ruhrtriennale 2012, Ruhr-area, Germany



Lemi Ponifasio, *Birds with Skymirrows*, Edinburgh International Festival 2010, Edinburgh, UK