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WRITTEN BY JIMMY GRIMA AND THE RUBBERBODIES COLLECTIVE

SPAZJU KREATTIV THEATRE
St James Cavalier, Valletta

8-13 JUNE 2021



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www.kreattivita.org



Committed to being an evolving cast of contributors, artist duo Ira Melkonyan and Jimmy Grima install temporary collaborative structures to create and foster performative situations on the Island of Malta, the Netherlands, and elsewhere. RUBBERBODIES began as a reason to come together and developed as a theatre and art group. Initiated by Rebecca Camilleri and Jimmy Grima, on the island of Malta, in 2009.

www.rubberbodiescollective.com

MALTA'S EXPLOSIVE NATURE

Daniel Azzopardi | Artistic Director



As we brace ourselves to reopen our theatre following the latest shutdown, Spazju Kreattiv will be presenting a new co-production with *the rubberbodies collective* which marks the return of the company to our theatre after a long hiatus.

Identifying what makes us 'Maltese' is a conundrum which has been ruminating within Malta's communities for centuries; a question that gained even greater weight following Malta's independence from the British.

In this latest production, the creatives take on the task to explore such notions through an exercise in shared memory which is brought forth through personal anecdotes and archival research.

By transforming the performance area into an intimate workshop space, audiences are transported on a journey of social discovery initiated through the exploration of firework-making culture in the remote village of Qrendi. By blending oral history and documented material, the production takes insightful information like the repercussions of Fifla's use as target practice by the British Forces, the meticulous process of creating petards and familial aspects in secluded community life to seek aspects of the so called 'Malteseness'.

What starts as an archival story of history and popular tradition slowly evolves in the performer's personal exploration of the explosive nature of Maltese men and how 'masculinity' is defined in today's society.

Paradoxically, this search for an explosive element in local personas happens in a silent and slow burning ritual of sounds and voices. This choreographed soundscape ends up becoming the central protagonist of the performance, metaphorically 'lighting the fuse' for audience-members to explore their own personas and identities.

In the end, while the latest closure due to the pandemic has caused further havoc to our programme we persevered in our plans to support our collaborators' projects. As a case in point, this venture which has taken the best of two years to research and develop had its fair share of difficulties. Now that we are finally presenting it, we hope that you will enjoy the experience whilst appreciating the fundamental role theatre and the arts have to play in the present predicament of society.



CONCEPT NOTE

When I was a child, there was hearsay that fishermen and fireworks makers were salvaging unexploded bombs from the military target practices on Filfla and extracting explosives (gelignite, TNT, cordite) from inside them. I always found it compelling that fireworks makers had found a way to recycle bombs that were initially meant for destruction and to turn their contents into poetry in the skies. In my childhood, the bangs in the festa could very well have been composed with the gelignite from

the bombs that had accumulated around Filfla over the decades.

Based on this idea, my curiosity for the craft of fireworks, the history of Filfla, and my interest in cross-generational memory processes, I began to investigate the diverse occurrences and meanings of explosions in Maltese society. In the past year, I researched the National Archives of Malta and conducted interviews with fireworks makers, relatives and friends about their memories of Filfla and the festa.

In the course of these conversations, other related themes emerged, for example, suggesting an exploration of the figure of the raġel kwiet (a quiet man or a man of few words) as well as the emotionally charged silences (kwiet) that precede explosions and that forbearingly act as the background for the loudest bangs. Since the protagonists in the field of my investigation mostly happen to be men, this work also became a reflection on the contradicting and changing local standards of masculinity/manliness.

As a result of this investigative-artistic process, *Kaxxa infernali*: Explosions manifests as a laboratory of explosive materials and memories. Between the reflections of a disparate chorus of men and an iconic auntie, the performance unfolds a historical topography of explosions – military, ritual, artistic, criminal – from bombs to fireworks to bombs – right up to the present. It is an invitation to closely listen to the sounds and voices of this shifting landscape – as if it were a slowly burning fuse.



Jimmy Grima performing Kaxxa Infernali: Explosions during a rehearsal at Spazju Kreattiv Theatre, Valletta, Malta, May 2021.

Photos by Elisa von Brockdorff

Santa Lucija
TNT
30-Sep-1983

ARTIST BIO

Jimmy Grima

Jimmy Grima is an artist-curator and holds an MA in Theatre from Das Theatre in Amsterdam. His trans-disciplinary practise is concerned with the politics of memory and archiving. Deeply interested in the disappearance of local and undocumented knowledge, he has a great affinity for the relationship between humans and nature.

Originally from Malta, where nature and her ghosts are frequently intertwined with daily life, Jimmy is now based between Malta and Amsterdam. He finds it striking how nature in the Netherlands has been controlled and adapted to the human scale.



Through remembrances, myths and scientific data, Jimmy tries to find histories, stories and details that reconnect humans to their environment.

Jimmy is an associate artist working with Malta's national theatre company, Teatru Malta, and also the founder of the rubberbodies collective. Rubberbodies began in 2009 as a way of bringing creatives together, and subsequently developed as a theatre and art group.

As an ever-evolving cast of contributors, rubberbodies continues to foster collaboration, community engagement and performative situations on the Maltese islands and elsewhere. Jimmy's desire to bring people and organisations together has also borne fruit in the form of other structured and ongoing frameworks such as Warehouse No. 8, and hope for prosperity. Jimmy is currently supported by 3Package Deal from Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst and Bureau Broedwoningen. With this support, he is researching the notion of water and how it has been tamed by humans in his adopted home of the Netherlands. However, with his roots still deep in the soil of his Mediterranean homeland, he is concurrently exploring the topic of explosions in Malta, drawing parallels between religious and ritual bombs (the fireworks of the Maltese festas) and historical and political bombings.

Having created past works involving the Earth, the winds and birds, it seems the stories of fire and water are to be balanced for the coming year.

CREATIVE TEAM

CONCEPT AND CREATION

Jimmy Grima and the rubberbodies collective

TEXT

Jimmy Grima and Joachim Robbrecht

DRAMATURGY

Maria Rößler

VOICES

Carmen Ellul (auntie)
Saver Ellul (uncle)
Godfrey Farrugia (fireworks master)
Choir of Men

SET DESIGN

Adrian Mamo

FIREWORK PROPS

Godfrey Farrugia

AUDIO RESTORATION

Mario Sammut

LIGHTS AND VISUALS

Jimmy @Tiny Island Studio

STAGE MANAGER

Adrian Mamo

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Julia Camilleri

HERO IMAGE

Ira Brand

TYPOGRAPHY

Jimmy Grima @Tiny Island Studio

FOR “FILFLA LAMENT” O.S.T

Lyrics

Jimmy Grima and Joachim Robbrecht

Guitars

Steve Delia

Voice

Mariele Zammit

SPECIAL THANKS

Fireworks licensee Lawrence Schembri
Ornithologist Benjamin Metzger

THANKS

Michael Grima, Cheyenne Stutzriem, Jon Mallia, Mark Camilleri, Sean Decelis, Mark Anthony Falzon, Noah Fabri, Dennis Pullicino from Transient Lights and Sound, and the St Philip Fireworks Factory, especially fireworks masters Mark Ciantar, Jason Vella, Philip Zammit, Antoine Micallef, Antoine Grima, Joseph Borg and Twanny Borg.

RESEARCH

RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Sean Decelis

TRANSCRIPTIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Julia Camilleri

ANTHROPOLOGICAL ADVISOR

Mark Anthony Falzon

ARTISTIC ADVISOR

Florian Malzacher

INTERVIEWED

Carmen Ellul
Saver Ellul
Godfrey Farrugia

SOURCES

Times of Malta Archive

National Archives

A Study of Newspaper Coverage Reporting Improvised Explosive Devices Incidents in the Maltese Islands, by Shanice Schembri, University of Malta, 2019

PRODUCTION

THE RUBBERBODIES COLLECTIVE

CREATIVE PRODUCER

Jimmy Grima

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

Stephanie Bonnici
Nicole Blackman

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Ira Melkonyan

A special thanks to all the Spazju Kreattiv staff who worked on this production.

A co-production of Spazju Kreattiv and the rubberbodies collective. With

the kind support of the German-Maltese Circle and the Goethe Institute.



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