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BAM 2014 Next Wave Festival #Skymirrors

Birds With Skymirrors

Lemi Ponifasio
MAU

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House
Nov 19—22 at 7:30pm
Running time: one hour and 30 minutes, no intermission

Concept, set design, choreography, and direction by Lemi Ponifasio
Lighting design by Helen Todd

With
Ioane Papalii
Teataki Tamango
Kelemete Fu’a
Arikita Tentau
Bainrebu Tonganibeia
Tebau Utiata
Maereke Teteka
Kasina Campbell
Rosie TeRauawhea Belvie
Ria Te Uira Paki
Ofati Tangaroa

Season Sponsor:

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Support for the Howard Gilman Signature Artist Series provided by The Howard Gilman Foundation

Leadership support for dance at BAM provided by The Harkness Foundation for Dance

Major support for dance at BAM provided by The SHS Foundation
PRODUCTION CREDITS

SOUND

Compositions by Russel Walder, Richard Nunns, Justin Redding, Marc Chesterman, Sam Hamilton

Soundscape with Lake and River by Douglas Lilburn

Live recording—two-minute excerpt from Requiem by Lemi Ponifasio, Lincoln Center (2008)
With thanks to Mere Boynton, Richard Nunns, and Marc Chesterman

Sound Operator Sam Hamilton
Head of Light Kristof Stevens
Head of Stage Danny Hones
Technical & Light Director Helen Todd
Executive Director Susana Lei’ataua

PRODUCTION: MAU
Co-production: Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Theater der Welt 2010 RUHR, spielzeit'europa Berliner Festspiele, Wiener Festwochen, KVS Brussels, Holland Festival, Mercat de les Flors Barcelona, DeSingel Antwerp, New Zealand International Arts Festival

BIRDS WITH SKYMIRRORS PERFORMANCE HISTORY
World Premiere: July 8, 2010, Theater der Welt 2010 RUHR, Germany
Théâtre de la Ville, Paris, France | Berliner Festspiele, Berlin, Germany | Mercat de les Flors, Barcelona, Spain | Le Maillon, Strasbourg, France | DeSingel, Antwerp, Belgium | Royal Flemish Theatre KVS, Brussels, Belgium | Helsinki Festival, Finland | Dansens Hus, Stockholm, Sweden | Festival Cervantino, Mexico | NZ International Arts Festival, New Zealand | Holland Festival, Netherlands | Edinburgh International Festival, UK | Novel Hall for Performing Arts, Taipei, Taiwan | Onassis Cultural Centre, Athens, Greece | Romaeuropa Festival, Rome, Italy | Festival Santiago a Mil, Santiago, Chile | Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia | National Arts Centre, Ottawa, Canada | Festival Transamériques, Montreal, Canada | DancelInversion, Moscow, Russia
DIRECTOR’S NOTE

Most of the performers of MAU and in particular in this work are from low lying atolls of the Moana that are already experiencing disastrous consequences of climate change. Many years ago I decided to create a response to this. There have been many scientific arguments, summits, and predictions. Radical climate change is not an apocalypse about to happen. It is already here.

While working on the island of Tarawa, I encountered birds carrying strips of video tapes in their mouths, dangling like liquid mirrors in the sky. It was both a vision of beauty and the spirit of death. Are they the souls of ancestors in final migration? I thought about the end of time. I thought about the Book of Revelation. I thought about the kumulipo [creation chant]. I began to chant to myself like the old mothers of the village. I thought about The Conference of the Birds and The Birth of Venus. I thought about the polluted oceans and poisoned rivers that we leave for our children. Dying rivers and dying species means dying humanity. It is our connectedness rotting away. Humanity is human caring.

I thought about what could be the last dance on Earth? I can hear the call weaving our genealogy with stone, sky, tree, and sea. I can feel the pulse of the orator begging us to the eternal present.

I have prepared Birds With Skymirrors not as an environmental lecture but as a karanga [a call to bind together the living and the dead], a genealogical prayer, a ceremony, a poetic space—a life reflection as a member of the human species sharing Earth’s process with all sentient beings.

—Lemi Ponifasio
LEMI PONIFASIO

In Auckland in 1995, theater artist Lemi Ponifasio founded the MAU, an ensemble of community members and artists from all over the world. MAU is a Samoan word that means a declaration to the truth of a matter or revolution as an effort to transform.

In his artistic universe, Ponifasio orients the modern individual towards other dimensions of consciousness by way of the decelerated rhythm of his strict aesthetic, making use of striking images, movement, and the dynamic interplay of light and darkness. A pioneer on the international frontier of dance and performance, his theater vision transcends the barriers between genres and cultures and transmits the universal power of art. Lemi Ponifasio presents his productions in such places as the Festival d’Avignon, Ruhrtriennale, Lincoln Center, Edinburgh International Festival, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), London’s Southbank, Holland Festival, Santiago a Mil Chile, Vienna Festival, and Berliner Festspiele.

Ponifasio’s most recent work, I AM, premiered at the Avignon Festival this year followed by seasons at the Edinburgh International Festival and at the Ruhrtriennale, Germany. I AM was commissioned to commemorate the First World War’s 100th anniversary. His other creations include Birds With Skymirrors, a response to the disappearing Pacific Islands, homeland to most of his dancers and devastated by climate change; Tempest: Without A Body, concerning our collective paralysis in the face of truth, symbolized by increased and unlawful use of state power post 9/11; Le Savali: Berlin, confronting the imperial city of Berlin with its own communities, the young generation of immigrant families in search of belonging and constrained by threat of deportation; The Crimson House, probing the nature of power and subjectivity in our panoptic state—a world that sees all and no longer forgets; and Stones In Her Mouth, a work with Maori women as community leaders and transmitters of a life force through oratory, ancient chants, choral work, and dance. In 2012 Ponifasio staged the epic opera Prometheus by Carl Orff for the Ruhrtriennale.
KUMULIPO
At the time when the earth became hot
At the time when the heavens turned about
At the time when the sun was darkened
To cause the moon to shine
The time of the rise of the Pleiades
The slime, this was the source of the earth
The source of the darkness that made darkness
The source of the night that made night
The intense darkness, the deep darkness
Darkness of the sun, darkness of the night
Nothing but night The night gave birth

CLEARING THE PATHWAY
I call to the light
I call to the darkness
The creator who dwells in the nothingness arise
So begins the world of light
Mother Earth and Father Sky are separated
The life essence, the power, the awesomeness, the sacredness of the gods
Listen to the voice of this woman calling
Come, come, come our ancestors
Welcome, welcome, welcome
Join, gather, and bind
Greetings, greetings, greetings to you all.

TREE OF SINA
An eel in love with a human girl
Of discarded genitals I was born
Pure and unbruised
You aroused me, then raped me
Your eyes wide open

ARCHITECTS OF HEAVEN
Listen to the cry of this bird
Its song weaves Interwoven above
Interwoven below Interwoven outside
Interwoven within Heard in the night
Heard in the day The woven flesh

WORLD OF LIGHT
Towards us, the unearthly Towards us, the ancient
Towards us, an entwine ment of the gods
The life principle rises
Join, gather, and bind
The post, earth pillar
The post, sky pillar
Pound, strike, the gales, the storms steepen, pulsate
Project upwards, project downwards
Listen the night, listen the day
Come forth into the break of day
DEATH OF BEAUTY
Turtles for the narrow stream—suffocation
Whales for the broad stream—disorientation
The seaweed escaping the sea
Fleeing birds without feathers
Venus is another whore
Light slips into Darkness
Earth and water evaporated
Man enters
God cannot enter

THE EYES OF WOMEN
Behold I live
Blood bone flesh breath
Tears split the sky
Covering nature in disarray
Spirit un-flown
One giant leap is one small step

SITTING PRAYER DANCE
Come bring your dead, your remembrances
We lament and greet them
The departed who have become stars in the sky
Traverse the sacred pathway to the departing place of the spirits
Paddle your canoe, to the home of your ancestors
The backbone of the land, the lowering of night
The waning of the moon, return to the call of Hinenui Te Po
The night of turning towards
The night of turning away
The night without end
Rest peacefully in your long sleep
Farewell
To the living, we welcome you

DUST OF ANCESTORS
Join the bones together.
Join the blood together.
Join the flesh together.
Join the sinews together.
Join them so they will be firm.
Join them so they will hold fast.
It is the heavens which join.
It is the heavens which bind together.
It is the earth which strengthens and supports.
Heavens, embrace us. Earth, embrace us.
What you embrace, is indeed embraced.
What you cherish is truly cherished.
What you stretch out and join stays stretched out and joined.
There is a world above
There is a world below
Night given over to the spirits,
Night given over to those long since dead.
A message of peace has been sent to your many above to your many below.
Your heart, my heart. You give me your dying heart.
I give you my living heart. Cross over to life! Rise up above!

**FINAL PRAYER**

Listen carefully!
Alert your senses to the wise counsel of the ancestors
Gifted from one generation to another.
Pluck the center shoot of the flax plant
And where will the bellbird go, girl?
Bereft, soaring towards the heavens Inland and seaward
When the springs are depleted Another will overflow
When the springs are depleted Another will overflow
The bird that feeds on the miro berry belongs to the forest
But they who feast on knowledge shall attain the world
Children—the breakers of calabashes
With your contribution and my contribution
The people shall be nourished and sustained.
A man of his word speaks only once
A person who tramples on guests has dirtied their own house
A pigeon in the home
A parrot in public.
The flounder does not return after fleeing
The sweet potato does not speak of its own sweetness
One thing within, yet another without
The corners of a house can be clearly seen
Yet the corners of the heart cannot
Behold the life principle
Behold the death principle
Rise, Ascend