

LAMAMA
EXPERIMENTAL
THEATRE CLUB **60**

in association with

Qendra Multimedia in Prishtina, Theater Atelje 212 in
Belgrade, and My Balkans in Belgrade/New York

presents

Balkan Bordello: The Saga of a Balkan Family



Ellen Stewart Theatre
66 East 4th Street, NYC, 10003
March 31 - April 10, 2022

Balkan Bordello: The Saga of a Balkan Family

A trans-Atlantic theatrical project between
USA, Kosovo, and Serbia

Written by Jeton Neziraj
Directed by Blerta Neziraj

With:

Onni Johnson*, Svetozar Cvetković, George Drance*,
Eugene the Poogene*, Valois Mickens*, Kushtrim Hoxha,
Mattie Barber-Bockelman*, Ivan Mihailović,
Matt Nasser*, Verona Koxha

Composer: Gabriele Marangoni

Costumes: Gabriel Berry*

Stage Design: Marija Kalabić

Choreographer: Gjergj Prevazi

Visual and Light Concept: Nico de Rooij

Dramaturges: Dimitrije Kokanov, Zishan Ugurlu*

Producer of the Balkan Bordello: Beka Vučo

Production Coordinator: Maud Dinand

Lighting: Yann Perregaux

Assistant Director: Gëzim Hasani

Translator: Alexandra Channer

Production Manager: Kushtrim Sheremeti

Technical Support: Mentor Berisha, Habib Krasniqi, Lulzim Rexha

Sound Design: Damiano Meacci / Tempo Reale

Assistant Costume Designers: Flaka Rustemi (Kosovo),
and Mona Damian (New York)

Video: Ilir Gjocaj

Photos by Ferdi Limani and Kushtrim Ternava

Members of the Great Jones Repertory Company

The show runs 90 minutes, no intermission

Balkan Bordello: The Saga of a Balkan Family is based on Aeschylus' trilogy *The Oresteia*. As an avatar of the modern world, Agamemnon returns triumphant from the battlefield, having reduced the enemy city to ashes. This is the bedrock of this play, which, with black humor, touches on the very fabric of the Balkan temperament, traces the morbidity of the human soul and highlights the stupidity and naiveté of an era being built on the foundations of violence, intolerance and hatred. The characters surrender to fate and nearly unconsciously fall into the trap of discontent and destruction. It's this vein of destruction that seduces as death seduces life. *Balkan Bordello* is an epic opera about traumatized societies that eat themselves. It confronts us with war as a machinery of destruction where life and normalcy capitulate in the face of humans' infidelities and evils.

Democracy cannot be taken for granted. The battle for it must be ongoing. Any fluctuation from this goal gives way to ghosts of war, abusers of power and autocrats who see the fate of the societies they rule as a game of Russian roulette. The same examples we had yesterday, we still have today. *Balkan Bordello* is an epic tale for the age of insanity we are currently living in.

La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club– New York, USA

La MaMa is dedicated to the artist and all aspects of the theatre. It is a creative home to artists and audiences from around the world, and a dynamic hub for risk-taking new performance. A vital part of New York City's cultural fabric, La MaMa has a worldwide reputation for producing theatre, dance, music, and performance art that defies form and embraces all identities. Founded in 1961 by theatre legend Ellen Stewart, La MaMa is the only original Off-Off-Broadway venue still in operation. Ellen established La MaMa as a haven for underrepresented artists to experiment with new work, without the pressures of commercial success. Today, it maintains an environment of uncensored creative freedom, where artists of all backgrounds and identities can develop work that pushes the boundaries of what is possible onstage.

To date, La MaMa has supported more than 5,000 productions, featuring 150,000 artists from 70 nations. In 2018, The American Theatre Wing presented La MaMa with the Regional Theatre Tony Award, recognizing us as "the influential company that helped give birth to the Off-Off-Broadway movement." La MaMa has also been honored with more than 30 Obie Awards, and dozens of Drama Desk, Bessie, and Villager Awards. Its international network extends worldwide. La MaMa has presented the U.S. debuts of many artists, such as Min Soo Ahn, Peter Brook, Tan Dun, Cecile Guidote-Alvarez, Tadeusz Kantor, Branko Milicevic, Kazuo Ohno, Andrei Serban, Shuji Terayama, Tokyo Kids Brother, Duk-Hyung Yoo and Belarus Free Theatre.

Qendra Multimedia, Prishtina, Kosovo

Qendra Multimedia is a cultural organization based in Prishtina, Kosovo. Since 2020 has its own theater (Oda Theater) with 200 seats, in the city center of Prishtina. Its main focus is in contemporary theater and literature. It is considered to be as one of the most interesting and provocative theatre companies in South Eastern Europe. Performances produced by Qendra Multimedia have shown to be provocative, stirring up debate with the public. Qendra has co-produced work with various theater companies in Europe and in the USA, including, with Volksbühne Berlin, La MaMa New York, National Theater of Kosovo ect. Qendra's work has been featured widely in the international press, including in The Guardian (UK), in the New York Times (USA), Der Spiegel (Germany), La Repubblica (Italy), The Stage (UK), Los Angeles Times Times (USA), Theater Heute (Germany), Danas (Serbia), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany), American Theatre (USA), Der Standard (Austria), Linköping (Sweden), Hystrio (Italy), Cassandre (France) ect. Our performances has been touring all over Europe and in the USA.

Atelje 212, Belgrade – Serbia

The theatre "Atelje 212" was founded by a group of actors, directors and writers in 1956 as the theatre of new avant-garde drama. The appearance of Atelje 212 is a significant milestone in Belgrade's theatrical life. The studio was established as a theater where a new avant-garde drama would be played, of great influence in Europe at that time. They want to create a theater that will be organizationally different from the existing ones. Atelje 212 is among the most visited theaters and most expensive in Belgrade. As of 2018, it has 34 permanent actors and actresses, and like in the past, actors from other Belgrade's theaters come to play.

My Balkans, New York – Belgrade

The guiding purpose in forming My Balkans is to support and encourage people to build a better, more just, and open democratic society in the Balkans and South Eastern Europe using arts, culture, and education. My Balkans mission is multifold: to develop and fund projects, programs, and activities in the region; to raise social awareness; to build relationships and alliances with individuals and organizations; and to support societies committed to justice and equality. All this, in order to promote freedom of expression, social openness, artistic excellence and educational advancement. The arts, culture, and education are pillars of a democratic society that play an essential role in human development. Actions in the sphere of arts, culture and education help create safe spaces for free

expression, exchanges, and mutual understanding and contribute to social equality, cohesion, innovation, and change. These pillars of democratic society can also be a powerful platform for tackling today's key social challenges, due to their capacity to elicit powerful cognitive and emotional responses and to promote conflict prevention and resolution. Arts and culture can truly be transformative, sparking hope and imagination, and taking people on journeys of discovery and change. High quality artistic work can connect people in unexpected ways, building safe spaces for individuals to be themselves and to believe in a positive future, especially in times of conflict or post-conflict and different crises. My Balkans will employ various channels and innovative systems to encourage and expand philanthropy and charitable giving through identifying, coordinating, and streamlining the charitable processes while building a reliable infrastructure for the distribution of grants to places of need and/or in crisis.

About the author:

Jeton Neziraj is the Director of Qendra Multimedia, after serving as the Artistic Director of the National Theatre of Kosovo. He has written over 20 plays that have been staged (over 50 productions), translated and published in more than 15 languages. His plays have won numerous prizes and have been performed in theatre festivals throughout Europe. "...The plays [of Jeton Neziraj] are raucous, irreverent and absurdist. They invoke Ibsen, Molière and Kafka..." The Guardian wrote about his work. The German theatre magazine Theater der Zeit and the German Radio Deutschlandfunk Kultur have described him as 'Kafka of the Balkans', while Los Angeles Times called him "a world- class playwright who challenges our complacency at every twist and turn". He is winner of 2020 Europe Culture Award.

About the director:

Blerta Neziraj has been directing plays in Kosovo and Internationally, and her productions toured extensively abroad (Vidy/Lausanne, Piccolo Theater/Milano, Volkstheater/Vienna. Volksbühne/Berlin...). She is a Lincoln Center Theatre Directors Lab alumnae (2018) and in Spring 2019, she recreated 55 Shades of Gay at La MaMa in New York. She is an award-winning theatre director (including "The best directing for 2020", in Kosovo) and for her work she received great local and international reviews. The Guardian described her as "one of the country's leading directors.", while The Stage described her shows as "uncompromising... necessary... bold and powerful".

About Great Jones Repertory* Formerly under the direction of La MaMa's late founder, Ellen Stewart, Great Jones Repertory Company is an OBIE-winning company known for their experimental productions of Greek tragedy that employ classical elements, unique visual, design and performance styles, world music, and movement. Started in 1972 by Ellen Stewart, Andrei Serban, and Elizabeth Swados, GJRC is an intergenerational, racially and ethnically diverse ensemble of artists, actors, designers, and musicians whose landmark works remain a significant part of La MaMa's history, most notably, *Fragments Of A Greek Trilogy* (1972), which ushered in a new movement in American ensemble theatre and was noted as one of the most brilliant works of its time. Great Jones Repertory Company's numerous New York productions and international tours include *Medea*, *Antigone*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Electra*, *Mythos Oedipus*, *And Dionysus: Filius Dei*, *Angels Of Swedenborg*, *The Trojan Women Project Festival*, *Pylade*, *Panorama*, and *Fragments Of a Greek Trilogy*.

CAST

Onni Johnson* (Clytemnestra) is a performer and teacher. She has worked on, off, and Off-Off Broadway in New York City, as well as internationally in over 30 countries. Onni is an original member of LaMaMa's Great Jones Rep, with whom she has toured extensively (including Bitef Festival, Belgrade, in 1975). Starting in 2014, Onni has been the Project Director for The Trojan Women Project (<http://thetrojanwomenproject.org>), establishing workshops, residencies, and productions in Guatemala, Cambodia, Kosovo (FemArt Festival 2018 in Pristina, Prizren, and North Mitrovica); at MindtheFact Festival in Greece (<https://www.mindthefact.gr/en/projects/>); with the NewStar Drama Group in Kisii, Kenya; and most recently directed a portion of Little Amal's Walk, a multi-national arts event drawing attention to the world-wide immigration crisis (<https://www.walkwithamal.org/events/birds-and-a-choir/>). She has taught experimental theater and performance on the Navajo reservation in Arizona, for the New York City School system, at Princeton University, and with the City University of New York.

Verona Koxha (Cassandra) is a passionate, experienced, and formally trained actress. Bringing forth enthusiasm, a strong work ethic, and an unrelenting desire to entertain. Past works include: *Ana dhe Zefi*, *Surprise*, *Fifty/five shades of gay*, *Blue room*, *Spring awakening* and *Balkan Bordello*. Film work includes: *Plum in the throat*, and *Wooden sword*.

George Drance* (Agamemnon) A proud member of Great Jones for almost twenty years, he toured with *Fragments of a Greek Trilogy*, and as a key collaborator on many of Ellen Stewart's original pieces. With La MaMa, he has toured throughout Europe and Asia, working on several of Ellen Stewart's original pieces and performing in the Andrei Serban/Elizabeth Swados' epic *Fragments of a Greek Trilogy*. He is currently Artistic Director of the critically acclaimed Magis Theatre Company, praised by the *NY Times* for its vision, skill, and daring. (magistheatre.org) Magis actor training has been presented at workshops, schools, and professional venues both nationally and internationally. Film credit include *Solidarity* and *The Light of Eons*. Television credits include Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* with Trevor Noah. He currently serves as Artist-in-residence at Fordham University Lincoln Center.

eugene the poogene* (Orestes) was an astronaut before he took up performing and was instrumental in the setting up of space station STS-111 (along with other members of Expedition Three), now famous for their work on the Biomass Production System. in his spare time, he likes to sit in the dark and repeat the word "larvae". eugene the poogene loves ellen stewart and the la mama family. he also loves all of his beautiful friends, family, directors, and teachers so much it's nauseating.. thank you to the byootiful city of prishtina. thank you jeton and blerta and the rest of the company for believing in me. i am nothing but a cold fart without you. proud to rep the great jones rep since 2001.

Valois Mickens* (Esme) is an original member of the Great Jones Repertory Company since appearing in Andre Serban's and Elizabeth Swados' *Fragments of a Trilogy*. She is noted for her roles as Cassandra, Clytemnestra and Chresothemis. Valois has been acting since 1970 and is a member of SAG AFTRA. She hails from, our nation's capital, Washington, D.C. She originally came to New York in '69 to be a fashion illustrator, but met Ellen Stewart and began a career at LaMaMa Experimental Theatre Club. She has worked extensively with director Andrei Serban and worked with him as assistant director at the National Theater of Romania. Valois is an Elder member of the Great Jones Rep. One film in her credits, *Fender L'Indian* won best film at the festival of Toulon, France.

Svetozar Cvetković (Aegisthus) Completed his degree in 1980 in acting at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade. That year he joined the ensemble of the Atelje 212 Theatre and is still there as an actor and was general manager between 1997 – 2010. During that period, he produced 78 different productions in the same theater. However, he participated as an actor in more than 70 productions during his acting career not just in Theater Atelje 212, but in many others in country and abroad. He had

roles in more than 100 feature films, TV series, TV productions, mostly produced in ex-Yugoslavia, Serbia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia, some of them produced abroad, France, Austria, Sweden, Morocco, England. In the past 40 years awarded for his acting on all major film and theatre festivals in Yugoslavia, Serbia and abroad. At present he works as actor and film producer, and is a member of the EFA (European film academy).

Kushtrim Hoxha (Pylades) recently appeared as a guest star in the TV series The Americans (FX), Blue Bloods (CBS), Elementary (CBS), Person of Interest (CBS). He has performed at The Old Globe in Othello, The Winter's Tale, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, and The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, Tartuffe, and Measure for Measure. He has appeared in Rock 'n' Roll, King Lear, Sun Monkey, The Glass Menagerie, and Hamlet (National Theater of Kosovo), Patriotic Hypermarket (Bitef Theater) and Yue Madeline Yue (Multimedia Center, Kosovo and Volkstheater, Vienna). Kushtrim has also performed in numerous theater festivals in Columbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Italy, Sweden, Serbia, South Africa, Macedonia, and Kosovo and has appeared in more than 70 episodes of famous Kosovo sitcom Familja Moderne. Kushtrim Hoxha holds his Master of Fine Arts degree from The Old Globe / University of San Diego master program, he also studied at Kosovo's University of Prishtina/ Academy of Dramatic Arts and received a B.A. in Theater Performance from Greensboro College in North Carolina.

Ivan Mihailović (Solider) graduated in acting at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, in the class of Professor Dragan Petrović, in 2011. He completed his master's studies in acting at the same university in 2012. He first stepped on the stage of the Atelier 212 theater in 2013 with the play "Waiting for Godot", where he continues to work and create with various directors from the region and the world. He will become a permanent member of this theater in 2021. Apart from Atelier 212, he also works in other theaters in Belgrade (Zvezdara Theater, Boško Buha Theater, Yugoslav Drama Theater, etc.). In addition to acting, he is engaged in various dance practices (tango, contemporary dance, contact improvisation...), and graduated from the summer school of dance and music theater in Barcelona. He is the winner in the dance television format "Dancing with the stars". He has performed at numerous theater festivals in the region, but also outside the borders of his country (Canada, France, the Czech Republic, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, etc.). At the festival "Days of Zoran Radmilović" in Zaječar, he won the Zoran's Mustache Award, an award for the actor of the evening. He is active in television and film.

Matt Nasser* (Bartender/Lawyer) has been a member of The Great Jones Repertory Company at La MaMa Theater for the past 15 years. Primarily an actor and singer in New York's downtown theatre scene, his other credits include productions by The Deconstructive Theatre Project, Yara Arts, The Bruce High Quality Foundation, The Inconvenience Store and the Big Art Group. Next Up: He will be performing in "Broke House" with the Big Art Group at the Venice Biennale! Matt graduated with a BFA in acting/directing from Boston University. @mattnasser on Instagram, snapchat and Twitter.

Mattie Barber-Bockelman* (Electra) is a performer, creator, and "handywoman" of theatre. She currently works with CultureHub, a global art and technology center based at La MaMa. She recently performed with the Great Jones Repertory Company in the 2019 revival of The Trojan Women directed by Andrei Serban. With collaborator Teresa Cruz, she has created performance works such as Ride the Wave at The Vortex, Timbuktu, USA with Sleeping Weazel at Boston Playwrights' Theatre, and The Birds with Juncture Theatre in Florence, South Carolina. She has trained with Double Edge Theatre, LAByrinth Theatre, Michael Chekhov School, Strasberg Institute, and La MaMa Umbria's Symposium on Theater for Social Change and Community Engagement with Belarus Free Theatre. She studied Theatre and Human Rights at Connecticut College where she received awards for Theater and Activism and Feminist Collective Action.

Balkan Bordello is made possible by the Trust for Mutual Understanding and the Howard Gilman Foundation. Additional support by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

Donors who contributed to the production and U.S. tour include: Rockefeller Brother Fund, Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, European Fund for the Balkans, Open Society Foundation Serbia, Olof Palme International Center, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, European Union in Kosovo, The Dutch Embassies in Prishtina and in Belgrade, Municipality of Prishtina, Municipality of Belgrade, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Kosovo, and ProtoPharma Beograd.



**A full program with information on
this production can be found on the
Balkan Bordello
page of the La MaMa website.**

**In addition you can scan the
QR code Poster located in the
theatre lobby for access to the
digital program.**

LA MAMA



RESTORE A BUILDING REMAKE A WORLD



Rendering: 74 East 4th St.

La MaMa's historic, landmark building at 74 East 4th Street is undergoing an urgently needed complete renovation and restoration to preserve the historic façade, create building-wide ADA accessibility, and provide much needed performance, exhibition and community space for decades to come.

La MaMa, founded by Ellen Stewart in 1961, has been on east 4th Street since 1967. La MaMa embraces every person in its community and is legendary as the place where new artists of all nations, cultures, races, and identities are given opportunities. It is the place where art begins.

To learn more about the renovation, or to make a donation please visit www.lamama.org/remakeaworld

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March 31 - April 10, 2022
Ellen Stewart Theatre

The Drag Seed
March 31 - April 10, 2022
The Downstairs

Tiffany Mills Company:
Homing
April 14 - 16, 2022
Ellen Stewart Theatre

Shared Evening: Johnnie Cruise Mercer
+ Jesse Zaritt
April 15 - 17, 2022
The Downstairs

Gerald Casel Dance:
Not About Race Dance
April 22 - 24, 2022
Ellen Stewart Theatre

Shared Evening: Pele Bauch +
Marina Celandier
April 22 - 24, 2022
The Downstairs

COMING SOON

Secret Journey: Stop Calling Them
Dangerous #3 - Panel
April 23, 2022
47 Great Jones Street

Compañía Cuerpo de Indias: Flowers for
Kazuo Ohno (and Leonard Cohen)
April 28 - 29, 2022
Ellen Stewart Theatre

John Scott Dance: Cloud Study
April 29 - May 1, 2022
The Downstairs

La MaMa Kids Dance Workshop
with Marina Celandier
April 30, 2022
The Downstairs

Valetango Company:
Confianza (Trust)
April 30 - May 1, 2022
Ellen Stewart Theatre

La MaMa Remake a World Gala
May 5, 2022
Ellen Stewart Theatre