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Press Release

Opera

## ***The Murderess***

**Giorgos Koumendakis**

Libretto: **Yannis Svolos**, based on Alexandros Papadiamantis' "social novel" of the same title

**3, 5, 28 & 30 December 2021** | Starts at: 19.30 (Sunday at 18.30)

Stavros Niarchos Hall of the Greek National Opera

Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center

Conductor: **Vassilis Christopoulos** | Director: **Alexandros Efklidis**

Featuring **Mary-Ellen Nesi** in the title role

**A Greek National Opera triumph and a landmark work in Greece's contemporary music landscape returns to the stage. *The Murderess* –an opera by GNO Artistic Director Giorgos Koumendakis that premiered in 2014 to great artistic and box office success– is coming to the Stavros Niarchos Hall on 3, 5, 28 and 30 December 2021. The libretto by Yannis Svolos is based on the novella of the same title by Alexandros Papadiamantis. Vassilis Christopoulos conducts and Alexandros Efklidis directs, with Mary-Ellen Nesi in the title role. This production is made possible by a grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) [[www.SNF.org](http://www.SNF.org)] to enhance the Greek National Opera's artistic outreach.**

The 2014 **Giorgos Koumendakis** work *The Murderess* creates a startling musical world that marks an evolution in the composer's distinct personal idiom. His music makes no attempt to bring the historical setting of Papadiamantis' original work back to life; rather it seeks to bring the inner world of its lead character to life – to capture the psychological portrayal of Frangoyannoù. The opera score traces the Murderess' every step, at times baring the innermost workings of her mind, at others plunging into the dark and bleak windings of her soul. There are points where the boundless loneliness felt by Frangoyannoù reigns supreme, and others where her scorn breaks through to provide moments of emotional release within the charged plot. "*I let the music wander –to express the very psyche of Frangoyannoù freely, in an unforced way– so as to arrive at places that logic alone cannot reach,*" notes the composer. He goes on: "*I tried to close in on the hidden facets of a psychopathic (?), neurotic (?), forceful (?), domineering (?), undoubtedly complex character fleshed out by the sensational literary sensibilities of the superlative Papadiamantis. In fact, the dividing line between heroine and author very often melts away to leave but a single presence inside of me. Throughout the time I spent writing The Murderess, I tried to set aside all thought of her physical appearance, her age, her facial features, and instead focused my attentions on connecting with that mind which, as Papadiamantis wrote, 'soared'.*"

*The Murderess* can be considered a work of the Literaturoper genre as it is an opera based directly on a literary work. **Yannis Svolos**, who created the libretto, has distilled the storyline of *The Murderess* down to its essentials, while keeping the language of Papdiamantis pristine. Hadoula, known also as Frangoyannoù, is a put-upon middle-aged woman who has spent her entire life serving others – her parents and husband, her children and grandchildren. Now at the end of her tether, having grasped the difficulties and limitations faced by women in poor farming communities like her own, she comes to believe that her mission in life is to unburden the world of its girls. She starts by strangling her new-born granddaughter before going on a murder spree, smothering yet more girls. Fleeing the authorities through the mountains, Frangoyannoù decides to confess her crimes, but drowns in the sea while trying to reach the hermitage of Aghios Sostis (the Holy Saviour).

The directorial approach taken by **Alexandros Efklidis** seeks to capture the heroine's psyche in ways that are poetic. The production is a balancing act between the largeness of scale demanded by the presence of multiple choruses and a multitude of characters, and the smallness of scale that is Frangoyannoù's internal monologue. Alexandros Efklidis himself notes: *"This opera by Giorgos Koumendakis focuses on the character of the Murderess and, through the use of music, spotlights something that is very difficult to capture in a straightforward staging of the story: the mental landscape of the heroine – her very psyche. The challenge here was to capture this precise element, to bring Frangoyannoù's nightmarish world to life on stage. As a result, the opera unfolds as a monodrama, playing out from the highly subjective and disturbed perspective of its protagonist. Ultimately, Giorgos Koumendakis' The Murderess is a balance between large scale and small, making use of four choral ensembles and a large orchestra to render the subtle, innermost nuances of the heroine's state of mind, which is absolutely core to the action."*

The sets by **Petros Touloudis**, and his costumes (designed in collaboration with **Ioanna Tsami**), generate a dark, furtive, guilt-riven, and terrestrial world, where the "agonies" of Frangoyannoù enter into dialogue with the haunting natural landscapes of Skiathos island. A sense of Greekness, the expansive horizon – both are rendered on stage in a singular way. In Act II, during the hunt for Frangoyannoù, everything is turned on its head: rather than have the Murderess run for the mountains as Papdiamantis describes, the production delivers the exact opposite, with the Murderess standing perfectly still as the natural world spins around her, closes in on her, drowns her. The lighting design is by **Vinicio Cheli**.

**Vassilis Christopoulos** –the renowned maestro, and former Artistic Director of the Athens State Orchestra– conducts. Accompanying the **Greek National Opera Orchestra** are three solo musicians up on stage, as well as four choral ensembles. The male chorus, set at the back of the stage and acting as a basso continuo, focuses on the suffering inherent in human nature, while a large female chorus acts as a mirror of everyday life. A further small vocal ensemble, comprising four lamenting women, also performs choral music inspired by the polyphonic songs of Epirus. The **Greek National Opera Children's Chorus** plays the role of a Greek chorus-like group of children who fuel the fire of Frangoyannoù's criminal inclinations. **Agathangelos Georgakatos** is chorus master of the **GNO Chorus**, while **Konstantina Pitsiakou** is chorus mistress of the GNO Children's Chorus.

The exceptionally demanding title role is played by **Mary-Ellen Nesi**, a renowned Greek mezzo-soprano who has carved out an international career, performing more than 40 major roles at leading opera houses across Europe, North America, and Asia, while also forging an impressive discography of recordings. Appearing alongside her are a series of established and emerging Greek soloists, including **Anna Stylianaki**, **Tassos Apostolou**, **Myrto Bokolini**, **Vangelis Maniatis**, **Sophia Kyanidou**, **Fylli Georgiadou**, **Yannis Christopoulos**, **Yanni Yannissis**, **Nicholas Stefanou**, **Marilena Striftobola**, **Stelina Apostolopoulou**, **Miranda Makrynioti**, and **Giorgos Papadimitriou**.

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Stavros Niarchos Hall of the Greek National Opera – SNFCC

Conductor: **Vassilis Christopoulos**

Director: **Alexandros Efklidis**

Associate director: **Angela-Kleopatra Saroglou**

Sets: **Petros Touloudis**

Costumes: **Petros Touloudis – Ioanna Tsami**

Lighting: **Vinicio Cheli**

Chorus master: **Agathangelos Georgakatos**

Children's chorus mistress: **Konstantina Pitsiakou**

Frangoyannoù (The Murderess): **Mary-Ellen Nesi**

Maroussò: **Anna Stylianaki**

Ioassaf: **Tassos Apostolou**

Delcharò: **Myrto Bokolini**

Yannis Perivolàs: **Vangelis Maniatis**

Yannoù: **Sophia Kyanidou**

Xenoula's mother: **Fylli Georgiadou**

First police officer: **Yannis Christopoulos**

A magistrate: **Yanni Yannissis**

Second police officer / Assessor: **Nicholas Stefanou**

Kriniò: **Marilena Striftobola**

Toula: **Stelina Apostolopoulou**

Myrsouda: **Miranda Makrynioti**

A doctor: **Giorgos Papadimitriou**

Amersa: **Maria Konstanta**

Konstantis: **Angelos Nerantzis**

Lamenting women (polyphonic ensemble): **Alkmini Basakarou, Ioanna Forti, Martha Mavroidi, Maria Melachrinou**

With the participation of the **GNO Orchestra, Chorus**, and **Children's Chorus** (as part of its educational mission), alongside a **polyphonic ensemble**

Ticket prices: 15€, 20€, 30€, 35€, 42€, 50€, 55€, 70€ • Students, children: 12€ • Restricted view seating: 10€ | Presale: GNO Box Office (+30 2130885700, 09.00-21.00 daily), [ticketservices.gr/en](https://ticketservices.gr/en)

**Please note that, in accordance with Official Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic N° 4919 / Issue B / 24.10.2021, the GNO's auditoria at the SNFCC are operating at 100% capacity and are only open to persons who are vaccinated against or have recovered from Covid-19 (all audience members must present valid certificates proving their status). Children up to 11 years of age must present a negative self-test result taken within the preceding 24 hours. Children aged between 12 and 17 years old must present a valid Covid-19 vaccination or recovery certificate, or a negative PCR / rapid test result.**

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