

All right. Good night.

Text by Helgard Haug, composition by Barbara Morgenstern
Rimini Protokoll
HOME Manchester
6–8 July 2023

British Theatreguide

Berlin-based Rimini Protokoll returns to the Manchester International Festival, but this time with a work—unusual for MIF, which usually only presents new commissions—that has already been performed in Germany last year, where it was crowned 'Play of the Year' by the critics of *Theater Heute* magazine.

The roots of this piece are in the true story of the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 somewhere between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing on 8 March 2014, and the painful period of waiting and uncertainty for the families of those lost right up to this day ("Something so large, so heavy, can't just disappear from our world. So we think."). The title of the play comes from what was said to be the last radio message from the plane to air traffic control.

Woven into this is the story of director Helgard Haug's father's slow disappearance into dementia, and the practical difficulties for the family trying to do the best for someone who is resisting their help, even though, when his mind was clearer, this was what he said he wanted.

The aircraft story contains mysteries, conspiracy theories and families who won't give up the search for their loved ones and don't believe what the authorities are telling them. The story of 'The Father' is a familiar one to many of us even in the UK: a man who has achieved some remarkable things in his past life and who wrote in great detail what he would like to happen in these exact circumstances, all now forgotten or denied, but who refuses the care and supervision his family believes he needs and at one point ends up in intensive care.

Haug said that when she had the idea to present these stories, she believed that the storyteller should be on stage, but she didn't want to be on stage. The solution she came up with was for the audience to read the majority of the text for themselves.

And so the performers (Matthias Badczong, Evi Filippou, Josa Gerhard, Martin Possegga and Beltane Ruiz Molina) play Barbara Morgenstern's score, arranged by Davor Branimir Vincze, behind a taut gauze, on which the stories unfold, bit by bit, in projected words, with only a few parts spoken in voice-over instead. Behind them, a screen shows some projected scenery, and they change clothes to match, at one point lying around in bathing costumes on sand scattered across the stage by 'Hands' Johannes Benecke and Mia Rainprechter in front of an animated sea while the music continues from a recording. When a piece of a wing washes up in the story, it is brought on by the Hands.

Finally, the recorded musicians (14 are listed) are seen on the projection screen and gauze and the live musicians play along with them. The only words spoken live on stage are the announcements of the number of the year we are on, each of which has a title.

MIF seems to be testing audiences this year with the length of an interval-less show, but this has topped them all at 2 hours 20—and quite a few didn't make it to the end without popping out. Any bladder issues aside, it is quite demanding of an audience for them to concentrate on reading the

story for themselves for that length of time with very little happening on stage, but it is worth the effort.

The interwoven stories are fascinating, with an English text that is extremely well-written, not just a basic translation from the German as often used in surtitles (no translator is credited, so I assume Haug wrote the English version too). Morgenstern's ever-present music goes from emulating the take-off of an aircraft to melodic to dark and foreboding — when I heard her say she grew up listening to Bauhaus and Joy Division, that kind-of made sense.

From an audience point of view, it's an intense couple of hours as it requires your concentration throughout — you can't sit back and let it wash over you. That said, this unusual combination of a concert and a written text with some gently subtle visuals is ultimately rewarding.

Reviewer: [David Chadderton](#)