



Yuja Wang



SPOTLIGHT

PS21: CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

# In its American debut at PS21, 'Catarina and the Beauty of Killing Fascists' questions the idea of 'doing harm to achieve good'

By Aaron Simon Gross, The Berkshire Eagle 4 hrs ago 3 min to read



In "Catarina and the Beauty of Killing Fascists," Romeu Costa, center, plays a fascist facing murder by civilians. PHOTO BY JOSEPH BANDERET

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CHATHAM, N.Y. — It's 2028 and, every year, a Portuguese family gathers for their favorite ritual: Kidnapping and murdering a fascist.

That's the idea behind Tiago Rodrigues' "[Catarina and the Beauty of Killing Fascists](#)," making its American debut July 5 and 6, at [PS21: Center for Contemporary Performance](#), in Chatham.

"I don't know how you're going to write about this without spoiling it," actor Romeu Costa said in a video interview with The Eagle, chatting from his Lisbon home.

In the [Festival d'Avignon](#) production, created by artists from [National Theater of Portugal](#), Costa, 44, plays the fascist facing the consequences of the family's ritual — and audiences have responded accordingly.

"You tend to see an audience as a relatively passive element in the protocol of theater: They sit down, they see the show. But here people stand up, they talk to me onstage, they tend to be violent, nervous."

The play's protagonist, a 26-year-old girl in the family, has doubts about the tradition: whether it's productive or ethical, if violence can lead to justice, if democracy can be defended by violating its fundamental principles.

"We started presenting the show four years ago and already the text reflected a lot of our political landscape, but in the past few years, COVID and social media I feel have rushed many of these dynamics," Costa said.

Rodrigues, the playwright and director, first shared the idea with Costa while they were working on another project, before he'd written a word; all he shared at the time was that there was this family who believed in doing harm to achieve good.

"We knew this was the starting point, but there are so many ways of telling this story," Costa said.

Shortly thereafter, Rodrigues gathered a group of collaborators, including Costa, for a weeklong retreat.

Rodrigues invited researchers and theorists who studied fascism, and led lectures analyzing Brazilian Jair Bolsonaro and Hungarian Viktor Orbán's speeches. He brought theater historians who spoke about how violence had been portrayed in contemporary theater.

"And then we did a lot of improvisations," Costa said. "We were trying to find our place in these themes, in this story. It was really this blank slate for everyone. I think Tiago might have had some ideas more structured but what he shared at the time was very open." They still didn't know who would be playing what characters, or even who exactly the characters would even be.

A few months later, Rodrigues gathered the actors to rehearse rough drafts of scenes he'd written.

"And then we would try them. Then he would rewrite those scenes for the next day, then we would try those," Costa said. "Tiago has this dynamic of writing alongside the rehearsal period, so it's really crazy. He's very good at writing for the people that are in front of him, improvising, bringing stuff with their bodies and voices and creativity."

The script was locked in a week before their opening night. "And then the reaction was crazy, it's really crazy to feel all this vibration from the audience," Costa said. "I, as an actor, have never lived anything like this. People get aroused, they get uncomfortable."

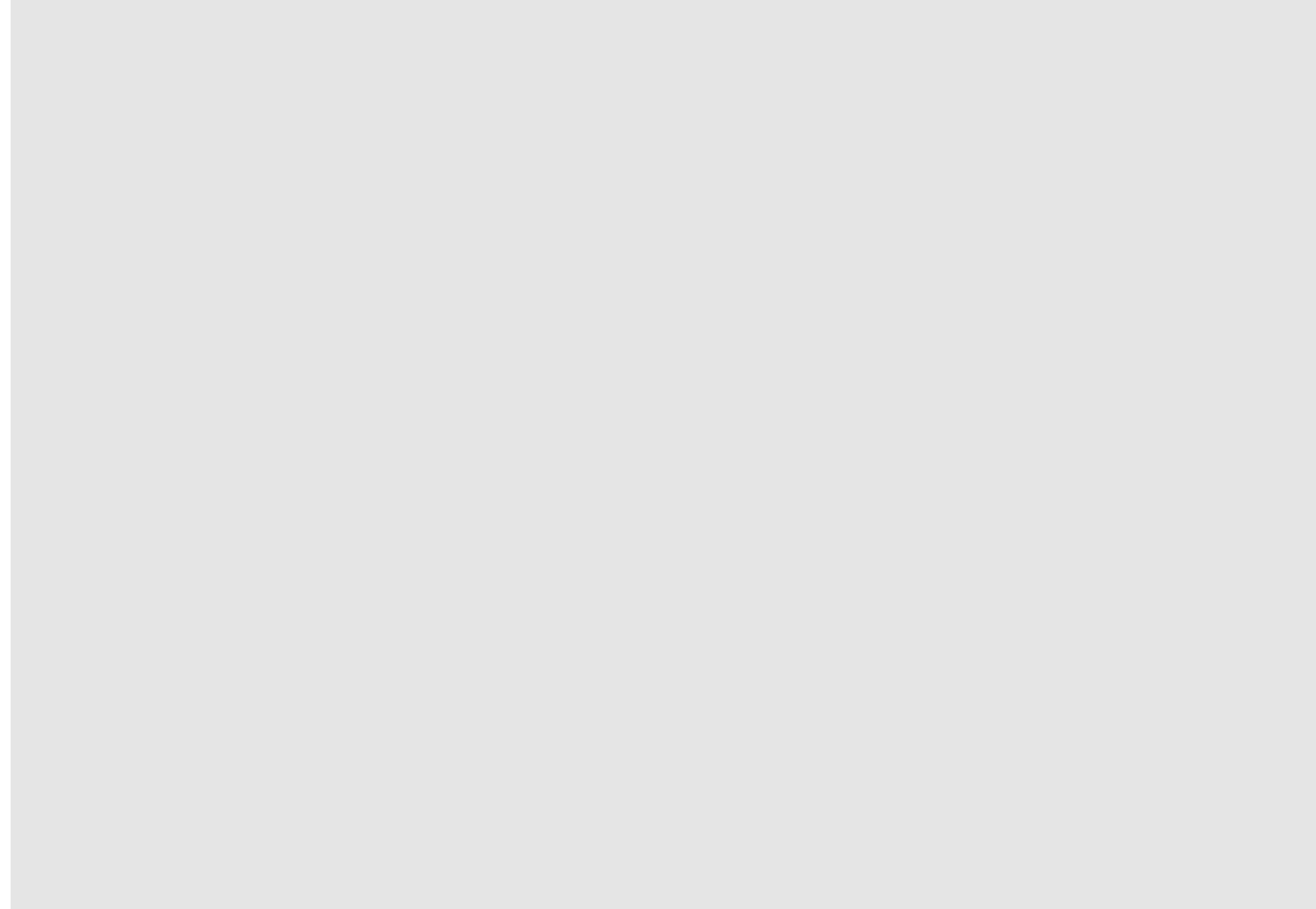
Costa, for his part, is a director in his own right. In the four years since "Catarina" premiered, he'd created his own work including "Marãia Quéri," or Mariah Carey, as well as acted in various film and television projects.

But as more theaters across the world have reached out to the company, asking if they could bring "Catarina," he's always delighted to return to it. Each time, he's felt more mature, more in control, more able to relax and have fun.

"Once you go away and come back, the work gets lighter, you gain perspective," Costa said. "I don't know how I did the show four years ago, I'm a different person now, a different actor."

He'll have plenty more chances to keep working on the show, which will head to the [Brooklyn Academy of Music](#), in New York City, in November, and spend three months touring South America next year.

"I'm always amazed at the way stories we believe are our own can become the audiences' stories all over the world, through the power of the human assembly of theater," Rodrigues wrote in an email to The Eagle.



"You have to be really sharp with your text, with your ideas, with your invisible dialogue with the audience. Whatever comes from them, I take in and give back," actor Romeu Costa, far right with arms outstretched, said. PHOTO BY JOSEPH BANDERET

Costa feels, too, like the play's ideas have only gotten more resonant over time.

"People are getting really antagonistic and not so willing to dialogue with different points of view, and so I think the show creates, through its fiction, many possibilities," he said. "How do you live with each other when you have different ways of getting to your goal?"

#### ONSTAGE

**What:** "Catarina and the Beauty of Killing Fascists," a Festival d'Avignon Production, produced by National Theater of Portugal

**Who:** PS21: Center for Contemporary Performance

**Where:** Pavilion Theater, PS21, 2980 NY-66, Chatham, N.Y.

**When:** July 5 and 6

**Performances:** 8 p.m. July 5; 7 p.m. July 6

**Tickets:** \$50, priority; \$35, general admission; \$15, students and youth

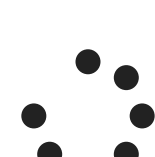
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Arts & Entertainment Reporter



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