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A Heads Up with Christina Thanasoula & Menelaos Orfanos

With Covid-19 lockdowns worldwide and health authorities urging people to self-isolate and practice social distancing on a massive scale as part of an enormous effort to #FlattenTheCurve of this global pandemic ... we are reaching out to industry friends, colleagues, associates, partners, etc., and asking them to share their #StayAtHome and #QuarantineAndChill activities with us during this extraordinary time.

Christina and Menelaos are co-founders of Greek lighting design company Creative Lighting www.creativelighting.gr. They have both trained in the UK: Christina studied for her MA at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and Menelaos is a Rose Bruford graduate.

During this "dark" summer Christina has designed the lighting for the Greek National Theatre's acclaimed production of The Persians staged at the ancient Open-Air Theatre of Epidaurus where Menelaos has been working as Head of Lighting.

Right now, Christina she spends her time evaluating lighting projects as a member of the judging committee of the 1st Lighting Awards Competition organised in Greece this year, and usually they would have both been really busy preparing for the opening of at least a dozen shows.

Christina should have been in Thessaloniki lighting The Haunted, a contemporary Greek opera, composed by Dimitris Maramis and directed by T.Papakonstantinou at the Thessaloniki Music Hall - it was initially staged 2 years ago in the Athens Music Hall, while Menelaos would normally be on tour.

Robe: Where are you right now?

Christina & Menelaos: We are both in Athens, Greece.

Robe: How are things emerging from the lockdown in your region / country?

Christina & Menelaos: Things are emerging slowly, in a weird way. After the lockdown, that ended on the 4th of May, open-air shows were allowed to take place in outdoor venues with some restrictions.

Still, there is no news from the government regarding the opening of indoor spaces for the upcoming season. Theatre companies have started rehearsing shows, but no one really knows when theatres are going to re-open or under what conditions regarding capacity, distances etc.

The lowered capacity will create many problems in small/ fringe size venues in Greece. Public theatres will do ok I guess, they rely on public funding, but everyone is really worried about freelancers and the private sector that depends on the box office.

The predictions don't look great to be honest. So many freelancers depend on the private sector being active to make their living.

Robe: How did you spend your time during lockdown?

Christina & Menelaos: Christina read the book "The Right Light: Interviews with Contemporary Lighting Designers" written by Nick Moran, watched a couple of shows on the National Theatre YouTube channel with "Frankenstein" (lit by Bruno Poet) being the highlight and also wrote an article about the lighting design concept of "Macbeth" - the last show she lit before the lockdown- for www.greek-theatre.gr.

Menelaos had just bought a new lighting console before the lockdown was imposed on us, so he had plenty of time to take a deep dive into the exciting new features!

Robe: What are your biggest concerns / considerations as lockdowns ease worldwide?

Christina & Menelaos: We have a feeling that no one really knows what is happening with this virus!

We are entering a new era for sure, we don't know the rules of the new reality yet and we don't know what to expect and when, so there is not much planning you can realistically do in advance. We need to stay focused and alert, and most of all we must keep calm and teach alertness and focus to our children! This is the biggest challenge of all: how not to scare to death the youngsters!

Robe: Do you have any thoughts / predictions about how and when live events and the industry will re-start?

Christina & Menelaos: The economic crisis is quite deep, and the problem is getting bigger and bigger every day. It's all about money, if there is no "money to make the world go round" then we guess time will freeze in Greece!

We can't really tell what is going to happen in the rest of the world, but Covid is affecting too many key financial sectors in Greece: the tourist industry (hotels, restaurants, bars etc) have also been deeply wounded, meaning that most of our beloved audience members probably won't have money to pay their bills in a couple of months, so they won't even consider going to theatre or to any kind of live event!

The best guess is that the entertainment industry in Greece will try to get back on its feet by Autumn 2021.

Robe: Going forward, how do you think live events and the entertainment technology industry will change in a post-Covid 19 world before there is a vaccine widely available?

Christina & Menelaos: There is not much the live entertainment industry can change in terms of staging. Live events need to stay live.

It's a live experience engaging all the senses of the audience, that cannot be replaced by livestreaming or any other sort of screening.

We need the live performer and the live audience to be in the same place at the same time in order for the live show to have impact: artists and spectators are deeply connected; the audience is actually affecting/shaping the performance.

Theatre and all live shows have the participation of the audience at the core of their being. If you take the audience's live feedback and pulse away, then I am not sure what is really left.

Robe: Has anyone / anything particularly inspired you since this crisis started?

Christina & Menelaos: Andrew Lloyd Webber has volunteered to try the vaccine to help the industry and prove that theatres are a safe place to be. What an honourable act!

Robe: Own question / answer / message of solidarity or something you'd like to say?

Christina & Menelaos: These are really tough times we are all going through, no one really knows how long this is going to last. We better all stay safe and make sure we don't sign up for dodgy projects that don't take all necessary anti-covid19 measures. We all want shows to be up and running the soonest possible, but this is not the time to take risks concerning our health. Health and safety should be a top priority, as it always is in the Entertainment Business.



