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THRU

Her Desperate Prayer

[SEAN ONGLEY](#) on January 23, 2016 at 1:56 pm



SOURCE MATERIAL OFFERS NINI JULIA BANG UPON MIGRATION TO PORTLAND

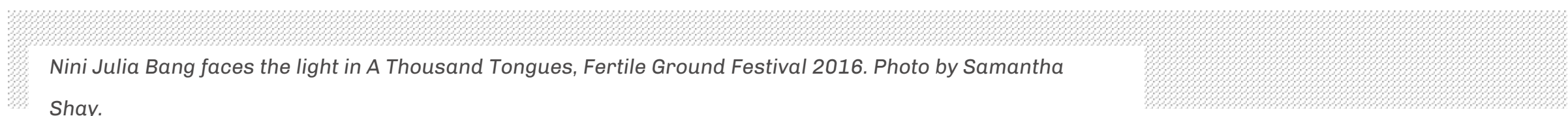
The Headwaters Theatre is not a large venue, but when you remove the seats it is obviously smaller. For *A Thousand Tongues*, just two and a half rows of chairs are set right onto the stage, angled to face the opposite corner. At most, twenty-five people were seated there. It took me a minute to realize it, but I think Nini Julia Bang was already playing her cello about six feet from me, as I found my front row seat. When the performer is already on stage, they appear to me as a mere object, until it begins. Bang howled to life with dark, moody, and triumphant vocals behind carefully crafted lighting arrangements.

Actually, it's not just vocals and it's not just lighting. It also isn't much more. The performance is understated, understated with a thousand tongues: It is yet quite powerful. As a theatrical performer, she conveys strong emotion through movement and facial expression, providing a complete experience for songs that evoke intense feeling.

With so few people, it is very intimate. A lack of stage ornaments, musical instrumentation, or much stage lighting, offers a sense of being somewhere beyond Earth or even time. The way that every item on the stage is used with purpose in the choreography, neither more nor less to be desired.

Modest amplification is used with almost no need for microphones. She has a foot pedal for looping cello parts, to construct harmonies and non-linear melodies, mostly to support the vocal performance. Her stage area is cut to around ten by ten feet, yet in that space, using every moment with purpose, other dimensions are revealed.

Executive at Source Material, Samantha Ravenna Sóley Shay has a lot to do with the magic of this performance concert. This is her first event in Portland since founding Source Material and gaining acclaim in Los Angeles in 2014. She is credited with direction and lighting design. She also brought Bang in from Poland, for this show.



Nini Julia Bang faces the light in A Thousand Tongues, Fertile Ground Festival 2016. Photo by Samantha Shay.

THE SHOW

Bang's back is turned against the audience. Her cello repeats one note to produce a drone. She also uses a hand-operated harmonium for some parts. The background is all black, with exception to a sheer white curtain draped from the ceiling to the floor. A single light at the top corner of the room points at the audience, its photons scattering through fog. She begins to sing from the depth of her gut into the microphone hanging above her.

After the first song, the microphone lifts away and she slowly kneels forward, holds, then stands. Her performance evolves as she concentrates herself in one part of the room or the other. The fog disperses, comes back, and disperses again, all timed within the choreography.

The official statement says Bang sings traditional music from Romania, Bulgaria, Kurdistan, Iran, and Greece, but it all comes from her own voice, so I can't tell where they mix with her original composition. None of it was in English, that I am sure of. So I wonder how I would respond if I knew the words.

One of the most magical moments came when the light faded down to a single lamp on the floor of the stage. Bang eclipsed it and held the curtain before her, sometimes embracing it to where the shadow disappeared, then falling back so that the shadow of her body became an eerie ominous presence. I felt like I watched the struggle that she has with herself, that we all have within ourselves.

A Thousand Tongues is a minimal affair, highly focused and not for the sake of entertainment. It is a fitful meditation, or desperate prayer, and definitely spiritual at the core. The piece is a work in progress and is slated to be finished by November, and performed at the Grotowski Institute in Poland. Who knows if we'll have a chance to see it here in town, but as Source Material gets settled in, I can appreciate that they imported this gift with them.

This performance runs tonight and tomorrow at Headwaters Theatre. Source Material presents *i Should Have a Party for All The Thoughts I Didn't Say* at The Old Church on February 4 to the 9th.

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SEAN ONGLEY

Publisher and Founder of THRU Magazine, I am essentially a musician, writer, and tradesman. I studied as an audio/video technician in Los Angeles, plus music, philosophy, and anthropology in Portland. For eight years, I worked in community radio and non-profit producing various music and arts festivals.

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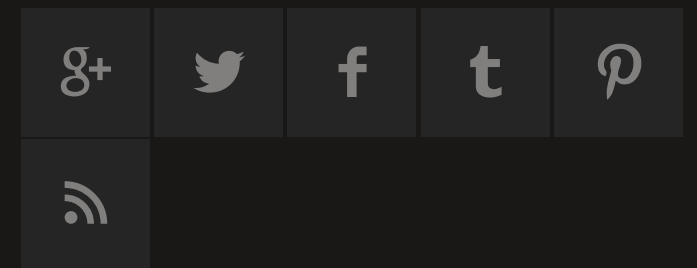
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