



NATIONAL  
CENTRE FOR  
CULTURE  
POLAND

# Operomanija: *Have a Good Day!*

29 November (Friday) ——— 7.00 pm

Nowy Teatr  
10/16 Madalińskiego Street

Supermarket and its sounds, female cashiers as opera characters – this idea by three Lithuanian female authors has achieved great international success. Now, we can also listen to it in Warsaw and experience individual stories emerging from behind a unified facade of standard greetings.

## Concert programme

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**Vaiva Grainytė (b. 1984)**  
**Lina Lapelytė (b. 1984)**  
**Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė (b. 1983)**  
*Have a Good Day!*  
opera for ten cashiers,  
supermarket sounds and piano  
(2013)

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**Performers:**  
**Operomanija**

## Operomanija: *Have a Good Day!*

### Have a good day!

This opera of less than an hour was written for an innovative cast: ten female cashiers, supermarket sounds and an upright piano. It was created by three young Lithuanian female artists. The author of the libretto – translated into a number of languages so far – is writer and poet Vaiva Grainytė. The music was composed by Lina Lapelytė, who specialises in performance art, improvised music and sculpture, while the direction and stage design were taken care of by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė. The artists share creative strategies consisting in the exploration of the tensions between objective and imaginary realities, realism and poetry, documentary and fiction, as well as in the questioning of the anthropocentric point of view.

The opera itself is far from being conventional, although it makes use of a maximally conventionalised fragment of contemporary reality. We are talking about supermarkets, brought to peak profitability and efficiency, where the main principle is to optimise the pace of sales, where any conversation is limited to a few sentences of an illegally 'stolen' terrain in the fight for time managed by electronic systems. Meanwhile, the artists' gesture shows a hidden fragment of this extremely exposed reality, that is the inner life of women working in a supermarket. The authors want to reveal what lies behind the facade of mechanically expressed lines such as 'Good morning!', 'Thank you!', 'Have a good day!', accompanied by a smile (often fake). The female supermarket employees encountered in everyday life – reminiscing the opera authors of nameless robots – 'are transformed into unique and lively characters of the opera'.<sup>1</sup> The short stage stories told by individual characters were created based on their secrets, thoughts and authentic scraps of their biographies. The libretto was thus written as an amalgam of a language of both literary and documentary origin, while 'a mosaic of destinies of different cashiers is transformed into a chorus, a universal poem suggesting the pleasure of consumption.'

The atmosphere of the supermarket is recreated by an installation exposing identically dressed female figures in a cold, matter-of-fact, stripped of all beauty, nervously flickering light of fluorescent lamps. The women are unnaturally exposed, as each sits on a white table in such a way that they are always visible, stripped of all intimacy, constrained by their assigned outfits,

set up in an extremely uncomfortable space and at risk of falling if they make a false move. The barcode scanner beeping characteristic of the supermarket space is omnipresent. The goods, on the other hand, appear in a descriptive form, sung as mini-ariosi with the accompaniment of the choir of the other voices. In this quasi-magical way, objects of commerce – mediated by the unrealistic sensitivity of individual women waiting for a moment of rest – reveal their surprisingly lyrical potential ('buttermilk is in a deep sleep / eggs, in line, are wearing calcic pyjamas'), while the time measured by the chaotically beeping scanners slows down and becomes oneirically static. Over this mechanised world controlled by the patriarchal system (it is no coincidence that the only man is – no more and no less – a bodyguard; he represents power and control, although he also reveals his weakness), female tenderness extends its human, warm nature, transforming the dehumanised into human.

Thus, juxtaposing what is artificial and superficial with the psychological and bodily truth of individual women, not devoid of humour and ordinariness, the creators of the opera surprisingly achieve a poetic effect. At the same time, the authors do not exude turpism; they do not try to artificially dramatise their characters. Although the opera in its essence undoubtedly criticises capitalist consumerism, the authors avoid moralising by using poetic irony, thanks to which the whole takes on a metaphorical character.

The premiere of the opera took place first in a shorter version in 2011 at the fourth Contemporary Opera Festival NOA (New Opera Action) in Vilnius. The extended version was performed in 2013 during the tenth International Vilnius Theatre Festival Sirenos. Since then, the opera has travelled around the world, receiving a number of awards. The American premiere was also enthusiastically received, with critics mentioning among its characteristic features: 'quietly subversive' and subtle (Steve Smith, *The New York Times*), 'multi-layered creation' and 'humour pierced by melancholy' (Alex Ross, *The New Yorker*), 'a tour de force of deadpan comedy... comes wrapped in a score of incantatory, almost liturgical serenity' (Justin Davidson, *New York Magazine*), 'minimalist textures' and 'banality transformed into art' (Heidi Waleson, *The Wall Street Journal*). In 2018, the opera was released on a vinyl record. Today, we finally get to experience the Warsaw premiere. Have a good day!

Katarzyna Naliwajek

<sup>1</sup> The information and quotations in the text are taken from the following websites: <https://operomanija.lt/en/repertoire/have-a-good-day/> and <https://haveagoodday.lt/> (accessed 13.09.2024).





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## Operomanija

In their collaborative practice, the artists pay special attention to the relationship between documentary and fiction, reality and poetry, and the overlap of theater, music and the visual arts. Their opera-performance *Sun & Sea* (2019) is the second collaboration between the three artists. The work represented Lithuania at the fifty-eighth Contemporary Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (2019), where it was awarded the Golden Lion for Best National Participation. Their previous work, the contemporary opera *Have a Good Day!* (2013) for ten cashiers,

supermarket sounds and piano earned six international awards in Europe.

**Vaiva Grainytė's** text-based practice shifts between genres, interdisciplinary theater works and publications. As a writer, playwright and poet, she takes action as an observant anthropologist: challenged by Grainytė's poetic interpretation, mundane social issues take on a paradoxical and defamiliarized nature ([www.vaivagrainyte.com](http://www.vaivagrainyte.com)).

**Lina Lapelytė** is an artist and musician. Her performances and installations engage trained and untrained performers often in an act of singing

through a wide range of genres such as mainstream music and opera. Her works take the form of a collective and affective event that questions vulnerability and silencing ([www.linalapelyte.com](http://www.linalapelyte.com)).

**Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė** works as a theatre director, filmmaker and visual artist. In her creative practice, Rugilė explores how the gap between objective and imagined realities opens in documentary narratives, how social constructs invade nature, moving from humour to horror, from real to surreal.

