Lemi Ponifasio

Star Returning

星回

Return to the marriage bed of the Earth!
Make people's fertility part of the weight,
This is the festival of life,
And of course it's also the festival of the people

O promised land, I hope at that time
People are still part of this world.

Jidi Majia, Promised Land

Terror and beauty will continue in this world long after we are gone.
It is in this tension that we find our purpose as artists.
Our task is to bring people together with grace, dignity, and respect,
inviting them to join the ceremony of life where we rise above the divides that separate us.

Star Retuning is a community project to honor the complexities of life
and infuse our communities with hope and authenticity.
Through our collaborative efforts, we can reshape perceptions, inspire action,
and resist despair with visions of beauty, strength, and potential.

Lemi Ponifasio, Star Returning

Yi People Of China

The Yi people are the sixth-largest ethnic minority in China, with a population of around 9.8 million and a history of over 3,000 years.

The Yi people have a vibrant culture that has flourished over thousands of years. It is shaped by the wisdom of their ancestors and their relationship with the natural world, exemplified by such forces as the tiger and the eagle. Their intricate and profound cosmovision weaves together their beliefs, values, and practices, enabling the Yi people to navigate their journey from ancient times to the present day.

In *Star Returning*, the Bimo and the young people of Yi speak to the world, communicating their sense of existence, struggle and beauty, and life as a triumph over death.

Star Returning Script

I AM BECOME DEATH
The skull of the eagle fell
from the unformed sky.
It sets the world on fire,
burning my mother's tongue.
I am born amidst the echoes of ancient chants.

FAIL TO MATERIALIZE
From the shadows, figures emerge —
grasping tattered flags of broken empires,
of unfulfilled blood-borne promises.

ARCHITECTURE
Ancestors trapped in human monuments,
spirits chained to fading memories,
unable to escape the future, unable to bury the dead.

PROMISED LAND
Where Eagles are born,
love is declared, the stone forest calls —
return home.

SLOW DANCE ON BURIAL GROUND
Women gather to pray on the ruins of history,
in silent laughter, cries,
summoning the faces of the ancestors.

ANGEL OF HISTORY
Can the angel soar through the storm?
Awaken the souls from their sleep.
Unearthed our dormant eyes Now entombed.
beneath the ever-mounting debris of our desires.

BIMO CEREMONY OF LIFE
To cleanse, to welcome the new creators,
new leaders, and new healers, to greet the ancestors,
and walk facing the future.

RETURNING TO THE WOMB
Quietude.

22 Chants For *Star Returning*

(Order of performance)

1. Bimo Blessing Song (Sung by Bimo Qubi Lahuoo)
Taken from Bimo blessing scriptures
Blessings for peace and prosperity in the heavens and earth, health and well-being for the people, abundant harvests, thriving livestock, and contented, joyful lives.

2. My Hometown · Dahuo Zhani (Sung by Jili Meziza)
My hometown is the most beautiful place in the world. No matter how far I travel, I yearn for it the most. On this affectionate land, young men and women express their feelings with love flowing through their words.

3. Asile Niu Niu (Sung by Aluo Zuogumu)
Asile Niu Niu, people in this world always yearn for beauty. Today is the most auspicious day; the sky is clear, and the road is smooth. Let's sing together on this beautiful day!

4. Song of the Cuckoo (Sung by Jili Meziza)
On Mount Aburhana, the cuckoo sings. It arrives every year after the seeds are sown, bringing the longing for distant relatives year after year.

5. Dahuo Zhani Love Song (Sung by Jigen Fuze)
I see a girl in a red pleated skirt walking over the hill and a handsome young man in a white cloak gazing at me from the other side. Under the moonlight, his fiery eyes make my heart flutter. Father, oh Father, please buy me beautiful clothes; I'm going to the Torch Festival to seek those burning eyes!

6. Asile Niu Niu (Sung by Aluo Zuogumu)
Asile Niu Niu, people in this world always yearn for beauty. Today is the most auspicious day; the sky is clear, and the road is smooth. Let's sing together on this beautiful day!

7. Mumole Dure (Sung by Liu Hui)
A deep bond between siblings is described, lamenting how shared lives are destined for different fates—like horses born to carry loads and oxen born to plough fields.

8. Lea Niu Niu (Sung by Qiebi Erli)
My beloved, when you leave, even as spring comes to the village, my heart feels empty. The joy of harvest warms others, but I still miss you. Separated by 99 mountains and 99 rivers, our longing grows ever distant.

9. Morning Ballad
(Sung by Hai Hongfei, Alai Muhai, Qiebi Erli)
At dawn, I saw a cow. Seeing a cow isn't strange, but seeing one wearing a scarf is odd. Then I saw a snake. Seeing a snake isn't strange, but seeing one wearing a belt is odd…

10. Asile Niu Niu (Sung by Aluo Zuogumu)
Asile Niu Niu, people in this world always yearn for beauty. Today is the most auspicious day; the sky is clear, and the road is smooth. Let's sing together on this beautiful day!

11. Aya Lo 2 (Sung by Sha Zhiguo)
On the vast mountains, sheep graze happily. In fertile fields with abundant water channels, rice grows well. Rivers teem with joyful fish, and the vast grasslands are home to contented cattle and sheep. Healthy elders and happy descendants complete the scene.

12. Asile Niu Niu (Sung by Aluo Zuogumu)
Asile Niu Niu, people in this world always yearn for beauty. Today is the most auspicious day; the sky is clear, and the road is smooth. Let's sing together on this beautiful day!

13. Aya Lo 2 (Sung by Sha Zhiguo)
On the vast mountains, sheep graze happily. In fertile fields with abundant water channels, rice grows well. Rivers teem with joyful fish, and the vast grasslands are home to contented cattle and sheep. Healthy elders and happy descendants complete the scene.

14. Hua Le (Sung by Jili Meziza)
The warriors of Bilrada are renowned. Jezhiyaida's beauties are as lovely as Gamo Aniu's. The strongest bull of Agaditu can plough a thousand acres in a day. Even slow horses excel in Jinjulada's races. Strong rams graze in Refuogibe. This is my homeland.

15. Boa Niu Niu (Sung by Jili Meziza)
Walking behind the autumn house, leaves turn yellow, and daughters are married off, like falling leaves. Some marry the wealthy, wear three outfits a day, and feast sumptuously. Others marry far away, change clothes every three years, and eat a meal every three days.

16. Aya Lo 3 (Sung by Sha Zhiguo)
The cuckoo's call brings parental longing. The geese in the sky carry news from a distant sister. The cicada's song conveys the thoughts of family and friends.

17. Suni Summoning Song
(Sung by Jili Meziza, Jigen Fuze, Aluo Zuogumu, Hai Hongfei, Qiebi Erli, Sha Zhiguo, Liu Hui, Alai Muhai)
The souls of loved ones are in the far-off mountains and high clouds. Break free from chains and ropes to return. Come back, drawn by the call of family.

18. Aya Lo 3 (Sung by Sha Zhiguo)
The cuckoo's call brings parental longing. The geese in the sky carry news from a distant sister. The cicada's song conveys the thoughts of family and friends.

19. Summoning Speech
(Sung by Qubi Lahuo, Jili Meziza, Jigen Fuze, Aluo Zuogumu, Hai Hongfei, Qiebi Erli, Sha Zhiguo, Liu Hui, Alai Muhai)
Loved ones, come back. Eggs, buckwheat, and delicious pork are prepared for you. Don't trust the soul-stealing spirits—follow the family's call to return.

20. Aya Lo 1 (Sung by Sha Zhiguo)
The beautiful sunlight, shrouded in clouds; the high-hanging moon, surrounded by stars; the lush hillside, enveloped in mist; the beautiful tree, filled with birds; the lovely flowers, visited by bees; and the kind, beautiful girl, who inspires dreams in countless young men.

21. Lullaby
(Sung by Jigen Fuze, Aluo Zuogumu, Hai Hongfei, Qiebi Erli, Sha Zhiguo, Liu Hui, Alai Muhai)
My baby, don't cry or fuss. Mama will shield you from the wind and rain as you grow up slowly.

22. Song of Missing Parents (Sung by Jili Meziza)
Seeing the hills behind the house reminds me of the sheep. Seeing the sheep reminds me of my father. The fields in front of the house remind me of my hard-working mother. Father, now old, was once a heroic young man. Mother, with growing wrinkles, was once the most beautiful girl in the village.

Star Returning

Concept Direction Design Costume Sound
Lemi Ponifasio

Poetry
Jidi Majia

Performed by
Wucaiyunxia New Culture & Art
of Liangshan Culture and Tourism Group

Vocal Performers
Male Actors
Qubi Lahuoo (Bimo)
Liu Hui, Alai Muhai, Sha Zhiguo

Female Actors
Jili Mezizha, Aluo Zuogumu, Jigen Fuze,
Qiebi Erli, Hai Hongfei

Dance Performers
Male Dancers
Xia Jun, Shiyi Buqian, Li Huajie

Female Dancers
Wu Zimo, Wang Qin, Peng Zhaoyuling,
Hu Agamo, Yanggao Zuolamu

Choreography
Performers + Lemi Ponifasio

Light + Technical Direction
Helen Todd

Video + Sound OP
Alex Waghorn

Light OP
Michael Morgan

Sound Engineer
Wang Bin

Technical Supervision
Issac Kirkwood

Stage Manager
Stella Chen Sifan

Tour Manager
Nancy Chen Simin

Company Manager
He Lijuan

Executive Producer
Chen Zhongwen

Wucaiyunxia New Culture & Art
Liangshan China

Wucaiyunxia New Culture & Art is affiliated with Liangshan Culture and Tourism Group, which is a state-owned cultural enterprise based in Sichuan Province, China. The organization is an important cultural institution in Sichuan Province and a national cultural industry demonstration base. They have made significant contributions to promoting the ethnic culture of the Greater Liangshan region and to the cultural development of Liangshan Prefecture. The organization has received numerous awards for its work in film and television production and has showcased outstanding performances on both domestic and international stages.

Lemi Ponifasio / MAU

With a unique artistic lineage, Ponifasio's creations defy conventional definitions. He guides the modern individual towards new cosmovisions and altered states of consciousness through the decelerated rhythm of his aesthetic—a palette of black, dreamlike imagery; the ceremonial, sacrificial body; a visceral interplay of sound, light, and darkness.

While established in the international avant-garde, Ponifasio's work deeply engages with local communities and diverse indigenous cultures. He draws on complex forms of knowledge—oratory, navigation, dance, music, and philosophies—to emphasize local arts and indigenous cultural recovery.

His collaborators are from all walks of life, staging works in diverse venues—factories, villages, opera houses, galleries, and more. Ponifasio's projects range from operas to community forums, presented globally at prominent festivals and venues, including Avignon Festival, BAM New York, Edinburgh International Festival, and the Venice Biennale.

Founding MAU in 1995, Ponifasio creates a philosophical foundation for his work. The Samoan term MAU signifies the declaration of truth as a path to transformation, focusing on arts, avant-garde thinking, and culture. It aims to challenge theatrical authority and redefine our understanding of humanity while fostering new arts, workshops, and community initiatives to cultivate knowledge and address our ecological crisis.

Lemi Ponifasio is a High Chief of Samoa. He holds the titles Tuala and Sala. He is ITI-UNESCO World Theatre Ambassador.

PRODUCTION
Lemi Ponifasio/MAU

CO-PRODUCTUION
International Theatre Institute ITI
China Theatre Association
Shanghai Theatre Academy
Liangshan Culture and Tourism Group