

Press release

World première OTEMBA – *Daring Women*

19 june 2025 in Muziekgebouw Amsterdam | Holland Festival

During the restoration of a 17th-century painting at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Japanese-Dutch Cornelia van Nijenrode steps out of her frame and her own time into the 21st century. She challenges Indonesian Kirana Diah, who is restoring the painting, to a nightly conversation about colonial relations, the female gaze and autonomy.

The performance sketches a magical moment in the restoration process: a one-time nocturnal encounter of heterogeneous identities and cultures, across the constraints of time and space; between painting and reality, between then and now, between East and West. Between two women who want to rewrite colonial history in their own unique way. Also present at the conversation is a scanning robot, artificial intelligence that is supposed to cooperate as a neutral data analyst, but also turns out to have a voice of its own.

'In Otemba, different characters, from different times, come together to stand up for a new view of our history. Restoration is also called management of change, and this restoration gives a renewed, decolonising perspective on the past.' (Director Jan van den Berg)

OTEMBA – *Daring Women* Music: Misato Mochizuki Libretto: Janine Brogt. Direction: Jan van den Berg. Vocals: Ryoko Aoki, Bernadeta Astari, Michael Wilmering. Uitvoering muziek: New European Ensemble. Conductor: Kanako Abe. Costume design: Lisa Konno. Light design: Gé Wegman. Video: Jasper Kayser. Choreography advise: Roshanak Morrowatian.

OTEMBA – *Daring Women* is an international musical theatre performance from Theater Adhoc, in co-production with New European Ensemble and Holland Festival. With support of Fonds

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The story

Cornelia van Nijenrode is a 17th-century woman of half-Japanese, half-Dutch descent, from the upper class of the former Batavia. As a child, she was disowned from Japan because of her mixed ancestry; as an adult, she was vilified for the divorce case in which she claimed her financial self-determination rights as a woman.

Kirana Diah is a young art historian from today's Jakarta, who bid farewell to her country to work as a conservator at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. She researches and restores paintings from Indonesia, believing that a painting's history should not be erased by restoration. Often, she believes, the visible scars on a canvas are testimonies of the pain of the (colonial) past.

In the Amsterdam of 2025, Kirana Diah works as a conservator on the 17th-century painting depicting Cornelia van Nijenrode. Kirana is particularly interested in the painting because of Untung Surapati, one of the first Indonesian freedom fighters. But Cornelia challenges her to a nightly conversation about indomitability, about their view of themselves and the other, about decolonisation and self-determination. For how do you view each other's cultural realities across the centuries?

The performance explores questions of identity, the impact of the colonial legacy and shows women following their own path, across time, space and social class.

Restoring a painting has been characterised as management of change. How we look at our history - gathering knowledge, creating knowledge - and how we rewrite history is a political act. So is how we restore a painting.

Otemba (indomitable) is one of more than a hundred and sixty Dutch words that have been assimilated into the Japanese language during the 250 years – from 1600 to 1859 – that the Netherlands and Japan maintained an increasingly exceptional (trade) relationship. The word refers to autonomous women who do not submit and go their own way.

Performances

19 June 2025 [Holland Festival](#), Amsterdam (wereldpremière)

20 June 2025 [Holland Festival](#), Amsterdam

21 June 2025 [Holland Festival](#), Amsterdam

13 November 2025 de Oosterpoort, Groningen

15 November 2025 Vredenburg, Utrecht

18 November 2025 Chassé | Theater, Breda

22 November 2025 De Doelen, Rotterdam

23 November 2025 Amare, Den Haag

About the makers

[Misato Mochizuki](#) (J) is an internationally renowned composer active in Europe, North America and Japan. Her style uniquely blends Western traditions with Asian rhythmic sensibilities, resulting in an inventive body of work comprising around 70 compositions, including 17 symphonies. Her works, which have been performed at international festivals such as the Salzburg Festival, the Biennale di Venezia, Lincoln Centre Festival, Music days in Donaueschingen, Berlin, Witten, Cologne, Lyon, Zurich, Toronto and so on, have received numerous awards.

Since 2007, she has taught at Meiji Gakuin University and has been invited to lecture at top institutions worldwide. In 2024-2025, she will be a research fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin. Mochizuki also writes about music and culture for leading Japanese newspapers, with her essays published in book form in 2019. Her most outstanding productions include the orchestral portrait concert at Suntory Hall in Tokyo (2007 and 2019), the cinema concert at the Louvre with the music to the silent film *Le fil blanc de la cascade* by Kenji Mizoguchi (2007) and the portrait concerts at the Festival d'Automne in Paris, Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam (2010) or at Miller Theatre in New York (Columbia University, 2017).

[Janine Brogt](#) (NL) is a dramaturg and playwright. She studied English literature and Theater Studies at the University of Amsterdam. From 1977 to 1985, she served as the resident dramaturg for Zuidelijk Toneel Globe, and from 1987 to 2001, she held the same position at ITA Ensemble (the former Toneelgroep Amsterdam).

As a freelance dramaturg, she has collaborated with various companies, including Dutch National Ballet, Orkater, Het Nationale Theater and Dutch National Opera. In addition to her work as a dramaturg, she is also a translator and librettist.

[Jan van den Berg](#) (NL) works as a director, film and theatre maker and teacher at the intersection of science and performing arts. In his performances and films, he links imagination to scientific findings. In the past, he made, among others, the films HIGGS and NEUTRINO (both co-directed with Hannie van den Bergh) and the music-theatre performances Oase (with composer and singer Najib Cherradi), Oerknal Variations (with composer and guitarist Jacq Palinckx) and Wim Klein, the last human computer (with VLEK). He is founder and artistic director of Theater Adhoc. Recently, his film NEUTRINO was awarded the Grand Prix AST de Paris.

Kanako Abe (J) is highly acclaimed as a specialist of contemporary repertoire. She premiered more than 200 pieces and works in collaboration with worldwide renowned composers like Michael Jarrell, Jonathan Harvey, Michael Lévinas. Based in The Hague, Netherlands, she has performed works by contemporary composers, including Tōru Takemitsu, Michaël Levinas, Régis Campo and Bushra El-Turk.

Kanako Abe now holds a position of Artistic Director of Orchestre Symphonique des Dômes (France) and Ensemble Orochi (NL), Resident Conductor of Reisorkest Arnhem, as well as Music Partner of Tokyo Ensemnable Factory and Ensemble Muromachi (Japan). In 2014, she founded in Yogyakarta, Indonesian Youth Symphony Orchestra, the first youth orchestra in the history of Indonesia and became its Music Director

Ryoko Aoki (J) is a groundbreaking female performer in the traditional Noh theatre, a field historically dominated by male actors. She is a pioneer of merging Noh – traditional recitation – with contemporary music, inspiring over 50 compositions by esteemed composers such as Peter Eötvös, Toshio Hosokawa, and Stefano Gervasoni.

Aoki has performed worldwide, including cities like Tokyo, Paris, and Berlin, and has appeared at major festivals such as the Asia-Pacific Weeks Berlin and the Takefu International Music Festival. Her notable collaborations include performances with the Arditti Quartet, the Münchener Kammerorchester and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

In recent years, Aoki premiered Hosokawa's *Futari Shizuka* and Eötvös' *Secret Kiss*, expanding her project *Noh x Contemporary Music*, through which she commissions new works. She also leads workshops, including sessions with Sasha Waltz and Guests, and released a *Noh x Contemporary Music* recording in 2014.

Bernadeta Astari (ID/NL) is a soprano and vocal artist. In 2012, she graduated with honors from the Utrecht Conservatory with a master's degree in classical singing, after which she immediately joined the Opera Studio Nederland and began performing as a soloist with the Dutch National Touring Opera and the Veenfabriek. After that, she was singing, dancing and acting in unique productions, such as *LIGHT*, a dance opera by LeineRoebana, and *Opera Suor Angelica* by Nico & the Navigators Berlin, with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

Her passion for music, language and theater stems from her childhood in Indonesia and drives her work. This makes her a unique performer who dares to push boundaries and collaborates closely with renowned composers like Boudewijn Tarenskeen, Sintia Wullur, and Tony Prabowo. Astari also creates family performances with her trio, featuring pianist Kanako Inoue and accordionist Pieterneel Berkers.

Michael Wilmering (Col/NL) earned his bachelor's and master's degrees with honors from the Conservatory of Utrecht and continued his studies at the Opera Studio in Stuttgart. He is now a freelance singer with a broad repertoire spanning opera, art song, and concert performances. At Dutch National Opera, he has performed in fifteen productions, including *Der Freischütz* (featured at the Holland Festival in 2022) and *Carmen*. He also appears annually in newly composed operas, a field in which he specializes.

At Opera Zuid, he has portrayed roles such as *Papageno* (*Die Zauberflöte*) and *Junior* (*A Quiet*

Place). In addition, he has won multiple awards for his art song repertoire, including at the International Vocal Competition, and has released critically acclaimed albums such as *Die Winterreise*.

New European Ensemble (NEuE) Founded in 2009 in The Netherlands, NEuE gathers dedicated and passionate musicians from across Europe. Their joint mission is to present a contemporary repertoire of classical music to a wide audience in a gripping and accessible manner, putting an accent on the necessity to understand musical tradition as a whole. To that end, the group is known to often combine new and old music with other mediums, ranging from film and literature to theatre, dance, or visual art. Throughout the years, NEuE has collaborated with an eclectic array of people, artist or not, such as Edward Snowden, Boris van der Ham, Nick Verstand, DeFrame, Opera2Day, Het Nationale Theater (Netherlands National Theatre), Amnesty International, The International Criminal Court and War Child.

In 2019, the NEuE was awarded the prestigious Kersjesprijs recognising ‘10 years of achievement at the highest level presenting contemporary music to a wide audience in a gripping and accessible way.’

Gé Wegman (NL) Gé Wegman (1957) works for many theatre companies and has created more than 600 lighting designs. He prefers to work with companies that are interested in developing their own drama style of theatre. For both young audiences and adult theater visitors.

Over the years, theatre companies and artists with whom he collaborated received more than forty prizes in most of the major categories at both the Dutch Theatre Festival and the Belgian Theatre Festival. Wegman won the Wijnberg Scenography Prize for his work as lighting designer.

Lisa Konno (J/NL) is an artist and designer working at the intersection of fashion, film, and visual arts. She began her practice in 2015 by creating collections from textile waste, drawing attention to sustainability and the ethical issues within the fashion industry. Since her short film *NOBU*, a portrait of her Japanese father, she has used fashion to tell personal and universal stories. Her work explores themes such as cultural identity, sustainability, and activism, with a central focus on the human experience. Her creations have previously been showcased at IFFR, Amsterdam Fashion Week, Tokyo Design Week, and are included in collections at the Kunstmuseum The Hague and the Centraal Museum in Utrecht.



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