

# LIVING IT UP WAY DOWN (UA)

English programme notes

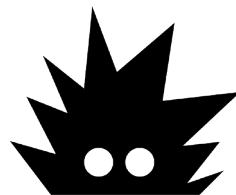
Dance theatre performance

Akademietheater

4, 6 and 7 December 2024

**myt**

Hochschule  
für Musik und Theater  
München



Bayerische  
Theaterakademie  
August  
Everding

## Cast & Creative Team

### *Stage Director*

Lara Freimuth<sup>1</sup>

### *Stage Design*

Sharon Smadja

### *Costume Design and Make-Up Artist*

Till Korte<sup>2</sup>

### *Music*

Lukas Stipar<sup>4</sup>

Konrad Zinner<sup>5</sup>

### *Dramaturgy*

Henri Höbel<sup>3</sup>

### *Choreography*

Ensemble in co-operation with Lara Freimuth

### *Lighting Design*

Ramona Lehnert

Leander Brandelik (Lighting Control)

### *Sound Design*

Matthias Schaaff

### *Video*

Stefan Arndt

Jakob Ströher

### *Production Manager*

Andreas Reisner

### *Production Director*

Georgij Igor Belaga

### *Stage Crew*

Andreas Böhm

Markus Flossmann

Luis Libel

### *Assistant Make-Up Artist*

Manja Burnhauser

### *Mentoring*

Ana Lessing Menjibar

### *Dancers<sup>6</sup>*

Sofia Azevedo, Marika Gargiulo, Stefánia Kovács, Olga Lavrentieva, Lucie Mackewicz, Anayss Vittoria Ranalli, João Silva, Sasha Smirnov, Petra Szlivka, Flóra Tiszai

### *Supporting Cast*

Sharon Smadja

### *Sound Recordings (Voices)*

Hannah Borchert

Olivia Lourdes Osburg

<sup>1</sup> Student of the Bachelor's degree programme in Stage Directing at the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich

<sup>2</sup> Graduate of the Bachelor's degree programme in Make-up Design - Theatre and Film at the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich

<sup>3</sup> Student of the Master's degree programme in Dramaturgy at the Ludwig Maximilian University Munich

The degree programmes belong to the cooperation network of the Bayerische Theaterakademie August Everding

<sup>4</sup> Student of the Composition for Film and Media programme at the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich

<sup>5</sup> Graduate of the Composition for Film and Media programme at the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich

<sup>6</sup> Students of the Stage Dance programme at the Iwanson International School of Contemporary Dance

## Illusion of safety

By Henri Höbel

When we think of bunkers, images of grey, massive concrete blocks that remain in German cities as memorials to past wars quickly spring to mind. Although bunkers exist to protect human lives from falling bombs, they often trigger a feeling of being trapped. The images of people cowering on the floor in dark, bare rooms, not knowing whether the bunker will protect them or become an underground prison, are still alarmingly relevant today.

After the Second World War, there was hope that bunkers would no longer be needed, but with the arms race of the Cold War, bunker plans were once again booming. US architect Jay Swayze took the concerns over the consequences of nuclear war seriously. He designed the Underground World Home, which he presented at the New York Fair in 1964/65: a house built underground that would not only protect against nuclear radiation, but would offer all the comforts of modern living.

Swayze advertised his plans, which promised people full control in a world that had spiralled out of control, with the slogan 'Living it up way down'. The comforts on offer ranged from underground terraces, views from so-called windows (which were actually screens), to simulated sunrises and sunsets to determine the time of day. The residents could customise everything to suit their needs.

Those who missed life above ground could view the sights of their home city on the screen windows at the touch of a button. After the end of the Cold War, however, interest in Swayze's project disappeared, leaving the model house at the exhibition centre as the only Underground World Home ever built. It is said that it was buried underground after the end of the exhibition.

To this day, there are private providers such as the California-based company Vivos, which designs luxury bunkers for concerned wealthy people. Back in 2016, the company announced plans to build the world's largest underground bunker facility, called Europa One, in the

small town of Rothenstein in Thuringia. The building was constructed in an existing ammunition depot. For a price of five million euros, you can buy a flat that is sealed off from nuclear radiation and other dangers of war. Residents also pay for the fact that they don't have to give up anything. The bunker houses a bar, a chapel and even swimming pools.

The so-called super-rich take their precautions even further: Facebook founder and second richest person in the world, Mark Zuckerberg, purchased a plot of land on a Hawaiian island in 2014, under which a 460 square metre bunker facility is said to be located today. Although he keeps the exact nature of the building a secret, there were reports on the underground shelters in 2023. Zuckerberg - at least that's what providers of private bunkers claim - was a trendsetter: demand is rising continuously. US media theorist Douglas Rushkoff, author of the book *Survival of the Richest*, published in 2022, sees this as a problem: "The more the ultra-rich believe they can escape an apocalypse, the less they feel the urge to prevent it." The bunkers make them feel more protected than the average population, and they see even less reason to take action against developments that jeopardise society, such as climate change or acts of war.

But the sense of security that bunker owners feel is an illusion. Because even the most stable buildings would be a "helpless illusory response" in the event of "nuclear overkill". (Spiegel.de, published online on 23 February 2016) Assuming the feared nuclear war would actually take place, the resulting nuclear contamination would unbalance the earth's ecosystem to such an extent that a return to the surface would be impossible. Bunker owners are therefore at best buying themselves time with their precautions. But even the largest supply of food and oxygen is exhausted at some point.

The few people who have already had a private bunker built are presumably not worried about such facts. They are clearly less concerned with actual protection than with the idea of preparation, the option of a longer life and a way of overcoming the limits of being human. If you want, you can see this isolation of a privileged few in an inaccessible space as a metaphor for a capitalist society that is increasingly concerned with self-interest.

In 1974 the French writer Georges Perec (1936–1982) explored how spaces define people in his book *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (*Espèces d'espaces*), which paved the way for the development of the choreographies in our production *LIVING IT UP WAY DOWN*. Based on his own experiences and biography, Perec examines the cultural significance of spaces and attempts to find a system behind them. No comprehensible pattern can be recognised in his descriptions, lists, experimental arrangements and streams of consciousness. Instead, his reflections illustrate how arbitrary the categories used to distinguish between different spaces are in many cases. His approach makes it clear that space, even if it appears stable and unchanging, can be questioned. At the same time, Perec's examples show that people's development is highly influenced by the spaces they enter in the course of their lives. At the end of his text, Perec expresses the desire for stable, unchanging places that have not yet been found. The planning of bunkers can be seen as a form of this search for stability. The ten characters in *LIVING IT UP WAY DOWN* enter a luxuriously equipped bunker with the aim of protecting their own lives. On the one hand, the production attempts to explore the desire for protection, on the other hand, it critically reflects on their withdrawal from any responsibility. Furthermore, the protagonists, who initially enter the room as a matter of course, soon realise that different rules apply in the bunker. The ten people seeking shelter rely on entertainment and distraction to make everyday life in isolation easier. However, this doesn't last long against the realisation that permanent confinement puts human relationships to the test. The cramped space designed by set designer Sharon Smadja for the Akademietheater gives the impression that it directs the players' bodies. In this extreme situation, the isolated characters have to deal with their fellow human beings and critically scrutinise their convictions: are seemingly essential luxuries, personal protection and property more important to them than basic needs such as social relationships or a common goal?

Bayerische Theaterakademie August Everding and  
University of Music and Performing Arts Munich with  
the Stage Directing Program  
(Programme coordinator: Sebastian Baumgarten)

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