

LAZARUS

BY **DAVID BOWIE** AND **ENDA WALSH**

INSPIRED BY *THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH* BY WALTER TEVIS



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Lazarus

Emilia Romagna
Teatro Fondazione

Teatro Nazionale
direction Valter Malosti

by **DAVID BOWIE** and **ENDA WALSH**

inspired to *The man who fell to earth* by **Walter Tevis**
versione italiana **Valter Malosti**

Italian version **VALTER MALOSTI**

cast and characters

Manuel Agnelli Newton

Casadilego Girl, later Marley

Michela Lucenti Elly

Dario Battaglia Valentine

Attilio Caffarena Michael

Maurizio Camilli Zach

Noemi Grasso

Maria Lombardo } Teenagers

Giulia Mazzarino }

Camilla Nigro Maemi / Japanese woman

Isacco Venturini Ben

the band

Laura Agnusdei tenor sax tenore and
baritone sax

Jacopo Battaglia drum

Ramon Moro trumpet and flugelhorn

Amedeo Perri keyboards and synth

Giacomo "ROST" Rossetti bass

Stefano Pilia guitar

Paolo Spaccamonti guitar

on screen

Roberta Lanave Mary-Lou

sound project **GUP Alcaro**

set **Nicolas Bovey**

costumes **Gianluca Sbicca**

lights **Cesare Accetta**

video **Luca Brinchi** and **Daniele Spanò**

movement care **Marco Angelilli**

choreographies **Michela Lucenti**

choirs and voice care **Bruno De Franceschi**

répétiteur **Andrea Cauduro**

assistant to the direction **Jacopo Squizzato, Letizia Bosi**

production

Emilia Romagna Teatro ERT / Teatro Nazionale

Teatro Stabile di Torino - Teatro Nazionale

Teatro di Napoli - Teatro Nazionale

Teatro di Roma - Teatro Nazionale

LAC Lugano Arte e Cultura

collaborative production for the performances in Cesena with **Balletto Civile**

collaborative production for the performances in Modena with

Fondazione Teatro Comunale di Modena

special thanks to **TPE - Teatro Piemonte Europa**

by arrangement with **Robert Fox and Jones/Tintoretto Entertainment**

and **New York Theatre Workshop**

courtesy of **Lazarus Musical Limited**

in accordance with **Arcadia & Ricono Srl**

Lazarus received its Off-Broadway premiere at the New York Theatre Workshop on 7 December 2015





Turn and face the strange

Valter Malosti

I remember well the very first record I bought, I mean bought in a record shop, sealed, and not found used on the wonderful stalls full of treasures of that years that I regularly looted. It was a real ritual. It was Christmas 1977. On 24th December I went out in the evening, Turin leaden and almost deserted, but the legendary Maschio music shop still open. The record has been released in Italy a month and a half before. That night, with a trembled heart, I took *Heroes* home. Bowie's music made me feel alive for the first time. As a child I was saved by music. It gave meaning to my life. I then understood through the writing on stage with my body - the voice is body - that the great authors not only deliver us great contents but within their writing much more passes from a recognizable and unique music. Music and theatre are inextricably linked, at least for my very personal experience. For me theatre is the place of mystery that should not be explained but in which to get lost with the increasing heartbeat, the beat of our hearts. Today I can't stop thinking about all those girls and boys who started a dialogue in Afghanistan with the music that was saving their lives. And I can't contain my anger. They took away the music and therefore the life. If you know the music, you can sing it and dance in your mind, you can sing it inside you. Somehow you are already free. But I hope, trusting in the power of music and art, that your voices will explode and unite freely.

From now on, when I will be on stage, I will sing for you. This *Lazarus* is dedicated to you and to all those who are denied art, music, voice...

But then when we begin singing / Our good, foolish songs, / It would happen that everything / was just like it had always been [...]. Once again we were only young people: / not Martyrs, not criminals, not saints. (*Primo Levi / To Sing / 3 January 1946*)

In my research work on *Lazarus*, I was immediately struck by a figure that Bowie had in mind since the beginning of the creation of his project: Emma Lazarus, an American poet and activist who fought against anti-Semitism and became famous after her death because her poem *The New Colossus* is engraved on the base of the Statue of Liberty and is an hymn to welcome.

"Give me your tired, your poor, your [...] masses yearning to breathe free [...], send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

I can't get out of my eyes the images of the toys of the little castaways on the beaches of our seas. The novelist and screenwriter Michael Cunningham, who was the first to work with Bowie on a musical project, says that the work had to be built around Emma Lazarus. And Enda Walsh, later co-author of *Lazarus*, confirms this. The poetess is one of the three characters of the mythical leaflet that Bowie presents

to him in their first meeting, together with a girl who is not clear whether she is alive or dead, and a serial killer named Valentine.

But Bowie had always had a close connection with theater, at first entering very young in the theatre-dance company of Lindsey Kemp (and it will be Kemp to choreograph the concerts related to *Ziggy Stardust*). At the time of *Diamond Dogs*, however, Bowie wanted to write a piece of musical theatre starting from 1984, Orwell's famous dystopian novel, but the heirs denied him the rights. In 1980 he then triumphed in Broadway with the theatrical text *The Elephant Man* by Bernard Pomerance, in which he played the moving and disturbing John Merrick, telling his deformity without the aid of any tricks. And the list could go on and on. Bowie was a shaman who sought, in his very personal way, the divine nature hidden in the darkness of our unconscious. Just look at the 1974 BBC documentary *Cracked Actor* to realize the aura and grace that resisted and persisted in Bowie despite being destroyed by drugs. It is by seeing this documentary that Nicolas Roeg chooses him as the protagonist of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (from the novel by Walter Tevis). More than 50 years after the novel and 40 after Nicholas Roeg's film, which saw him in his best performance as an actor, Bowie has chosen to pick up in *Lazarus* the threads of the unhappy story of the interstellar migrant Newton.

The alien is still a prisoner on Earth, increasingly isolated from the world unable both to live and to die. In this desperate situation various characters (ghosts? hallucinations?) wander in the claustrophobic space of Newton's apartment (or in the devastated *continuum* of his mind?).

Bowie was a sensitive antenna of the spirit of the time and of the arts, he perceived moods and atmosphere, and then digested and remixed everything in a brilliant synthesis, I would say alchemical given Bowie's interest in this subject, in which androgyny and Dionysian energy make the interiority and identity explode in a thousand fragments and masks.

For Bowie the figure of the alien represents all the "different", or rather those that society considers as such. We are the leper Lazarus, Bowie seems to tell us from the poster of his show and from the album cover in which the "us" (we) detaches from Lazar.

The first performance of *Lazarus* took place on December 7, 2015 at the New York Theater Workshop in Manhattan, and that was the last public appearance of Bowie, who passed away a month later. Albeit bent by illness, with an extraordinary and moving creative effort, Bowie wanted to leave us this strange musical theater object which can be considered, together with the magnificent album *Blackstar*, released two days before his death, his creative testament.

In our performance music, visual art, theatre, dance and video art come together to create an experience of "total theatre", in which artists are the medium of an extraordinary flow of energy. In this turbulent period, as I often say, our task as artists is precisely this: to give energy, to speak to everyone.

And *Lazarus* is a very sophisticated but at the same time popular work. *Lazarus* tells us about our journey of migrants on earth. The body of Bowie/ Newton disappears but remains as a gift the precious energy of his music that saves us and makes us vibrate.

Playlist Lazarus

Lazarus
It's No Game
This Is Not America
The Man Who Sold the World
No Plan
Love Is Lost
Changes
Where Are We Now?
Absolute Beginners
Dirty Boys
Killing a Little Time
Life on Mars?
All the Young Dudes
Always Crashing in the Same Car
Valentine's Day
When I Met You
Heroes



This way or no way, you know I'll be free

Enda Walsh

(...) When that ridiculously wide office door opened, Mr. David Bowie was standing there. He hugged me and the first thing he said to me was, 'You've been in my head for three weeks.' We sat and we chatted about my work (he had read everything) and why I was writing the way I was – and what themes kept returning into my plays (...). I spent that whole morning and now this first hour of our first meeting in a state of serene self-confidence. David Bowie had passed me a four-page document to read so we could begin our discussions on writing a new story with his songs, and based upon the character of Thomas Newton from the Walter Tevis novel "The Man Who Fell to Earth" – which David had famously played in the Nicolas Roeg film.

It was only at the moment when he said, 'This is where I'd like to start', when he pushed those four pages towards me, that I was hit with the realization that I was sitting opposite this cultural icon – this man who had created so much and influenced so many. This bloody genius. David Fucking Bowie.

I felt like a child (...) who had once the ability to read words but had forgotten how to read. I scanned the first page and all I heard was interference – my own insecurities screaming at me.

I stopped reading, took a deep breath and read from the first line again.

David had written three new characters around Thomas Newton (the stranded alien, seemingly immortal and definitely stuck). There was a Girl who may or may not be real; a 'mass murderer' called Valentine; and a character of a woman who thought she might be Emma Lazarus (the American poet whose

poem 'The New Colossus' is engraved on the base of the Statue of Liberty) – a woman in this case who would help and fall in love with this most travelled of immigrants: Thomas Newton.

At the centre of these four pages was a simple, powerful image: Thomas Newton would build a rocket from debris. His mind, having further deteriorated, would torture and tease him with the dream of escape; and in his imprisonment – in his room in this big tower – Newton would try one last time to leave.

So this is where we started.

We talked around the characters and the themes of the book. On isolation and madness and drug abuse and alcoholism and the torment of immortality. And there was a lot of talk about the beauty of unconditional love and goodness. We talked about characters finding themselves out of control – about the story sliding into a murky sadness and quick violence – about characters having drab conversations about television snacks – the everyday bending quickly and becoming Greek tragedy. The celestial and the shitty pavement.

(...) 'Yeah, but what happens?' It was a fair question (...) but we weren't there yet. We needed to get a sense of the themes of it and its atmosphere and its world. The narrative trajectory of a man wanting to leave Earth and being helped by some and stopped by others – this was there in David's four pages and would remain in our story, but the events of the story would emerge later. And then there were the songs.

David handed me a folder of lyrics and CDs he had put together.

'Some of these you'll know.'

It was a bloody funny thing to say. We would hammer out the story together, but initially he wanted me to choose the songs we would use. I guess he had lived with some of them for years and there must have been unshakable associations – maybe it would be easier for me to listen to them coldly from a purely narrative perspective.

His lyrics often arrive cut-up and opaque – so it was rarely about listening to the words and sticking it into the story. It was about the emotion, rhythm and atmosphere of those songs – and having the characters riding that wave and accessing their souls, where they could lyrically go to those strange places.

We talked about the form – the shape of the story arriving broken and a little shattered. We talked about a person dying and the moments before death and what might happen in their mind and how that would be constructed onstage. We started talking about escape, but we ended up talking about a person trying to find rest. About dying in an easier way.

Newton would spend his last moments trying to stop a bullying mind that kept him living. Physically it didn't matter to us whether he was on Earth or in the stars at the very end. We wanted Newton – in his terms – to feel at rest.

No matter how plays come out, you always end up talking about yourself.

David was certainly the most superb shapeshifter – one of the greatest ever collaborators too – someone who could walk his colleagues in directions they'd yet seen. But for me he remained personal in his work and spoke about where he was at that moment in really truthful terms.

Lazarus arrived at both of us with its own swagger and shape and emotion. It's a strange, difficult and sometimes sad dream Newton must live through – but in its conclusion, he wins his peace.



Lazarus, Newton, Graccus

Simon Critchley

But why *Lazarus*?

The theme began to perplex me. It was not just the name of his final video, but also the name of the piece of musical theatre that had opened on December 7th, 2015 at the New York Theatre Workshop that Bowie co-wrote with Enda Walsh and which was directed by Ivo van Hove. The show also features the song “Lazarus”, brilliantly sung by Michael C. Hall (who does a formidable Bowie imitation throughout). I had the good fortune to see the show twice, once in preview, and again after the premiere in mid-December, when I did a talkback with the audience and Henry Hey, Bowie’s musical director.

The narrative of the show *Lazarus* is a continuation of the story of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, based on Walter Tevis’s 1963 novel. Nicolas Roeg’s 1976 movie adaptation of Tevis’s book ends with Bowie as the alien, Thomas Jerome Newton, living in New York with a rather serious drinking problem. Newton hasn’t aged and cannot die. The show *Lazarus* picks up from the end of the film, showing Newton in his New York apartment, drinking copious amounts of gin, eating Twinkie candy bars and obsessively watching television.

Lazarus is the story of an earthbound alien who cannot die and does not age. The inability to die is entirely infused with the memory of love for the character of Mary-Lou, the

chambermaid he meets in the motel in New Mexico in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Her image is projected in video flashbacks on a screen that fills centre stage. Bullied by a broken mind, Newton eventually conjures up the ghost or fantasy of a new pretend teenage girl, who is some quasi-incestuous mixture of his lover, Mary-Lou, and his dead daughter on his home planet. Eventually, the girl evaporates after being symbolically killed and Newton submits to a full psychotic delusion of lifting off on a rocket ship and returning to his home planet. But it is clear that in reality he is going nowhere. He is earthbound.

For his fans, the identification of Bowie with Newton is total. It always was. Still shots from Roeg’s *The Man Who Fell to Earth* were used on the covers of *Low* and *Station to Station*. Roeg had originally conceived of casting Bowie as Newton after seeing Alan Yentob’s 1975 BBC2 documentary, *Cracked Actor* where Bowie plays himself, whatever that means. What is so odd is the fact that Bowie in his last years should take such an interest in the Newton character as to want to re-enact and extend the story. This time, however, Bowie fills the story with his own music, which permits an even greater identification between Bowie and Newton than the 1976 movie, which used none of the compositions that Bowie had written for the soundtrack. The stage show features about fifteen Bowie songs, four of them unreleased, which included “Lazarus”.



Of course, particularly in the light of his death, we're going to read anything Bowie did in his final years as autobiographical allegory, especially when given such a series of seemingly obvious clues as we find in *Lazarus*. But Bowie is occupying the persona of Newton, mobilising it as a vehicle for a number of constant themes in his music: ageing, grief, isolation, loss of love, horror of the world and media-induced psychosis. Newton is at once Bowie and not Bowie. It is through this act of distancing that we are permitted the deepest intimacy.

But why is the show called *Lazarus*? and why did Bowie choose the track with that name for his last video, his final public appearance, his last curtain call? At this point, we need to turn to the Bible. In *John's Gospel*, Lazarus is the figure whom Jesus raises from the dead after four days in a stony tomb.

At some personal risk, because of the hatred of the local Pharisees, Jesus returns to Judea to the village of Bethany, which is now reputed to be the West Bank town of al-Eizariya. He does this out of love for Lazarus, but particularly because of the kindness and faith that Jesus was shown by Lazarus's sisters, Martha and Mary, who "poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair". This is the key moment in the narrative and theology of the New Testament, when Jesus declares that "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." When Jesus sees Mary's grief at the death of her brother, John's Gospel says, "Jesus wept."

Mary, Martha and Jesus go to Lazarus's tomb and Jesus commands that the stone laid across the entrance be hauled aside. Martha complains that "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there for four days". But Jesus is messianically undeterred and says to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" Jesus then calls in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" John's Gospel continues, "The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his eyes."

Returning to Bowie, what is so striking is the cloth around Lazarus's eyes, which is how Bowie is depicted in both the "Blackstar" and "Lazarus" videos. Lazarus is the figure who has been down to the realm of the dead and is brought back to life wrapped in his funeral shroud, his eyes covered. In the video of "Lazarus", Bowie is shown levitating from his bed, being raised up and resurrected, while a demonic young female figure cowers underneath.

In the biblical scene, Lazarus doesn't speak. John's Gospel concludes abruptly with Jesus's final words, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." Lazarus doesn't say "Hey, I'm alive again; thanks a lot, Mr Messiah." He doesn't burst into grateful tears or betray any emotion. He just reappears and is allowed to go. Nobody asked Lazarus if he actually wanted to come back from the grave and he does not seem particularly happy to be back with his sisters. Maybe he was happier being dead.

Interestingly, this theme is explored by Nick Cave in "Dig, Lazarus Dig!" from 2008, which also takes place in New York City. Cave sings of Lazarus, *I mean he, he never asked to be raised from the tomb*
I mean no one ever actually asked him to forsake his dreams.

After his resurrection, Lazarus (or Larry, as Cave nicely puts it) behaves in an increasingly neurotic and obscene manner and *He ended up like so many of them do, back on the streets of New York City*
In a soup queue, a dope fiend, a slave, then prison, then the madhouse, then the grave
Ah poor Larry.
But what do we really know of the dead and who actually cares?

Maybe *Lazarus* isn't so much the story of a heroic resurrection that proves Jesus's messianic credentials, but a sad tale of someone being pulled back to life

without really wanting it at all. Bowie's "Lazarus" is not so much a story of a return to life as the acknowledgment of the inability to die while being gripped by grief over lost love, radical separation from the world, addiction and psychosis.

So, what might Bowie be telling us with the figure of Lazarus? That he is "poor Larry"? To be honest, I really don't know. And what do we know of the dead, really? The biblical Lazarus occupies a space between life and death, belonging at once to both realms and to neither. He is at once dead and not dead. If we think back to the character of Newton – and the naming of the stage show is hardly incidental here – then he is also obviously a Lazarus figure, unable to die, but also unable to live because of the ghosts of the past and the lost love that haunts and tears at him.

Is Bowie Lazarus? Is this why he chooses to use this final persona in order to say goodbye to us? And in choosing the character of Lazarus as the one who

is unable to die, is Bowie even saying goodbye? I am reminded of Kafka's remarkable little story "The Hunter Gracchus". The hunter dies after falling from a precipice while chasing chamois in his native Black Forest. The boat of death then takes him on the long journey to realms of the dead, but the pilot stupidly takes a wrong turn and Gracchus is condemned to spend the next fifteen hundred years pointlessly drifting from port to port wearing a rotting, Lazarus-like, shroud. "I had been glad to live and I was glad to die," Gracchus says.

Gracchus, Lazarus and Newton are all figures who cannot die and cannot live. They occupy the space between the living and the dead, the realm of purgatorial ghosts and spectres. Perhaps Bowie is telling us that he also occupies that space between life and death, that his art constantly moved between these two realms, these two worlds, while belonging fully to neither. Bowie is dead and not dead. And perhaps he always was...









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Texts

pp. 5, 6 from «La Lettura - Corriere della Sera», 19/03/2023.

pp. 8, 9 from *The Complete Book and Lyrics* introduction, Nick Hern Books, 2016.

pp. 11, 12, 13 from Simon Critchley, "Lazzaro, Newton, Gracco" *Bowie*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016, pp.175-182

