

# **“A Migrant’s Son” Audio Description Pre-Show Notes**

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## **SHOW INFORMATION**

A Migrant’s Son is a one-woman cabaret, written and performed by Michaela Burger, first performed at the Adelaide Cabaret Festival in 2018. The show tells the story of Michaela’s Greek father’s migrant experience, from the arrival of his mother in the 1930s to the life he created for his children and grandchildren.

Michaela presents her family’s history through song, comedy, and storytelling, and inhabits the roles of various family members as she recounts events from their lives through the decades.

## CHARACTERS AND COSTUME

### First Half: As Herself

In this show, Michaela uses costume as a tool to transform herself into her relatives. During the first half of the show, as herself, Michaela wears a short, high-waisted sequinned silver skirt under a white sleeveless blouse with a ring of silver sequins forming the top's collar. These sequins catch the light and sparkle as Michaela moves across the stage in silver strapped sandal heels. She has a fair complexion, her head of short brown waves parted and pulled back behind her left ear and over her right. On her exposed left ear, she wears a large sun-shaped beaded earring. She wears red lipstick and dark eyeshadow, which make her features stand out under the bright stage lighting. She wears a pale cream-coloured microphone which emerges from behind her right ear, and hovers to the left of her lips, its colour blending in with her skin tone.

### Character Costume Changes

When Michaela plays the role of Marika, her Yaya, or Grandmother, she dons an ankle length high-waisted skirt, dark blue with a subtle sequinned floral pattern which catches the light. Over this skirt she wears a grey-blue apron with a thick zig-zag embroidered border, tripled in width at the apron's lower hem.

When Michaela plays the role of Marika's father, her Pro-Papou or Great Grandfather, she wears a knee-length suit jacket, made of the same blue sequinned floral pattern of Marika's skirt. The jacket is tailored to her, and she wears it with a single button done up at the bottom of its lapels, and Pro-Papou spends much of his time with his right hand in the pocket on the right side of the jacket.

At one point, Michaela plays the role of her father Luke as a child, and she flips Marika's skirt inside out, and pulls its waistband around her neck, wearing the open skirt like a superhero's cape. The cape is made of an unadorned grey-blue fabric, save for a large gold embroidered pound sterling symbol which occupies much of the right side of the cape across her torso.

In addition to costume, Michaela often demonstrates character shifts with changes in the tone of her voice, or in the way she carries herself across the stage. Her Yaya Marika wears a youthful face of concern as a young woman, and comes into her confidence as she ages. For the older men in her stories, like her Papou Michael or Marika's father Pro-Papou, Michaela's mouth is often turned down at the edges, her frown giving her deeper lines and aging her into the characters. As her father Luke, she often tenses her shoulders, and walks with a stiff amble, while her mother moves with an upright and feminine sophistication.

## Second Half

During the second half of the show, Marika changes her base outfit from a white blouse and silver skirt, to a gold sequin jumpsuit with long sleeves, short shorts, and a diagonal black pattern of banding, which gives the fabric the appearance of snakeskin. From this point on she no longer uses costume to transform into her other characters, relying on her performance to make clear these shifts.

## SET AND PROPS

### The Theatre

The Lennox Theatre is a black box theatre that holds 213 seats, arranged in ten rows of steep raked seating, which all face forward towards the stage. The stage space is approximately 15 metres wide and 7 metres deep, and is not raised, so audience members look down towards the stage from their seats.

### The Stage

The stage for A Migrant's son remains static throughout the performance. The rear half of the stage is populated by three musicians, each placed alone amongst their instruments. On the left side of the stage, a pianist is seated, with a microphone positioned to allow them to provide supporting vocals. In the centre, a drummer sits amongst a busy drum kit, with various extra percussion added, notably a set of chimes, often used to signal a visual transformation of Michaela's characters. To the right, a bouzouki player is seated, alongside a guitar and two instrument stands. Each of the instrumentalists has a black foldback speaker alongside them, and two further speakers are placed front and centre on the stage for Michaela.

Behind the instrumentalists, a semitransparent curtain spans the full height of the space, usually appearing black and occasionally having colours projected onto it during the performance. Being transparent, when lighting is used behind it, a choir is revealed, who sing along with Michaela in various songs throughout the show. They are standing, arranged loosely in two lines, and wear mostly black performance clothing, along with small splashes of blue, like scarves, ties, or jewellery.

Lighting is used to set the mood throughout the show. Michaela is generally warmly lit from the front with a warm spotlight, and backlit with colours that shift as the scenes of her stories progress, between shades of blue, pink, purple, and red, with occasional use of bright golden light or dramatic spotlights to highlight particular scenes. The instrumentalists and choir are lit more softly with the coloured lighting of each scene. Occasionally in musical numbers, the lighting becomes more dynamic, swirling with textures over Michaela and the stage as the music swells.

The front half of the stage is largely empty, allowing Michaela freedom to move around as she performs. A single stool is draped with a fabric cover and placed in front of the pianist to the left, which Michaela sits on as different characters during the performance. To the right near the edge of the stage, a pile of four old-fashioned suitcases is stacked haphazardly. The top suitcase is open, facing to the back, and Michaela uses this suitcase throughout the show to collect and return props and costumes she uses throughout the performance.

## Photos

Behind the suitcases and towards the right edge of the space, a simple black clothesline has pegged to it a single white sheet. This sheet starts the show half pegged, before Michaela as her Yaya Marika pegs it up completely. From this point on, this sheet forms a screen onto which photographs are projected throughout the performance. The appearance of these photographs will be announced in the Audio Description, but more detailed descriptions of each of the 23 images are included here.

1. An aerial photograph of a small, densely populated village on the Greek Island of Chios. The village is located along a winding road that snakes through a tree-filled hillside, and the white walls and orange rooves of the town's houses are packed in together, almost on top of one another.
2. A black and white family photo of Michaela's Pro-Yaya, Great Grandmother, with her four young children, including Michaela's Grandmother, Marika.
3. A black and white family photo of Michaela's Pro-Yaya and Pro-Papou, Great Grandparents, seated in front of their four teenage children in 1936. This photo is then zoomed into Yaya Marika's face, the older of two girls, with a short dark hair and a white patterned dress that matches her sisters.
4. A sepia toned wedding photo of Yaya and Papou, she wears a white dress with a floral crown over a white veil, her husband and his best men wear black suits with black bowties and pale corsages. Papou is covered with sprinklings of rice or confetti which dot his black jacket.
5. A colour photo of Michaela's father as a boy with his mother, Marika. His brown hair is neatly parted, and his large blue eyes match his mother's. He wears a brown vest over a white shirt, and his baby teeth fill his mouth with small gaps between them. His mother wears a dark dress, red lipstick, white earrings, and perfectly curled hair.
6. An aerial photo of Coober Pedy, a barren land peppered with rusted tin sheds and dirt tracks.
7. A rusted corrugated iron shed, with an open rickety-looking wooden door, various tools leaning up against it on the dry dirt floor. The bright blue sky is pierced by an oil barrel which forms a chimney atop the structure.

8. A dugout, a mud-formed structure peppered with oil barrels and corrugated iron to reinforce its structure, with a single closed wooden door set a few steps down from ground level, into the earth.
9. A black and white photo of Michaela's father Luke as a young man, with a fellow miner. They stand amongst heavy mining machinery over an open landscape, holding small rocks in their hand. Luke is handsome, with a head of short curls, and wears a loose-fitting jumper and short shorts.
10. Luke pictured alone laying atop a pile of rocks, mining refuse. He has a beard now, and wears a loose-fitting cap and a wool jacket over dirty miner's clothes.
11. Luke works on mining equipment with three other men, most shirtless, but with hard hats on.
12. Luke sorting through a pile of pale green rocks, opals, on a table.
13. A close-up image of green opal rocks.
14. A black and white image of a cleaned-up Luke with five friends, all in black dinner suits and bowties, with neatly parted hair.
15. Luke surrounded by four smiling women, all attempting to kiss him as he smiles.
16. Luke, shirtless with his brother Lee and a young woman in a mine shaft.
17. Michaela's mother, Helen, wearing a black and white striped singlet top and a blue headscarf, relaxing at a table of drinks in front of a picturesque ocean view.
18. Helen wearing a blue top and skirt while sitting on the edge of a large fountain.
19. Michaela's parents' wedding day. Helen wears a white frilled dress; Luke wears a thick-lapelled brown suit with a black bowtie.
20. Photo of Luke with his brothers and friends, wearing colourful fashions from the 70s. This photo is then zoomed in to his brother Anthony, on the far right. A young man in blue with a youthful smile.
21. The twisted metal wreckage of the burned down grocery store in Coober Pedy.
22. Luke holding his three young daughters in his arms, with Michaela the youngest, in the centre.
23. An older Luke with three of his young grandsons as they blow out candles on a cake.

End of pre-show notes.

Prepared by Elias Wilson, Riverside Theatres, 2023.