

Peter Vermeersch & FES

chronology and projects 1999-2009

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photo Giannina Urmenete Ottiker 2006

“The music is full of bizarre and shocking juxtapositions...but once you’ve got over the sheer oddity, the juxtaposition becomes poetic, though in a surreal way. It’s as if a night scene in a Raymond Chandler novel were suddenly invaded by a flock of seagulls. Vermeersch’s approach is risky, which is what makes it so energising.”

Ivan Hewett – The Telegraph

“Flat Earth Society, a tight 14-piece band led by clarinetist and composer Peter Vermeersch, late of X-Legged Sally. Two brilliant sets confirmed how accomplished they are, twisting rapidly from theatrical bombast to tenderness, collective improv, mad movie-chase music and back to swinging anthems... Wet is Wet presented jazz as envisaged by Goebbels. Vermeersch grins impishly, like a young Daniel Libeskind, as he directs his close-knit ensemble. He is a monster talent, with an outrageously original band.”

John L. Walters – The Guardian, about the concert at the London Jazz Festival, November 2007

Peter Vermeersch & FES

FES was founded in 1998, when no-nonsense artist, former architect, clarinetist, saxophonist, keyboard player, composer and producer Peter Vermeersch, wanted to explore new horizons after having convinced music lovers all over the world with Maximalist! and the cult legend band X-legged Sally. Vermeersch, who worked with international artists like Josse De Pauw, Wim Vandekeybus, Vincent Bal, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Fred Frith, The Simpletones and Jazzwork from Berlin and wrote music for the Arditti Quartet, Prima La Musica and the Smith Quartet, assembled a pack of inspired and inimitable musicians, forming a big band which has nowadays become much more than just a big band. **Peter Vermeersch** included, the band now consists of a permanent group of 14 musicians: **Stefaan Blancke** (trombone), **Benjamin Boutreur** (alt sax), **Berlinde Deman** (tuba), **Luc Van Lieshout** (trumpet), **Bart Maris** (trumpet), **Michel Mast** (tenor sax), **Marc Meeuwissen** (trombone), **Kristof Roseeuw** (double bass), **Bruno Vansina** (alt & baritone sax), **Peter Vandenberghe** (piano & keyboards), **Teun Verbruggen** (drums & dustbngrooves), **Wim Willaert** (accordion & keyboards), **Tom Wouters** (clarinet, vibraphone & vocals). Occasionally this group is completed by guest musicians: Esther Lybeert (vocals) and/or Pierre Vervloesem (guitar).

The music of FES, varying from strictly written sheet music to liberating improvisation, is 95% home-made. Streaks of music of other composers are used as inspiration, frequently arranged, adapted and integrated into FES compositions, adding a wide range of atmospheres and styles to the eclectic FES universe. FES, who dares to flirt with other disciplines as theatre and film and owns the ability to seduce a number of different audiences, from more select jazz listeners to a wild young rock public, is at its best live on stage. Toots Thielemans experienced their joy of playing, their humour and technical skill and joined them on stage during Jazz Middelheim 2003. He refers to FES as a 'a band of rebels!' FES must be the most versatile and at the same time the most daring big band phenomena ever.

FES chronology: a brief overview

In February 1999, FES premiered with concerts in Ghent and Brussels. The response to these concerts was amazing. FES caught the attention of the Belgian National Radio (Radio 1) and one of the following concerts was recorded live and broadcasted on radio and released in January 2000. FES started the new millennium with a Belgian tour, followed by the theatre production **Larf** in May 2000. In January 2001, a first FES-full album appeared, **Bonk**, on Peter Vermeersch's own label Zonk! Records. In June 2001, the music of the theatre production 'Larf' was also released on cd. That same month, FES records the soundtrack of **Minoes**, the original score composed by Peter Vermeersch. The film was released on December 6th 2001 in the Dutch theatres and after that travelled the world. The film was awarded with two 'Gouden Kalf's', the Dutch Oscar. Peter Vermeersch's soundtrack was **nominated for the World Soundtrack Award 'best soundtrack debut'**.

In 2002 most of the FES-activities were situated in Bruges. **Bruges 2002** engaged FES as their house orchestra, just because nobody could ever do it their way: presenting audacious music and being able to flame up a large audience. FES has their very own sound, in which all borders between existing genres are festively blown away. The result is a mix of jazz grooves, tasteful cha-cha-cha, opposing melodies and cheerful playground music – virtuosity and humour in the most eligible marriage. After several successful concerts during the cultural year in Bruges, FES started their international tour, 'FES in Motion', in the Concertgebouw of Bruges on November 1st 2002. During this new tour FES did not just present a selection of their Bruges 2002-compositions, they also presented their new album **Trap**. Also in 2002, Ancienne Belgique assigned FES to work on a Louis Armstrong-tribute. This AB-production premiered on August 30th 2002 during the 'Boterhammen in de Stad'-festival in Brussels. **The Armstrong Mutations** were recorded late 2002 and the cd was released in May 2003. Due to the success of the première of 'The Armstrong Mutations', FES did another tour with this repertoire in the fall of 2003. The album 'The Armstrong Mutations' was nominated for the ZAMU Award (Belgian Music Awards) as best album of the year.



FES ft. Uri Caine, photo Giannina Urmenete Ottiker 2004

Highlight of 2003 was **Heliogabal**, the big band opera commissioned for the Ruhr Triennial by Gerard Mortier. In the autumn of 2003, Peter Vermeersch quite coincidentally met Uri Caine in New York and they agreed to write a new repertoire for FES. **FES ft. Uri Caine** premiered at Arts Centre Vooruit on November 10th 2004 and toured during March 2005. At the end of 2003, **Mike Patton**, well-known musical genius, former Faith No More front man and originator of a.o. the incorrigible rock band Fantômas, discovered the music of Flat Earth Society. He thereupon immediately proposed the band to make himself a compilation of the six former FES cd's. **FES-isms** was released early September 2004. Flat Earth Society joined Patton's band Fantômas on their European tour in Italy, Belgium, Holland, France, Switzerland and England.

In 2005 Peter Vermeersch was commissioned by the Film Festival Gent to compose a soundtrack to **The Oyster Princess** (Die Austernprinzessin), a silent film by Ernst Lubitsch (1919). FES accompanies the film in theatres in Belgium and abroad.

Psychoscout (2006), the first FES record released by the Belgian label Crammed Discs, mainly consists of FES ft. Uri Caine songs. It was described by Pitchfork as 'an unruly confluence of 'Merrie Melodies', Henry Mancini's cosmopolitan swank, and Sun Ra's cosmic slop -- all performed with the whiplash attention span of John Zorn's Naked City'. Started up also in 2006 was the project **Modernski**, initially on demand of the Flanders Festival that wanted to reinvigorate forgotten or rather unknown composers/music from the 20th century. FES arranged works by Igor Stravinsky, Mauricio Raül Kagel and Tom Dissevelt and performed them for the first time on October 19th 2006 at the Flanders Festival in Leuven.

Due to the positive response to the 'Psychoscout' record, FES made a well-received Japanese tour, attended the North Sea Jazz Festival and travelled to Canada to play on the jazz festivals of Vancouver and Montréal in the summer of 2007, and was welcomed at other international venues like the JazzFest Berlin, Jazzfestival Saalfelden and the London Jazz Festival. Also in 2007, FES created a collection of **Answer songs**, which premiered successfully in Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels. On the 13th of December, FES presented the whirling results of the cooperation with the Finnish musician 'Take me baby'-**Jimi Tenor** in the Vooruit Arts Centre, as part of the Etoiles Polaires Festival 07.

Eye-catcher in 2008 is the making of **Zilke**, a music theatre production created together with Walpurgis. 'Zilke' was first performed in an open air version during Theater op de Markt in Hasselt and had its theatre premiere on September the 13th, in De Warande, Turnhout. In January 2008, FES was invited to Le Parvis in Tarbes – Pyrénées and after that partook in the Budapest LOW Festival. Later on, in April 2008, FES traversed the ocean to participate in the Festival de las Artes de Naucalpan in Mexico city, and gave a free concert for the citizens of Ecatepec, a rather poor suburb of the capital. Together with Jimi Tenor FES toured some summer festivals (North Sea Jazz Festival, Gent Jazz, Dour Festival and Festival Músicas do Mundo, Sines, Portugal).

In 2009 FES mainly plans to concentrate on touring, so as to render the existing repertoire and recent creations maximal exposure ('Zilke', 'Answer Songs', 'The Oyster Princess' and 'Modernski'). To be expected furthermore in March 2009 is the release of the second Crammed Discs album, a double cd, which will contain the new repertoire called **Cheer me, Perverts** written by Peter Vermeersch and the collection of 'Answer Songs'.

See AGENDA on www.fes.be for concert dates



FES meets Jimi Tenor, photo Jo Voets 2008

FES projects: more info & some revealing quotes

1999: Live at the Beursschouwburg (Via Records)

The music of the Flat Earth Society sounds playful and slightly eccentric: it finds itself in between jazz, chachacha, soundtracks and frivolous fairground tunes. (...) On this live debut, FES proved that simplicity can also be complex and that intricate is not necessarily synonymous with introverted.

De Morgen, Belgium

Belgian big bands are expensive since the rise of the jukebox, but subsidies and wild playing fun sometimes work miracles. An example of the latter is The Flat Earth Society, a kind of big band formation by Peter Vermeersch. (...) FES combines refractorious satire with the fun of playing, humour and technical skill.

Knack, Belgium

Flat Earth Society is a big band that strays from well-trodden paths (...) Strangely enough through the arrival of the Flat Earth Society, the flat Flemish country might become more rugged.

Tijd Cultuur, Belgium

2001: Bonk (Zonk! 001/Lowlands)

The barometer explodes and a cosy thunderstorm hits the orchestra. Music with brake tracks and a mow fragrance, and the detonation pot is defect.

Peter Vermeersch

The clever wind arrangements occasionally remind you of flamboyant circuses and sultry night clubs (...) A disc which is as equally characteristic as it is beautiful.

Oor, The Netherlands

Peter Vermeersch is a master in almost guilelessly quoting musical history. Probably the most flexible band ever.

Knack, Belgium

Whimsical fairground tunes, dented film themes, derailed jazz-digressions, you can all retrieve it (...) humour and imagination rule. The band plays with inimitable extremes.

De Morgen, Belgium

2001: Larf (Zonk! 002/Lowlands)

On a journey with Josse De Pauw's texts crossing highways, a long ascent on a fake flat road, u-turns and muddy paths when in the end: 'Nothing's gonna be alright'.

Peter Vermeersch

Like a hunting thunderstorm, Peter Vermeersch's compositions push and drive the performance. Brilliant music.

Rotterdams Dagblad, The Netherlands

A truly amazing battery. With wide flows of energy it impresses, in the silent moments it's moving. And in the end it leaves you looking deeply into your heart. A forcing experience.

De Standaard, Belgium

Voices announce that tonight a child will become a king and then Peter Vermeersch is setting free the instruments into some amazing compositions, which evolve in one fluent movement to the apotheosis of the blues king. Larf is the icing on the cake of a long lasting art-brotherhood between Vermeersch and De Pauw... A mature fruit, eating and drinking at the same time, which makes up for an entire year of theatre.

Knack, Belgium

The play 'Larf' was awarded with the 'Océ Stage Price'.

The cd is a live registration of the performances in the city-theatre of Bruges.

2002: Minoes (Zonk! 004/Lowlands)

An assembly of the original music used in Vincent Bal's movie with the same name: The 'composer's cut'. Light where it's obligate, heavy where it's allowed.

Peter Vermeersch

Asking Peter Vermeersch to compose the score for this cat movie, turned out to be a very good idea of director Vincent Bal. The music is as mobile and unpredictable as a kitten.

Knack, Belgium

You not only see Minoes slip and slide over the roof on her high heels, you also hear her doing so by the sound of a warm 'walking bass' and drumsticks softly tickling the cymbals. The guitars sound suitably horny, the bass clarinet spins cosy as a top cat on an electric blanket. And as the icing on a delicious cake, every now and then Vermeersch allows himself a musical joke.

Filmkrant, The Netherlands

For this score, Peter Vermeersch was nominated with a World Soundtrack Award 2002. The film received the Dutch film award 'Het Gouden Kalf' in the categories 'best film and best actress'. Due to his Belgian nationality, director Vincent Bal could not be nominated.

2002: Trap (Zonk! 006/Lowlands)

"Goe verscheén es goe te goare" or better: a staircase that goes up while it goes down. FES in Technicolor, styleless with style.

Peter Vermeersch

The title track 'trap' and 'O.P.E.N.E.R' could have been good soundtracks for the American gangster movies of the seventies. (...)Even if a slight 10% of the people that went to see Minoes buy Trap, you won't hear us complain the following years.

Humo

Trap is a fantomish, daring record. What Vermeersch would like to tell the listener is not always clear, but it remains unbounding.

Focus Knack, Belgium

2003: The Armstrong Mutations (Zonk! 008)

I already enjoyed mutating into the first-man-on-the-moon and the first American bicycle hero, but this beats it all! It's all excitement in hell, all devils are delighted and give me from now on a special treatment. Thank you all, assholes from FES. The oil is at its hottest, the flames hurt more than ever, your muzak sounds way too loud and you know what, I love it. I'm looking forward to see you in a couple of years and I'll help the devils personally to burn you black, all of you, you white Zulu's. Take care of my royalties. Satchmo.

Peter Vermeersch

Words don't come easy to hail the qualities of this cd! This is the most intelligent, beautiful, exciting, thrilling and exuberant human music that I came across the past time.

P-magazine, Belgium

Armstrong Mutations is a record without compromise, full of musical pluck and knowledge, and played by a gang that can laugh with themselves. In short: not to be missed.

Focus Knack, Belgium

2003: Heliogabal, a big band opera

The Ruhr Triennial commissioned Peter Vermeersch and FES the music for the big band opera Heliogabal, a libretto written by the young German author Thomas Jonigk, who drew his inspiration from the historical figure with the same name – a child-emperor who met a gruesome end – and has written a contemporary text about power and mass hysteria, love and narcissism, insanity and calculation. The opera was not only performed by FES, but also by a mix of (opera) singers and actors, and directed by Roy Faudree. Heliogabal is a wild musical ride that at times speeds recklessly through the familiar territory, takes you through the dirt tracks behind the scenes and finally dances on a tight rope back to where it started. Heliogabal premiered on May 8th 2003 as part of the Ruhr Triennial and started a second life as a concertante with a new cast under the direction of Josse De Pauw, touring through Flanders in September & October 2005.

Heliogabal was registered and released on a double cd by the Flemish classical radio Klara.

Libretto: Thomas Jonigk - Music: Peter Vermeersch - Direction: Roy Faudree (Josse De Pauw) - Cast: Livia Budai (Madiha Figuigui), Larence Janot (Sylvie De Pauw), Ursula Hesse von den Steinen (Anniq Burms), Esmé Bos, Sara De Bosschere, Stephan Bootz (Keith Tillotson), Wim Opbrouck, Bernard Van Eeghem, Pieter Embrechts, FES – Production: Ruhr Triennale (Het Toneelhuis)



Heliogabal, Ruhr Triennale, photo Marc Vanderslagmolen 2003

Mr Vermeersch's score, far removed from the historicized big-band sounds one mostly hears these days in the United States, sounded fresh, inventive and witty.

New York Times

**A trumpet that hesitates, a sax that moans, toils and moils,
till the rest falls in and the musicians get everything out of their instruments.
The cheerful cacophony goes over in a swinging rhythm,
and what seemed to be a circus orchestra turns into a perfect big band.**

Volkskrant, The Netherlands



Heliogabal, Toneelhuis, photo Maarten Vandsen Abeele 2005

2004: FES ft. Uri Caine

Some really smashing compositions, together with a number of stunning piano solo's, a sparkling mix of the jolly chaos characteristic of collective improvisation, some snuffs of mambo and jazz, a few dots of impressionism, tango and honky tonk, and for this special occasion a final touch of Gregorian requiem masses and American patriot music.

For less FES and Uri Caine still don't mount the stage.

Koen Van Meel, Kwadratuur, Belgium

The FES ft. Uri Caine repertoire was recorded on the cd 'Psychoscout' (release June 2006).

2004: ISMS (IPECAC 53/Bomba Records 24012)

FES played tight, enthralling, verging on the brink of chaos and proved to be the night's revelation for a major part of the audience.

Knack Magazine on the Blue Note festival

'Isms, draws from their four prior releases and presents a band capable of everything from beautiful chamber jazz miniatures to slinky crime-theme jazz noir to driving rock rhythms. (...) The songs are all very approachable, but there's plenty of punch in the playing and soloing and great detailed arrangements. Fans of progressive jazz orchestras and big bands like Pierre Dørge's New Jungle Orchestra, Sun Ra, and even Frank Zappa should find a lot to enjoy here.'

Allmusic.com by Sean Westergaard

'Due to the band's rambunctious nature each FES album displays multiple personalities, but Isms compounds this schizophrenia by drawing material from such distinctive records as 2002's Minoes, the soundtrack to a children's movie, and 2003's The Armstrong Mutations, on which the group re-interprets the works of Louis Armstrong. As a result this collection undergoes such violent mood shifts from track to track that you'll either be enthralled by FES's seemingly bottomless creativity or else you'll feel like you just spent an afternoon on the Tilt-A-Whirl after a heavy lunch of ketchup and mustard.'

Pitchforkmedia.com by Matthew Murp

2005: 'The Oyster Princess', a silent movie by the legendary Ernst Lubitsch

'The Oyster Princess' tells the story of oyster tycoon Quaker, a man so rich he even has a butler to hold his cigar while he smokes. The one thing left that could possibly impress king Quaker, would be to have his daughter Ossi marry a bona fide prince. He finds a poor prince, prince Nucki, who in turn sends his friend Joseph to get an idea of what Ossi is like... 'The Oyster Princess' marks a turning point in director Ernst Lubitsch' comedy work. He leaves the slapstick behind and evolves toward a sophisticated form of satire. The target of his humour in this case is the American bourgeoisie, personified by the wealthy businessman 'the Oyster King'. Laced with sour humour, we hear the story of the boundless wealth of the American bourgeoisie in the twenties and the snobbish attitude of the impoverished European aristocracy.

Lubitsch is known mainly for his Hollywood-period in the 1940's and 1950's with 'The Shop Around the Corner', 'Ninotchka', 'Heaven can wait' and many others. A few films from his Berlin period (ca. 1915) were recently restored, amongst others Carmen (Gypsy Blood) and Die Austernprinzessin from 1919.

For the 2005 edition of the Flanders International Film Festival – Ghent, composer Peter Vermeersch wrote the music (score and sound mix) for the Oyster Princess and FES accompanied this film live. This project combines a director of historical importance with the refreshing FES approach and therefore appeals not only to the habitual audience of music lovers but also to film fans. For this specific audience FES recorded The Oyster Princess on DVD, together with the short film 'Brasschaet 1932', a curiosity about a bicycle race with a score by Peter Vermeersch.

The screening of The Oyster Princess is a co-production of the Festival of Flanders, Vooruit Arts Centre, the Flanders International Film Festival - Ghent, deSingel, Motives Festival Genk and Bonk vzw. The dvd was released in 2007 by Bonk vzw in cooperation with the Royal Belgian Film Archive.



The Oyster Princess (Die Austernprinzessin) 1919, Ernst Lubitsch, Peter Vermeersch

2006: Psychoscout (Crammed Discs 128 / Bomba Records 24066)

'The '90s downtown New York aesthetic and mutated. Flat Earth Society, hailing from Belgium, has every bit of the circussy, genre-jumping, soundtrack-esque, Raymond Scott-like, smirky moodiness that characterizes the Knitting Factory diaspora. Where that sound can sometimes turn snarky and sarcastic, the group wisely remains earnest and open, though they are sometimes too clever for unqualified endorsement. The 14-strong band, weighted toward lower horns and brass, is punchy and dynamic, playfully romping through clarinetist/leader Peter Vermeersch's charts. With a big sound and juicy arrangements, they're stacked with able improvisers, perfectly exemplified on "In Between Rivers", which breaks down from the huge orchestral sound to an intimate trumpet/drum duet. On "Without," the intimacy happens –this time jittery free play from drums and trombone– in the company of a sedate composed part

for piano and band. Drummer Teun Verbruggen deserves special mention for his wide ranging abilities, even if he does cop mercilessly from New York drummer Jim Black on Uri Caine's 'Snaggletooth'.

Downbeat Hotbox, John Corbett

'Sit up and listen. Flat Earth Society is a big band with the integrity of a magpie, in the sense that it goes for the shiniest elements of a cultural outlook that takes in a kind of homage to Kurt Weill, incidental music for old TV detective series, and perhaps a touch of Henry Cow at its most formal. All that makes for listening that could have you laughing out loud or wondering happily over the sheer bravura of it all.'

www.allaboutjazz.com, Nic Jones

'The players are all great, with some especially nice piano by Peter Vandenberghe, fiery solos from Benjamin Boutreur on alto, Vermeersch on clarinet, and the addition of organ or synth on some tracks which gives the big band quite a different flavor than most big bands. (...) They really know how to use dynamics to keep the pieces moving, and Vermeersch's horn charts are fantastic. If you thought big band music in the 21st century was confined to repertory bands, think again. Flat Earth Society is a hard-swinging outfit that knows the past but has its eye on the future, and Psychoscout shows that there's a whole lot of life yet in the big band tradition.'

www.allmusic.com, Sean Westergaard

'This is an acoustic big band with the energy of an electrified punk band. But much like punk, the group's enthusiasm and vigor is sonically accessible: it's never so extreme that it drifts into cacophonous excess. (...) There are few contemporary ensembles in modern music that quite fit into the same category as this energetic and zany outfit. As unique and virtuosic as it is creative, the FES has a sure-fire winner with Psychoscout.'

www.allaboutjazz.com, Troy Collins

2006: Modernski

'Modernski' (referring to the nickname that Schönberg invented for Stravinsky), initiated in 2006 as part of the Flanders Festival, is chiefly a 'research project'. A selection of lesser known 20th century works is freshened up and arranged for the complement of 14 FES musicians. 'Modernski' is a work in progress; the repertoire will grow with every year. Already arranged are the 'Ebony Concerto' by Stravinsky and work by Mauricio Raúl Kagel and Tom Dissevelt. Peter Vermeersch and Peter Vandenberghe (his right hand) plan shortly to work on 'Scherzo à la russe' by Stravinsky, 'Non loin de la Chine' by Ennio Morricone and some pieces by Paul Bowles (writer of 'The Sheltering Sky' who was most productive as a composer in the 40ies and 50ies). This project appeals to a relatively new audience of classical music lovers and those who dote on cross-over music, and opens up for FES a new circuit of venues that are focused on that specific kind of music.

2007: Answer Songs

When you write a song in answer to an existing song, you get an answer song. Gerda Dendooven, Rokus Hofstede, Jef Neve, Corrie van Binsbergen, Peter Vandenberghe, Bruno Vansina, Peter Verhelst, Peter Vermeersch and Tom Wouters worked on lyrics and music for a dozen songs for FES. Among others, Esther Lybeert performs as singer.

Existing songs, susceptible to or screaming for an answer were longlisted (a.o. 'Song to the Siren', 'Should I stay or should I go', 'My funny Valentine' and 'Poupée de cire'). Style, age, language were of no importance. Usually the text was decisive, but also instrumental songs were considered. There were no limits to how close the adaptation had to refer to the original, the new composition didn't even have to be in the same style. But new lyrics on an existing song were out of the question. The result had to be a completely autonomous song, and couldn't depend on its reference to the original. The reference could go from 0 to 100 %, but it couldn't become a cover-evening.

The premiere was on September 14 2007 during the KlaraFestival in Bozar, Brussels.
Coproductio: Bonk vzw, KlaraFestival and deSingel.



Answer Songs (Tom Wouters, Esther Lybeert - vocals), photo Wannabes 2007

2007: FES meets Jimi Tenor

The doors of Flat Earth Society are always open for someone who describes music as 'a series of whatever'. In December 2007 we asked this jazzy coloured cuckoo from Lahti to lay his egg and brood on it with us. Jimi Tenor wrote all the music and with the man himself on stage it has become an exciting conspiracy; the similarities, the differences, the stupidity, the cleverness, the Finnish palm trees, the Flemish fjords and most of all: a shared virulent appetite.

The première took place on December 13th 2007 in Vooruit Arts Centre, Ghent, during the Etoiles Polaires Festival. FES met Jimi Tenor also on the North Sea Jazz Festival (Rotterdam, the Netherlands), Gent Jazz Festival & Dour Festival (Belgium) and Festival Músicas do Mundo (Sines, Portugal).

Coproduction: Vooruit Arts Centre and Bonk vzw



FES meets Jimi Tenor, photo Eddy Westveer 2008

2008: Zilke, An existential variety farce with a twist of bitter



Zilke, photo Koen Broos 2008

The stunningly beautiful Zilke suffers since birth from the extremely rare syndrome of Cinderbeauty, or commonly known as Sleeping Ella, which shows itself in the following symptoms: several times a day her heart breaks under the weight of compassion for the suffering of mankind, and she dies, only to be awakened again and again by the merciless Death.

Suzanne, Zilke's mother, unscrupulously exploits these Deaths and Awakenings, elevating them to a spectacular circus act, thus forming the core business of her extremely profitable company: The World Enterprise of Entertainment. The day the rebellious Zilke runs away from home her mother faces bankruptcy. Being at her wits' end she turns to her treacherous mother Bernadette, who has been running her establishment with an Iron ladylike hand for forty years, keeping the middle between a freak show, a circus and a variety theatre. Bernadette, that is for sure, is determined to break Zilke's will.

But then suddenly along comes Rafaël, a young entrepreneur who is madly in love with Zilke, thinking love and money can buy anything. What follows is a passionate melodrama taking place in the deepest caverns of the entertainment industry. But the special guests of this existential farce must be the legendary seven goats, fired up by the Iranian shepherd Abbas, unleashing a spectacular and surprising finale. A French version of this production is prepared with the intention to attend several French festivals.

ZILKE can be booked in the period: April 25th - September 15th 2010.

Production: Walpurgis - Coproduction: Flat Earth Society, Theater op de Markt, Zeeland Nazomerfestival -
Music: Peter Vermeersch - Text: Pieter de Buysser - Text adaptation and direction: Judith Vindevogel -
Scenography: Stef Depover - Costumes: Myriam Van Gucht - Sound: Geert De Wit - Technique: Kris Merckx
With: Nordine Benchorf, Annique Burms, Eurudike De Beul, Flat Earth Society, Thais Scholiers,
Charlotte Vandermeersch, Geert Van Dijk, Bernard Van Eeghem en Evelien Van Hamme

2009: Cheer Me, Perverts! (Crammed Discs 138)

If you think Django Bates squeezes a quart of jazz notes into the pint pot of the unforgiving minute, then beware of Flat Earth Society. Other than the fact they have the daftest song titles since Dr Strangely Strange (ah, Vole Sperm Reverie, there's a name to conjure with) and include a gratuitous beaver shot on their cover, they also rattle off as wackily eccentric a bunch of tunes as you'll have heard in a aeon or three. With various roots to draw upon, most obviously Willem Breuker and in turn his muse Kurt Weill, but also Zappa, Varèse and, of course, Loony Tunes, 'leader', producer and clarinettist Peter Vermeersch has a ball, handbrake turning his extraordinary 14-piece orchestra through various musical chicanes, be it the high energy clatter of the aforementioned Vole song or the epically joyous 'Blind Inside'. Some critics (Brits, naturally) find the Society 'fatiguing' in its unremitting energy, but most of the arrangements do have spaces for breath, the musicianship is exemplary and it's not all cartoonery: 'Too Sublime in Sin' is darker, more meditative while the clarinet, piano and beeps of 'Smoke on Fire' is eery and evocative. Fatiguing? Nah, inspiring.

Jazzwise, Andy Robson

Former FES concerts include:

Festivals: Jazz Middelheim (2003, 2009), Blue Note Festival / Ghent Jazz (2003, 2008), Moers Music (2005), Vancouver International Jazz Festival (2006, 2007), North Sea Jazz Festival (2006, 2008), JazzFest Berlin (2006), Festival International de Jazz de Montréal (2007), London Jazz Festival (2007), Jazzfestival Saalfelden (2007), Festival de las Artes de Naucalpan, Mexico City (2008), Festival Músicas do Mundo, Sines (2008), Dour Festival (2008), The Hague Jazz Festival (2008), Jazz à Luz (2008), Brighton Festival (2009), Europa Jazz Festival (2009), Jazz festival Montreux (2009).

Venues: Ruhr Triennale (2003), Domicil, Dortmund (2003), Hiroshima mon amour, Torino (2004), Rohstofflager, Zürich (2004), Paradiso, Amsterdam (2004), Elysée Montmartre, Paris (2004), Astoria, London (2004), Trafó, Budapest (2005), Wiener Konzerthaus (2006), O-East, Tokyo (2006), Big Cat, Osaka (2006), Taku Taku, Kyoto (2006), Pordenone Silent Film Festival (2006), Bimhuis, Amsterdam (2008), Philharmonie Luxembourg (2008).

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