

# **Peter Vermeersch & Flat Earth Society**

*Toots Thielemans refers to FES as a 'a band of rebels!'*

Frontman of FES is Peter Vermeersch, composer, saxophonist and producer (eg from the first dEUS CD, Raymond het Groenewoud, Mad Dog and Het Zesde Metaal). He created music for numerous own bands, he composed for theater and dance productions of a.o. Wim Vandekeybus Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Dito'Dito, Walpurgis, Radeis, Peter De Bie and Josse De Pauw. In addition he wrote for the Arditti Quartet, Prima La Musica, Spectra Ensemble, Mirror Quartet, Laika, Het Paleis and the Smith Quartet and performed with groups like Fred Frith, The Simpletones and Jazz Work from Berlin. From 2004 to 2006 he was city composer of the city Ghent. In 2005 he was hired as curator of the biennial Time Festival. In 2009 he composed the soundtrack for the film "My Queen Karo" by Dorothée van den Berghe and in 2014 he wrote for the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège 'Zwerk', a composition commissioned by Ars Musica.

He is the artistic director of this fourteen piece orchestra, which, beside himself consists of: Benjamin Boutreur (alto sax), Peter Delannoye (trombone), Berlinde Deman (tuba), Thomas Mayade (trumpet), Bart Maris (trumpet), Michel Mast (tenor sax), Marc Meeuwissen (trombone), Marti Melia (clarinet & bassclarinet), Kristof Roseeuw (double bass), Peter Vandenberghe (piano & keyboards), Bruno Vansina (baritone sax and flute), Teun Verbruggen (drums), Pierre Vervloesem (guitar) and Wim Segers (vibraphone). Depending on the production, guest musicians are invited. For Boggamasta we are joined by David Bovée (guitar & vocals) and Amel Serra (percussion). In the past FES collaborated with, a.o. Uri Caine, Toots Thielemans, Jimi Tenor, John Watts, Esther Lybeert, Ernst Reijseger and Mauro Pawlowski

The music of FES, varying from strictly written sheet music to liberating improvisation, is 95% homemade. 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, opera 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.

## **FES chronology: an overview**

## **BOGGAMASTA (2017-2018)**

### **Flat Earth Society & David Bovée**

David Bovée was the first FES guitarist from 1999 till 2003. After four years he left the band to develop his own project "Think of One" (BBC Radio 3 World Music Award in 2004 and 2007). Whether they worked with throat singers from Greenland, Gnawa musicians from Morocco or Brazilian virtuosos, they achieved an exciting melting pot of music.

The fruitful collaboration with Peter Vermeersch for the 'Theater aan Zee Festival' in Ostend in 2013 (an ad hoc orchestra with four Gambian musicians), triggered both artists to develop a new project. Meanwhile, David lives and works in São Paulo (Brazil) and knows the Maracatu, Frevo, Ciranda and Coco music through and through.

For Boggamasta, Vermeersch and Bovée wrote an exuberant repertoire, got rid of the word Frevo, to bring their own direct, energetic and frenzied music: feverish, delirious and groovy, and lots of electro!

### **Boggamasta premières on March 3rd 2017 at Handelsbeurs Ghent (B).**

David Bovée (guitar & vocals), Benjamin Boutreur (alto sax), Peter Delannoye (trombone), Berlinde Deman (tuba), Bart Maris (trumpet), Michel Mast (tenor sax), Thomas Mayade (trumpet), Marc Meeuwissen (trombone), Kristof Roseeuw (double bass & violin), Amel Serra Garcia (percussion), Peter Vandenberghe (keyboards & laptop), Bruno Vansina (baritone sax & flute), Teun Verbruggen (drums & percussion), Peter Vermeersch (tenor sax & vocals) en Pierre Vervloesem (bass guitar)

## **SS DE BELGENLAND (2016-2017)**

In the summer of 2015 the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp was approached by a US wholesale buyer, who had found sixteen 16mm film tapes at an estate sale in Illinois, on the subject of the world cruise that the Red Star Line ship S.S. Belgenland made in the winter of 1927-1928. Upon closer examination by the Red Star Line Museum, the team found that it was one of the first 'home movies' made by a participant of the cruise, 'home movies' being a very relative term for that era. The amateur filmmaker was one William Olsen, a 53-year-old wealthy citizen of Chicago, who made a trip around the world on the S.S. Belgenland with his wife Emma and their daughters Mabel and Hortense. From New York to Shanghai, from the Pacific to Egypt, everywhere he went he took his amateur camera with him. He was thus one of the first tourists ever to film a trip around the world.

From 1924 to 1931 the S.S. Belgenland departed seven times for a wintry world cruise of 133 days. However, the ship was originally built for the transportation of emigrants. In 1923, when it docked in Antwerp for the first time, the whole city was in an uproar. But due to immigrant quotas in the 1920s by the US Government, the transportation of emigrants across the Atlantic Ocean collapsed.

The Red Star Line ventured into the tourism market and refurbished the ship into a luxury cruiser for wealthy British and American tourists and business travelers, with amenities such as luxury suites, dining and dance halls, both a classical and a jazz orchestra, a clay pigeon shooting range on deck and a beach with sand from Ostend. Most days they spent at sea, but highlights were the shore excursions at the landing places of the ship.

A cruise departed from New York and sailed to Cuba, where they would stock up on liquor (due to the American prohibition). Then it went through the Panama Canal to Hawaii, the Far East, India, the Mediterranean Sea and back to New York.

The trips were a unique experience but often quite stressful: distrust of the locals, poverty, confrontations with beggars and also the typical disenchantment of the tourist who finds something that does not correspond to the images from the brochures. Fortunately, there was always the familiar S.S. Belgenland as the ultimate refuge.

### **Flat Earth Society and Peter Vermeersch**

The Red Star Line Museum bought the film reels and forged a partnership with Cinematek Brussels to restore these unique reels, digitize them and ensure their long-term preservation. Peter Vermeersch, composer and clarinetist of his brainchild Flat Earth Society (FES), was asked to get cracking with the film material, similar to what he had done in 2005 with 'The Oyster Princess', a silent film by Ernst Lubitsch from 1919. Vermeersch re-edited and composed the S.S. Belgenland home movie entirely according to his own understanding and with a healthy disinterest for the documentary and historical value of the images. He composed superb music on the film and the show premiered at a sold-out Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp on October 1, 2016.

## **REVUE RAVAGE (2015)**

### **Death of a politician**

Tom Lanoye has written a new play about the life and work of an older politician: The man wants to stop, and yet he doesn't, but he has no choice, so how should he go about it? Not with a whimper but with a bang, if he has any say in the matter. He'll look for a finale, a final public moment of glory in which he can abdicate – lauded and celebrated – in the knowledge that he will still be able to exercise power from behind the scenes. Or that's how he imagines it... A number of other characters circle around this central figure, like moths and mosquitoes around the searing lamplight of power: his wife, who wants to enjoy a quiet retirement with him; his brilliant son, the crown prince; his mistress, who is waiting for the moment he asks for a divorce so that he can embark upon a second youth with her; his internal opponent – the honest but terribly dull seasoned party man; and his faithful political mentor and friend – a sly tactician, and a tower of strength at both a political and a private level, the trouble shooter, the man in the twilight zone, who carries out tasks that are only handed out silently and with averted eyes...

*Revue Ravage* promises to be a terrific clash between renowned musicians and ditto actors: Josse de Pauw creates and acts together with Els Dottermans, An Miller, Nico Sturm, Willy Thomas and Frank Focketyn. Peter Vermeersch composes the music that will be performed live by Flat Earth Society.

## **TERMS OF EMBARRASSMENT (2014-2016)**

**Flat Earth Society & Mauro Pawlowski**

**Homage to Mr Zappa – Don't worry, Frank is dead anyway.**

To attempt to describe the music of Flat earth Society is an impossible (and pointless) task. But it is clear that the old Frank has made quite an impression on the young Peter Vermeersch. And what is even more true: they have a lot of common musical and other heroes and sources. Under the title 'Terms of Embarrassment', Flat Earth Society, featuring the heathen guitar gods Pierre Vervloesem and Mauro Pawlowski, pays homage to Mr Zappa. Don't expect covers, but a concert that will make the famous moustache gleam once again in the grave. An evening mainly of fresh material, wonderfully embarrassing moments, new pieces like 'Hail Gail!', 'Me Standard, You Poor' and 'Who's wrong, who's right and who's left behind', over-long guitar solos and tight, exciting collective passages. And for anyone who, given the context, might get into trouble because of this: don't worry, Frank is dead anyway.

## **'13' (2013)**

*'The most unreliable music since 1999'*

13 is a round number according to Flat Earth Society and so it's a jubilee year! We raise the flag and sing our song. On our new album, which we conveniently called "13", we serve you our usual unusual portion of gas, chaos & chazz. The 13<sup>th</sup> album contains 13 new pieces, some more instrumental than the other. The musical journey defies varying landscapes and weather conditions, the orchestra remains ever fresh and unshaven, the music is our pocketknife and compass, the words are of a profoundly deep depth. The CD industry will completely revitalize.

A year ago, radio Klara kindly invited us to their Toots studio to record our new album. From that session, we selected 11 very different pieces. Most of the songs are own compositions, but also Scott Joplin and Tom Dissevelt (who?) \* got a spot. Some pieces are from our HearSee repertoire and can be viewed on our website with the corresponding films. John Watts also pulled his weight and contributed to 2 numbers (Patsy & Unconditional Lucifer), and so we end up with '13'.

Flat Earth Society is and remains Belgium's most original and most daring 'big band'. Not in the traditional sense of the word, but simply because they are 15. The influences are many in their far from traditional 'big band' music. And although the word 'eclectic' still gives them the creeps, it is difficult to describe this exuberant music otherwise. A musical definition for chemical reactions and cooking techniques, is as yet not available. And even after 13 years this latest sprig still bursts with enthusiasm. For this occasion the cd is released by Igloo Records, who also released Vermeersch' first Maximalist! album some 25 years ago.

*\* Ragtime means "time to shreds" and in our version of Scott Joplin's "Stop Time Rag", these patches are even more tattered, so as to intensify the ragtime-feeling.\*\* Tom Dissevelt was bassplayer and*

arranger for "The Skymasters" and composed only one piece in his life: "Intersections" (1960), based on twelve-tone serial principles. But fear nothing, it has become a sort of swinging cityjazz. For our remake Bart Maris reconstructed the scores.

## **FES ft Ernst Reijseger (2012)**

*I wish the promotor had chosen Flat Earth Society as closing act for the festival. The roof would have been on fire at Middelheim, just as we're used to each year.*

Jazzenzo, August 2012

Ernst Reijseger and Flat Earth Society bumped into each other during one of their atypical musical wanderings, as if it had to be. A big band and a cello – it works!

In this surprising conspiracy Ernst Reijseger, Peter Vandenberghe and Peter Vermeersch made new compositions and adapted existing material. The grooves are there, the lyrics also, the silliness and seriousness, the swing and the contrariness, the improvisations, the melodies, the rampage, the intrusiveness. And all these musical peregrinations culminate in an exciting concert. Anything else?

FES & Earnest, it was meant to be!

## **Boat & Berg (2012)**

*The musicians visually call up the gritty sanding and grinding of ice and stone, without lapsing into illustrative film music*

Dick van Teylingen - [www.theaterkant.nl](http://www.theaterkant.nl)

On April 14<sup>th</sup> 2012 it was exactly a 100 years ago that the sinking of the Titanic occurred, and on that specific date the new production of FES premiered in deSingel in Antwerp.

The sinking of the Titanic has become a part of the collective memory, appeals to everybody's imagination, is a source of countless stories and has reached an iconic status. The sinking of the Titanic has become the almost universal metaphor for the human hubris. 'The Titanic is unsinkable, sinking unthinkable'. We know better now, even though we seem to have learned nothing, as the metaphor now turns from the ship to the iceberg, melting slowly but decisively.

In this production, FES plays a new composition by Peter Vermeersch for soprano (Champ d'Action veteran and grande dame Rolande Van der Paal) and orchestra, on texts by Josse De Pauw. The public hears the story of the iceberg through the voice of the singer, singing of her own fate, until everything becomes unruffled and still. Ship gone, iceberg gone.

Bonk vzw & Music Theatre LOD / Peter Vermeersch – Josse De Pauw

Coproduced by deSingel, Antwerp, Vooruit Ghent and Zeelandia Theater Productions.

## **R.I.P. – Funeral Songs (2011)**

With the R.I.P. project FES ventures itself to a funeral repertoire; Peter Vermeersch composed death songs for his musicians. All 15 of them die, one by one, by disease, accidents, old age and other mishaps, pick your choice. Some of them perish together in a terrible plane crash, life is full of

unexpected twists. And so, as the concert progresses, the orchestra gets smaller and smaller, a grim preview of what FES will eventually overcome if no substitutions for the dead musicians are made. The order of the dying musicians was determined by fate: this results in an arbitrary and perhaps illogical, but nevertheless interesting orchestral occupation.

So imagine this: the FES concert starts off with the whole band, then the drummer leaves the stage because of a fatal fall while putting out the garbage. The rest of the orchestra plays his farewell song. Then the trumpet player follows, a blood vessel rupture. The rest of the band now plays his In Memoriam. This continues until only one musician remains on stage playing his own requiem, he then also disappears and leaves the stage empty. And at that moment all the musicians are reunited, like the dead in 'Blues for Gaston' by Roland Topor. The reunion is a wild and exciting piece of whirling music, a grotesque death march putting its tongue out to Death. R.I.P. challenges fate, shows the beauty in tragedy and sorrow, and pays a macabre salute to life with a pleasant dose of black humor.

R.I.P. is a coproduction between Concertgebouw Bruges, Vooruit Ghent and Bonk vzw.

## **HearSee, FES & FILM (2011)**

In spring 2011 a new FES film project premiered. After the success of 'The Oyster Princess', 'Minoes' and 'My Queen Karo' Peter Vermeersch again used his talent for writing film scores in a new project, called Hearsee. Along with filmmakers, - collectors and - curators, he collected images from a wide range of film archives. In this case the composing of the music pieces already started at the gathering and editing of all these fragments into an exciting whole. The result is a 75 minute non-stop soundtrack, which fully reveals the very cinematographic music from Flat Earth Society. Certain "image sets" are assembled. Thus, different themes and atmospheres are addressed, one set can exist out of a homogenous (short) film, another may be an assembly of different source material.

## **USA tour (2011)**

From May 14 till 22nd FES toured the USA for the first time. From intimate clubs to cultural centers and a festival:

14/05: Tampa, Tropical Heatwave Festival

15/05: St Petersburg, The Palladium

17/05: Washington, Kennedy Center, Millennium Stage

18/05: Philadelphia, Johnny Brenda's in co-operation with Ars Nova Workshop.

19/05: NY, Lincoln Center, Atrium Stage.

20/05: Museum of Moving Images, NY, The Oyster Princess

## **Answer songs (2009/2010)**

When you write a song in answer to an existing song, you get an answer song. Gerda Dendooven, Rokus Hofstede, 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.

Co-production: Klara Festival and deSingel

## **Cheer Me, Perverts ! (2009/2010)**

*This vibrant, upbeat big-band jazz ensemble entwines circus, burlesque, lounge, and Cirque du Soleil sounds in its quirky mix — one that counts on 15 regular members. The title of this second album for Crammed Discs is an anagram of the group's leader, Belgian composer/clarinetist Peter Vermeersch. It's a fitting title for an album that sounds joyous and debauched, an album that should vie for best jazz disc of 2009.*

Alarm Magazine, June 2009

2009 brought a new CD with the Brussels label Crammed. More than 50 national and international reviews got published. The band played 20 concerts at home and abroad, culminating in the live session at the BBC studios and a live session on Klara Radio. In 2010, they got rewarded with plenty of concerts in the UK, Switzerland, Austria, France, the Netherlands, Hungary, ....

## **Modernski (2008)**

*'Musical cuckoo's eggs'*

Karel Van Keymeulen - De Standaard

'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 15 FES musicians. 'Modernski' is a work in progress; the repertoire grows 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) worked 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.

## **Zilke, An existential variety farce with a twist of bitter (2008)**

*The piece is a mix of circus, parable, musicals, variety shows and what not,  
with especially beautiful music by Peter Vermeersch,  
performed by Flat Earth Society.  
Hein Janssen - De Volkskrant*

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.

WALPURGIS and Peter Vermeersch worked together before on "The Soluble Fish" (1994) and "Charms" (1997). For this 'sung' drama they joined forces again, this time in the company of the complete FES combo. Coproduction: WALPURGIS, Theatre on the Market, Zeeland Nazomerfestival.

## **FES meets Jimi Tenor (2008)**

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 colored 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 with Jimi Tenor also played the North Sea Jazz Festival (Rotterdam, the Netherlands), Gent Jazz Festival & Dour Festival (Belgium) and Festival Músicas do Mundo (Sines, Portugal).

*Coproduction: Vooruit Ghent and Etoiles Polaires 07 Festival*

## **Psychoscout (2006)**

*The '90s downtown New York aesthetic and mutated. Flat Earth Society, hailing from Belgium, has every bit of the circusy, 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.  
Downbeat Hotbox, John Corbett*

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'. 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.

## **The Oyster Princess (2006), Ernst Lubitsch (1919)**

*With mild madness Flat Earth Society created an atmosphere of satire and absurdity.*

Brecht Ransschaert, De Standaard

'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 towards a sophisticated form of satire. The target of his humor in this case is the American bourgeoisie, personified by the wealthy businessman 'the Oyster King'. Laced with sour humor, 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 curiosum 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.

## **FES isms & concerts with Fantômas (2005)**

*This is the most interesting CD I've heard in quite some time.*

Chris Polansky, Eleven Elephants

When Mike Patton in 2004 contacted FES, to report how much he was impressed by the band's music, FES could not be anything else but flattered and surprised. Mike Patton, leading man of Faith No More and of many other projects / bands (Mr. Bungle, Tomahawk, Peeping Tom), has now become a legend. Patton invited FES as support act for his European tour with Fantômas. The tour ran along the greatest rock venues in Europe and the band played to sold out audiences everywhere. Patton, impressed by the enthusiasm, decided on a selection of FES material and released them on his American label IPECAC. Under the heading ISMS (IPECAC-53, 2004) he made a compilation of 19 songs from the six FES cd's, mainly from The Armstrong Mutations and Minoes, but also from previously unreleased material, an introduction to the FES repertoire for the overseas audience, as it

were. Mike Patton said about the album: "It's really unique and engaging stuff. It's going to blow people's minds."

## **FES ft. Uri Caine (2004)**

*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

Uri Caine is known for his work on the New York avant garde jazz scene (if you remember his cooperations with John Zorn and Dave Douglas among many others). In the past few years he has risen to popularity, not in the least in Europe, with his adaptations of music by Mahler ('Uhrlicht'), Bach ('Goldberg Variations') and Beethoven (Opus 120). Starting with the basic material of the original pieces, he rewrites them in his own peculiar idiom, rooted in the current New Yorkan "jewish wave" of which he is one of the leading figures.

At a personal meeting in New York, Uri Caine was intrigued by Peter Vermeersch and his Flat Earth Society. Never having worked with a big band before, FES' obstinate approach seduced him into forging a complot. Vermeersch and Caine agreed from the start not to be project-minded and pinned to a theme, but to simply walk a portion of the road together, up to the next crossroads. They agreed to do what they always did, each starting from his own biotope. That is: to create music and exchange it.

Existing pieces were newly arranged, embryonic ideas were explored further, finished pieces were mutilated, allowed to mutate and infect each other, nothing restraining the musicians from transforming each other's material. It was clear that this would result in a varied program. The vast field between improvisation and set-in-stone scores is open, and the big band is filled with small bands. FES sounds different from before again, and what's for sure is that this new repertoire will have a clear thread running through it.

## **Heliogabal (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

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.

## **The Armstrong Mutations (2002)**

*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

Question: How does Flat Earth Society takes hold on the music of Louis Armstrong? Eighteen white zulu's straight from the Belgian jungle meet the big black smurf from perdido-black and blue. The darkness, the blues, the funeral and the streetparade, the inbounceable vitality, the gospel, the golden intro's, the evergreens and the jungle-jazz. Satchmo, the macho, the intaking, the outtaking, the angular, the raging, the sentimental, the groweer, wornout, unheard-old cadillacs never die. His godly guds burst, and like an alien, FES force themselves a way out and bothers without shame all the rooftiles.

Question is also: How does Armstrong takes hold on the music of Flat Earth Society? After thirteen Armstrong-mutations, only FES remains and carries on.

'The Armstrong Mutations' are a project of 'Ancienne Belgique' and went into premiere on the 30th of August during ' Boterhammen in de stad'. The cd was recorded the end of November 2002, in studio Dada in Brussels under the expert knowledge of Pierre Vervloesem, who also finalized the cd.

## **Bruges 2002 & FES in motion – Trap**

*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

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 humor 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.

## **Minoes (2001)**

*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'.

## **Bonk & Larf (2000)**

*Voices become sound, floating on music and sinking into it. Indeed, in this show, music and words are equal partners.*  
Han Geurts, the Rotterdams Dagblad

The première of 'Larf' took place on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2000 in Vooruit. This dramatic concert was developed via a number of small 'improvised' stages in 1999 on which graphics and text were tested with music for a limited audience.

In a certain way; 'Larf' was a continuation of 'Weg'. This show was produced in 1998 by Josse De Pauw, Peter Vermeersch and Pierre Vervloesem and, when it was selected for the 'Theaterfestival 1999', it was described as "a new standard in narrative theatre".

'Larf' too is, just like 'Weg', a big jam in which everybody enjoys doing what he wants with and next to the others. The participants to the Larf-jam were, in addition to Josse De Pauw, the actors Tom Jansen and Dirk Roofthoof, Flat Earth Society with director Peter Vermeersch, painter-sculptor-sceno-graphist Koenraad Tinel and Roland Van Campenhout.

Larf was crowned with the Océ-podium Prize 2001. It's a Victoria production within the framework of TIME Festival 2000.