

This booklet presents the key players in today's music theatre landscape in Flanders. Profiles of music theatre companies are presented against the backdrop of a number of essays and statements dealing with major developments and issues in Flemish music theatre.

With a strong sense of historical background, this book zooms in on current issues in relation to music theatre today. How do we expect cultural policy to categorize a hybrid 'genre' such as music theatre? Is the international (festival) circuit open enough to young and emerging artists? How can the artistic symbiosis music theatre calls for be dealt with in different institutional contexts: in education and training, in the media, in policy environments?

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE LANDSCAPE

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Flanders Music Centre

The shortest way to music from Flanders

VTi (Vlaams Theater Instituut)

Supporting the performing arts

2009

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In June 2009, four Flemish companies – Flanders Opera, deSingel, LOD, Muziektheater Transparant – join forces for OPERA XXI, a new biennial contemporary music theatre festival (including opera, music theatre and musical). With meetings, exchanges and discussions in the context of this festival, VTi (Centre for the Performing Arts) and Flanders Music Centre – the support centres for the performing arts and music in Flanders – want to spark off the debate about Flemish music theatre in its international context.

To this end, both our institutes will organize an international congress weekend – with meetings, performances, lectures and debates on the contemporary music scene in Flanders and Europe. A number of prominent artists, including Heiner Goebbels, will speak about their fascination with music theatre.

Furthermore, we would like to use the opportunity to present the work of some key players in today's music theatre landscape. On VTi's website (www.vti.be/muziektheater), video clips with excerpts from major productions will be available. In this booklet, profiles of a number of Flemish music theatre companies will be presented, but before that, some major developments in Flemish music theatre since the 1980s will be examined. With a strong sense of historical background, a number of authors zoom in on current issues in relation to music theatre today: trends in music theatre production, definitions of music theatre in relation to cultural policy, education, the place of the composer in music theatre production, the international dimension, the relationship between music theatre and the audience.

How do we expect cultural policy to categorize a hybrid 'genre' such as music theatre? Is the international (festival) circuit open enough to young and emerging artists? How can the artistic sym-

We also refer to the article *Music Theatre in Flanders – some tendencies* by musicologist and critic Maarten Beirens:

Beirens, Maarten. "Music Theatre in Flanders - some Tendencies". *Flemish Music Theatre since 1950 (Contemporary Music in Flanders V)*. Edited by Mark Delaere and Veronique Verspeurt. Leuven: Matrix – New Music Documentation Centre, 2008: 12-25. www.arts.kuleuven.be/matrix/images/flemish%20music%20theatre.pdf

biosis music theatre calls for be dealt with in other institutional contexts: in education and training, in the media, in policy environments? These issues and questions are not exclusively connected to the performing arts at this side of the Belgian borders. Music theatre in Flanders explicitly confirms the internationalization of the performing arts per se. This will arm us against protectionist reflexes and defensive responses and open the way towards dialogue.

In the world of the performance arts – an increasingly transnational production domain – how do we deal with trends such as an increasing production volume, hybridization, inter-culturalization, changing relations with ever-changing audiences? This booklet is meant as a tool to launch an international debate about the results of our research. We hope the experiences we document in Flanders will prove inspirational to artists and cultural workers in other European countries.

Stef Coninx, managing director Flanders Music Centre
Ann Olaerts, director VTi (Centre for the Performing Arts)

perspectives



Music theatre's blurring boundaries

TRENDS IN MUSIC THEATRE PRODUCTION IN FLANDERS (1993-2005)

Joris Janssens

VTi (Vlaams Theater Instituut) has made it a tradition to underpin discussion about trends and developments in performing arts production with material from its database. That database provides ready-for-research information about professional productions by Flemish producers during the period between 1993-1994 and 2004-2005 – the twelve seasons governed by the 'Podiumkunstendecreet' – the Flemish Parliament's Performing Arts Decree. In *Metamorphoses. Performing Arts in Flanders Since 1993 (Metamorfose in podiumland)* we distilled a series of tendencies from the material for the entirety of the performing arts. We ascertained, among other things, an increase in production during the examined period, a tendency among individual artists to present themselves as independent field players, a tendency to produce in joint venture and a distinct tendency towards internationalization. *Metamorphoses*, in a nutshell, showed how radically the production of performing arts in Flanders and Brussels has changed since the 1990s. In 1993 the theatre company, with its relatively permanent team of contributors, was still the prototypical organization. Today we are seeing more and more interdisciplinary production nuclei, which maintain casual relationships with freelance artists and co-producers at home and abroad.

Following the publication of this field analysis in 2007, we made in-depth studies of the results for the various sub-disciplines and

sub-sectors, including dance (*Canaries in the Coal Mine. Master plan for Dance in Flanders and Brussels*, 2007) and performing arts for children and youngsters (*POP-UP! The Place of Children and Youngsters in a dynamic performing arts landscape*, 2009). In the previous issue of VTI's magazine *Courant*, which touches upon the debate about repertoire, we focused on the position of the playwright in the (text) theatre (www.vti.be/courant).

Here we will analyze the same database material, now directing our focus to music theatre. The approach will be similar to the partial analyses that were made for dance and performing arts for children and youngsters. The main focus of attention will, here again, be how specific sub-segments relate to the entirety of the performing arts production in Flanders. Does music theatre production follow the overall trends or can we find differences that shed light on what could be particular for this specific sub-segment? Which organizations account for music theatre production?

METHOD

For over two decades, VTI has been keeping records of professional performing arts production involving Flemish government supported organizations. What have they produced? How many seasons were these productions put on again? Which performing artists and producers are featured in the production credits? For each production, the database contains a file that mentions information gathered from flyers and programme books: title, date of premiere performance, season, cast, producers and co-producers, and genre. For the period 1993-1994 until 2004-2005, the database contains a total number of 6,653 productions, reprises included.

In the following pages, we will mark out a 'music theatre' sub-segment of a total of 1,038 productions. This selection was not

made on the basis of institutional criteria, but of production qualities. Productions are identified as 'music theatrical' productions on the basis of two criteria: genre labels attached to productions and information about the casts.

Genre labels

All productions in the database are given one or more genre classifications. Much like the production credits, we do that on the basis of the information supplied by the producers and exhibitors. Throughout the years, a variety of genre labels and indications have been used in ever shifting combinations. In *Metamorphoses* we clustered this multitude into five categories in order to make it surveyable: 'theatre', 'dance', 'music theatre', 'children and youngsters' and a rest category 'other disciplines'. For the complete survey of sub-genres, we refer to *Metamorphoses* (download via <http://en.vti.be/booklet.metamorphoses.pdf>). For the music theatre category, it is important to note that both opera and other performing art forms are included, as well as the musical, i.e. as far as the subsidized circuit is involved (the musicals produced by the Flanders Royal Ballet Company, for instance). Productions by profit-based companies are not included (unless their work has been co-produced by subsidized partners).

On stage live music

In *Metamorphoses* music theatre was discussed merely on the basis of the genre labels. We had to refine the criteria for this new exercise in figures. On closer inspection, the use of the genre label 'music theatre' proved complicated. Alain Platel's production *La Tristeza Complice* (1995), for instance, was given the label 'music theatre', but his *lets op Bach* (1998) and *Wolf* (2003) were exclusively labelled as 'dance'. The difference in labelling was

probably merely the result of the fact that *La Tristeza Complice* was a co-production between Platel's company Les Ballets C de la B and Het Muziek Lod (now LOD), a music theatre company.

Producers and venues will, undoubtedly, have a variety of motives to classify and present productions as 'music theatre': these can be institutional, artistic or simply a matter of communication. This, however, affects VTi's database. So, in order to refine the definition of the 'music theatre' sub-segment, we must also consult information about the cast. We shall include stage productions during which music was performed live on stage, on the basis of artistic and/or technical staff lists indicating that music was meant to be performed live on stage: 'singer', 'soprano', 'conductor', or collective descriptions such as 'vocal ensemble' or 'orchestra'. The result is that the music theatre category broadened and that certain dance productions by, for instance, Rosas or Les Ballets C de la B will, henceforth, be included.

In brief: when marking out a music theatre sub-segment within the entirety of the Flemish performing arts, we do not restrict ourselves exclusively to the output by producers whose mission is to produce opera and/or music theatre, but look at specific characteristics of each individual production. We will examine how these productions relate to the rest of the stage production between 1993 and 2005. Which part of the stage production combines musical and theatrical expertise? Is the use of live music on stage on the rise?

The second important issue is the institutional embedding of these productions. We know which producers were credited for music theatre productions. We have information about their provenance (on the basis of addresses) and about their subsidy status. That will help us get a clear view on both the degree of internationalization and the Flemish government's music theatre policy between 1993 and 2005.

MUSIC THEATRE'S SHARE IN THE PERFORMING ARTS

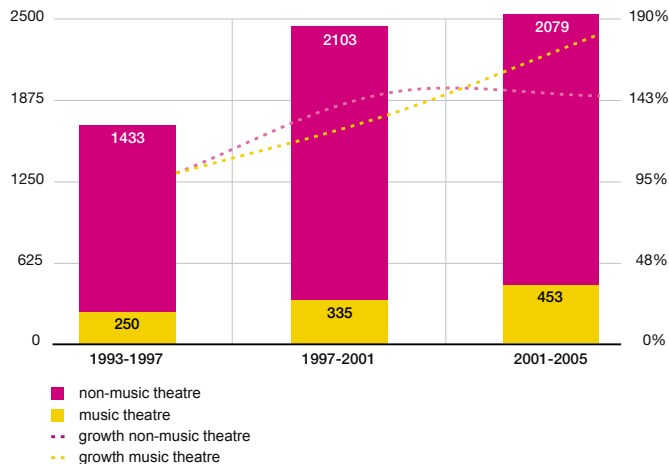
During the examined period, the database counts 6,653 productions, reprises included. On the basis of the selection criteria mentioned above, 1,038 of these can be considered as music theatre productions.

The diagram below shows the evolution of the production volume for the music theatre segment as well as for what belongs to other segments. The examined period has been sub-divided into four-year periods according to the logic of the Flemish Parliament's Performing Arts Decree, which was effective in the period 1993-2005. Other than the prior Theatre Decree, which it replaced, the Performing Arts Decree not only supported theatre companies, but also dance companies, music theatre companies and arts centres. These could be supported by means of project subsidies (for specific productions) or via multi-annual grants for a four year term.

Before it was replaced by the Arts Decree in 2006, there were three consecutive terms of four seasons each during which performing arts organizations could receive government recognition and support via the Performing Arts Decree: 1993-1997, 1997-2001 and 2001-2005. How are the productions spread over the three terms?

The bars on diagram 1 indicate how many productions we have counted for each of the three consecutive terms in the segment of 'music theatre' and in the other performing arts disciplines. The absolute figures – i.e. precise numbers of productions – are shown on the left Y-axis. The curves relate in terms of percentage to the Y-axis on the right and indicate the two segments' growth rate. The latter two terms are compared to the rates for 1993-1997, which we equated with 100%. This will allow us to compare the music theatre's growth rate with the evolution of the other performing arts disciplines.

Diagram 1: Evolution of the number of productions in the 'music theatre' segment and the other performing arts disciplines



For the examined period, an increasing number of music theatre productions and of other performing arts productions can be observed, but the growth curves have a different shape.

The music theatre growth curve deviates from the trend for the entire segment of the performing arts. Since 1993, the year the Performing Arts Decree became effective, there has been a strong increase of performing arts productions in Flanders. This growth, however, appeared to have taken place during the years before the turn of the century. After 2000, production no longer increased at the same rate. For 2001-2005, music theatre, therefore, seems to evolve contrary to the overall tendency. While the other performing arts disciplines production rate comes to a standstill (and at a certain point even becomes negative), music theatre production keeps moving up.

How can we explain this remarkable increase? Several elements may have been influential, on an institutional as well as on an artistic level.

- Has the Performing Arts Decree increased the production capacity?** In *Metamorphoses*, we related the rise in production to the diversification of the landscape. In 1993, the landscape was still strongly marked by the Theatre Decree, that ruled the performing arts between 1975 and 1993. It was only since the 1993 Performing Arts Decree that dance and music theatre producers and arts centres could be considered for government recognition and support, acknowledging the existence of a 'music theatre' category and creating room for cross-over in the performing arts. Among the companies that still receive subsidies today, LOD, Music Theatre Transparant and WALPURGIS were the first to receive recognition. As a successor of the old Theatre Decree, the 1993 Performing Arts Decree definitely created a diversification of the landscape, allowing music theatre production to gain strength and continuity as a result of project subsidies and the possibility of a four-year envelope for producers.
- Increasing international co-production support?** In *Carnaries in the Coal Mine. Master plan for dance in Flanders and Brussels* (VTi, 2007) it was noted that after 2000, dance production had a strong breakthrough on the Flemish (and Brussels) scene, contrary to the overall tendencies for the performing arts. The Performing Arts Decree definitely played a major part in this, but perhaps even more the increasing participation by foreign (co-)producers. It is worthwhile investigating to what extent the increasing internationalisation of co-production practice could explain the expansion of the music theatre segment.

- **More on stage live music?** A third explanation could be that live music on stage has gained importance during the examined period: not only because the music theatre companies have become more solid, but also because heterologous producers (theatre and dance companies) began to work with music live on stage more often.

Has the growth of music theatre, therefore, been a result of the increasing capacity of music theatre producers, internationalisation of production or of the fact that quite a number of companies have begun to put more live music on stage? We shall examine these hypotheses by taking a closer look at the backgrounds of the music theatre producers who have brought about this growth.

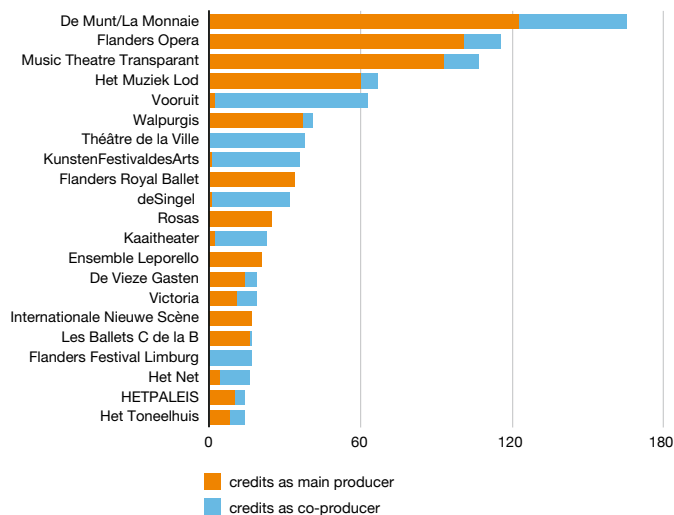
MAIN PRODUCERS AND PARTNERSHIPS

On the whole, 518 different producers were involved in the 1,038 music theatre productions compiled in VTi's database. Not all these organisations take an equal share: some were involved in over 100 productions whereas 254 producers only took part in one single production. Not only the quantity, but also the quality of the participation varies. 207 producers acted as executive producer. The other 311 only gave co-production support.

To a certain extent, VTi's database allows us to measure the differences between those involved to a larger or smaller extent. We do not have information about the production budgets, but on the basis of the billed information, we can distinguish main producers from co-producers¹.

Diagram 2 shows the most active producers in the music theatre sector. For each organization, we counted the number of credits between 1993 and 2005, distinguishing main production credits (orange) and partnerships (blue). The result is a top-twenty list.

Diagram 2: Top-20 of the most active music theatre producers 1993-2005



Topping the list are, of course, the usual suspects: the opera houses, which compiled over 100 credits during the examined period, closely followed by the music theatre companies that received government support over a longer period via the Perform-

1. In daily practice, the participation of organizations in a production is defined in various ways. For our research we tried to define the production responsibilities. For each production we have tried to identify one (or max two) main producers. Next we have tried to discern various partnership modes, including contribution in kind, increased fees, premiere deals, various financial arrangements and actual joint production. These various forms of participating will all be labelled as 'partnerships'.

ing Arts Decree. But the list's most striking feature is the diversity of the involved organizations' backgrounds. There is the Flanders Royal Ballet (Koninklijk Ballet van Vlaanderen), that also produced musicals during the examined period (the company actually closed its musical department in 2004). There are also the productions by dance companies such as Rosas and Les Ballets C de la B: not their entire production, but only the productions that worked with on stage live music. There is also the theatre companies' share: Ensemble Leporello, Victoria, HETPALEIS, Toneelhuis, Het Net... It should be noted that nearly all – Leporello is an exception – theatre companies have been involved both as main producer and as co-producer. Toneelhuis, for instance, co-produced Wayn Traub's work during the period.

The list also shows a number of arts centres and festivals which work primarily as co-producer for – domestic and foreign – music theatre companies: Vooruit, Kaaitheater, deSingel, Kunstenfestivaldesarts and Flanders Festival. A striking presence in the list is Paris-based Théâtre de la Ville: this house does not primarily owe its high ranking in the list to a partnership with music theatre companies in Flanders recognized as such, but to its year-long partnership with theatre and dance companies such as Rosas, Needcompany and Les Ballets C de la B. Further below is a list of the most active foreign co-producers.

The top of the pyramid is, of course, only one side of the story. Diagram 2 only shows the music producers top twenty, representing only 4% of the organizations, but responsible for 41% of the entire production volume. In what follows, we shall take a closer look at the rise of co-production practice and the background of producers for the entirety of music theatre production.

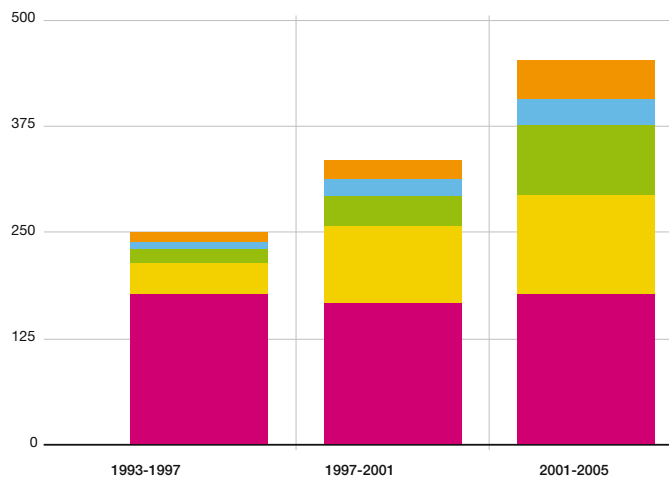
DEVELOPING CO-PRODUCTION PRACTICE

During the period 1993-2005 the production mode of the performing arts drastically changed. In *Metamorphoses* a strong rise of co-production practice was noted as one of the most striking trends. Whereas the majority of the productions of the early 1990s were made by single organizations, today's production increasingly takes place in a network environment – in co-operation with partners with a variety of backgrounds, domestic and foreign. This is a trend that began in the 1980s and that was probably intensified since the introduction of the Arts Decree. A new edition of the field analysis, scheduled for mid-2011, is expected to give definite answers.

In the meantime, it is plausible to say that co-production has become a regular practice in music theatre as much as in any other performing arts discipline. For the 1,038 productions, a total of 2,184 mentions of a (co-)producer can be counted.

This means that, on average, just over two producers are involved in a music theatre production. But averages can sometimes disguise considerable differences. That is why we think it is better to cluster the productions on the basis of the number of producers. Did co-production practice become increasingly frequent during the examined period? How do the averages in music theatre relate to the entirety of the performing arts?

Diagram 3: Number of producers per production (for music theatre only)



1	177	167	177
2	37	90	117
3	16	36	82
4	9	19	31
5 or more	11	23	46

The diagram shows that co-producing became an increasingly current practice in music theatre during the period of the Performing Arts Decree. In 1993-1997 the majority of productions – 71% to be precise – were still taken care of by one single organization. During the period 2001-2005, this percentage went down to a mere 39%.

When comparing this diagram to the data concerning the entirety of the performing arts (as published in *Metamorphoses*), it is clear that things evolved more quickly in music theatre than in the performing arts in general. In the performing arts, the general number of productions made by one single producer decreases from 80% (during the period 1993-1997) over 64% (in 1997-2001) to 52% (in 2001-2005). In music theatre, as we noted above, the number decreases from 71%, over 50%, to 39%. In other words: there is a difference in pace in co-production practice between music theatre production and the performing arts in general. Moreover, there is a remarkable analogy in dance, where things proved to evolve even more quickly: in 2001-2005 less than a third of the productions was made by one single company.

Why is there so much co-operation in music theatre? There are artistic as well as economic reasons. Music theatre production is interdisciplinary by definition and requires the combination of very specific artistic competences and skills. Co-operation can be meant to bring together partners who have very different forms of expertise.² For *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, for instance, LOD and RO Theater worked together with The Royal Monnaie and De Filmfabriek.

But economic necessity also plays an important part. It is definitely not a coincidence that there is more co-operation in dance and music theatre than in the other performing arts. What both sub-disciplines have in common is that they are relatively expensive, labour-intensive performing arts disciplines. For music theatre, you often need large casts – having to involve actors and (ensembles of) singers/musicians, as a result of the choice of a specific repertoire,.... Working together opens opportunities

2. The following should be noted: Flyers often mention the contribution of music ensembles not as 'co-production' but as an addition to the cast (e.g. 'music performance: Ictus').

to handle productions on a scale no company could ever handle single-handedly.

SUBSIDY STATUS

Between 1993 and 2005 an ever increasing number of organizations became involved in music theatre production. In 1993-1997, we count 125 different music theatre producers, in 1997-2001 this number has risen to 207 and in 2001-2005 their number increases to 381: that is more than a threefold increase compared to the first subsidy term. An ever increasing number of companies turned to music theatre production: the number of main producers doubles – from 64 in 1993-1997 to 128 in 2001-2005 – and the number of organizations that restrict themselves to co-producing or to giving co-production support rises even faster.

A closer look at the music theatre producers' backgrounds will shed more light on the motives behind this increasing co-operation. In the following, we shall examine the land of origin and – for the Belgian organizations – the producers' subsidy status. We shall work with four overall categories: 'Performing Arts Decree', 'other public funding', 'foreign organizations' and a rest category 'non-subsidized Belgian organizations', taking a closer look at some of them.

Performing Arts Decree

The 'Performing Arts Decree' category includes organizations that during a certain subsidy term made an appeal to structural or project support from the Flemish Government within the framework of the Performing Arts Decree. To this group primarily belong organizations which received structural recognition. During the period 1993-1997 these were exclusively theatre, dance

and music theatre organizations and arts centres. As of 1999, festivals were also included. Arts laboratories were not recognized until 2006, with the introduction of the Arts Decree.

The decree granted project support to separate, individual productions, not to organizations. Still, we shall also include a 'project companies' sub-category, referring to organizations that at least once received a project grant during a certain subsidy term.

Between 1993 and 2005 there was an in and out flux of organizations into and out of the Performing Arts Decree. For that reason, we have avoided putting one single label on an organization throughout the entire term. Instead, we reviewed the labels for each of the three subsidy terms, thus allowing for 'migration' of producers from one category to another during the examined period.

As for the organizations that received subsidies in the capacity of 'music theatres', it can generally be stated that during the examined period the 'migration' of project-based supported organizations to structurally supported organizations was very limited. There are, actually, only two cases. Opera Mobile received project subsidies in 1993-1997 and structural support in 1997-2001. The organization stopped its activities after 2001. Puppet-theatre company De Spiegel – established in 1965 and, therefore, hardly a 'newcomer' – received project subsidies in 1997-2001 and structural support in 2001-2005.

Other public funding

The 'other public funding' category includes organizations that do receive government support, but not within the framework of the Performing Arts Decree. The first group includes organizations that received 'ad nominatim' subsidies from the Flemish government culture budget. The most prominent example is, as far as music theatre is concerned, the Flemish Opera. Our category

also includes organizations that received Flemish subsidies from outside the culture budget, or from other government bodies on different levels (federal, local or European). In some exceptional cases – for instance the European Cultural Capitals (Brussels 2000 and Bruges 2002), the governments acted as producers themselves. Music theatre’s major player is the Brussels based Royal Monnaie – an institute funded by the federal government.

Another category that should not be underestimated is the cultural centres. These venues, which are mainly funded by municipalities, act as co-producers only exceptionally. For the examined period, about 14 cultural centres were known to co-produce music theatre productions. Performing arts training graduation projects also find their way to VTi’s database.

Foreign

‘Foreign organizations’ are performing arts organizations that have an office address outside Belgium. We shall make distinctions based on geographical criteria and discuss them more thoroughly later.

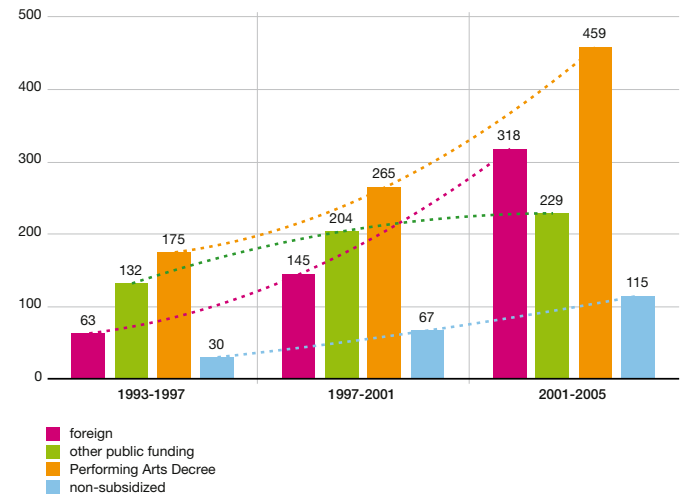
‘Non-subsidized’ rest category

Finally there is a ‘non-subsidized’ rest category. We do not monitor the commercial sector systematically. This category therefore mostly includes non-subsidized producers who do have connections with the subsidized circuit: either because they did receive subsidies during other periods, or because their work has been co-produced by subsidized organizations. Organizations of other arts sectors are also included in this category, notably music ensembles such as the Beethoven Academy, Champ d’Action, Aka Moon, Galacticamendum, Ictus and B!ndman. [We already mentioned that these ensembles’ contribution is often billed as

part of the ‘cast’ rather than as ‘co-producer’. In these cases, the orchestra’s contribution is not reflected in the table and diagram shown below.]

The table shows how many organizations of the types listed above appear in the three subsidy terms, as well as the total number of production credits for each of these types. That will allow us to see which types of organizations made the largest contribution to the (increasing) music theatre production. The corresponding diagram is based on the information about the number of credits.

Diagram 4: Background production credits music theatre



		credits	organisations	% credits	% organisations
'93-'97	foreign	63	45	16%	36%
	other public funding	132	18	33%	14%
	Performing Arts Decree	175	43	44%	34%
	non-subsidized	30	19	8%	15%
'97-'01	foreign	145	77	21%	37%
	other public funding	204	35	30%	17%
	Performing Arts Decree	265	61	39%	29%
	non-subsidized	67	34	10%	16%
'01-'05	foreign	318	169	28%	44%
	other public funding	229	50	20%	13%
	Performing Arts Decree	459	95	41%	25%
	non-subsidized	115	67	10%	18%

The rising number of production credits is apparent in all categories. The trend lines, however, are most outspoken for foreign organizations and the Performing Arts Decree companies.

- The number of foreign credits rises from 63 in 1993-1997 to 318 in 2001-2005: in absolute figures, this is an increase from 16% to 28% of the total number of credits. The values are higher than in the performing arts in general (where the rise goes from 11 to 19%) and lower than in dance (where it goes from 27 to 33%).
- Another striking feature is the increasing participation by Performing Arts Decree-funded organizations. In relative terms, the Performing Arts Decree's share in the total number remains more or less stable. In absolute figures, however, the

number of credits by Performing Arts Decree-funded organizations rises from 175 to 459.

In short, internationalization and an increasing production capacity stimulated by the Performing Arts Decree appear to be important factors explaining the rising number of productions in the music theatre segment. In the following two chapters, we shall examine these categories more closely.

But let us have a look at the backgrounds of the foreign organizations first. Next, we shall take a close look at the Performing Arts Decree category and at the contribution by the various decree sub-categories to music theatre production.

A CLOSER LOOK ABROAD

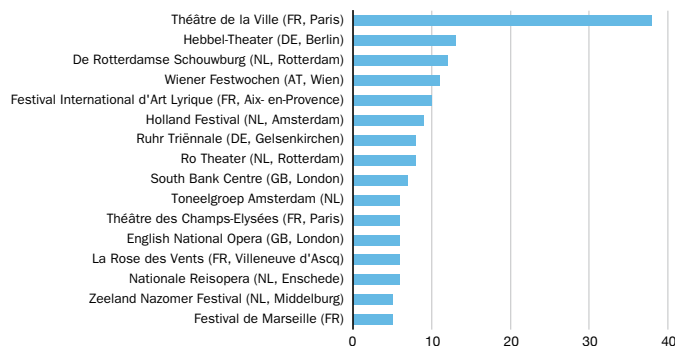
For the entire period 1993-2005 we count a total of 215 foreign producers making a contribution to Flemish music theatre. For the main part, these contributions are co-production support, but the participation of prominent co-producers such as the Kunstenfestivaldesarts, deSingel or Vooruit makes the international exchange not only a matter of taking, but also of giving. These Flemish organisations frequently co-produce foreign music theatre companies.

In music theatre, the international dimension is developed somewhat more strongly than in the performing arts in general. Maybe it is the musical element that causes music theatre production to be less confined to national or linguistic borders than text-based work. Economic elements may also play an important part: it is precisely in the music theatre segment that partnerships are the most numerous. Joining forces makes major productions possible, allowing live on stage music performance. We should, however, be cautious to generalize the international potential of

'music theatre'. After all, the 'music theatre' segment covers a wide variety of institutional circuits. Not every music theatre producer remains equally active in the international co-production market. For the major players – the opera houses as well as Transparant, LOD and WALPURGIS – this is, indeed, the case. But the international dimension of our segment is also boosted by the presence of internationally working theatre or dance companies and co-producers.

Which are the most important foreign co-producers in the 'music theatre' segment? The majority (124) only contributed once. The following diagram lists the most important foreign partners, each of them being at least five times involved in a Flemish music theatre production during the period 1993-2005.

Diagram 5: Top list foreign producers



This list is characterized by wide diversity. Like diagram 2, it also counts organizations that are mainly active in music theatre, and others that develop a wide range of activities. Still, it is striking that many of these producers cross the Flemish institutional borders. The top name – Théâtre de la Ville – was less involved in the productions by Flemish music theatre and opera companies. But many others in the list – Hebbel-Theater, South Bank Centre, Wiener Festwochen, Rotterdamse Schouwburg – have worked together with Flemish partners of very different backgrounds. It is impossible to speak of clearly defined opera, music theatre or other circuits.

The top producers apparently originate from the neighbouring countries. When considering the complete list of foreign producers, however, the origin proves more widespread and diversified. The following maps cluster the number of credits according to origin for the four-year subsidy terms, first per continent, then inside Europe and per country. We make a contrast between the period 1993-1997 and 2001-2005. For each period, we include a map with the distribution of the production credits per continent, and then focusing on European countries.

Diagram 6. Origin production credits 1993-1997 (per continent)



Diagram 7. Origin production credits 2001-2005 (per continent)



Diagram 8. Origin European production credits 1993-1997 (per country)



Diagram 9. Origin European production credits 2001-2005 (per country)



When comparing the 1993-1997 world map with the map of 2001-2005, a certain tendency towards 'globalization' of music theatre production can be noted. For the period 1993-1997, the producers' backgrounds are almost exclusively European. The rest of the world was only incidentally involved, with only one co-operation with the US: in 1993-1994, the Brooklyn Academy of Music was co-producer of *The Cave*, a production by The Royal Monnaie.

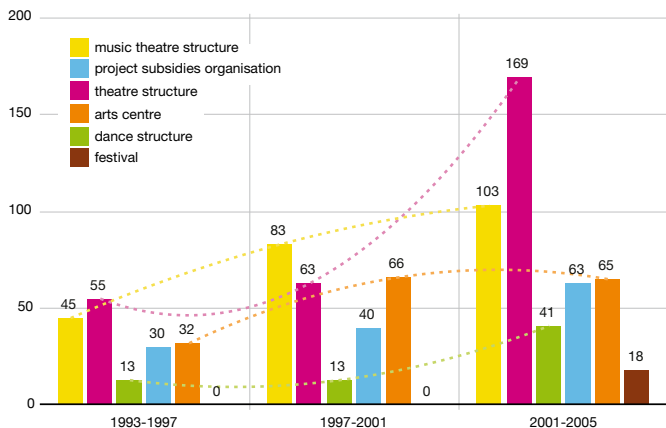
Partnerships with producers from all parts of the world did occur during the period 2001-2005. All continents are now represented, even though the figures vary strongly. The majority of international credits are still European (264). North-America is the only continent where more than ten credits can be noted during the period. All other continents are now featured in the list, but it would be premature to characterize this as structural co-operation.

Music theatre's international dimension, therefore, basically remains a European matter. And even inside Europe, there are blind spots, as can be concluded from diagrams 7 and 8. Flemish organisations mainly collaborate with organisations from the west, even during the period 2001-2005. If European credits have been on the rise, it has been the result of the increasing co-operation inside Western Europe. For the time being, Eastern Europe has not been on the Flemish co-production map.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PERFORMING ARTS DECREE

The second category that grew considerably was the group of organizations that received recognition and support by the Performing Arts Decree (cf. Diagram 4). As stated before, the Performing Arts Decree distinguished various categories, each with a specific advisory committee and criteria. One of these was music theatre. Diagram 10 gives a survey of the number of credits per sub-category for each subsidy term.

Diagram 10: A closer look at the Performing Arts Decree



How does the growth of music theatre production relate to the Performing Arts Decree sub-categories? It is striking that for each subsidy term, it is other organizations that account for the growth.

The growth for the period 1997-2001 can mainly be attributed to music theatre structures and arts centres. During this period, the number of credits in these two categories doubles: from 45 to 83 for the music theatre structures, and from 32 to 66 for the arts centres.

This tendency, however, is not continued during the period 2001-2005. The arts centres' share comes to a standstill. The music theatres' share, nevertheless, goes on growing, but at a slower pace. On the other hand, different organizations emerge strongly: the theatre and dance structures. Compared to the period 1993-1997, music theatre production, or the use of on stage live music, by theatre and dance companies remained stable during the pe-

riod 1997-2001. But then, during the period 2001-2005 this type of production nearly triples among theatre structures, and more than triples among dance structures.

CONCLUSION: MUSIC THEATRE'S BLURRING BOUNDARIES

In the global Flemish performing arts production, we marked out a 'music theatre' segment on the basis of genre labels and information about the cast. In some important respects, this segment's evolution differs from the rest of the performing arts. The growth of Flemish performing arts production between 1993 and 2005 comes to a standstill after 2000, but music theatre keeps on growing considerably.

How can this increasing growth of music theatre be explained? There are several reasons. The emergence of co-production practice in an ever more international environment during the examined period is one of them. The diagrams reveal that there is a lot more co-production in music theatre than in any other performing arts discipline. They also reveal that this co-production takes place in a network that is more international than for the other disciplines. A lot of music theatre structures operate on an international scale. Furthermore, there are quite some internationally oriented theatre and dance companies that often work with on stage live music.

Internationalization is certainly not the only explanation for the growth of the music theatre segment. 1993 was the year when the 1975 Theatre Decree was replaced by the Performing Arts Decree, which would spark off a strong dynamism. From then on, dance and music theatre companies could also receive structural recognition and financial support. The period 1993-1997 saw the emergence of a number of music theatre companies, some of which are still active today. And these organizations went through

a growth process. In the beginning, in 1993, the support they received within the framework of the decree was very modest, but over the years in the examined period, the envelope would systematically grow thicker. In 1993, Transparant started with an annual allowance of one million BEF, Het muziek Lod (LOD) started with 2.5 million BEF. In 1996, both companies received just over 7 million BEF and as of 1997-1998 the subsidies rose to 15 million BEF. During that same period, WALPURGIS's budget went up from 3.5 million BEF to 8 million BEF. An investment that did not fail to affect the increasing production volume we have witnessed during the 1990s.

During the period 2001-2005, the above-mentioned companies made another giant leap forward: the annual support doubled. LOD's and Transparant's allowances rose above 30 million BEF, WALPURGIS's rose to 16 million. And again, a production increase can be noted: from 83 to 103.

But at the same time, confusion strikes the Performing Arts Decree categories. The huge growth of the music theatre segment during this period can mainly be attributed to theatre and dance companies, that all of a sudden began to work more often with on stage live music. This is partly a matter of individual stories: during the period 2001-2005, for instance, Ensemble Leporello, a lot of productions of whom have been added to the music theatre segment, received structural support as a *theatre* company, not as a music theatre company. But the trend is more general. On the basis of the figures, we argued in *Metamorphoses* that the production tended to become more 'hybrid', that there was a rising number of crossovers between theatre and dance and other disciplines, music included. That interdisciplinary boom, however, cannot entirely be attributed exclusively to artistic concerns. There were, undoubtedly, also economic motives and concerns involved. In 2001-2005, culture minister Anciaux gave the performing arts an extra half a billion BEF subsidy injection. In *Metamorphoses*

– and as shown above in diagram 1 – we noted that this injection did not spark off an increase in the number of productions. Apparently, this was an investment in quality, rather than quantity. We see the emergence of artists with a more diversified background. In *Metamorphoses* we already pointed out that as of 2001 the casts tended to grow bigger again, after they had shrunk during the period 1997-2001. The figures suggest that more money was available to start working with on stage live music. The culture minister's financial injection apparently made it possible to invest in production quality, rather than in production quantity.

Between 1993 and 2005, music gradually took a more prominent place in the Flemish performing arts. Performing arts productions increasingly added musical components to the theatrical. Different dynamisms play a clearly phased part: during the 1990s, the growth is mainly to be attributed to music theatre structures. But after the turn of the century, theatre and dance companies claim their share in the growth.

The obvious result might be the broadening of what we perceive as 'music theatre'. During the 1990s, this type of work was exclusively made by producers who had a very specific mission and whose work positioned them explicitly within the framework of music-theatrical traditions. It is, of course, impossible to deduce this from the figures, but it seems reasonable to argue that the institutional broadening that is noticeable after the turn of the century also had artistic consequences. The distinction between 'theatre', 'music theatre' and 'opera' became blurred. From then on, at least, we had to consider a broad spectrum ranging from a subordinate presence of music on stage to a distinctly emphatic and self-reflective presence of the musical component.

This raises questions about the policy that is to be pursued to support music theatre. Is there still a real need to treat 'music theatre' as a distinct decree category? Is separate treatment of music theatre institutionally and/or artistically still possible

at all? The borderlines between the traditional sub-disciplines are constantly shifting, both artistically and institutionally. Will a separate music theatre advisory committee apply other criteria and another frame of reference than for the 'other', increasingly hybrid, performances? Elsewhere in this booklet, Pieter Verstraete writes: 'As a result of the explosion of multimedia and new multidisciplinary forms of music theatre, it has become extremely difficult for an advisory committee to apply an ultimate definition as a standard'. Moreover, *Metamorphoses* revealed that the evolution increasingly obscures the position of organizations that continuously diversify their activities in relation to the subgenres of the performing arts, making it increasingly difficult for them to submit the entirety of the operations to one single specific sub-disciplinary advisory committee.

As a result, the question about the specific identity of a music theatre sub-sector within the performing arts at least demands further consideration. What once was a clearly defined, separate sector today seems to merge into a larger entity. To which extent could this be a problem? Is this confusion productive or does it have a paralyzing effect instead? Does it generate new dynamism – because it makes cross-fertilization between previously separate sectors possible (renowned theatre directors who now venture into opera or music theatre, for instance)? Or could it be that a specific expertise – the combination of musical and theatrical elements into one consistent theatrical entity – is no longer recognized as such?

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Claiming music for the theatre

ABOUT DEFINITIONS BETWEEN CULTURAL POLICY AND ARTISTIC FORMS

Pieter Verstraete

It would not be entirely appropriate to claim that music theatre has defined itself independently from theatre and opera. Whoever takes a glance at music theatre in Flanders will immediately notice a rich variety of cross-over forms, some inclining towards theatre, others towards opera. In fact, the diversity is so striking that it would appear as if music theatre escapes definition.

However, music theatre has struggled long to legitimize itself by means of a definition that opposes it to certain text-based theatre and opera traditions. As an international phenomenon it has been referred to as 'new' or 'small-scale music theatre', as opposed to large-scale opera. This 'small-scale' label, which music theatre took on in its underdog position during the 1980s, now seems to dissolve increasingly among continuously growing music theatre ensembles such as LOD (since 1989), Muziektheater Transparant (1994), and in between, Walpurgis (1989). One of the effects of this growth was an increased awareness of institutionalization and internationalization. The question is what this development's impact on future cultural policies will be, and how the smaller local music theatre companies will respond to this in their search of an identity.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In addition to the numerous small, subsidized music theatre companies, 2009 will mark the arrival of two new major players: Musical van Vlaanderen (Musical of Flanders), a new company established by Geert Allaert, known from numerous previous efforts to position himself in the music theatrical landscape, and Service to Others (now known as 'Het Verbond'), a company set up by booming 'theatre animal' and filmmaker Wayn Traub. The question can be raised to which extent these organizations can still be called 'music theatre companies'. The systematic broadening of the definitions and the current subsidy policy appear to be putting the dearly won identity of Flemish music theatre again at stake. The funds required for a continued growth will constantly decrease and the landscape is getting saturated. After well over twenty years Flemish music theatre now appears to have reached a point in history at which it tends to consolidate its working methods, resources and artistic views. The call for singularity is, therefore, more crucial than ever. In view of the latest subsidy decisions, it is high time to critically reconsider the struggle for self-definition and legitimization.

For a better understanding of this struggle for self-definition, the historical perspective will be helpful to situate the logic and the need of an identity within the evolution of the artistic landscape. Such historical survey remains yet to be written, and may prove difficult to achieve considering the heterogeneity of the music theatre landscape itself. Music theatre is in constant motion. I will, therefore, try to instigate the historical perspective. The struggle for a self-definition is characterized by two types of definition. On the one hand, there are the definitions that present themselves after some time on the basis of the occurrence of similarities with recognizable theatre forms, genres and styles. Definitions of this kind take shape in relation to a certain cultural

awareness and aesthetic views about the role of music in the theatre. On the other hand, the different music theatre concepts have a common interest when it comes to self-definition or re-definition: they share the desire to institutionalize in view of the government's subsidy policy. It is this historical field of tension that will allow us to look at the future.

IMPACT OF THE THEATRE

Unlike the budget situation of the early 1990s, the available financial resources today seem sufficient more than ever. During the last decade, music theatre definitely ceased to be a starvation art practised by obscure composers in the wings of the theatre and opera. The 1993 Performing Arts Decree (Podiumkunstendecreet) recognized music theatre as an independent theatre form. But now the battle for music theatre seems won and its right of existence acknowledged, the landscape threatens to saturate and the dearly won identity to be lost. As a result, the call for singularity has, again, become very expedient, and there are, at least, two reasons for this.

First of all, 'post-dramatic theatre' (as described by Hans-Thies Lehmann) has caused the theatre to become increasingly musical and sound-aware as well as multimedia and interdisciplinary – resulting in new forms of 'total theatre'. As a result, the artistic boundaries of music theatre, as well as opera, have shifted towards theatre. In this way, post-dramatic theatre has indirectly affected the staging practice of both music theatre and opera. The shift 'from opera to theatre', launched during the 1980s by Gerard Mortier at the Royal Monnaie (De Munt/La Monnaie), can be regarded as an exponent of this tendency. Still, commissions for composers who wanted to experiment with music theatre in opera remained scarce. Post-dramatic theatre's effects were more noticeable

on the level of opera stage design, staging and acting style, that viewed to activate the spectator. It undoubtedly also affected opera programming, creating opportunities for 20th-century and contemporary composers (Alban Berg, Benjamin Britten, Leoš Janáček, and, in Flanders, Boudewijn Buckinx, Karel Goeyvaerts and Wim Henderickx), but also for more innovative staging of the opera canon by theatre directors such as Jan Fabre, Gerardjan Rijnders, Ivo van Hove and Johan Simons.

In fact, you might just as well claim that music theatre and theatre evolved similarly, in the sense that both were in search of new forms of theatrical communication. The past couple of years, an aesthetic strategy giving music, sound design and audio technology a more prominent place on the stage could be noted. Only now can we analyze to what extent the numerous music theatre performances have had an impact on the development of the post-dramatic theatre idiom.

Secondly, as a result of its continuing struggle for self-definition, music theatre has, throughout the last decade, expanded to an extent that now might turn against its own right to exist. Either formally, or geographically, an increasing number of small-scale companies have adopted a music theatre profile as a specific segment of the cultural landscape. The formal diversity has resulted in a productive confusion about what music theatre is. This confusion is intensified by the transition of text theatre into multisensory theatre or, to be more specific, into a 'theatre of the ear', as in the many performances with text and soundscapes by Braakland/ZeBilding after 1998. Furthermore, music theatre found its way to children's theatre, with a certain amount of overlap as a result: Figurentheater De Spiegel (1993) as well as Kunsthuis Pantalone (1999) both aim at a very youthful audience, including infants less than three or even not-yet-born. The interest in the latter target group, apart from the therapeutic and emancipatory intentions, could be read as a statement about the future of music theatre itself.

The expansion of music theatre from within the theatre, with Wayn Traub's ensemble's plans to settle in Limburg (Hasselt) as the most recent example, will surely be beneficial for geographical diversity in music theatre as well as for its cooperation with theatre. Still, in the long run, the expansion could also endanger the continuity and means of existence of the smaller companies. The odds are that new financial constructions will have to be found, as has been pointed out during recent debates on commercial sponsorship in the theatre sector. But, then again, the variety of ground-breaking forms of music theatre guarantees a high degree of self-reflection. The interference of the profit sector, which for the musical has always been a necessity, would stand in the way of self-reflection.

DEFINING BY NEGATION

Historically, multiform and expanding definitions have always been part of music theatre. For that matter, the fear that appropriation by the theatre and subsidies for the musical represent a threat to the singularity of music theatre is historically justified. Music theatre in Flanders as we know it today, is not merely the result of a re-theatricalization of music, which also took place in the opera: it was also part of a 'musicalization' of the theatre – internationally described as 'post-dramatic theatre'. Music theatre inevitably presented itself as a countermove against antiquated or obsolete theatre models, breaking down classic music composition and performance models on the one hand, and opposing traditional principles of representation in dramatic theatre on the other.

In fact, appropriation by the theatre was there from the beginning, be it in a negative sense, to create a new form of eclectic theatre that incorporates musical and theatrical means in a

new relation or constellation. The connections often arise from the tension between old and new, theatrical action and concert staging, word and music, etc. In this way, music theatre explores theatrical forms beyond the Wagnerian 'Wort-Ton Drama' idea of total theatre. The latter had become a model for a certain music drama tradition and is now still often considered the standard for opera. In itself, Wagner's opera model actually was a revolution in 19th-century opera. After the Wagnerian model grew antiquated, partly as a result of ideological considerations after WW II, 20th-century music theatre increasingly went in search of more direct interaction with the audience and the individual spectator, which could indirectly be understood in a socio-political sense. This quest often produced an emancipatory effect: the totality does not exist outside the spectator's own, subjective experience. Meanings are no longer imposed by a master-genius. The spectator is compelled to become aware that he is responsible for his own experience and for the meaningful associations he is making. In essence, this approach is not any different from contemporary theatre.

The present tendency is that an increasing number of small-scale music theatre initiatives are putting the boundaries of the theatre under pressure by making alliances with installation art, visual art, modern dance, site-specific theatre, and new electro-acoustic technologies and interfaces. The intensified interaction with the audience and the often consequential additional cost raise the question whether the theatre's (re-)appropriation has not become imperative. In that case, the influence of the theatre is a matter of logistics. But co-operation with the theatre – from which it has largely originated – and the mutual influences will be beneficial for music theatre. LOD, Muziektheater Transparant and Walpurgis play a pioneering role in that process: for quite some time now, their working strategies have been based on collaboration between composers, theatre directors, choreographers and

stage designers, all of whom commit themselves to music and opera and to theatre alike.

It is important to bear in mind that the current music theatre landscape does not begin with LOD, which began some twenty years ago as a series of innovative lunch concerts under the heading 'Lunch On Thursday' (Lunch Op Donderdag, the abbreviation of which would become the organization's name). Nor did music theatre begin in the 1950s, with the first chamber operas by what was then called 'Chamber Opera Transparant' (Kameropera Transparant), nor with the individuals who during in the 1960s and 70s deliberately decided to break down the boundaries of institutionalized opera. Music theatre has a much longer history of reformations, re-definitions and breaks with the past. It has always been under development, which is emblematic for its uncertain genesis. In the 20th century, however, we do note an accelerating development of music theatre forms, causing cultural policy to lag behind. This acceleration is also basically an international phenomenon in western art music, including the ground-breaking efforts by Luciano Berio, Cathy Berberian, John Cage, Philip Glass, Alexander Goehr, Hans Werner Henze, Maurizio Kagel, Georges Aperghis, Luigi Nono or Peter Maxwell Davies. The impulse, however, was not only given by composers. As a result of a plethora of artistic and especially personal trajectories, it has become rather difficult to capture music theatre in one single definition.

DEFINITIONS AT RISK

The diversity of forms, styles and genres historically caused general confusion about music theatre, which nourished the struggle for a definition. The necessity of a definition to secure the right to exist and the distinctiveness of music theatre is felt somewhat

different when it comes to subsidies. As a result, two overall approaches towards a definition have emerged. In the first, music theatre is generally defined negatively, as mentioned above: music theatre is *not* text-based theatre and *not* opera. The second is diametrically opposed to the first: it suggests that the term 'music theatre' is an 'umbrella term' designating all subgenres, including musical, opera, operetta, chamber opera and all sorts of experimental mixtures of theatre and stage concert.

In the first, negative definition, the term 'music theatre' involves the last group of experimental cross-over forms which escape strict definitions. This type of music theatre fought the battle for a definition mainly to make itself known and to obtain a separate place in subsidy policies. Aesthetically, music theatre moves more intuitively through formal experiments between different productions, with interrelations which are perceived sooner by the makers themselves.

The second – all-embracing – definition caused even more confusion. So far, we have had a fairly clear idea of what opera, operetta or musical is, as these forms have a clearly delineated stage history and because they were thoroughly institutionalized. Experiments with these older, music dramatic idioms, however, have raised a general awareness of their heterogeneity. The opera scene used the term 'music theatre' in and out of season to invigorate itself. With my students in Amsterdam, I often illustrate this with the example of the Dutch Opera, which renamed itself 'Het Muziektheater' on the occasion of the opening of the new opera venue near the Amstel in Amsterdam. In a counter reaction, the state-funded opera institute appropriated the term to 'rejuvenate' itself – or rather, to claim a younger profile – in the changing landscape.

In the early days of the amendments to the 1993 Performing Arts Decree, opera, operetta, musical and other multidisciplinary artistic expressions were included in the definition of music

theatre. This definition gradually became more concrete, until in 2003 (and later in the 2006-7 advisory committee's introductory notes) it was decided that the main criterion would be that music theatre organizations 'primarily engage in initiatives in which music, mostly performed live, is combined with theatrical forms.' The advisory committee went on to define the theatrical aspect in terms of 'the living presence of performers, actors and/or singers, who are responsible for the dramatic action'. A recent performance by the German music theatre maker Heiner Goebbels, *Stifters Dinge*, even challenges this last notion: all music was reproduced by musical robots in a giant installation of tubes, valves, membranes, prepared pianos, etc. Similar experiments can be noted in Flanders in the radical performances by, among others, Godfried-Willem Raes and Moniek Darge in the alternative experimental music circuit of the Ghent-based Logos Foundation. Subsidized music theatre companies are, for that matter, more frequently trying to establish synergies with new, possibly interactive music and sound technologies.

As a result of the explosion of multimedia and new multidisciplinary forms of music theatre, it has become extremely difficult for an advisory committee to apply an ultimate definition as a standard. The problem is becoming even more complicated because experimental music has developed into a complex knot of styles and composition techniques, in which the tone is no longer set by one single avant-garde. Music theatres nowadays are junctions where individual artist trajectories come together, where boundless eclecticism goes hand in hand with formal experiment and the search for new sonic textures, sounds and technologies. Because the structurally subsidized companies have little budget available for experiment, project grants are vitally important to maintain music theatre's laboratory function.

PRODUCTIVE AMBIGUITY

All things considered, the battle for a new sound in the theatre that feverishly broke out at the end of the 1980s, can be said to have been successful. Numerous radical experiments have preceded the current music theatre companies, with even a series of operas for the Belgian radio and television way before Bob Ashley's so-called television operas in the US in the 1980s. Today, Flemish music theatre is an unprecedented breeding ground thanks to successful definition policies. The vagueness and confusion surrounding its definition has procured a productive gap that is presently stopped by at least nine government supported companies and various small initiatives. The only invariable thing in music theatre is, perhaps, that it has become an organization model that offers a refuge to experimental and somewhat more difficult theatre that thinks and operates through music.

Historically speaking, this productive ambiguity has been around since the evolution of the 16th-century *dramma per musica* [or even earlier] up to the 19th and 20th-century music drama boom. As a music theatre genre in the broadest definition, musical too has made its claims on music and the singing voice, despite its more advanced institutionalization and definition. In the debate, the musical fences with its social function by comparing it to 19th-century Italian belcanto-opera. In spite of the historical misconception, which is based on an intentionally reduced notion, the argument serves the purpose of a similar productive ambiguity in the expansion of definitions, as well as in the repeated negation of the alleged 'old' opera model. This vagueness is meant to nourish the need to anchor musical more firmly in Flemish cultural policy. The desire also remains to perpetuate the musical as an institution through mature tuition of multi-talented performing artists. As a result, the musical has got stuck in the same urge for emancipation as music theatre about twenty years ago. But con-

sidering its dependence on commercial strategies, the question remains whether an experimental musical scene will be capable of creating comparable historical awareness and self-reflection as music theatre did.

THE FUTURE OF MUSIC THEATRE

As a result of the ongoing self-legitimization through different, uncompromising artistic trajectories, project-based formal experiments and innovative forms of collaboration, the roads are open more than ever before. Thanks to a successful definition policy, certain notions of the meaning of music theatre have begun to live their own lives in cultural policy. The confusion of definitions perpetuates the need of more financial resources. Conversely, we are slowly reaching a point at which it is possible to define constant indicators, and at which cautious institutionalisation of music theatre is becoming plausible. But for bona fide, formal definitions the landscape is still too much in motion.

One side-effect of the definition policy is that the major music theatre houses will focus more on self-preservation. These houses have taken up the distinct role of offering growth trajectories to artists in residence (such as Dick Van der Harst, Jan Kuijken, Dominique Pauwels and Kris Defoort at LOD; Wim Henderickx, Peter Maxwell Davies, Jan Van Outryve and Eric Sleichim at Muziektheater Transparant). The major advantage is that companies can guarantee sufficient time and means to develop new productions, as music theatre requires a relatively long production time, as well as ample rehearsal time and space for musicians, singers and actors. On the other hand, the system has the setback of privileging the means for an elite of composers and performing artists over a long period, even though they have proven their artistic worth and merits in the development of

music theatre. As a result, LOD will prefer to work in trajectories in order to be able to respond to the increasingly complex cultural reality more sufficiently.

It is promising that the major companies have not only established an ongoing internationalization and a solid reputation of their composers; they have also developed structures and collaborative associations that make it interesting to offer short-term opportunities to new creators. Collaboration with the opera is becoming reality, also internationally, even though structural funds are still lacking. The 'Orpheic' desire for the idiom of opera, which music theatre has long resisted, is winking at the moment when music theatre is seeking to perpetuate and consolidate its definition. An increasing number of composers venture demanding 'operas', either in new hybrid forms with other musical idioms (with Kris Defoort's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* as a successful prototype), or in alternative interdisciplinary forms that question the theatrical experience, such as Wayn Traub's notorious 'cinema-operas'.

Institutionalization and self-preservation are at odds with the original struggle for definition that is so closely connected to music theatre as a cultural phenomenon. In that case, one of music theatre's major challenges ahead will be fairly predictable. It is up to a new generation to *oppose* opera, to *oppose* post-dramatic theatre and very likely also to *oppose* the music theatre that is discussed here. History teaches that such resistance movements are necessary to maintain continuity. Music theatre is such a flexible phenomenon that it will continue to seek new formal and substantial expressions in relation to the culture in which it operates. It is this field of tension between theatre, opera and musical that gives music theatre its resilience and right to exist.

Music theatre incessantly breathes and moves, *with* and *against* the currents of the dominant culture. At times it inflates its definition and then deflates it again, just like the opening and closing of a lung, like Dick van der Harst's bandoneon.

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issues

LE GRAND MACABRE, DE MUNT/LA MONNAIE, 2008-2009 - PHOTO BERND UHLIG

The international ambitions of music theatre

Guy Coolen

OVER-SUPPLY AND FRUSTRATION: THE PRODUCER'S TASKS

Opera and music theatre are on the rise worldwide. Contrary to about twenty or thirty years ago, nowadays at least one new work is created every week. Whether all these recent creations will reach an international platform is doubtful. But that should be no problem: among the vast array of efforts, one or two projects will, in the end, rise to the surface, just like in the old days: from the thousands of operas written at the time, only a select canon is left.

Quite some opera houses and music theatre companies regularly commission new operas or music theatre productions, usually out of international ambition. And so we now find ourselves in a situation of an over-supply that is often frustrating for the makers. Apart from some ten internationally renowned living composers, whose new works fairly easily find their way in the market, the international scene has become pretty inaccessible to unknown, or less well-known, makers. The producer and/or local governments need to have a strong network or plan to get these compositions on an international platform.

Typically for music theatre, the local national target group is relatively small. The producers logically aim at an international market. The producer therefore now plays a more important role in the creation process, especially in the way he supports the artistic research process and even more when it comes to assessing the potential and the ambitions. Not every piece of work is to go

international. It is much more essential that the artist (composer, librettist...) is allowed to remain true to himself and it is the producer's task to assess which creation will have an international potential, and which will not. That is how he can prevent people from being disappointed. The question is also whether it would not be better if the producers would raise their artistic demands, because the quality of the opera creations often fails to go beyond regional standards. There is a discrepancy between the international ambitions and the actual overall quality.

Still, most forms of contemporary music theatre have a potential for broad international appeal. Language usually is not an obstacle, because the singing is mostly done in a foreign language or because the productions allow for performance in various languages. But the success will greatly depend on subject matter, composition style and the diverging perceptions of innovative contemporary music theatre.

AN AFFLUENT FLEMISH MUSIC THEATRE SCENE

The Flemish music theatre landscape is particularly lush and rich in variation. Apart from the Flemish Opera, there is an array of small to medium size music theatre houses. This can partly be explained by the available artistic quality, but also by the career opportunities the Flemish government has created during the past fifteen years. This affluence and broadness are quite unique in the international performing arts and the government's choice to give the genre full bottom-up support has proven fruitful.

Most music theatre organizations in Flanders have an international profile or are on the way to international recognition. They are oriented towards international quality standards. An invitation to a foreign festival is considered a useful indicator for the quality of domestic production. And performing at the festivals

of Aix-en-Provence or Edinburgh usually generates invitations to other festivals. The Flemish government has always supported this international ambition and could even go one step further by keeping organizations informed on a pro-active basis about upcoming major events and festivals. Some additional support in external communication might prove equally useful.

Flemish theatre makers' urge to perform abroad is primarily a result of that international quality label, but it also has much to do with the fact that Flanders only has to offer a rather limited number of venues. The local cultural centres take less risks – the number of Flemish co-producers is declining, making an orientation towards an international market a necessity. Some Flemish music theatre productions can be seen more often abroad than in Flanders itself, as a result of their sheer size. The government could, perhaps, aim for an increase of the number of venues where such relatively demanding productions could be staged.

MUSIC THEATRE OUTSIDE FLANDERS

For a government, it is important to create the basic conditions for the development of a diversified music theatre scene. In most countries, priority is given to an opera house or a prominent festival, leaving little room for other quality music theatre. The Netherlands, for instance, strongly invest in the international promotion of productions and spend huge amounts of money on presentation abroad, but too little has been invested in the quality development of small-scale music theatre. Apart from the Dutch Opera and one or two interesting medium size houses (such as Paul Koek's Veenfabriek and O.T....) the Netherlands have only recently developed a more creative music theatre policy, as a result of which the Netherlands are trailing behind when it comes to small-scale quality projects with an international appeal. Small-

scale productions often lack true international ambition and content themselves with local acclaim. In Flanders, however, this international dimension is present among both major and minor organizations.

At a recent Opera Europe Conference on music theatre and opera held in Oslo, the question was raised what our approach towards all these new operas could, or should, be. The Opera of Barcelona's director explained that he had proposed Covent Garden to take over the new opera creation he had commissioned from a Catalan composer. But there was no interest, because Covent Garden already had a contemporary opera by a British composer, and because the production would be hard to sell to the London public. The Catalan composer's lack of added value as well as the opera's regional subject matter and composition aesthetics made the production unappealing for London audiences.

In an attempt to bypass the differences in regional tastes, interesting but difficult forms of international co-operation have been set up, bringing artists from different countries together. An artist's participation in a production is beneficial to open a natural market in his country of origin, but far too often, there is too much compromise. This kind of co-operation can only prove successful if it is based on artistic necessity. If money is the only reason, the result is usually below standard.

Some production houses or companies respond to the demands of the international market by setting up artificial projects or by copying success formulas. Festivals play a major part as launch sites, but for production companies, it remains essential that the artist is in charge and that he is allowed to do his job without compromise.

FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

- In contemporary music theatre, the international market is a necessity, either to get projects financed, or to increase the number of venues. Certain international arts centres and festivals are becoming increasingly influential in determining which names will make it, and which will not. For young makers, it has become extremely difficult to attract attention if they are not backed up by a strong producer or publishing company, especially as the major festivals increasingly opt for well-established names to attract huge audiences. The question is what we can do about it. How can we prevent the leading festivals from merely exchanging each other's prestige projects? How can we safeguard the influx of fresh blood?
- That a lot of new operas and music theatre works are made is a good thing, but among most producers and makers, there is a lack of quality awareness. International scope is to overrule regional concerns. A lot of works should, perhaps, never see the light of day or be elaborated. How can producers be made to adopt a more critical attitude towards their own artists and to work on an international level?
- A government can play a stimulating role to make the music theatre landscape prosper. Certain conditions for subsidizing can raise bottom-up potential and make it easier for smaller organizations to professionalize. Should the government, therefore, adopt an even more active policy, or should the talent that has been made to shoot up with the help of subsidies, now prove itself instead?

Guy Coolen has been artistic and general director of *Transparent Music Theatre* since 1993. In 2008, he was appointed artistic director of the *Frysk Festival* and of the annual *Rotterdam Opera Days*. He is also a member of the *European Cultural Parliament*.

Opera is dead. Long live the opera!

ABOUT MUSIC THEATRE AND ITS AUDIENCE

Ute Haferburg

In the early 1960s Th. W. Adorno diagnosed the hibernation of opera on records as a means to prevent it from trivialization and from becoming 'scenic museum pieces'. During a 1967 interview Pierre Boulez demanded: 'Blow up the opera houses', and thus declared war on opera as an art form abused – in the 'capitalist West' – as a performing art. A lot has happened since then. The stuffy post-war opera developed into a socially critical art form, in which the so-called director's theatre created new, anti-museological and anti-performance stage aesthetics. The scenic confrontation of the work with history and current social reality, involving critical analysis of source material and interpretation of the music, became the epicentre for each staging that wanted to be taken seriously. Western opera has been revolutionized since the 1980s by major directors such as Ruth Berghaus, Peter Konwitschny, Hans Neuenfels, Patrice Chéreau, Werner Herzog, Harry Kupfer or Herbert Wernicke. In the socialist East, the GDR, critical music theatre (and drama) had been developed by Walter Felsenstein (who had, incidentally, outlined the notions 'music theatre' and 'director's theatre' already during the late 1940s), Ruth Berghaus and Harry Kupfer since the 1950s, and by Peter Konwitschny since the 1970s. During the 1990s, they were joined by young English speaking 'savages' from across the ocean: Robert Carsen, Richard Jones, Bob Wilson, Nigel Lowery and many others.

OPERA AND PROTEST

The (western) traditional audience initially struggled with the revolution in the opera houses. In the early days of the Gielen/Zehelein directorate at the Frankfurt Opera, for instance, Ruth Berghaus's or Hans Neuenfels's premières met with storms of furious, and even fascistic protest. But in the wake of the new and fresh aesthetics gradually emerged a growing younger group of supporters who re-discovered opera as a socially relevant art form (note: the author of this article was with this new audience herself.) By the end of the Gielen/Zehelein decade, the audience profile had visibly changed and rejuvenated: the message had come through. Similar processes took place at various other German opera houses. At first, innovative music theatre was severely punished: subscriptions were cancelled and the attendance dropped dramatically, and it was tough going to build a new and younger audience. Depending on change of management and/or artistic profile of a house, similar cyclic processes of renewal also occur today.

In Belgium, this process appears to take place less dramatically as a result of structural differences. In spite of the sometimes progressive repertoires, the major subsidized houses continue to enjoy strong public response. They have no problem with attendance thanks to the 'ensuite system', a system with a limited number of performances of productions which are scheduled consecutively. The attendance is almost 100%! Still, to draw the conclusion that a status quo is good enough would be a mistake.

Today, the audience have taken a giant step forward. Even the more extreme, radical interpretations, such as Calixto Bieito's, can count on enthusiastic response. There is a promising generation of young directors, who attract yet a new young generation. Aficionados of tonal opera – from Monteverdi to Richard Strauss – appear to be younger than thirty years ago, and, what is more, they network on an international scale.

CONTEMPORARY OPERA AND ITS AUDIENCE

With Schoenberg's and Berg's dodecapronic music theatre, the contemporary opera scene, that had to make its way along a very thorny path, finally begins to attract full houses at the renowned opera houses. A lot of managers failed to accomplish their cultural mission to stimulate contemporary music theatre, sometimes out of ignorance, of anticipating obedience to an alleged public taste, and for fear of empty seats and box offices. Today, that situation has partly changed: opera houses do schedule contemporary opera more often and attract special attention by means of attractive and persuasive publicity campaigns, sidebar activities, non-conventional frameworks, educational projects and workshops. As a result, these contemporary operas attract bigger audiences than, say, twenty years ago.

Next to its grand opera repertoire, which always includes one or two contemporary operas, the Stuttgart Zeitoper, for instance, successfully schedules smaller, experimental performances you would rather expect in the independent circuit. In those cases, the grand Staatsoper Stuttgart's repute acts as a deliberate bridge builder between various target audiences and thus generates new audiences.

Still, contemporary music theatre and its new forms of interdisciplinary communication between the stage and the public have, so far, not made it to the real opera repertoire. Even today, many managers still stage 20th or 21st-century operas merely as a front to legitimize themselves culturally and to secure subsidies.

THE INDEPENDENT MUSIC THEATRE SCENE

During the 1980s, a separate international experimental music theatre scene emerged, partly out of protest against the opera

houses' often inflexible trade union regulated operating procedures – a movement that followed developments in theatre and dance, which (as far as the author knows) received more acclaim, support and promotion in the Benelux than in the German cultural scene. Highly creative production teams of directors, composers, writers and dramatists developed new forms of – sometimes cross-disciplinary – music theatre, that abandon the traditional stage and, for instance, theatrically explore public spaces for specific projects. The public response varies clearly depending on concept, topicality, renown, occasion and location. Here, too, we find a mostly small group of aficionados that rarely mix with 'classic opera fans', but rather with contemporary theatre and dance devotees.

Contrary to the German speaking territory, Belgium has to offer a highly diversified music theatre scene outside the opera houses. They also receive more recognition from culture policy makers, resulting in higher government support. The Belgian music theatre scene has broken out of the niche and addresses a broad and diversified audience, that feels connected with its theatre companies and artists, and identifies with them.

The big budget contemporary works, however, allow themselves to be produced exclusively in established houses or by rich festivals for practical-financial reasons.

OPERA AND ITS TABOO: WHERE IS THE AUDIENCE OF TOMORROW/OF THE FUTURE?

For all that, the present status quo is unsatisfactory: today, opera and music theatre (I mean contemporary opera and its experimental exponents) are still the exclusive prerogative of a minor part of the so-called cultured middle- and upper class.

Even today, opera is, to many, taboo or undiscovered territory,

an art form ridden by ignorance, prejudice and inhibition, keeping people from entering an opera house or independent venue. I do not believe that opera – contemporary opera included – musically 'aims too high' for general audiences. As an art form, opera is, in se, elitist, but the subject matter appeals to everyone: people sing to people, whatever the colour, race or social class to which they belong.

In 'real life', however, marginal groups and migrants are hardly given the chance to find the way to the opera or music theatre, except perhaps accidentally for educational projects. General music education in the German territory is below standard. So far, education planners still seem unaware of the 'socio-educational value' of music and theatre education. If they were, music education finally would have been given the prestige of a major subject, instead of being omitted from the curriculum. Until today, the relevance and significance of music education has been completely underestimated.

Quite some successful music projects with disfavoured social groups – such as the *Rhythm is it* dance project with Simon Rattle, Royston Maldoon and the Berlin Philharmonic, or Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan-youth orchestra – have shown the value of a creative approach to music and theatre education. This is also a form of audience recruitment: when they discover their passion for music, theatre or art, instead of violence, aggression or depression, all these youngsters become part of our 'cultural pool' and educational work would generate new audiences.

AUDIENCE RECRUITMENT BETWEEN 'PUBLIC RELATIONS' AND 'ART EDUCATION'

What is the trick? How can we 'popularize' music theatre? How can we present it to the general public, without any populism and

without moulding it for the market as 'entertainment'?

Truly visionary audience recruitment certainly implies an obvious development of public relations on the one hand, and the use of unorthodox methods for aesthetic-communicative promotion of programmes on the other. But providing quality stage productions and organizing promotion campaigns will not be sufficient to reach new audiences and to accomplish the cultural 'opera for all' mission. Creative ideas, programmes and actions also need to be mobilized to communicate the artistic process: direct confrontation with the public in argumentative and playfully interactive lectures, rehearsals and workshops in proper productions with amateurs (the public) and professionals.

Most subsidized opera houses should, before all, pave the way for new educational concepts. They should fight for a programme in which a substantial part of their subsidies is invested in creative and educational projects for young and new audiences. Ideally, they would establish their own opera ateliers (as was already tried at some opera houses, including the Staatsoper Stuttgart) with professionals and amateurs, organizing workshops and making own creations on the basis of theatre education theory.

Conclusion: opera is alive, the audience is there and it is younger than is usually assumed. Building a future audience means: act now, mobilize more resources, more creative vision, and set up more aesthetic or social-educational projects. Only then can we reach today's children and youngsters and send them on an exploration trip of music theatre. For theatre makers it means what Voltaire's *Candide* once summarized as: 'Il faut cultiver notre jardin'.

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Music as fellow driving force

TWO CONDITIONS FOR MUSIC THEATRE COMPOSITION

Petra Vermote

I remember a time, not so very long ago, when commissions and cultural policy makers spent a lot of – and artistically useful or otherwise – time and energy on discussion about what was called 'functional music' and whether or not such music could qualify for subsidies for commissioned compositions within the framework of the former Music Decree. I also remember my irritation about the fact that the subsidy directives for commissioned compositions for music theatre only mentioned the three 'archetypes': opera, operetta and musical, and, what's more, provided they were full evening programmes. Is 'music theatre' only these three archetypes? And what does this – to me very confusing – term 'functional' precisely mean? Is music for music theatre 'functional'?

Fortunately, the recent Flemish Parliament Arts Decree (2006) has largely given short shrift to these discussions, justly responding to the tendency that partitions between the various arts disciplines are becoming increasingly blurred. The Arts Decree is a regulatory framework for all arts disciplines (except literature and film). Multi-disciplinary works of art, of which music theatre is a very particular exponent, less and less often slip through the net of subsidy regulations, and music theatre in Flanders is thriving. The blending of genres and artistic disciplines has become a well-tried recipe. And that raises questions about each individual artistic practice's role in the multidisciplinary work.

Even the term 'music theatre' causes some confusion: which cargo does it cover? Is there a difference between music thea-

tre and theatre music, or is that mere word play? Are there fixed criteria to define 'music theatre'? The only possible criterion, in my opinion at least, is the simultaneous presence of musical and theatrical elements. But defining these theatrical elements is yet another subject for further discussion.

ARTISTIC SYMBIOSIS

Rather than venturing myself into [objective?] categorizing and standardizing, I will discuss two interrelated conditions which, for me, are essential to experience my role as a composer in a music theatre piece as substantial.

First of all, there has to be something that I could best describe as an artistic *symbiosis*. An interesting and inspiring symbiosis between different art forms is established when they reinforce each other within the entirety, when each of the two benefits from the presence of the other and where none of the parties involved tries to push the other into a subservient or merely illustrative role. Moreover, symbiosis within a multi-disciplinary work of art departs from the idea that the outcome will be more than the sum of the constituents. That is also the reason why I like the Dutch word 'muziektheater', in which the two words, 'music' and 'theatre' are written as one single word, suggesting that the musical and theatrical elements have merged.

For me, music as a fellow driving force behind the dramatic development is an essential condition to establish what can be called 'music theatre'. In itself, music that merely underscores or illustrates the action, or that only serves as an interlude between spoken parts, is not interesting enough for music theatre. Or let me put it this way: when I watch and listen to a music theatre piece, I want to have a feeling of *inexchangeability* of the music, to experience the vital contribution the music makes to the artistic

identity of that particular music theatre piece. That symbiosis is best established when the makers of a music theatre production have the courage to peek over the walls of their own artistic discipline and at the same time take their own discipline's contribution entirely seriously. They will automatically and inevitably enter into each other's artistic territory. This requires mutual trust, open-mindedness and empathy for each other's art and artistic vision, willingness to get to know each other, to listen and absorb and to refrain from passing quick judgments. And, of course, the readiness to allow the other to be true to him/herself in his/her artistic language.

WORK PROCESS

And so, here is our second essential condition: an efficient organization of the work process, of how the music theatre production is accomplished. Writers, musicians, actors, singers, composers, directors, designers... they all regularly meet under the protective roof of one of the larger Flemish music theatre organizations. But every so often, the meetings take place by chance, with no organization involved. For practical, organizational reasons, working under one of these roofs often is an asset, for instance because the artists no longer have to worry about practical matters and because there is an entire team, ready to organize communication, rehearsal room and schedules... These major organizations also have a stronger network of artists in every possible art discipline, of venues and potential co-producers. These major music theatre houses often also work with *composers in residence*, the performance of whose artistic output is thus secured, and who, in turn, co-determine the house's artistic identity. On the other hand, a large organization also implies a certain degree of institutionalizing.

In the ramified music theatre landscape in Flanders a lot of people, or smaller groups of artists, practise music theatre a bit on their own, without the protection of some major organization, and – sadly enough – often in greater anonymity. Still, these initiatives are precious, because they are often innovative and therefore deserve support. Most of them receive project subsidies. I believe it is absolutely necessary that they will be able to continue working, next to and apart from the larger organizations. Moreover, I am fond of the image of the artist as an – artistically – autonomous individual, independent from any organization whatsoever.

A striking parallel between the world of music and the world of music theatre has occurred to me. Ever since the 1960s (or sometime then) composers of classical music ('classical' – but the partitions are disappearing here as well) have increasingly been turning back to ensembles, showing a tendency to abandon the symphonic orchestra and the standardized chamber music instrumentation. By choosing a distinctly contemporary ensemble, that can be characterized by a line up of single solo instruments (unlike, for instance, the symphonic orchestra, where each instrument has a multiple presence), contemporary composers try to avoid the standardized, originally 18th and 19th-century instrumentations, ranging from piano quintet to symphonic orchestra. What they want is a small-scale form of making music in which the individual contacts between musicians and composer are easier to establish and more direct, avoiding the overall hierarchic musical structures we know from, for instance, the symphonic orchestra, though there will, admittedly, also be economic reasons.

This tendency reminds me of the emergence, also in the 1960s, of small-scale music theatre, in which the makers work together very closely without having to 'give account' to a larger structure they are part of. In that context, close collaboration between all makers implies, for instance, that the composer is allowed to take part in establishing the dramatic content, and that

he can bring in his ideas about purely theatrical issues, or that someone like the text writer, who is often also the director, can have a strong impact on the composer's writing of the music. In this context, the fixed traditional libretto-music-stage design-direction-rehearsal sequence is replaced by a rather concentric and highly organic approach, in which the various art disciplines simultaneously interact and shape the music theatre piece. This approach has many advantages and is, from an artistic point of view, often very challenging as a work process (and highly unpredictable), but there are, of course, also some setbacks. The final artistic product is so closely connected to its makers and the various art disciplines are so tightly interwoven, that a reprise with new personnel will, as it were, be a new work. And that is, on all accounts, a very significant difference from opera – even contemporary opera.

BIG AND SMALL

To me, as a composer, working for music theatre is a very challenging and enriching artistic occupation. Sometimes, of course, I wonder how music written for contemporary small-scale music theatre can be evaluated. This so-called 'functionality' remains a hot potato when it comes to judging the quality of music written for music theatre. I think it is odd that the music should be isolated from the artistic work as a whole (the music theatre piece) for and as a part of which it was conceived. Autonomy can, for me, be no criterion to evaluate the quality of music. In fact, we should simply apply the criteria used for concert music: originality, musical imagination and inventiveness...

Still, I have to admit: too often, theatrical tricks are used as an adroit, though extremely irritating, camouflage to hide the lack of musical imagination. A composer who takes writing for

music theatre seriously has to take his own contribution seriously as well.

Flanders offers a lot of opportunities to composers who would like to work for the music theatre. It is good to see that contemporary artists are not merely confined to or that they take resort to small-scale work (or are 'put away' there), but that they reach an international level, also in opera. I would definitely like to plea for a landscape in which large-scale opera and smaller-scale music theatre projects can exist side by side, preserve their own identity and remain free from too much 'institutionalizing'. 'Hard to standardize' also means: abundance of colour and variation!

Petra Vermote is a composer of concert music as well as music for interdisciplinary projects and music theatre. Between 2004 and 2008, she was vice president of the music theatre advisory committee and of the ad hoc committee commissioned creations (commissioned composition).

The supposed gap

Martin Valcke

What is the significance of today's drama and music education for tomorrow's music theatre? Does music education respond sufficiently to music theatre performance practice? Is there enough room for musical issues in drama education? Do we have to build bridges?

As a lecturer to both word and music students I have experienced that for many of them, there is a deep gap. There is, undeniably, an intrinsic natural difference between how both articulations are experienced, but these differences can perfectly be bridged, if, at least, noses are made to point in the same direction, and that does not happen automatically. The sooner children and youngsters are trained during the education process, the better. And fortunately there are red herrings that are willing to do it.

REALITY

Word or drama students have chosen their training because of a passionate, mostly intuitive, fascination for word and drama. Very often, they are equally infatuated by music, but their musical knowledge and skills are very limited. They will, logically, focus on a small segment in music production, music in which text and drama play an important role – chanson, rock or pop music, musicals.... Their rational knowledge and interpretation of music, however – music theory, formal analysis, music history – is usually poor indeed. So, when they combine word and music, music will, inevitably, play a merely secondary, illustrative role – entirely as in our commercial society.

In turn, music students, struck by the magic of music *an sich*, will develop little awareness of the meaning and impact on music of lyrics, libretto and, even less perhaps, of theatrical and rhetorical effects. Literature, poetry and rhetoric are all right, but let us, above all, enjoy making music! And once they practice their profession, most musicians will show little interest in, for instance, theatrical elements in music. Because they were simply never taught how to deal with them.

THE FATA MORGANA

Still, music and theatre are children in one and the same family. Whatever the style, music is a language, with its grammar and rules, with a syntax and its proper rhetoric, form and diction. Language and theatre use the same parameters as music: melody, rhythm, timbre, dynamics, articulation... Both disciplines only really exist when they are imbued with craftsmanship and the joy of performing in a mature performance practice.

The basis of communication is exploring one's own and the other's limits, getting off one's little island. The danger for word and music students is that they stick to sunbathing on their own little heavenly island far too often. Still, the gap is not really that deep, the water is far less turbulent than it seems. Exploring each other's island with interest proves fruitful for both...

MUSIC IN DRAMA TRAINING

Broad and *profound* music interpretation is the basis for any musical training in drama. In my music lessons for instrument makers at ILSA, I have a very heterogeneous group of students, whom I bring together through music: the classical musician who has

had ten years of training and the pierced backyard garage rock 'n roll player who is driven by enthusiasm. And it works, simply by having them listen to a rich variety of music. They are offered listening methods and attitudes which they eagerly assimilate and which help them learn to appreciate each other's music. From then on, the ice is broken and they will begin to collaborate. For musically untrained drama students, such a guided promenade through the rich variety of music can be a true *trip*. In my opinion, it is equally obvious to explore all possible relations between text and music thoroughly through songs, standards, cantatas, operas and libretti... Guided listening and theoretical formation have to be part of the student's musical living environment.

Such nutrient will deliver rich fertile soil for more technical and practical music courses in which making music remains the focus of attention: solfeggio, vocalization, singing, composition and arrangement, performing. For these students, making music is not self-evident. Some do play an instrument, some have some experience with ensemble, but many have neither. Within the framework of a drama course, it is difficult to make room for profound music performance training. That is why collaboration with, for instance, music students, can be a useful solution.

Still, it is clear that separate music training within the framework of a drama course is impossible to achieve. Music's added value within a theatrical framework has to be reflected and acknowledged in all other courses. It should be possible to combine and train theoretical and practical aspects on a regular basis, in combination with word and drama within the performance and presentation practice itself. For the students, this practice creates moments to work up to. Confrontations with an audience will help them gain the experience – also on a musical level – that is required to develop craftsmanship and to master the trade.

DRAMA AND WORD IN MUSIC TRAINING

Drawing music students' attention to the rhetoric and dramatic qualities *in* music, through thorough and alternative music analysis, will make their purely musical experience more profound and complete. Apart from music analysis, text and literary analysis as well as the study of the relations between text and music in lyrics and libretti will complete their experience.

During a therapy session, a music therapist has to respond musically to what the patient reports. That is why, in the Music Therapy department, at which I teach, music is evidently combined with extra-musical elements. This approach to music can be fruitful for any music student, especially when combined with word and drama.

Music students who focus on writing and improvisation (composers, pedagogues, music therapists) must learn how they can consciously combine music with word/drama in all its manifestations: from purely illustrative *mickey-mousing* to the most profound structural *synergy*, when text becomes music and music becomes rhetoric.

Students who want to pursue a career as a musician will benefit from lessons given by people from the stage. How does a musician behave on stage? What is a musician's place within the framework of a stage production? What is the role of his musical line in the overall musical and theatrical work?

As with drama students, it will be equally essential to keep the courses directly connected to actual stage practice.

Allow professional musicians to give lessons to drama students. Allow professional actors or directors to teach text or stage-related courses. And do it in mutual consultation, abandoning the little islands.

YOUNGSTERS

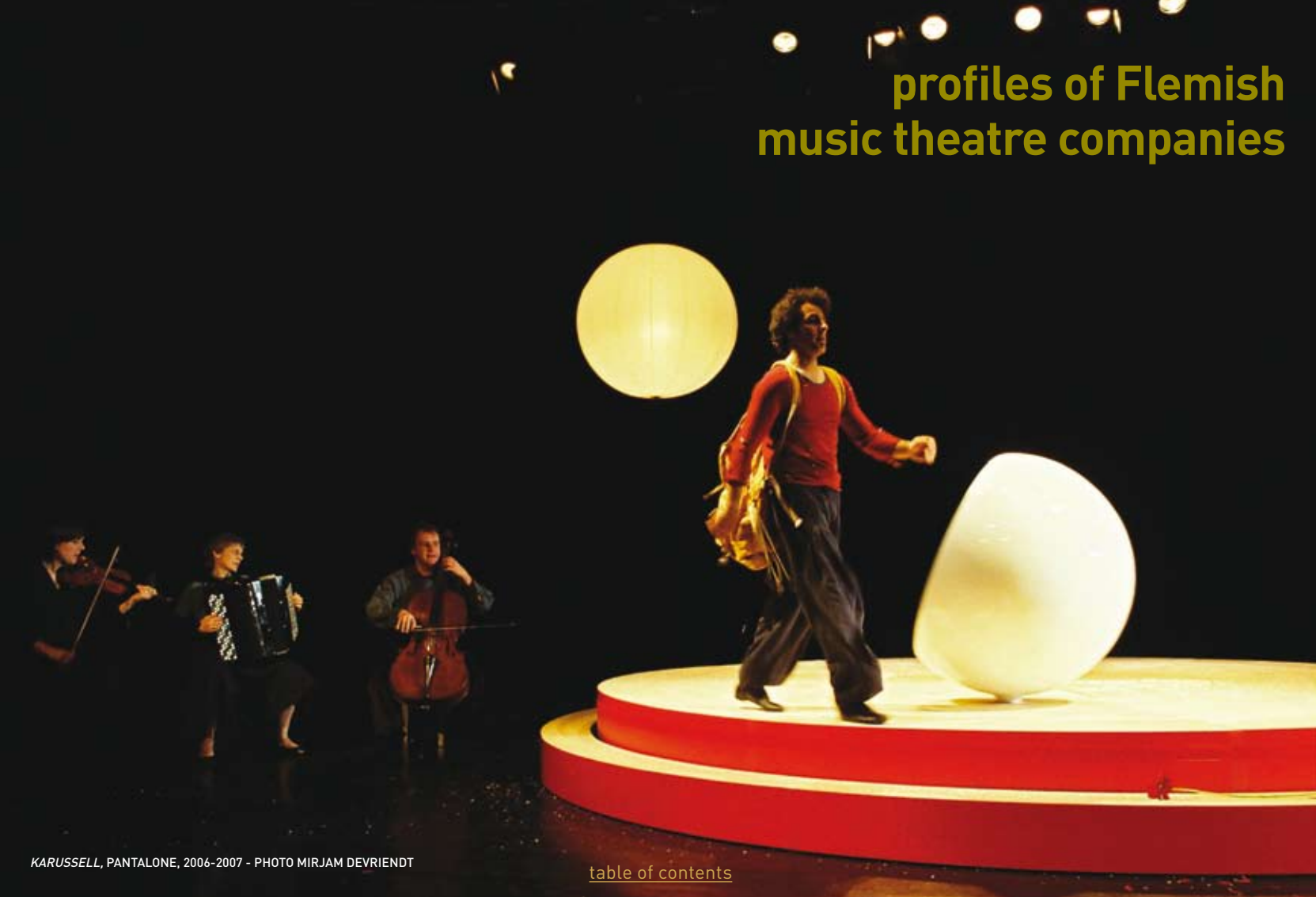
Children who have positively experienced the combination of music, word and stage at an early age will remain sensible to it for the rest of their lives. This could, for instance, be accomplished on a structural basis during part-time art education with a *light* version of higher education. Rudimentary music teaching for word students, word courses for music students, cross-discipline courses such as breathing techniques, stage presence and stage experience – all directly connected to actual stage presentations. Moreover, these word-and-music projects are often cultural peak moments for art school pupils. There is a new tendency to embed theory entirely in practice, making it easier for pupils to understand theory and to discover how useful it is. Within the framework of the combination of music and drama, this is a tendency that deserves to be applauded.

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Compagnie KAiET! Compagnie Carlotta LOD
De Kolonie MT Muziektheater Transparant
Service to Others (Het Verbond) 2fabrieken
Tirasila Musical van Vlaanderen Pantalone
De Eilandverkaveling Braakland/ZheBilding
WALPURGIS Muziektheater van Zilverpapier
www.vti.be/muziektheater

De Munt Timecircus Wentelteefjes/Spoor13
Roodvonk De Bovenkamer Vlaamse Opera
Les Rêveurs Sont Maltraités Muzi a Zeny
De Bloedgroep Zomeropera Alden Biesen
TheaterDeSpiegel Judas Theaterproducties
De Dagen Salomee Speelt Theater Taptoe

profiles of Flemish music theatre companies



De Bloedgroep

<http://bloedgroep.be>

De Bloedgroep is a collective of performing artists that was formed around theatre maker and lecturer Sam Bogaerts. Through improvisation and cross over, De Bloedgroep explores unfamiliar combinations of ideas, people and art disciplines to contribute deliberately to the current tendency of boundaries between the various arts disciplines to evaporate.

Since 2007, the collective has been exploring the dramatic field of tension between jazz and drama. For *Wild Vlees* (2007) they worked together with the Bender Banjax acoustic jazz quartet on jazz improvisation. For their next production, *Anima Pharma* (2010), De Bloedgroep and Bender Banjax are currently exploring protest songs, Palestinian and South African folksongs and Negro spirituals. For this project, De Bloedgroep works together with light, sound and stage designer Clive Mitchell and dance and performing artist Tarek Halaby, who happens to be of Palestinian origin.

Braakland/ZheBilding

www.braakland.be

Braakland/ZheBilding (BZB) explicitly positions itself as a company of makers: a group of theatre makers who follow a collective path that departs from the spectator's aural imagination.

Braakland/ZheBilding makes theatre for the ear, choosing the organic combination of spoken text and contemporary alternative music, cross-over between rock, jazz, folk, punk, minimal music



TRUST, BRAAKLAND/ZHEBILDING, 2006-2007 - PHOTO BART GRIETENS

and electronics. The company plays with the quality of the voice and with narrative points of view to make literary texts sensual, rhythmical, musical and theatrical. Speaking frontally, performing, addressing the public directly, Braakland/ZheBilding's theatre is far from being lyrical drama. The company is particularly interested in the areas that lie between speaking and singing. BZB always departs from socially relevant subject matter. The company fully opts for creation; each project starts from scratch. Music is composed, and text is written. The group wants to deal with the present, or at least things that are still going on, or reverberating. Braakland has good reasons why it chooses the 20th and 21st centuries as its biotope.

Braakland/ZheBilding's artistic management is headed by author-directors Stijn Devillé and Adriaan Van Aken, and dramatist

Els Theunis. The artistic team includes musicians Geert Waegeman, Rudy Trouvé, Gerrit Valckenaers, Youri Van Uffelen and Ephraïm Cielen, and actors Sara Vertongen, Kris Cuppens, Dirk Buyse, Pieter Genard and Janne Desmet.

Compagnie Carlotta

www.compagniecarlotta.be

Compagnie Carlotta produces theatre performances for young audiences departing from (classical) music. The artistic team is headed by theatre maker-writer Karelmaria De Boeck and theatre maker-musician Alexandra Aerts.

For its young audience, the company resolutely puts its material in a social perspective. Compagnie Carlotta's performances act as poetical-philosophical reflections on contemporary social issues. On a linguistic level, the company opts for a poetic rather than a hyper realistic discourse.

Classical music has been the company's basic material ever since it was founded. On previous occasions, Cie Carlotta worked with music by – among others – Grieg, Ravel, Pergolesi, Satie, Wagner and J.S. Bach. The productions are developed on the basis of the principle of 'synoptic representation' (i.e. sounds generate images and vice versa).

Compagnie Carlotta interweaves narrative and music. The imagery is deliberately kept as austere as possible, to move the spectator in a subtle combination of image, colour, sound and word. Watching and listening are active components of the process.

Compagnie KAIET!

www.kaiet.be

The young artistic collective Compagnie KAIET! entered the Flemish music theatre scene in 2003. KAIET!'s main mission is to present art in such a way as to break down barriers without disrespecting artistic quality standards. Compagnie KAIET! departs from the idea that it possible to break down barriers by presenting art not in isolation, but within a dynamic context. To achieve this, KAIET! organizes presentations in living rooms and develops projects on location to create direct bonds: bonds between the audience and the performance, between the public and the performers, and between the performers themselves.

For its theatrical form and subject matter, KAIET! opts for directness, revealing the great themes in stories drawn from ordinary people's everyday lives.

The company's artistic leader is Geert Hautekiet, writer, narrator, artist, stage and costume designer, musician and singer, who is also known from solo performances such as *Dorst*, *De Sigaar*, *De Held* en *Nonkel Goesting*.

De Bovenkamer

De Bovenkamer is a new company that acts as a platform where young musicians, dancers, theatre makers and visual artists are given the opportunity to blend different art forms.

Orphelie in de Bovenkamer was De Bovenkamer's first production, an opera for children aged nine and over. During the crea-

tion process, music and text were generated simultaneously from the dramaturgy. Theatre maker and musician Brick de Bois was invited to write the libretto and to direct. The music was written by Axelle Kennes, De Bovenkamer's home composer. Her music sounds contemporary and atonal, but has moments of unexpected simplicity.

DE DAGEN

www.dedagen.be

DE DAGEN, a music theatre company headed by singer Silvie Moors, wants to share word, image and music with children and grownups, a philosophy that is given shape in cross-disciplinary projects: a visual exhibition accompanied by a music theatre piece, a picture book changing into a musical tale, or a concert turning into a plastic workshop – with music and text material always made to measure.

Pinokkio (2007) is a narrative concert with songs by and with Silvie Moors and Lieven Gouwy. The concert is accompanied by an interactive exhibition of illustrations by Sara Fanelli.

Requiem voor een Eend (Requiem for a Duck, 2009) is a musical kamishibai-performance about death, based on a picture book by Wolf Erlbruch, with music by Jan Van Outryve performed by musicians Silvie Moors and Frans Grapperhaus and narrated by Sofie Sente.

One of DE DAGEN's classics is *Floris en Blancefloer, de kamishibai* (2004), a project developed in co-production with Laika and in collaboration with children's art lab 'Art Basics for Children'. This intimate narrative performance combines illustra-

tions by Paul Verrept with a text by theatre maker Jo Roets. In 2010, DE DAGEN plans a musical castle drama on location, to be followed by a musical kamishibai-performance with Esmé Bos and Bart Voet based on picture books by illustrator Carl Cneut.

De Eilandverkaveling

www.eilandverkaveling.be



KLEINTJE OF HET VERLANGEN, DE EILANDVERKAVELING, 2008-2009
PHOTO DE EILANDVERKAVELING

Founded by theatre maker Ward Bal and musician Jeroen Tilkin when they were teenage singers in the choir of the Flemish Opera, music theatre collective *De Eilandverkaveling* ('Island Allocation') became a professional music theatre company in 2007. Sometime later, Tilkin persuaded his musician brothers Wouter and Frederik into joining the collective. They were also joined by musicians Johan Vingerhoets and Johan Sarens.

De Eilandverkaveling's performances increasingly focus on the interaction between text, narration, theatre and music. All music is performed live to intensify the interaction with the audience.

For the direction of their first performance, *Broers* (Brothers, 2005), based on the children's book *Gebr.* by Ted van Lieshout, the collective engaged theatre maker Sven Ronsijn (Ultima Thule, Tank!). Ronsijn also wrote and directed De Eilandverkaveling's second production: *Kleintje of het Verlangen* (2008).

The premiere of their third project, *Alex*, is scheduled autumn 2009.

de kolonie mt

www.bospaenc.be

De kolonie mt is a trans-disciplinary music theatre company that wants to use the stage to break down barriers between the various disciplines, mainly relying on live performance by the artists – musicians, actors, dancers...

Artistically, de kolonie mt explicitly chooses for artists who feel no need or urge to hide their vulnerability behind professionalism. The overall intention is to make room for spontaneous inspiration, interchange of emotions and the creative impulse during the per-



CINEMA RETRO, DE KOLONIE MT, 2008-2009, PHOTO KOEN BROOS

formances themselves, which usually depart from original texts and music.

Artistic leader Bo Spaenc sees de kolonie mt as an environment where young music theatre makers can explore and cultivate their artistic territory. This nesting ground idea is, in fact, an extension of the company's residencies. Young makers are stimulated not only on an artistic level; they also receive guidance to learn all about audience recruitment, networking and marketing.

De Munt/La Monnaie

www.demunt.be

De Munt is a federal cultural institution. In 1963 De Munt was officially named National Opera. A major turning point in the history of the Royal Monnaie was the appointment in 1981 of Gerard Mortier as general director. During his directorate, not only the building was thoroughly modernized; he also artistically reorganized the Monnaie's choir and symphonic orchestra and employed new and young staff. All this, and Mortier's choice of a more personal and peculiar repertoire, turned the Monnaie into an opera of international stature and renown.

After Mortier left for the Salzburger Festspiele in 1992, Bernard Foccroulle took over. The same year, he appointed Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker's Rosas company as the Monnaie's company in residence. Together, they founded a new international school for contemporary dance, P.A.R.T.S., as successor to Maurice Béjart's Mudra School.

In June 2007, after fifteen years as its artistic leader, Bernard Foccroulle bade the Monnaie farewell. He was succeeded by

Peter De Caluwe, the Dutch Opera's former artistic director. De Caluwe opened the doors to a new generation of artists. Today, the Monnaie is populated not only by today's international household names, but also by young talent: conductors, directors and visual artists for baroque, lyrical as well as symphonic genres. The traditional repertoire remains the spine of De Caluwe's programme, but he always makes room for baroque opera, work by 20th-century and contemporary composers.

Furthermore, De Caluwe breaks down the conventional approach for concerts and recitals by introducing visual or scenic elements. Dance still takes an important place in the programme. The special relation with Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker is maintained, but De Caluwe also invites new choreographers, such as Akram Khan, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Sasha Waltz as well as international dance companies. Each year, he invites stage productions by directors such as Ivo Van Hove, Romeo Castellucci and Krzysztof Warlikowski to be shown at the Monnaie.

Theater De Spiegel

www.despiegel.com

As a music theatre company, Theater De Spiegel explores the common grounds between music, figures, objects, image, sound and voice to develop a particular narrative idiom for general audiences.

Theater De Spiegel has a small creative and production team. For each production, soul mates from a diversity of musical genres and artistic environments are invited. Since three years, Theater De Spiegel has been focusing on a new target group: lit-

tle children, younger than three.

Driving force behind the company is Karel Van Ransbeeck. He grew up at 'Familietheater De Spiegel', a puppet theatre company that was set up in 1965 by his father Fé. After he became the company's artistic leader in 1989, he professionalized it and directed it towards music theatre.

The creation process invariably starts from scratch: for each production, Theater De Spiegel marks out a number of lines, but the final artistic result is largely determined by the dynamism of, and the input given during the creation process itself.

Judas TheaterProducties

www.judastheaterproducties.be

Founded in 1999, Judas TheaterProducties (JTP) became a professional company in 2005. JTP is a group of young makers who surround themselves with Flemish and Dutch theatre veterans. Judas TheaterProducties intends to distinguish itself in various ways as a production company of musicals. On the one hand, they produce major musicals such as *The Party Is Over*, by and with Anne Mie Gils and Pol Vanfleren, and *The Last Five Years* by Jason Robert Brown. *Ganesh – Een perfecte god* (Ganesh – A Perfect God, 2010) was JTP's first entirely new creation. Allard Blom wrote the text inspired by a story by Terrence McNally. Director was Martin Michel.

The company also develops small-scale productions, and thus fills a gap in the music landscape. *Je Anne* (2009) is an intimate music theatre performance, based on the diary of Anne Frank. And last but not least, the company acts as a musical laboratory

for young and recently graduated music theatre makers. As such, Judas TheaterProducties also operates as a think tank and innovation platform for music theatre.

Les Rêveurs Sont Maltraités

Les Rêveurs Sont Maltraités ('Dreamers are ill-treated') is a structure around writer-director Jan Van Dyck. This young company's first production, *Achter de bossen, voorbij het moeras ('Krabat')* (Behind the Woods, Beyond the Swamp) (2009) is a music theatre performance for eleven years-old and beyond. But Les Rêveurs Sont Maltraités does not want to restrict itself to productions for youngsters. Neither do they intend to confine themselves to music theatre performance: text theatre – from the repertoire or new creations – for grownups is equally considered. For future projects, the company may leave the stage for other media and artistic environments, such as video and film, text and visual arts.

LOD

www.lod.be

LOD is a Ghent based production house for opera, musical and other forms of music theatre. It launches creative projects with a pool of artists (composers Kris Defoort, Dick van der Harst, Jan Kuijken, Dominique Pauwels, Daan Janssens and Thomas Smeyrns, director Inne Goris, actress-director An De Donder, ac-



JUDASPASSIE, EEN ALTERNATIEVE VERTELLING OVER JEZUS' LIJDENSWEG, LOD, 2008-2009 - PHOTO KURT VAN DER ELST

tor-writer-director Josse De Pauw and philosopher-writer Pieter De Buysser). Together, they produce a wide range of projects in which various artistic genres meet.

With productions such as *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, *Yerma vraagt een toefeling* (Yerma Wants a Spanking), *Diep in het bos* (Deep in the Woods), *Het huis der verborgen muziekjes I & II* (House of the Hidden Tunes), *Onegin*, *Boreas*, *Liefde / zijn handen* (Love/His Hands), *Die siel van die mier* (The Ant's Soul), *Twee oude vrouwtjes* (Two little Grannies) en *Judaspassie* (Passion According to Judas) LOD opts for a contemporary approach towards music theatre. The work of the resident artists is hybrid and hard to label. The focus is, first and foremost, on thorough artistic research and a profound joy of creation and performance.

LOD particularly looks across the Belgian linguistic border for co-operation with Walloon artists, including, for instance, *De Duivel Beduvelde* (Cheat the Devil) with Patrick Corillon, or *The Attendants' Gallery*, with, among others, Dominique Goblet and Thierry Van Hasselt. LOD also maintains partnerships with other art houses and companies, domestic and foreign, such as deSingel (Antwerp), Kunstencentrum Vooruit (Ghent), the Monnaie (Brussels), Concertgebouw (Bruges), Muziekcentrum De Bijloke (Ghent), Rotterdamsche Schouwburg, Le Maillon (Strasbourg), Opéra de Dijon, Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg and L'Hippodrome (Douai).

Musical Van Vlaanderen

Musical Van Vlaanderen's ambition is to become Flanders' most prominent producer of musicals. Working with local Flemish talent, the organization produces musicals which are fully up to international standards and which should have broad public appeal.

The organization, which resides both in Antwerp (Stadsschouwburg) and Ghent (Capitole), is headed by Music Hall Group's Geert Allaert, who is assisted by a team of artistic consultants and experts, including Frank Van Laecke (writer, stage, opera and musical director) and Stany Crets (writer-performer).

The young musical production company set off with *Elisabeth, the Musical* (2009), the true story of Empress Sissi, starring Ann Van Den Broeck. The texts were written by Michael Kunze, the music was composed by Sylvester Levay.

Dans der Vampieren (Dance of the Vampires, 2009) is Musical Van Vlaanderen's second production. This production is based on the widely acclaimed *Fearless Vampire Killers* by Roman Polanski,

who directed a musical version of his film in 1997. In Flanders, the production is to be directed by Cornelius Baltus, with music by Jim Steinman and texts written by Michael Kunze. Choreographer is Dennis Callahan.

In 2010, Musical Van Vlaanderen plans the productions *La Bohème*, *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *Spamelot*.

Muzi a Zeny

<http://muzizeny.wordpress.com>

Muzi a Zeny was established in 2007 to back a couple of music and music theatre projects. Its backing mainly consists in giving artistic impulses and managing various administrative tasks (accountancy, applications for subsidies etc.). There are presently three companies that work under Muzi a Zeny's wings: two instrumental ensembles and the Fosfor Collectief music theatre company.

Fosfor Collectief harks back to contemporary music theatre's original concepts, as proposed by key figures such as Mauricio Kagel and Dieter Schnebel, later joined by John Cage en the Fluxus Movement. Music theatre is considered as a continuous and iterative process. Iterative because music, word and image interact in a process that constantly repeats itself. A process that has nothing to do with music written on a text, or images based on music: the iterative process causes images, words and sounds to combine without any notion of hierarchy.

Fosfor Collectief opts for a continuing evolution of projects rather than for a sequence of consecutive productions. This forces the artists to experiment and to walk untrodden paths, in the end obliterating the boundaries between the musician, writer, actor and stage designer.

Fosfor's first theatrical production is *Kraaien* (Crows, 2009), a sensory performance based on Israeli writer Meir Shalev's *The Four Meals* (aka *As a Few Days*).

Muziektheater Transparant

www.transparant.be

As a production company Muziektheater Transparant explores the artistic boundaries of opera and music theatre. Vocals are invariably the company's projects' main focus of attention. Old and new are programmed simultaneously and thus constantly confronted with each other. Transparant also nourishes local contemporary artists and offers them career opportunities.

Since 1994 Transparant has been headed by artistic and general director Guy Coolen. He represents the company in various international organizations. Director Wouter Van Looy assists him for the company's artistic policy. He is also responsible for its youth work. Transparant's resident composers are Wim Henderickx, Jan Van Outryve and Eric Sleichim. As a theatre company, Transparant mainly focuses on the work of its directors Wouter Van Looy, Caroline Petrick and Ramsey Nasr. Still, young artists are invited on a structural basis to explore music theatre practice or to present their work in the best possible conditions. In that respect, two young composers, Joachim Brackx and Annelies Van Parys, were offered a three years residence in 2007.

The Institute for Living Voice project is a travelling institute where singers and vocalists from all over the world, in all possible styles and traditions, are brought together in workshops and concerts. During an annual summer course young singers are offered the op-



RUHE, MUZIEKTHEATER TRANSPARANT, 2006-2007 - PHOTO HERMAN SORGELOOS

portunity to develop an opera production in professional conditions. Transparant works with various partners on a regular basis. Among them are deSingel (Antwerp), the Monnaie (Brussels), the Flemish Opera (Antwerp – Ghent) and HETPALEIS (Antwerp). For performances abroad, Transparant works with international festivals and institutions.

Muziektheater van Zilverpapier

www.vanzilverpapier.be

At the basis of Muziektheater van Zilverpapier's music theatre are unexpected encounters between artistic genres and people of very different origins. Its productions basically involve confrontations

between old and new, North and South, professional and non-professional, classical and contemporary, in an ongoing search of new forms of trans-cultural and multi-disciplinary music theatre. Driving force Brigitte Mys chose the company's name referring to the bygone western custom to collect silver foil and little mirrors 'to help the underdeveloped countries'...

The performances all deal with the search for human creativity and expression in 'short of material' situations. The choice of the subject matter is invariably connected to street life in whichever part of the world. Muziektheater van Zilverpapier's music theatre performances are socially and politically committed and are intended to raise awareness.

The presentation form varies with the subject matter. Some projects are presented in traditional theatre environments, but others are developed for open air and street presentations.

Pantalone

www.pantalone.be

As a music theatre organization and producer of work in various art disciplines, Pantalone operates in an ongoing pursuit of a poetic synergy between music, word and image. The company brings together artists from different disciplines for creations in all shapes and sizes – from a musical picture book to a multi-media children's opera or a visual concert. Pantalone tries to respond to the actual living environment and interests of children: a book, an object, a song. Sonorous texts sing, colourful images dance and the music tells stories. The equal treatment of music, word and image delivers performances with a strong poetic un-

dertone and particular visual appeal.

Pantalone's source of inspiration and guidance is 1974 Nobel Prize winner for medicine and physiology prof. Christian de Duve, who pointed out that 'the wiring of the brain is done by education. One should give babies, as of birth, touch, taste, music, colour and speech to develop and stimulate their neurological links.' That is why Pantalone produces music theatre for children of all ages, as well as their tutors.

Roodvonk

www.roodvonk.be

Roodvonk is Marijke Umans's music theatre company. In her performances, music and word go hand in hand. Umans acts, sings, writes and is a narrator for children and youngsters. Roodvonk works with existing texts as well as with newly created material. In her poetry performance *1 Jaar vol geluk* (One year full of Happiness, 2008), for instance, Umans knits together excerpts from poems by Ted van Lieshout, Hans Andreus, Willem Wilmink and Ed Franck. *Kom weg* (Come Away, 2008) is music as well as object theatre: the theatre maker tells the self-written story using objects on stage.

Roodvonk combines well-known pieces of music, such as popular songs, with own material. The performance usually starts with the music, which is often performed live on stage by Umans, accompanied by other musicians.



KOM WEG, ROODVONK, 2007-2008 - PHOTO NATHALIE WIJNANTS



DE ADEMTOCHT VAN GILBERTE EN HENRIETTE, DE WENTELTEEFJES, 2008-2009
PHOTO KURT VAN DER ELST

Salomee Speelt

www.salomeespeelt.be

Salomee Speelt is a loose-and-regular collective, set up by actress Noémi Schlosser. The idea was to combine different art disciplines, materials and artists from different artistic backgrounds. For each creation, specific collaboration is set up. Salomee's first production, *Le Bel Indifférent* (2015), for instance, was performed on location at the Antwerp Central Railway Station by opera singer Mireille Capelle and word performer Vitalski.

Salomee Speelt makes no attempt to stick to a specific style or subject matter. For the performances, new and/or existing text material is used. Still, they frequently focus on the place of the individual in society.

In *Moskou – New York* (2009), Schlosser uses a short story by Nobel Prize winner Isaac Bashevis Singer about migration, breaking away from one's roots, the pursuit of happiness and the sacrifices that have to be made to achieve this. The theatre maker works with violin player Eliot Lawson, soprano Valerie Vervoort and actor Han Kerckhoffs. For the writing process, she received guidance from Josse De Pauw. Text and music are equally important in the performance.

Spoor13

In Spoor13 theatre makers Michelle Adriaense, Ilse Roman and Lisbeth Maes have joined forces in music theatre production. For some projects, guest makers are invited. The young npo Spoor

13 ('Track 13') was actually established by the key figures of De Wentelteefjes, a compact and musical theatre company firmly rooted in cabaret traditions.

Spoor13 works with text based on improvisation or brainstorm sessions. The music, too, is always original. The company's working method is characterized by a long and intense process of rehearsals in which all players and musicians develop a profoundly committed collaboration. The interaction that results from the diversity of backgrounds of the makers – they were trained in visual arts rather than in theatre and drama – intensifies the visual character and imaginative power of the productions.

Spoor 13's most recent productions were *Voor den Eeuwigheid* (For Eternity, 2006) and *De Ademtocht van Gilberte en Henriette* (The Breath of Gilberte and Henriette, 2008). For forthcoming music theatre performance, *BinnenSpoor* (2010), Spoor 13 explores the traditions of installation art and performance. Other projects include the installation *Still* – a combination of film, camera obscura and live music, and the book-in-progress *Het huis huilt*, (The House is Weeping) that is intended as the basis of an interactive music theatre performance.

Theater Taptoe

www.theatertaptoe.be

Theater Taptoe is specialized in a mix of actor and figure theatre (puppets, silhouettes, objects...). The company's home base is Ghent, but travels all across Europe and beyond to perform at international figure theatre festivals. Even though most productions are meant for young audiences, Taptoe enjoys performing

for grownups just as much.

Theater Taptoe produces figure theatre in all possible meanings of the term and challenges it in confrontations with other disciplines, such as music theatre. Young talent is gladly offered opportunities. Furthermore, Taptoe fervently advocates figure theatre as a full artistic discipline.

Originator of and driving force behind Taptoe is Luk De Bruyker. In 1973, he was joined by Freek Neyrinck, who became the company's writer and later also artistic leader. Neyrinck inspired Taptoe to abandon the well-trodden paths of puppet theatre and to develop a mix of actor and figure theatre. In 2004 Freek Neyrinck bade Taptoe farewell. Luk De Bruyker, who is still in charge of business affairs, is still Taptoe's foremost performer.

Time Circus

www.timecircus.org

Time Circus is a multi-disciplinary collective set up by Charlotte Heller, Bram Rombouts, Sara Dandois, Bram Soli and Sebastiaan Boumans. For over ten years, Time Circus has been experimenting new ways to surprise its audiences both musically and theatrically. To achieve this, they design all sorts of mobiles and installations. During the past couple of years, Time Circus attracted international attention with circus-like location projects in which the public is actively involved.

Time Circus's most recent production is *S.W.A.N. & T.C.*, a mobile electro rock concert on solar energy that is made to fit any location or situation. There is no 'acting' during the performance: the actors are 'turbo roadies – technicians' who are one with their

machine. Still, in spite of the presence of robots, there is a lot of text, written and sung in three languages by David Bovée.

Muziektheater Tirasila

Ever since it was founded in 1996, Muziektheater Tirasila has developed an expressive theatrical language. Its frame of reference is non-western traditional theatre forms and genres (kabuki, noh, kathakali, Beijing opera...) and western physical theatre concepts alike (Artaud, Meyerhold, Brecht, Kantor, Brook, Mnouchkine, Toneelgroep Ceremonia). Headed by theatre maker Vital Schraenen, the company pursues a form of total theatre in which the multi-disciplinary performer occupies a central position. Tirasila addresses general audiences with performances on location, social-artistic projects and ad hoc interventions.

Tirasila developed an epic, musical theatrical style that is characterized by highly stylized imagery, new music performed live, new, adapted or re-told text material and a mix of acting, music making, dancing, singing and speaking.

As a director, artistic leader Vital Schraenen has been pursuing a more personal career within the Flemish Music theatre scene, on the basis of his experience with Tirasila. For 30CC (Louvain), for instance, he created the social-artistic opera project *Ceci n'est plus Carmen* (This Is No Longer Carmen, 2007) and he also directs theatre-oriented performances by music groups such as Muziekmaatschappij Excelsior and De Nieuwe Snaar.

2fabrieken

www.2fabrieken.be

www.tuningpeople.be

2fabrieken ('2factories') is a young production unit that brings artists from different disciplines together for collaborative projects. The artistic heart of the company is stage designer/sound designer/project developer Wannes Deneer, choreographer Karolien Verlinden and theatre maker Jef Van gestel.

The first results of this co-operation were the 'Tuning People' performances (sound and people) – the name the collective uses for their sound performances. Each production departs from artistic research into sound and movement. Found and sought materials



WORM, TUNING PEOPLE/2FABRIEKEN, 2008-2009, PHOTO SVEN VAN BAARLE

are used to fabricate new instruments, little sound factories. Thus, in the first production of the company, *TP#1*, body and sound enter into a naked confrontation. Girded in a sensory costume, a dancer is launched into a dialogue with the sound produced by a combination of mechanical and electronic sound sources. In *Madame Fataal*, the sound is a character that interacts with an actor and a dancer. The sound supports or disturbs the combined performance of the two players. This interaction turns into a struggle for control, ending either in harmony, or in chaos. Tuning People's most recent project is a music theatre installation with self-designed instruments. *Worm* moves like an idle sound vehicle. The spectators find themselves in a confined space full of odd instruments and sound devices and have to relate continuously to the space and the moving 'worm'.

Vlaamse Opera/Flemish Opera

www.vlaamseopera.be

The Flemish Opera is the only Flemish institution for opera. The company has two venues, in Antwerp and Ghent, and it has its own choir and orchestra.

The company considers opera a complete art form, an artistic discipline in which visual and aural components are equally important. The programme includes both household repertoire, in contemporary presentations, and less well-known or unknown works, allowing the public to enjoy a wide range of musical expressions, from 17th-century music theatre to the latest opera creations.

With world creations of commissioned work by talented young artists, performance of unknown baroque repertoire or by work-



TURANDOT, VLAAMSE OPERA, 2008-2009 - PHOTO ANNEMIE AUGUSTIJNS

ing with internationally renowned Flemish directors (Jan Fabre, Guy Joosten, Ivo Van Hove...), the Flemish Opera cautiously avoids to tread well-trodden paths. Apart from opera, the Flemish Opera schedules symphonic concerts (with a strong vocal component) and lunch concertos. In 2000, the Flemish Opera also created the Opera Studio, a postgraduate training for young singers. From 1989 to June 2008, the Flemish Opera was headed by Marc Clémeur. At the beginning of the season 2008-2009, he was succeeded by the young Swiss Aviel Cahn.

WALPURGIS

www.walpurgis.be

Ever since it was established in 1989, WALPURGIS has specialized in the creation and development of contemporary music theatre in which the singer, both as a creator and as a performer, is the focus of interest. WALPURGIS is also an artistically and culturally diverse environment: multidisciplinary and many-voiced.

Soprano Judith Vindevogel has been the organization's artistic director since 1999. Her company regularly commissions compositions and text material and has its own CD label – WALPURGIS records.

Pursuing dialogue as a basis of its creative projects, the company does not depart from cut-and-dried ideas of what music theatre should be. Instead, it makes room for what music theatre could become. Therefore, apart from being the company's artistic foundation, dialogue is also a major theme in most – if not all – of WALPURGIS's projects.

At the basis of WALPURGIS's artistic development is the idea of the ensemble: a collective of free and individual artists working together in long term artistic partnerships. Because none of these artists are actually employed on a regular basis, they feel free to bring in new ideas and experiences during each new project's development process. As a result all parties involved have had an equal say in WALPURGIS's productions.



EN VOLGEND JAAR UW KOP, WALPURGIS, 2008-2009 - PHOTO STEF DEPOVER

Wayn Traub

www.wayntraub.net

Wayn Traub's first stage appearances, among which the *Misen-Traubs* series he made for Victoria (now CAMPO), were highly physical performances. After that, the maker went in search of a contemporary form of ritual theatre, that is: theatre of instinct, animalism and eroticism. In his *Manifest van het Dierlijk Theater* (Animal Theatre Manifesto), written during the 1990s, he described how he intended to accomplish this.

With *Maria-Magdalena* (2009), Traub concluded his *Wayn Wash Trilogy* – the other parts being *Maria-Dolores* (2003), and *Jean-Baptiste* (2004). For two seasons, Traub experimented with new contents and form in performances such as *Arkiologi* (2007) and *N.Q.Z.C.* (2007). In 2009, all this came together in the trilogy's third part. Traub prefers to call this peculiar and most personal combination of theatre, video and music 'cinema-opera'.

Now that the *Wayn Wash Trilogy* is completed, Traub will leave Toneelhuis Antwerp to establish his own music theatre company: Service to others, that will allow him to finally realize the ritual theatre that has been on his mind all these years.

Alden Biesen Summer Opera

www.zomeropera.be

Since 1997, the npo Alden Biesen Summer Opera has annually organized a barrier breaking opera festival on the premises of the Alden Biesen castle in Limburg, an event that also celebrates the cultural heritage of the famous 'Land Commandery'. Apart from the main opera performance, the festival also produces music theatre performances for children and youngsters, offering a platform to talented young opera singers to make their first appearance on stage.

The management of Alden Biesen Summer Opera is headed by artistic director Piet Vansichen and business manager Martine Cuyvers. The programme is tailored to the historic environment of the Land Commandery, accessibility of the music for general audiences and some additional artistic concerns. Every five years, a 'light' opera, or operetta, is staged. Since 2006, the festival has been producing a Puccini cycle. In 2009, the company presents Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, directed by Frank Van Laecke.

The children's opera alternately addresses children from six to nine and ten to twelve years of age. The organization adapts an existing opera for a one hour Dutch version. For this programme section, Summer Opera deliberately works with young music theatre artists. For the 2009 edition, Bruno Van Heystraeten is currently preparing an adaptation for children of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, the performance of which will be under his direction.

About VTi

Centre for the Performing Arts

Since it was founded in 1987, **VTi (Vlaams Theater Instituut)** has developed into an open organization with strong links to both the sector itself and the policy-makers. The reason for its existence is the need for sound information among the public, theatre professionals, politicians, students, press and academics. On performing artists and their work. On cultural policy and stage matters. On international work. On developments and trends. On infrastructure, distribution and art education.

VTi wants to provide all this information in a broad range of easy-to-use resources. To this end it currently fulfils three main functions: documentation, research and information/awareness. Its intention is in this way to contribute to the ongoing growth of the sector and help build a social environment for artistic creation.

Documentation centre for theatre, dance and music-theatre

VTi assumes responsibility for the intensive documentation of performing arts practices. The sector and its context are observed, artistic and policy-making developments are recorded, sorted and made accessible by means of the extensive database, library and website.

Sectorial think-tank in a diverse and international Flanders

Applied research is a major component of VTi's work because it converts the information in the database and collections into a useful form. The research is applied to actual practices by means of descriptive and analytical fieldwork. In this regard, the performing arts are not simply the object of research, but also play an active part in shaping opinion.

Critical interface between theatre-makers, the public and the policy-makers

VTi is a place for knowledge, study and also vision. It is for this reason that it sets debates going, and wants to actively inform people and increase their awareness. Research and new insights are presented as feedback to the sector on the website, in publications and the periodical *Courant*, through the library and at study sessions. The chief concerns here are reflexive dialogue, practical usefulness and an overview of the broader picture.

In all these activities VTi links current events in the performing arts to long-term projects. At the moment, for example, special attention is being focused on a thorough analysis of artistic practices and oeuvres, on public participation (concentrating on art education, distribution and criticism) and on the challenge of international and intercultural cooperation.

DAY-TO-DAY BUSINESS

VTi's three core tasks are organically combined in its day-to-day business.

In the **VTi library** visitors can consult books, periodicals, cuttings and documentation free of charge and without enrolment. It includes:

- documentation on organizations in Flanders
- books on the performing arts, cultural management, policy, art education, etc.
- at least 10,000 plays, in both published and manuscript form
- current subscriptions to over 120 professional journals
- cuttings archives of relevant information from newspapers and periodicals
- a video library with over 5,000 hours of tapes

The **www.vti.be website** is intended to be flexible and keep pace with current news. It enables you to keep track of VTi's work, with a survey of all its activities and policy documents. In addition, the site contains a mass of useful information on the performing arts sector: the ins and outs of subsidies, a list of premieres, the latest job vacancies, etc. An ingenious search engine also provides you with a huge amount of online information from the database.

The quarterly information booklet ***Courant*** keeps performing arts professionals up to date with special topics, in-depth articles and brief news items.

VTi staff also answers **specific questions** from Belgium or abroad by phone, e-mail, fax or post.

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About Flanders Music Centre

Flanders Music Centre is an organization established by the Flemish government to support the professional music sector and to promote Flemish music in Belgium and abroad.

- **Encouraging expertise:** advice, news and guidance for professionals about management, the music industry, government policy, social and legal affairs, artistic programmes, music education...; support for music research and collaborations; a platform for exchange of ideas and knowledge;...
- **Information & documentation:** on all aspects of the current music scene in Flanders: biographies of composers and musicians, music encyclopaedias, scores, reports, publications, newspapers and magazines, databases, newsletters...; a music archive of historical and contemporary recordings
- **Promotion:** national and international publicity of music and artists of all genres from Flanders: membership within network organisations, presence at trade fairs, creation and distribution of overview publications and compilation CDs, coordination of showcases and invitations to music industry professionals at major events, project collaboration with various music organizations...

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