

“Rethinking the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: creating new dramaturgical codes.”

The *Gesamtkunstwerk*, by many considered to be the summum of artistic creation and performance, remains a problematic genre, despite – or perhaps even because of – its rich history. It is considered to combine the major artistic disciplines and thereby reinforcing their own expressive power; nevertheless, many productions, whether they are historically reproductive in nature or entirely newly developed concepts, fail in their ideological attempts and capsize due to a failing collaboration between the disciplines involved. Dramaturgical codes (musical, verbal, physical and visual) are in regular, if not constant, conflict. A competitive imbalance, reinforced by the archaic, consecutive creative process, arises between composer, librettist and director, and almost obliterates the voice of the performing artist. In contemporary opera, this issue is widely recognised, and several ‘solutions’ have been formulated: the use of ‘fantasy language’ (switching off the narrative, shifting content to concept), adaptation (composer or dramaturge adapts a pre-existing text to the music), ‘composer-does-all’ (no director, librettist or dramaturge) or director-decides-all (minimizing the role of both composer and librettist). In rare cases, , when even more rare multi-talented geniuses are at work, this leads to strong productions; more often than not however the result of minimising expertise of one or more disciplines is one of artistic loss.

While all these abovementioned approaches for solutions are focused on a smooth process and the elimination of conflict, none of them addresses the idea of a new model of co-creation aiming for added value by combining the strengths of all disciplines, and an all-encompassing new dramaturgical code. In order to avoid the forementioned artistic loss and disciplinary-bound specific expertise, the following questions arise: How can a relevant, contemporary *Gesamtkunstwerk* be created, where no concessions are made to the artistic quality, and where the process is collaborative and simultaneous? What are the consequences for the traditional processes of a creative artist and that of a performing artist?

Two years of preliminary interviews, case studies and literature and field research have led up to the current stage in the research process: the experiment. Two artistic researchers who work independently on the same research questions – Lies Colman from a musical background, Gaea Schoeters from literature and drama - hereby join forces, and reach out to other specialist in contemporary creation and performance: composer Annelies Van Parys and mezzo-soprano Els Mondelaers. Several of these small-sized experiments will be conducted over the next few years, an analysis of which will be formulated in the form of a new, ‘updated’ specifically interdisciplinary dramaturgical code. After this, these can be tested and employed in more formal music-theatrical and/or opera contexts.

This performance is the result of one of these experiments: a non-improvisatory performance, from conceptualisation to performance co-created by creators and performers, utilising trans- and uni-disciplinary parameters and vocabularia, and gradually integrating created material into a semi-improvisatory, experimental rehearsal process. This same performance will be performed in a larger form at several festivals and documented in both involved research projects.

Researcher / performer 1:



Lies Colman
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Lies Colman is an internationally performing pianist, soloist, chamber musician, artistic creator and pedagogue. She is artistic director at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp, where she coordinates the Master in Music and Education, chairs the theoretical and contextual departments in the Classical Music programme and teaches the courses Artist in Society and the interdisciplinary creative course 'Parnassus'. Her artistic specialty is the romantic to the contemporary era, with a special interest in opera and music theatre, aside from performing and recording more traditional chamber music. With a Master's degree in Music, in Cultural Sciences and in Strategic Management and Leadership, she has a broad view on the arts, society and education, and aims to connect those both on the stage, in projects and in the classroom. Her main research area is that of collaborative artistic practices: working from individual expertise in an (interdisciplinary) creative environment. (www.Liescolman.com)

Recordings:

<https://soundcloud.com/lies-colman>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Y_J1AJN_D4
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zt5Ft1yTGgg>

Researcher / performer 2:



Gaea Schoeters
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Gaea Schoeters writes novels, opera-librettos, screenplays and theatre texts. With composer Annelies Van Parys she made the operas Private View (winner FEDORA-prize 2015) and Usher (Staatsoper Berlijn/Folkoperan Stockholm, nominated for International Opera Awards 2019). For theatre, she wrote the political satires Heimat and Merci and translated Tempest's Hold Your Own for Het Toneelhuis (premiere 2020). Her work combines experiment with form and social commitment. She loves intertextuality and likes to play with old texts in new contexts, thus generating new meanings. She teaches literary writing at the RITCS and is working on a joint research project with Van Parys on interdisciplinary coherence in music theatre and opera, which will result in a piece for Flanders Symphony Orchestra. She has published several novels and collections of short stories, and writes columns and essays about art, literature, music, gender (in)equality and the linguistics of nationalist politics.

More information and list of works: www.gaeaschoeters.be

Researcher / performer 3:



Els Mondelaers
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Belgian mezzo Els Mondelaers received a master degree in Classical Singing with great distinction at the Ghent Conservatory, where she has specialized as a soloist in Contemporary Music as well. Preliminary she obtained her master's in Music Theory and Music Pedagogy at the Lemmens Institute in Leuven.

Gradually, she expanded her career as a specialist interpreter of classical contemporary music to that of an all-round performer. New challenges such as music and / or physical improvisation, music creation, acting and moving presented themselves. The world of music theatre, contemporary dance and performance in addition to the contemporary concert venues became her second habitat. She is appreciated for her personal involvement in projects and her enthusiasm to be challenged in an artistic way.

As a guest professor, she was invited by the Royal Conservatorium of Antwerp (BE) and the Academy of Music and Performing Arts Fontys Tilburg (NL). (www.elsmondelaers.com)

Recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0z4YdFXNnGA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdHewJAfqSE&list=PL6ISjgSWbfWQPni-uAp-1gYZCcEqwwXxH&index=35>

Researcher / collaborating artist 4:



Annelies Van Parys
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Annelies Van Parys is one of Belgium's leading composers. She writes solo and chamber music as well as big orchestral works, exhibiting a special talent for vocal music and music theatre. Since 2007, as a resident composer at Muziektheater Transparant, she composed music for memorable performances such as *RUHE*, *An Oresteia* and *Private View*, her first coöperation with Schoeters which received four (inter)national awards, amongst which the prestigious Fedora Prize. Also with Schoeters, she worked on *USHER*, which

premiered at Staatsoper Berlin (2018) and subsequently played in Folkoperan Stockholm (2019). In 2018 she wrote *A War Requiem* for the Belgian National Orchestra and Collegium Vocale Ghent, with soloists Sophie Karthäuser and Thomas Bauer. Van Parys' artistic research stays in touch with the canonic works of past and present composers. Currently she is writing an orchestra piece for the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra, to be premiered in 2021 under the baton of Pintscher. (www.anneliesvanparys.be)

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/anneliesvanparys>