

**JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY**

**ISABELLA'S ROOM**

Laugh and be gentle to the unknown



Viviane De Muynck – Photo © Eveline Vanassche

Festival d'Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Théâtre Garonne (Toulouse), La Rose des Vents (Scène Nationale de Villeneuve d'Ascq), Brooklyn Academy of Music (New York), welt *in* basel theaterfestival.

With the collaboration of the Kaaithheater (Brussels).

With the support of the Flemish authorities.

## ISABELLA'S ROOM

*Laugh and be gentle to the unknown*

Erwin Jans

1.

Isabella's room contains a secret. It is the location of a lie. It is the location of the lie that dominates Isabella's existence. This lie is an image. An exotic image. The image of a desert prince. Isabella is the daughter of a desert prince who disappeared on an expedition. This is what her foster parents, Arthur and Anna, told her. They lived together in a lighthouse on an island, where Arthur was the lighthouse-keeper. Like an island, the lighthouse is a transitional area: somewhere between the sea and the land, between solid and fluid, between inside and outside. The lighthouse is built on the land, but it yearns for the sea. Isabella yearns for the desert, the desert prince, Africa.

This is how the life-story of the blind old Isabella begins. But it soon becomes clear that a terrible, unutterable truth lies hidden beneath the story of the desert prince. Anna and Arthur cannot live with their secrets and escape into drink. Anna dies and Arthur throws himself into the sea. Isabella's quest for her father, the desert prince, does not lead her to Africa but to a room in Paris, filled with anthropological and ethnological objects.

2.

Isabella is old and blind when she looks back over her life. She lives in her room in Paris surrounded by the thousands of exotic objects plundered from Ancient Egypt and black Africa. They belonged to Jan Lauwers' father, who on his death left them to his wife and children. These objects were separated from their cultural context by the view of a different era, one which was colonial and regarded them as exotic. They are objects in which a world - Africa - has come to a standstill, become petrified, stored, 'museumised' and fetishised.

Isabella's life spans almost the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century: the First and Second World Wars, Hiroshima, colonialism, the development of modern art, involving such figures as Joyce, Picasso and Huelsenbeck, the journeys to the moon, David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust, the famines in Africa and the Vlaams Blok [Tr.: far-right political party] in Antwerp. Isabella's lover Alexander is taken prisoner by the Japanese during the Second World War. He survives the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima ("It was as if the sun had exploded and scattered its ash over the earth"), but after the war gradually descends into madness: "I liked staying with Isabella. She sincerely loved the world and I hated it. I hated the world because nothing about it was right anymore. They didn't do anything useful and all I felt was irritation and Isabella was the only one who made me forget about it. Her passion for life was pure unbearable beauty. The only weapon against the dictatorship of the lie."

3.

*Face à l'extrême*: this is the title of a book by the French thinker Tzvetan Todorov about the concentration camps of the Second World War. But at the same time the title points to the attitude of everyone who lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with some degree of awareness. Every day we come face-to-face with the extreme. It looks at us with its Medusa's head and it is as if we turn to stone: in emotional indifference, in political apathy, in social isolation, in even more economic production and consumption. At the same time we are fascinated by the apocalyptic visions and scenarios of ecological doom the media offers us every day.

According to the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, we have in the meantime gone beyond reality and history. Things have already passed their end. They are no longer capable of coming to an end. They are sinking into an unending crisis. In other words our era is not characterised by the end of history but by the impossibility of bringing history to an end. We are living beyond the end. It is here that the apocalypse of our era lies: in the impossibility of the end. Or rather: life beyond the end. So what happens beyond the end? What events take place beyond the end? Baudrillard calls them 'extreme phenomena'. He refers to the Latin stem '*ex-terminus*': beyond the end. The characteristics of these 'extreme phenomena' are ecstasy and involution. The ecstasy of the social: the masses (more social than the social). The ecstasy of the body: corpulence (fatter than fat). The ecstasy of information: simulation (truer than true). The ecstasy of time: real time, immediacy (more present than the present). The ecstasy of the real: the hyperreal (more real than the real). The ecstasy of sex: pornography (more sexual than sex). The ecstasy of violence: terror (more violent than violence).

Our era is the era of obscenity: all our structures swell up and absorb everything in their expansion. Every structure penetrates every other, mutually immersing each other. It is a long time since we were able to distinguish between the political and the economic, the private and the public, the intimate and the pornographic. The exponents of this implosion are the media and the multimedia: as a result of the surfeit of information we have lost access to real information and real historical events. This is why, after the worldwide publication of the photos of tortured prisoners in Iraq, Donald Rumsfeld, the American Secretary of State for Defence, was able to say, "I don't read newspapers any more." Alexander said, "When they came to tell us the war was over I knew it was a lie. It was a lie. And the worst thing about this lie was that everyone believed it."

4.

Is there any such thing as 'extreme theatre'? And if so, what would it mean? 'More theatre than theatre', to formulate it *à la* Baudrillard? A theatre that sets itself up '*face à l'extrême*', its gaze turned towards the Medusa's head of the unbearable reality and aware of the risk of turning to stone? A theatre with explicit political and social subjects and intentions? A theatre with and by the homeless and illegal immigrants?

A theatre that goes onto the streets and into the neighbourhoods? A theatre in the name of democratic values? In short: a theatre that is 'engaged', a theatre that 'intervenes', that addresses its audience directly?

5.

Isabella tells the story of her life, but she does not tell it alone. All those who were important to her tell it with her; the many in her life who had died: Arthur and Anna, her lovers Alexander and Frank. And not only do they tell Isabella's story together, they also sing it. This is not the first time in a piece by Jan Lauwers that *live* music is played and that the actors sing, but it has never happened in such an open and inviting way as here. Unlike other cultures, Western culture has become alienated from group singing; here it now exists only as a professional activity. Song always points to a ritual aspect. It is another form of energy exchange than the spoken word and creates another type of communication with the audience. It is associated with festivity and celebration. Language has always been a problematic means of communication in Lauwers' pieces, always connected to power and desire. Language was both a deficiency and an excess: several languages were spoken, translations were made from one language to another, people spoke at the same time and often screamed... language always came up against its own boundaries. This has not entirely disappeared but the singing in *Isabella's Room* carries language across this boundary.

Lauwers: "Singing together is one of the finest things you can do. It was one of my dreams to put this on stage. And miraculously enough it succeeded very quickly. We decided to make the singing and the music a very informal presence. The music seems to be there only indirectly, but in fact it dominates everything. Your emotions are determined by what you hear. I want everyone to sing to the audience while smiling as much as possible. I myself join them on stage to put the whole thing into a little more perspective. I just sit there with them, sing along a bit, and explain a few things to the audience. As relaxed as possible. No solemn nonsense. I want the ritual of theatre to become something like people coming together to sing. When I was writing the script I was thinking more of the way Marquez passes on popular stories in *A Hundred Years of Solitude* than of the complexity of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. Now, when I think about communication with the audience, I think more of Marquez, whereas in the past Joyce was the model."

6.

'Watching and not intervening', is how Lauwers described his attitude at the time of *Le Voyeur* (1994): "I see voyeurism today as having two sides: on the one hand it is looking at what mankind does, from necessity taking part in it and adopting an indifferent attitude in order to survive; on the other hand there

is this sexually-tinted voyeurism: it has to do with AIDS, the disease in which death and eroticism merge.”

Isabella is not a voyeur, and certainly not when it comes to sex. With her 74 lovers she glorified sex: “I am convinced that sex has a healing power. Or at the very least gives energy.” When she is 69 she starts a relationship with a 16-year-old boy. In Isabella, Lauwers separates sex from the network of voyeurism and violence, disease and death, and guilt and perversion, as was the case in *The Snakesong Trilogy* and in the Salomé monologue in *No Comment*. Isabella is like Molly Bloom in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, a text that Jan Lauwers directed with Viviane De Muynck: both these women fundamentally say ‘yes’.

7.

Is it a coincidence that Isabella is blind? Watching – in the voyeuristic (and thus male) sense – and the frustration/castration it entails forms the heart of the dialectics of Lauwers’ work for the stage. Lauwers stages the blind spot in the male eye – a point at which ‘*le voyeur*’, ‘*le pouvoir*’ and ‘*le désir*’ (the titles of the three parts of *The Snakesong Trilogy*) are turned against themselves and implode. The woman is the issue here, the object of the men’s gaze, desire and power. It is around her body that the male gaze (aesthetic, voyeuristic, pornographic) takes shape. But is she not at the same time the blind spot in man’s eye, to which all looking returns, has to return, once it has unmasked its own desire? And does this return not create the possibility of another sort of looking, very temporary and very fragile? Just like the shaky glass construction Carlotta Sagna builds in *Le désir*, the third part of *The Snakesong Trilogy*, after she has performed an excerpt from Wilde’s *Salomé*, where she had the man whose gaze refused to desire her beheaded? But unlike the tea drinker, Salomé and Ulrike in *No Comment*, Isabella is not a castrating woman. “She had had 73 lovers during her life. Wonderful experiences, each in its own way. And she always spoke of them with respect and tenderness.”

8.

In 1993 Jan Lauwers said, “In *Need to Know*, the first play by Needcompany, you see a woman crying her heart out and you hear a *lamento* by Mozart. I might use the same music today, but you would no longer hear the woman crying. The tears have dried up. The woman tries to cry some more but they are tearless sobs. Even though she feels an intense sadness, she can no longer cry. The annoying thing is that this intense sadness has not gone away.” This image of the woman who cannot cry comes from the opening scene of *Le Voyeur*, the first part of *The Snakesong Trilogy*.

Isabella does not cry either, but in her case the intense sadness *has* gone. She has lost her lovers, but she feels no loss, no sorrow, no rage: “No deep stirring of the soul. No emotional coquettishness.” Lauwers experiments with his philosophy of life through the medium of the female characters in his work. In the successive portraits of women that occupy an increasingly compelling place in his plays, we discern a

profound existential reflection. Is Isabella a new step, a new insight, a new attitude to life? In her, 'indifference' seems to have been overcome. Lauwers has thought up a name for this: 'Budhanton', a contraction of 'Buddha' and 'Antony', of contemplation and impassioned control. Or in Isabella's words, "The peaceful circle of Buddha and the invulnerability of Mark Antony, the Roman general who one day drank his own piss, languishing in the icy cold of the Alps, and the next was in a golden bed making love to the most beautiful woman in the world. And never regretted his actions." This is Lauwers' way out of the Christian morality of guilt and punishment which lost its ultimate legitimacy after the death of God. Budhanton: the mixture of a religion without a god with a pre-Christian self-awareness.

9.

Isabella is blind: her seeing has come to an end. But she is a participant in a scientific experiment whereby images are projected directly into her brain by means of a camera. In the end she will also distance herself from these images - the objects in her room - when she comes to an ultimate realisation.

Isabella: "Look, here, the photo of the man with the beard. The man born out of a lie: my desert prince. He will always remain. Unlike Anna, Arthur, Alexander and Frank: gone. For good. He is the only one that still exists, my desert prince. When I switch off my camera, I see him crystal-clear: Felix. F.E.L.I.X. And that means 'happiness' in a dead language. Sham and illusion."

It is on the basis of this constantly repeated lie that Lauwers creates his plays: the lie of the imagination as an answer to the lie of reality, in the ultimate realisation that happiness can only be written in the letters of a dead language.



Photo © Maarten Vanden Abeele

## **CREDITS**

Jan Lauwers

Isabella - Viviane De Muynck

Anna - Anneke Bonnema

Arthur - Benoît Gob

Alexander - Hans Petter Dahl

Frank - Maarten Seghers

The Desert Prince - Julien Faure

Sister Joy - Taka Shamoto (replaces Louise Peterhoff)

Sister Bad - Sung-Im Her (replaces Tijen Lawton)

Narrator - Misha Downey (replaces Ludde Hagberg)

### **Script**

Jan Lauwers

Except The Liar's Monologue was written by Anneke Bonnema

### **Music**

Hans Petter Dahl, Maarten Seghers

Lyrics: Jan Lauwers, Anneke Bonnema

### **Dance**

Julien Faure, Ludde Hagberg, Tijen Lawton, Louise Peterhoff

### **Costumes**

Lemm&Barkey

### **Set**

Jan Lauwers

### **Lighting**

Jan Lauwers, Marjolein Demey

### **Sound Design**

Dré Schneider

### **Technique & production**

Marjolein Demey

### **Surtitles**

Elke Janssens

**French Translation**

Monique Nagielkopf, Olivier Taymans

**English Translation**

Gregory Ball

**French Language Coach**

Anny Czupper

**English Language Coach**

Marty Sparks

**Production of the creation**

Luc Galle (production manager), Lieven De Meyere

**Trainee Technicians**

Jelle Moerman, Dorus Daneels

**Dramaturgical Introduction**

Erwin Jans

**Photography**

Eveline Vanassche, Maarten Vanden Abeele

**Production**

Needcompany

**Coproduction**

Festival d'Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Théâtre Garonne (Toulouse), La Rose des Vents (Scène Nationale de Villeneuve d'Ascq), Brooklyn Academy of Music (New York), welt *in* basel theaterfestival

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## **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2004-2005**

### **First night**

Cloître des Carmes, Festival d'Avignon	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15 July 2004
welt <i>in</i> basel theatre festival, Basel	13, 14, 15 August 2004
Kaaitheater, Brussels	22, 23, 24, 25 September 2004
Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse	20, 21, 22, 23 October 2004
Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus	16, 17, 18, 19 November 2004
Next Wave Festival, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York	14, 16, 17, 18 December 2004
Cultuurcentrum Brugge	19 January 2005
Vooruit Kunstencentrum, Ghent	21, 22 January 2005
La Filature, Mulhouse	25, 26 January 2005
Théâtre de Nice	2, 3 February 2005
Théâtre de la Ville, Paris	8, 9, 10, 11, 12 February 2005
Rotterdamse Schouwburg	15 February 2005
TorinoDanza, Teatro Nuovo, Torino	19 February 2005
Les Halles de Schaerbeek, Brussels	23, 24, 25, 26 February 2005
Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg	11 March 2005
deSingel, Antwerp	18, 19 March 2005
La Rose des Vents, Villeneuve d'Ascq	29, 30, 31 March 2005
Théâtre l'Agora, Evry	12 April 2005
Carrefour international de théâtre, Théâtres d'Ailleurs, Québec	25, 26, 27, 28 May 2005
Festival de théâtre des Amériques, Montréal	31 May and 1, 2, 3 June 2005
Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg	22 June 2005

## **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2005-2006**

Festival de Marseille	6, 7 July 2005
ImPulsTanz, Vienna	27, 29 July 2005
Theaterfestival, Kaaitheater, Brussels	30, 31 August 2005
Theaterfestival, Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam	8 September 2005
Stadsschouwburg Groningen	14 September 2005
Kulturhuset, Stockholm	22, 23, 24 September 2005
Teatre Lliure, Barcelona	18, 19 October 2005
Festival Octobre en Normandie, Rouen	22, 23 October 2005
Théâtre de Namur	27, 28, 29 October 2005
Château Rouge, Annemasse	8 November 2005
Espace Malraux, Chambéry	10 November 2005

Comedie de Valence	12 November 2005
Teatro Central, Sevilla	18, 19 November 2005
Teatro Cánovas, Malaga	22, 23 November 2005
Teatro Alhambra, Granada	25, 26 November 2005
Théâtre National de Bretagne, Rennes	6, 7, 8, 9 December 2005
Le Lieu Unique, Nantes	14, 15, 16, 17 December 2005
Dubbelspel, Stasschouwborg, Leuven	20 December 2005
Théâtre des Salins, Scène nationale de Martigues	17 January 2006
MC2, Grenoble	25, 26, 27, 28 January 2006
Centre Culturel Jean Gagnant, Limoges	1, 2 February 2006
UWA Perth International Arts Festival, Perth	22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28 February 2006
Trafó, Budapest	27, 28 April 2006
Théâtre de la Ville, Paris	3, 4, 5, 6 May 2006
Théâtre de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines / Scène Nationale	10 May 2006
Le Quartz, Brest	13 May 2006
Teatro São Luiz, Alkantara Festival, Lissabon	2, 3 June 2006
Zürcher Festspiele, Schauspielhaus Zürich	17, 18 June 2006

### **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2006-2007**

ImPulsTanz, Vienna	25 July 2006
Biennale de la Danse de Lyon, Théâtre de la Croix-Rousse	21, 22, 23 September 2006
Tramway, Glasgow	9, 10, 11 November 2006
Centre Dramatique National de Normandie, Comédie de Caen	21, 22 November 2006
Hebbel Theater, Berlin	14, 15, 16 December 2006
Centre Dramatique de Bretagne, Théâtre de Lorient	20, 21 December 2006
LG Arts Center, Seoul	30, 31 March, 1 April 2007
Saitama Arts Theatre, Saitama	6, 7, 8 April 2007
Théâtre Le Quai, Angers	8, 9 June 2007
Hellenic Festival, Athene	15, 16, 17, 18 June 2007

## **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2007-2008**

Deutsches Nationaltheater, Kunstfest Weimar	31 August 2007
TANZtheater INTERNATIONAL, Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Hannover	2 September 2007
National Theatre Festival, Bucharest	13, 14 November 2007
Le Manège de Reims Scène nationale	6, 7 December 2007
Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogotá	19, 20, 21, 22, 23 March 2008

## **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2008-2009**

Le Carré de Jalles, St-Médard-en-Jalles	2, 3 February 2009
TAP, Le Théâtre-Scène Nationale de Poitiers	5, 6, 7 February 2009
Grand Théâtre de Provence, Aix en Provence	13, 14 February 2009
Laboral Escena, Teatro de la Laboral, Gijón	27, 28 February 2009
CC De Werf, Aalst	12 March 2009
Krakowskie Reminiscencjes Teatralne	21 April 2009

## **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2009-2010**

Festival Internacional Teatro a Mil, Santiago de Chile	4,5,6,7 January 2009
Zagreb theatre festival	20, 21 September 2009
Burgtheater, Vienna	23, 24 September 2009
Scène National de Sète et du Bassin de Thau	1, 2 October 2009
49 <sup>th</sup> International theatre festival MESS, Sarajevo	24 October 2009
V International Theatre Festival, Moskou	2, 3 November 2009
Festival de Otoño, Madrid	11, 12, 13, 14 November 2009
MC2 Grenoble	16 March 2010
L'Arsenal, Metz	27, 28 May 2010

## **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2010-2011**

BITEF Festival, Belgrado	15, 16 September 2010
Novi Sad	20 September 2010
Burgtheater, Vienna	28, 29, 30 September 2010
Théâtre Champ Fleuri, Saint-Denis (île de la Réunion)	26, 27 November 2010
REPUBLIQUE, Copenhagen	30 March 2011
La Comédie de Clermont-Ferrand, scène nationale	11 May 2011

## PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2011-2012

Le Festival au Carré, Le Manège, Mons	6, 7 July 2011
La Biennale di Venezia	11 October 2011
La Halle aux grains, Scène nationale de Blois	13, 14 December 2011
CSS Teatro stabile di innovazione del FVG	21 January 2012
Grand Théâtre, Opéra de Dijon	27 January 2012
Le Parvis, Scène Nationale Tarbes Pyrénées	3 February 2012
Le Trident, Scène nationale de Cherbourg-Octeville	9 February 2012
Paris Quartier d'Été	17-28 July & 1-4 August 2012

## PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2012-2013

Theater aan het Vrijthof, Maastricht	19 March 2013
National Center for the Performing Arts, Beijing	16, 17 September 2013
Tianjin Grand Theatre	20-22 September 2013
Guangzhou Drama Art Center	26-28 September 2013
World View Series, Taipei	11-13 October 2013

### *As part of the Sad Face/Happy Face Trilogy*

Salzburger Festspiele 2008	1, 3, 5 August 2008
Schauspielhaus, Schiffbau, Zurich	5, 7 December 2008
Festival d'Avignon	12, 14, 18 July 2009
deSingel, Antwerp	20 December 2009
MC2 Grenoble	20 March 2010
MALTA Festival Poznan	27, 29 June 2010
REPUBLIQUE, Copenhagen	3 April 2011
National Center for the Performing Arts, Beijing	16, 17 September 2013
Tianjin Grand Theatre	20-22 September 2013
Guangzhou Drama Art Center	26-28 September 2013
World View Series, Taipei 11-13	October 2013

## **DATES SAISON 2013-2014**

Maison de la Culture d'Amiens, Amiens	27 January 2014
La comète - Scène Nationale, Châlons-en-Champagne	13, 14 February 2014
The New Theatre Institute of Latvia, Riga	19, 20 March 2014
PACT Zollverein, Essen	29, 30 April 2014
Tanz und Theater - Internationales Festival Freiburg	7 May 2014

## **DATES SAISON 2014-2015**

FIBA - Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires	19, 20 September 2015
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## WORK FOR THEATRE – JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

- 1987 **Need to Know**  
Opening: 24 March, Mickery, Amsterdam
- 1989 **ça va**  
Opening: 18 March, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1990 **Julius Caesar**  
Opening: 31 May, Rotterdamse Schouwburg
- 1991 **Invictos**  
Opening: 18 May, Centro Andaluz de Teatro, Seville
- 1992 **Antonius und Kleopatra**  
Opening: 14 February, Teater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1992 **SCHADE/schade**  
Opening: 21 October, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1993 **Orfeo**, opera by Walter Hus  
Opening: 23 May, Bourschouwburg, Antwerp
- 1994 **The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Voyeur**  
Opening: 24 March, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1995 **The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Pouvoir (Leda)**  
Opening: 11 May, Dance 95, Munich
- 1996 **Needcompany's Macbeth**  
Opening: 26 March, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 1996 **The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Désir**  
Opening: 6 November, Kanonhallen, Copenhagen
- 1997 **Caligula, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part one**  
Opening: 5 September, Documenta X, Kassel
- 1998 **The Snakesong Trilogy, reworked version with live music**  
Opening: 16 April, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 1999 **Morning Song, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part two**  
Opening: 13 January, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 2000 **Needcompany's King Lear**  
Opening: 11 January, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 2000 **DeaDDogsDon'tDance/ DJamesDjoyceDeaD**  
Opening: 12 May, Das TAT, Frankfurt
- 2001 **Ein Sturm**  
Opening: 22 March, Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg
- 2002 **Images of Affection**

- Opening: 28 February, Stadsschouwburg, Bruges
- 2003 No Comment**  
Opening: 24 April, Kaaitheter, Brussels
- 2004 Isabella's room**  
Opening: 9 July, Cloître des Carmes, Festival d'Avignon
- 2006 All is vanity**  
Opening: 8 July, Théâtre Municipal, Festival d'Avignon
- 2006 The Lobster Shop**  
Opening: 10 July, Cloître des Célestins, Festival d'Avignon
- 2008 The Deer House**  
Opening: 28 July, Perner-Insel, Hallein, Salzburger Festspiele
- 2008 Sad Face | Happy Face**  
Opening: 1 August, Perner-Insel, Hallein, Salzburger Festspiele
- 2011 The art of entertainment**  
Opening: 5 March, Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2012 Caligula**  
Opening: 17 May, Kasino (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2012 Marketplace 76**  
Opening: 7 September, Ruhrtriennale , Bochum
- 2014 Begin the Beguine**  
Opening: Spring, Kasino (Burgtheater), Vienna

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## PUBLICATIONS IN BOOK FORM BY OR ABOUT JAN LAUWERS

- LAUWERS, Jan, *Leda*, Bebuquin (Antwerp), a coproduction with IT&FB publishing company (Amsterdam), 1995.
- VANDEN ABEELE, Maarten, *The Lucidity of the Obscene*, Needcompany in cooperation with IT&FB publishing company (Brussels/Amsterdam), 1998.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *La Chambre d'Isabella* followed by *Le Bazar du Homard*, Actes Sud-papiers, 2006.
- STALPAERT, Christel, BOUSSET, Sigrid, LE ROY, Frederik, (eds.), *No Beauty for Me There, where Human Life is Rare. On Jan Lauwers' theatre work with Needcompany*, Academia Press (Ghent), IT&FB publishing company (Amsterdam), 2007.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Restlessness*, Mercatorfonds, BOZAR Books, Needcompany, Brussels, 2007.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Sad Face / Happy Face, Drei Geschichten über das Wesen des Menschen*, Fischer Taschenbuche Verlag (Frankfurt), 2008.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *La maison des cerfs*, Actes Sud-papiers, Paris, 2009.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *KEBANG!*, Uitgeverij Van Halewyck, 2009.
- FREEMAN, John, *The Greatest Shows on Earth. World Theater from Peter Brook to the Sydney Olympics*, Libri Publishing, Oxfordshire, 2011.

## PRIZES

- Mobil Pegasus Preis, Internationales Sommertheater Festival Hamburg, for the best international production, *ça va*, 1989.
- Thersitesprijs, Flemish theatre critic prize, 1998.
- Obie Award in New York for the play *Morning Song*, 1999.
- *Kinematrix Prize* for Digital Format, International Film Festival Venice 2002, *Goldfish Game*, 2002.
- Grand Jury Honor for Best Ensemble Cast, Slamdance Film Festival, *Goldfish Game*, 2004.
- Le Masque, prize awarded by the Académie Québécoise du Théâtre in Montréal, Canada, for the best foreign production, *La Chambre d'Isabella*, 2005.
- Prize awarded by the Syndicat Professionnel de la Critique de Théâtre, de Musique et de Danse in France, for the best foreign production, *La Chambre d'Isabella*, 2005.
- Culture prize awarded by the Flemish Community 2006, theatre literature category, for the *De kamer van Isabella* and *Ulrike* scripts.
- Grand Prix - Golden Laurel Wreath Award for Best Performance / MESS Festival Sarajevo, for *Isabella's room*, 2009.
- 'Politika' prize for best director / BITEF Festival in Belgrade, for *Isabella's Room* and *The Deer House*, 2010.
- Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria, 2012.

## **JAN LAUWERS**

Jan Lauwers (Antwerp, 1957) is an artist who works in just about every medium. Over the last twenty-five years he has become best known for his pioneering work for the stage with Needcompany, which was founded in Brussels in 1986. From 2009 until 2014 Needcompany has been artist-in-residence at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Over the years he has also built up a substantial body of art work which was shown in an exhibition at BOZAR (Brussels) in 2007. Jan Lauwers is awarded with the 'Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic Austria' (2012).

Jan Lauwers studied painting at the Academy of Art in Ghent. At the end of 1979 he gathered round him a number of people to form the *Epigonenensemble*. In 1981 this group was transformed into the Epigonentheater zlv collective which took the theatre-world by surprise with its six stage productions. In this way Jan Lauwers took his place in the movement for radical change in Flanders in the early '80, and also made his international breakthrough. Epigonentheater zlv presented direct, concrete, highly visual theatre that used music and language as structuring elements. Their productions were *Already Hurt and not yet War* (1981), *dE demonstratie* (1983), *Bulletbird* (1983), *Background of a Story* (1984) and *Incident* (1985). Jan Lauwers disbanded this collective in 1985 and founded *Needcompany*.

## **NEEDCOMPANY**

Jan Lauwers *needs company*. He founded Needcompany together with Grace Ellen Barkey. They together are responsible for Needcompany larger-scale productions. The group of performers Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey have put together over the years is quite unique in its versatility. Their *associated performing artists* are MaisonDahlBonnema (Hans Petter Dahl & Anna Sophia Bonnema), Lemm&Barkey (Lot Lemm & Grace Ellen Barkey), OHNO COOPERATION (Maarten Seghers & Jan Lauwers) and the NC ensemble, which includes the inimitable Viviane De Muynck. They create work of their own under Needcompany's wing.

Since Needcompany was founded in 1986, both its work and its performers have been markedly international. Its first productions, *Need to Know* (1987) and *ça va* (1989) - which received the Mobiel Pegasus Preis - were still highly visual, but in subsequent productions the storyline and the main theme gained in importance, although the fragmentary composition remained.

Lauwers' training as an artist is decisive in his handling of the theatre medium and leads to a highly individual and in many ways pioneering theatrical idiom that examines the theatre and its meaning. One of its most important characteristics is a transparent, 'thinking' acting and the paradox between 'acting' and 'performing'.

This specific approach is also to be found in his adaptations of Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar* (1990), *Antonius und Kleopatra* (1992), *Needcompany's Macbeth* (1996), *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000) and, at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, *Ein Sturm* (2001). After directing *Invictos* (1996), the monologue *SCHADE/Schade* (1992) and the opera *Orfeo* (1993), in 1994 he started work on a major project called *The Snakesong Trilogy*, which signalled his first full emergence as an author: *Snakesong/Le Voyeur* (1994), *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir* (1995) and *Snakesong/Le Désir* (1996). In 1998 he staged the reworked version of the whole *Snakesong Trilogy*.

In September 1997 he was invited to take part in the theatre section of Documenta X (Kassel), for which he created *Caligula*, after Camus, the first part of a diptych called *No beauty for me there, where human life is rare*. With *Morning Song* (1999), the second part of the diptych *No beauty...*, Lauwers and Needcompany won an Obie Award in New York. In May 2000, at the request of William Forsythe, Lauwers created, in co-production with Ballett Frankfurt, the piece entitled *DeaDDogsDon'tDance/DJamesDjoyceDeaD* (2000).

*Images of Affection* (2002) was created on the occasion of Needcompany's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Jan Lauwers presented three monologues and a dance solo under the title *No Comment* (2003). Charles L. Mee, Josse De Pauw and Jan Lauwers wrote pieces for Carlotta Sagna ('Salome'), Grace Ellen Barkey ('The tea drinker') and Viviane De Muynck ('Ulrike') respectively. Six composers – Rombout Willems, Doachim Mann, Walter Hus, Senjan Jansen, Hans Petter Dahl and Felix Seger – wrote a musical composition for the dance solo by Tijen Lawton. Broadly speaking the themes of this performance are those Lauwers has reformulated and redefined ever since the start of his work with Needcompany: violence, love, eroticism and death.

A collection of several thousand ethnological and archaeological objects left by Jan Lauwers' father urged him to tell the story of Isabella Morandi in *Isabella's room* (2004) (Avignon theatre festival). Nine performers together reveal the secret of Isabella's room with as central figure the monumental actress Viviane De Muynck. This play was awarded several prizes, including the 2006 Flemish Community Culture Prize in the playwriting category.

In 2006 he created two pieces for the Avignon Festival, one of which is *The Lobster Shop*, whose script he wrote himself, and *All is Vanity*, a monologue by Viviane De Muynck, which the actress herself adapted from Claire Goll's book of the same name.

The Salzburger Festspiele has invited Jan Lauwers to make a new production, *The Deer House*, for summer 2008. Together with *Isabella's Room* (2004) and *The Lobster Shop* (2006) this new production makes up a trilogy on human nature: *Sad Face / Happy Face*. The trilogy as a whole was performed for the first time at the Salzburger Festspiele 2008.

Jan Lauwers was selected in the margin of the Biennale in Venice for the workshop of Dramatic Arts. Curator Alex Rigola invited a group of prominent theatre makers, resulting in a performance called *The Seven Sins* (2011).

*The art of entertainment* (2011) which premiere in Vienna is currently running and the leading role is played by Dirk Roofthoof. *Caligula*, a collaboration with the Burgtheater, will premiere in May 2012. The new play which Jan Lauwers wrote for the Needcompany ensemble is called *Marketplace 76*. It will premiere in 2012 during the Ruhtriennale

## PROJECTS

In 1999 Jan Lauwers launched *Needlapb*, a one-off occasion for ideas, notes, sketches and random thoughts. *Needlapb* enables one to see the initial stages of various projects in which experimentation gropes its way towards the stage.

*Just for Toulouse* (Théâtre Garonne, 2006) was the first of a series of evenings when Needcompany's *associated performing artists* presented installations and performances. In 2007 *Just for Brussels* was presented at BOZAR.

He founded OHNO COOPERATION together with Maarten Seghers to give concrete shape to their mutual artistic commitment. Up to now this has taken the form of listening to, looking at, thinking about and making music, visual art and performances: *The Grenoble Tapes* (2006), *O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O.* (2006), *The OHNO Cooperation Conversation On The O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology* (2007). They are combined in *an OHNO cooperation evening* (2008). In 2009 the artist-curator duo OHNO COOPERATION invited several artists to participate in *The Tragedy of the Applause - Roubaix*. A variation of *The Tragedy of The Applause* was brought to CC Strombeek at the request of Luk Lambrecht, in confrontation with work by Jeff Wall.

AIR Antwerp invited OHNO COOPERATION to curate the fifth OPEN AIR in August 2011, in the frame of which they introduced the work of artists from all over the world.

*Deconstructions* were made by Jan Lauwers using disused museum material. These museum installations have already been shown at BOZAR (Brussels) and the haus der kunst (Munich) in 2007. They formed the setting for a six-hour marathon performance by the NC ensemble on which the whole of Jan Lauwers' mental world converged. The result was *The House of Our Fathers*, which went to the Museum M in Leuven after the 16<sup>th</sup> Internationale Schillertage in Mannheim.

## FILMPROJECTS

Jan Lauwers also has a number of film and video projects to his name, including *From Alexandria* (1988), *Mangia* (1995), *Sampled Images* (2000), *C-Song* (2003), *C-Song Variations* (2007) and *The OHNO Cooperation Conversations on the O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology* (2007). During

summer 2001 Lauwers shot his first full-length film with the working title *Goldfish Game* (2002). The script was written together with Dick Crane. *Goldfish Game* is the story of a small community of people who are violently torn apart. The premiere took place at the Venice Film Festival (in the New Territories (*Nuovi Territori*)) category. The *Kinematrix* internet magazine (Italy) proclaimed *Goldfish Game* the best film in the *Formati Anomali* (Unusual Forms) category. The jury report said: 'An innovative style of directing that surpasses the limits of the digital medium'. *Goldfish Game* was selected for the Buenos Aires International Human Rights Film and Video Festival in 2002, the Ghent Film Festival in 2002 and the Solothurn Film Festival in Switzerland in 2003. At the Slamdance Film Festival (January 2004), *Goldfish Game* was awarded the Grand Jury Honour for the Best Ensemble Cast.

In February 2003 Jan Lauwers made a silent short film on violence, called *C-Song*. This film has been shown to a limited audience several times, during the *Needlapbs* at STUK in Leuven and the Kaaaitheater Studios in Brussels, and also in 'War is Not Art' at the Vooruit in Ghent. In April 2004 *C-Song* had its official premiere at the Courtisane short-film festival in Ghent. It was subsequently selected for the International Short-Film Festival in Hamburg in 2004 and in July 2004 was screened in the old water-tower at Bredene on the Belgian coast as part of Grasduinen 2004, SMAK-aan-Zee.

*C-Song Variations* (2007), a short film made in connection with *The Lobster Shop*, had a preview at BOZAR (Brussels) in April and its premiere at the Temps d'Images festival in La Ferme du Buisson (Paris) in October 2007. It was then shown at the haus der kunst (2007) in Munich.

For the SPIELART Festival in Munich (2007) he did a video project together with Maarten Seghers: *The OHNO Cooperation Conversations on the O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology*.

## **VISUAL ART**

At the request of the curator Luk Lambrecht, Jan Lauwers took part in the *Grimbergen 2002* exhibition together with 8 other artists (including Thomas Schütte, Lili Dujourie, Job Koelewijn, Atelier Van Lieshout, Jan De Cock and Ann Veronica Janssens).

In spring 2006 his work was included in the DARK exhibition at the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam.

In 2007 Jan Lauwers had his first solo exhibition at BOZAR (Brussels), curated by Jérôme Sans (former director of Palais de Tokyo, now at the UCCA). To accompany this exhibition he also compiled the first book to focus on his art work from 1996 to 2006. At the Artbrussels art fair (2007), Lauwers was invited to make a site-specific work for BOZAR.

Luk Lambrecht has invited Jan Lauwers to take part in *Down to Earth*, a group exhibition of ceramics at Strombeek cultural centre, which includes work by Ann Veronica Janssens, Heimo Zobernig, Atelier Van Lieshout, Lawrence Weiner, Kurt Rylavy and Manfred Pernice.

In May 2009 Jérôme Sans invited Jan Lauwers to exhibit at *Curated by\_vienna 09*. *Curated by* brought 18 Viennese contemporary art galleries together with international curators.

In September 2011 Champ d'Action and M HKA organised the 8th Time Canvas, during which Jan Lauwers' "Last Guitar Monster" was shown.

*Deconstructions* were made by Jan Lauwers using disused museum material. These museum installations have already been shown at BOZAR (Brussels) and the haus der kunst (Munich) in 2007.

*The House of Our Fathers* - a house measuring 20 x 5 x 5m - is the basis for a major new project by Jan Lauwers. A 'house' work of art that examines time, place and perception (the essential difference between theatre and art). It will be expanded over the years to form an entirely independent work of art to which Jan Lauwers invites other artists. A first version of this house was exhibited in 2011 in the Kunsthalle (Mannheim) during the Schillertage. A second version was shown in Museum M in November 2011 (Leuven). Work is currently ongoing on a large version for Hannover's Kunstfestspiele Herrenhausen in 2013.

Click below for the performers' biographies:

[Anneke Bonnema](#)

[Hans Petter Dahl](#)

[Viviane De Muynck](#)

[Misha Downey](#)

[Julien Faure](#)

[Benoit Gob](#)

[Sung-Im Her](#)

[Maarten Seghers](#)

[Taka Shamoto](#)

## PRESS ABOUT ISABELLA'S ROOM

*Isabella's room* is an explosive piece, a story without moral, an aubade, a love song addressed to a woman who has seen a procession of the worst horrors – one after the other: the world wars, the camps, Hiroshima, the famine in Africa, the ultra-right wing Vlaams Blok party, ... Isabella certainly deserves this homage, as much as the interpreter of her role, the mad genius Viviane De Muynck.

***Vernay, Marie-Christine - Libération, 12 July 2004***

This is a performance that continues to follow you long after it has ended, like a white shadow, which pursues you through the streets, through the night. It is *Isabella's room* by Jan Lauwers, which opens and closes with a song: “We just go on”, a song you will not easily forget, because those who sang it for you did so with a smile, an attempt to give some much-needed lightness to what comes after the end: beyond death. The death in this case is the death of Jan Lauwers' father, an event which provided the inspiration for *Isabella's room*.

***Salino, Brigitte - Le Monde, 13 July 2004***

A reminder to announce the tour of the best show of the last year. *Isabella's room*, directed by Jan Lauwers. Viviane De Muynck - the greatest living actress? - leads Lauwers' dancers and actors in a 'tragic musical comedy'. All the audience has to do, with its eyes shut, or rather wide open, is follow the Needcompany on this crazy journey halfway between a dream and childhood memories.

***Fabienne Arvers, Philippe Noisette - Les Inrockuptibles, 12-18 January 2005***

\* The price for the best foreign performance, category dance. (“Syndicat professionnel de la critique de théâtre, de musique et de danse”, France, June 2005)

\* Selected for the Theaterfestival, edition 2005 (Brussels, Amsterdam)

\* The price for “le Masque de la *production étrangère*”. (Foreign performance - Académie québécoise du théâtre, December 2005, Canada)

\* Culture prize awarded by the Flemish Community 2006, theatre literature category

\* Grand Prix – Golden Laurel Wreath Award for Best Performance / MESS Festival Sarajevo, for *Isabella's room* (2009).

Full press reviews on [www.needcompany.org](http://www.needcompany.org)

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