



RICKY AND RONNY AND HUNDRED STARS
A SADO COUNTRY OPERA

MAISONDAHLBONNEMA & NEEDCOMPANY

Theatre is about looking at people. Possibly even an excuse to look for a long time. Because people have a desire to learn. To learn about what happens in extreme situations.

MaisonDahlBonnema

RICKY AND RONNY AND HUNDRED STARS

A SADO COUNTRY OPERA

MaisonDahlBonnema's **Ricky and Ronny and Hundred Stars – a Sado Country Opera** is the follow-up to their first opera, *The Ballad of Ricky and Ronny – a Pop Opera* (2007). The mystery left unresolved at the end of the first opera provides an open beginning for the second. Ricky and Ronny, their creators' alter egos, are a couple who wander like spirits among the stars. That's where they meet the twinkling presence of eternal spoilsport and Salvationist Hundred Stars, who in her turn has been sent to save them from their degenerate fantasies. Through her, Ricky and Ronny stumble into a pornographic universe where they appear to lose their hold completely.

As they float through space, Ricky and Ronny, guided by Hundred Stars, sound out the possibility of a rebirth, a continuation of their existence on earth. In this opera, unbridled idolatry and rampant consumerism are stranded in the plant and animal kingdoms. What do 'stars' have to do with animals? And what happens when we take animals seriously, and are literally absorbed by them, in an attempt to embody animal energy? Hundred Stars helps Ricky and Ronny to focus on these issues and in passing teaches them that good and evil are inseparable.

The setting is Paris and the rest of the mental world.

This sadistic underworld is coloured by melancholy landscape songs. Sado Country is the musical style for this new opera: nothing but sadness and the aggressive pleasure of wanting to feel it by singing and telling about it. A world fuelled by day-to-day worries and moral dilemmas and the eternal endeavour to do good. Dream on.

Ricky and Ronny and Hundred Stars – a Sado Country Opera tries to tell a story about the contemporary experiences of a couple for whom there is no happy end. What initially resembles a soap is soon transformed into a metaphorical tangle, a psychedelic nirvana in which several realities intermingle.

In their first opera, MaisonDahlBonnema showed that their artistic concept is a successful expression of a new theatrical idiom. In **Ricky and Ronny and Hundred Stars – a Sado Country Opera**, they

continue the quest for the potential of this genre. In this work, the creators and performers Anna Sophia Bonnema (libretto) and Hans Petter Dahl (composer) are joined by the dancer and singer Louise Peterhoff.



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CREDITS

A MAISONDAHLBONNEMA / NEEDCOMPANY PRODUCTION

COPRODUCTION THEATER AAN HET VRIJTHOF, EUREGIONAAL OPERA- EN MUZIEKTHEATERFESTIVAL (MAASTRICHT), BIT TEATERGARASJEN (BERGEN) AND NOORDERZON/GRAND THEATRE GRONINGEN. WITH THE SUPPORT OF KAAITHEATER (BRUSSELS) AND KONSTNÄRSNÄMDEN (STOCKHOLM), THE FLEMISH AUTHORITIES AND NORSK KULTURRÅD

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PERFORMED BY

Anna Sophia Bonnema, Hans Petter Dahl, Louise Peterhoff

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Hans Petter Dahl

COSTUME AND LIGHT

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REFLECTIONS ON *RICKY AND RONNY AND HUNDRED STARS* – A SADO COUNTRY OPERA BY MAISON DAHL BONNEMA

By Frank Vande Veire

How can we have drunk the sea dry? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do, when we uncoupled this earth from its sun? Which direction is it moving in now? In which direction are we moving? Away from any sun? Aren't we falling endlessly now? Falling backwards, sideways, forwards, every way? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we wandering as if in an infinite nothingness? Doesn't the empty space breathe in our faces?

'Declining values', 'blurring of standards', 'disintegration of the sense of community', 'ideological vacuum', 'cultural crisis', and so on and so on. Anyone who uses such phrases without irony is a conservative simpleton. Anyone who shrugs their shoulders at these things because people have been moaning about them for at least two centuries is simply lazy. A synthesis of the two views would involve acknowledging that the decline is indeed in full swing, but that the *paralysing amazement* at it is inappropriate, that it is better *to welcome the symptoms of the decline quite simply as the stable element and be prepared for the saviour only as something extraordinary that almost verges on the miraculous and incomprehensible*. So any satisfaction or pride regarding our accomplishments would be misplaced. The logic that controls our lives is that of Doom. Barbarism, the so-called 'state of emergency' is the rule. If good exists, it is only as something improbable, as an unexpected gift, as a miracle, as pure mercy. And this good only shows itself in the *image* of doom. But who would dare boast of possessing such an image, an image not defiled by the kitsch that Doom has in the meantime become? Is there anyone, who, without some dark pleasure, with no cynical sniggering, nor moral pretension, without secretly taking up the most perverse position conceivable – that of a punishing, *purifying* god – can proclaim that the Catastrophe is imminent, or that it has actually already taken place? The Catastrophe has long been a utility item, a tune in our mind, a slightly sharp perfume, a masturbation fantasy, a *game*, an aphrodisiac. It is not just a thing we are afraid of because it would bring an end to our comfortable little lives. We stupefy ourselves with it so we can endure this little life. In a world with no conceivable alternative it is the final image of the True Life. It is not the monopoly of the prophets of doom, not simply a spectre of total destruction projected into the future, but a fact that we have tacitly based our lives on. Our houses full of screens picking up signals from a distant outside world, our cars increasingly armoured and soundproofed, our supermarkets and amusement parks, our own minds that scan their surroundings with friendly, indifferent eyes – these are all places where we have already abandoned the earth and wander around like monads, in the calm supposition that the earth can no longer be lived on. We have surrendered the earth to the inconceivable. We only maintain contact with it from a distance, with reservations, when comfort and safety are guaranteed, when the necessary measures have been taken. At this point we even dare to show ourselves as quite wild and eccentric. How, in this state, could the sense of unreality possibly not creep up on us, the feeling – which is barely a feeling – of only being here in anticipation of something else, something infinitely better, or if need be something extremely bad, the feeling that our presence here is *ironic*, that everything we encounter here is at best a melancholy metaphor for something that once was or should have been? The world,

including the 'humanity' we profess to be in this world, is a system to which we are connected, while in the meantime we dream that we are a sort of animal, part of a monstrous, vegetative growth that is slowly devouring the world, bringing it back to earth. It feels good to be part of the Catastrophe that we fear, especially when it encompasses us, as a silent, creeping, almost friendly force fuelled by an immensely fertile rain, a force which, all in all, destroys nothing, but brings a strange, eccentric life to everything, even the toughest materials. *The disaster destroys everything, but leaves everything intact.* But there is no purity to our animalism. It is unnatural, a pathetic fancy-dress party, a failed vanishing trick – a dream sown in us by the same world we wanted to escape. Hidden away in the green darkness are we truly the slaves of the profusion and the tumult of the twinkling stars. We are spellbound by a transparent, luminous monster, a floating supermarket packed full of memories of the unfulfilled, a sort of eternal Paris in which, as if in a snowglobe, we see ourselves drinking cappuccinos, enjoying oysters and champagne and flirting with stars. In this world, swarming with our doubles, we like to avenge ourselves, but even this revenge remains unreal. Like sadists, we dream of the ecstasy we expect our victim will enjoy. Like cannibals, our larynx hurts with the desire to be devoured. The soulless animal beckons like an image of deliverance.

Source of the quotes (italics in text) in the same order:

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, no. 125 (1882).

Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstrasse* (1928).

Maurice Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre* (1980).



REACHING FOR THE STARS WITH MAISONDAHLBONNEMA

An interview by John Custers with MaisonDahlBonnema

Theaterberichten Theater aan het Vrijthof, 23 February 2010

A second performance with Ricky and Ronny. Who are these two?

Dahl: We invented Ricky and Ronny as two possible alter egos in 2007. That gave rise to a possible self-portrait, a story about what might happen to us if we found ourselves in another world.

Bonnema: So it's not autobiographical. We are not portraying our lives, but a possible life. Part one is set mainly in a large city, part two mainly in the cosmos, amongst the stars. It's no problem to see part two without first having seen part one.

Ricky and Ronny die at the end of part one. So how do they continue to live in part two?

Dahl: Ricky and Ronny wander about among the stars as spirits. There they meet Hundred Stars, a role sung and danced by Louise Peterhoff from Switzerland. Through her they stumble into a pornographic universe where they seem to completely lose their footing.

Bonnema: As they float through space, led by Hundred Stars, they explore a possible rebirth and continuation of their life on earth. But then they will have to put idolatry and consumerism behind them. Of course things don't end well.

Dahl: No. In fact if, after you have seen the performance, you think that anything worse exists, please tell me about it.

This doesn't sound terribly optimistic. Does this betray a sombre view of life?

Bonnema: On the contrary. They get quite a lot of enjoyment out of it too. The world Ricky and Ronny find themselves in is very rich, but also dangerous. Sombre has nothing to do with it.

Dahl: We all know there's misery all around us. But if we accept it and act as if we have no system of values and standards, judgement and morality, what would happen then? That's the fantasy this work is all about. The story is about the question of how Ricky and Ronny could be reincarnated. Anyway, it's up to the audience to answer that question.

You describe it as a sado country opera. Why?

Dahl: We call it an opera because lots of people die in an opera, as Ricky and Ronny do in the first part. Sado country refers to my Norwegian background. There is a Norwegian joke about country musicians that inspired me when I was writing the music. How many country singers do you need to change a light bulb? Two. One to replace the bulb, and the other to sing about how the bulb broke.

That's how I think of country, a style of music that's enormously sentimental. And we introduce the element of sado to add a bit of fun. So the title is more of a metaphor than a comment on the actual style of music. Actually this time it's quite symphonic, with the occasional step towards classical instrumentation.

In this performance the music is electronic. Is the work also suitable for fans of traditional opera?

Dahl: Why not? They might even think it's wonderful. Of course they have to realise it's quite an intense work. It's not suitable for children under 16.

Bonnema: At the same time there's a lot of humour in the work. We certainly try to entertain and move the audience, even though our story is wide-ranging and complex.

MaisonDahlBonnema also makes much use of video, art, fashion and so on. Is this the case here too?

Dahl: That's still a secret. But you can be sure we have planned a few surprises for the audience. So the only thing I have to say to the public is this: don't miss this performance.



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PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2010

25, 26 February 2010	Theater aan het Vrijthof, Euregionaal Opera- en Muziektheaterfestival, Maastricht (NL)
5, 6 March 2010	BIT Teatergarasjen, Bergen (NO)
12, 13 March 2010	Kaaistudios, Brussel (B)
5, 6 June 2010	Operadagen, Rotterdam (NL)

PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2010 - 2011

25, 26 August 2010	Noorderzon, Groningen (NL)
26 September 2010	Avant Art Festival, Wroclaw (PL)
29 January 2011	De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam (NL)
23, 24 February 2011	STUK, Leuven (B)

MAISONDAHLBONNEMA

MaisonDahlBonnema is the name adopted by the duo *Hans Petter Dahl* and *Anna Sophia Bonnema*. These two performing artists have since 1999 played an important part in Jan Lauwers & Needcompany's stage productions. Hans Petter Dahl had previously been a co-founder of and for many years a performer with the Norwegian cult group BAK-TRUPPEN. In 1995 Dahl and Bonnema set up *Love & Orgasm*. Since then they have created ten performances as a duo or with other artists, at the meeting point of composed music, visual arts, literature and theatre.

Dahl and Bonnema are constantly redefining themselves: from *Love & Orgasm* through L&O Amsterdam to *MaisonDahlBonnema*, which opened in 2003 as a virtual concept establishment that launches new collections of ideas in the form of clothes, music, video and writing.

Their performances display a radical preference for the autonomous juxtaposition of the various means of stage production. The audience itself has more than once also become part of the overall setting. Dahl and Bonnema work out everything themselves: the writing, the music, the design, the acting itself.



Photo: Maarten Vanden Abeele

ANNA SOPHIA BONNEMA

From 1982 to 1986 the Dutch Anna Sophia Bonnema studied at the theatre school in Amsterdam. She staged several plays and also wrote a great many, including *De bomen het bos*, staged with the Nieuw West theatre company, and *Tegenmaat*. Since 1995 she has worked with Hans Petter Dahl in the L & O Amsterdam performance group. They have created several pieces including the love show *Tantra & Western*(1995), *What have you done with my poem? - Sing-Dance #1* (1996), *Made in Heaven – Sing-Dance #2* (1997), *Attention - Sing-Dance #3* (1998) and the multidisciplinary performance *Post coitum omne animal triste est* (1999), with a different improvising dancer every night. For these projects they worked with people from several disciplines such as Liza May Post (artist), Oyvind Berg (writer), Tom Jansen (actor) and improvising dancers including David Zambrano, Laurie Booth, Eva Maria Keller and Michael Schumacher. In 1997 they did a coproduction with Bak-Truppen called *Good Good Very Good*. As a duo they created the performances *Nieuw Werk* (2001) and *Shoes and Bags* (2003). The latter was made on the occasion of the opening of their virtual house for fashion, art and concepts, *MaisonDahlBonnema*. In 2005, they made their thoughtful piece *Not The Real Thing* together with Robert Steijn (as performing dramaturg). Their latest pieces, *The Ballad of Ricky and Ronny – a Pop Opera* (2007) and *Ricky and Ronny and Hundred Stars - A Sado-Country Opera* (2010), receive production support from Needcompany.

Needcompany's King Lear (2000) was Anna Sophia Bonnema's first production with Jan Lauwers. Since then she has also appeared in *Images of Affection* (2002), *Goldfish Game* (2002), *Isabella's room* (2004), *The Lobster Shop* (2006) and *The Deer House* (2008). In *No Comment* (2003) she replaced Carlotta Sagna. She has already written several things including pieces for Needlapb and *The Liar's Monologue for Isabella's room* (2004).

HANS PETTER DAHL

From 1987 to 1995, Hans Petter Dahl worked with the Norwegian company Bak-Truppen. In 1995, together with Anna Sophia Bonnema, he founded the L & O Amsterdam performance group. They have created several pieces including the love show *Tantra & Western*, *What have you done with my poem? - Sing-Dance #1* (1996), *Made in Heaven – Sing-Dance #2* (1997), *Attention - Sing-Dance #3* (1998) and the multidisciplinary performance *Post coitum omne animal triste est* (1999), with a different improvising dancer every night. For these projects they worked with people from several disciplines such as Liza May Post (artist), Oyvind Berg (writer), Tom Jansen (actor) and improvising dancers including David Zambrano, Laurie Booth, Eva Maria Keller and Michael Schumacher. In 1997 they did a coproduction with Bak-Truppen called *Good Good Very Good*. As a duo they created the performances *Nieuw Werk* (2001) and *Shoes and Bags* (2003). The latter was made on the occasion of the opening of their virtual house for fashion, art and concepts, *MaisonDahlBonnema*. In 2005, they made their thoughtful piece *Not The Real Thing* together with Robert Steijn (as performing dramaturg). Their latest pieces, *The Ballad of Ricky and Ronny – a Pop Opera* (2007) and *Ricky and Ronny and Hundred Stars - a Sado Country Opera* (2010), receive production support from Needcompany.

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also appeared in *Images of Affection* (2002), *Goldfish Game* (2002), *Isabella's room* (2004), *The Lobster Shop* (2006) and *The Deer House* (2008). In *No Comment* (2003) he was one of the six composers. He also composes music for Needlapb, for *Isabella's room*, *The Lobster Shop* and *The Deer House*.

LOUISE PETERHOFF

Louise Peterhoff, born in Sweden, studied dance at The Royal Swedish Ballet School and theater at Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts. She started working with The Royal Swedish Ballet in contemporary and classical repertory (1997-1998). For several years she worked with a variety of directors and choreographers including Jens Östberg (*Billy's dream*, 1999 *Play House*, 2000), Irene Hultman (*Cascade*, 2000), Philippe Blanchard (*Airbag*, 2000 *Noodles*, 2003), Jan Fabre and Troubleyn (*Je suis sang* 2003), Gunilla Heilborn (*The Potatocountry* and the film *Alaska* 2008). She has made several appearances in Swedish TV such as award winning series SPUNG.

Isabella's room (2004) was the first production in which Louise Peterhoff worked together with Jan Lauwers & Needcompany. *Chunking* (2005) was her first venture together with Grace Ellen Barkey & Needcompany. In 2007 she was the lead singer in the band 'The Ideal Husband'. In 2010 she will be performing for the first time in a MaisonDahlBonnema production, *Ricky and Ronny and Hundred Stars – a Sado Country Opera*.

PRESS about **RICKY AND RONNY AND HUNDRED STARS – A SADO COUNTRY OPERA**

This 'sado country opera' is the second part of a trilogy. The first part was a pop opera where they also sang about the loss of the freedoms gained in the 60s. In part two they are accompanied by a red-hot vamp enveloped in black latex, called Hundred Stars, played by the Swedish actress Louise Peterhoff. In the beginning they sing to an ethereal soundtrack as they fly through a cloud above Paris and ultimately land in a park. The trio will in fact often return to the clouds, both in their heads and with their bodies.

In the park they have some wild nights packed with sex, drugs and violence. The psychedelia takes them tumbling from one place to another, resulting in a confusion that makes indistinct leaps through space and time. It is the confusion which the characters themselves feel that also guides you agreeably through the world they are involved in. From the park they are shot up to the stars, where Ricky is swallowed by a big fish.

But there appears to be more to this than psychedelia. Ricky and Ronny are adrift and have lost all sense of their centre. Ricky calls himself a machine without a soul. The laws of raw nature obscure any respect for feelings or morality. The park they camp in starts to overgrow the deserted city of Paris. Whereas in Ricky and Ronny traces of humanity are still to be found, Hundred Stars has lost it completely. She seems to be their guide through this barren landscape. According to Hans Petter Dahl, she is based on Nietzsche's 'amoral being'.

The sado country opera shows where this sort of utter lack of restraint can lead. In Ricky and Ronny's case it is to utter emptiness. Not just a spiritual emptiness, sings Ricky, but an actual one where everything is equal to its opposite. She has had enough of all the theories and lets herself go entirely into the black hole. At the end, like a vision, we see an animated film in which Ricky and Hundred Stars eat Ronny and then dive into a lake, until all that remains is a black screen with a few air bubbles, a distant echo of the starry sky.

It is an emptiness they are able to communicate to the audience through their stage setting, choreography and, above all, music. The set is simple, with five white rostra which are reminiscent, successively, of a cloud, a bed and a gravestone. Here unfolds a choreography that depicts not much more than stylised seduction, flight and unabashed fucking. Hans Petter Dahl's electronic soundtrack floats just above them without culminating in any climax or coming to a rest. The rhythms are monotonous and are generally accompanied by vague synthesizer strings, deep basses and repetitive guitar picking that gradually empty your mind.

This emptiness leaves you with a remarkably contented restfulness. But if the spirit of Nietzsche is truly to be found in this piece, as Dahl hinted in the discussion afterwards, it cannot end with emptiness. Even though Nietzsche was the philosopher with the hammer, who smashed all accepted truths and experienced the black hole several times in his own life, he was also the philosopher who repeatedly rose again and refilled the void with a message for mankind. It is to be hoped that we shall see this in the final part of Ricky and Ronny's trilogy.

INTERNATIONAL PRESS about **THE BALLAD OF RICKY AND RONNY – A POP OPERA**

Hans Petter Dahl and Anneke Bonnema skate on the boundary between the ordinary and the absurd, and between love and alienation. The intimacy expressed in their presence on stage is a sample of vulnerability that is only very rarely to be found in the theatre.

Etcetera, January 2008

(Dutch-language magazine on the performing arts)

The primary for Bonnema and Dahl never seems to be to challenge the limits of performing arts – it sort of happens along the way – but to present their ideas through the intimacy of the human meeting. That's precisely why "The Ballad of Ricky & Ronny" is both a humorous and touching depiction of the abundance society and the hunt for the individual happiness.

Dagens Nyheter, 5 October 2008

(*Dagens Nyheter* is a daily newspaper in Sweden. It has the largest circulation of Swedish morning newspapers.)

"The Ballad of Ricky & Ronny" is formally and content wise an extreme play."

De Morgen, 11 December 2008

(*Belgian national newspaper*)

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