

**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 – Sarah Lutz (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, Sarah Lutz, Sung-Im Her

### **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

With the collaboration of the Kaaithheater (Brussels).

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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      |



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|--|--------------------------------------|
| 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,<br>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,<br>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'Eté                               | 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

### **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 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

### **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2014-2015**

FIBA - Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires

19, 20 September 2015

### **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2017-2018**

Théâtre National, Brussels

9, 10, 11 November 2017

Festival de Almada, Almada

8 July 2017

### **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR SEASON 2018-2019**

Théâtre de Namur, Namur

19,20, 21 September 2018

Le Grand T, Nantes

26,27,28 September 2018

Festival Temporada Alta de Girona, Girona

6 October 2018

Scène Nationale 61 d'Alençon-Flers, Alençon

19 March 2019

Maison de la culture de Bobigny, Bobigny

12, 13 April 2019

ILT-Festival, Aarhus

24,25 May 2019

### ***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

## 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, Theater 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, Kaaitheater, 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, A Trilogy, Three Stories on Human Nature**  
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, Jahrhunderthalle, Bochum
- 2014 **Begin the Beguine**  
Opening: 1 March, Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2015 **The blind poet**  
Opening: 12 May, Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels
- 2017 **Begin the Beguine**  
Opening: 26 January, hTh, CDN - Montpellier
- 2017 **War and Turpentine**  
Opening: 7 December, Toneelhuis, Antwerp

## 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.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Sad Face | Happy Face, Una trilogía sobre la humanidad*, Papeles Teatrales, Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades, 2014.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Silent Stories*, McaM, Shanghai, 2016.
- BRAECKMAN, Dirk, LAUWERS, Jan, *The House of Our Fathers*, MER Paper Kunsthalle, Ghent, 2017.

## PRIZES

- Mobil Pegasus Preis, Internationales Sommertheater Festival Hamburg, for 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.
- Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award at the Venice Biennale, 2014.
- Golden Laurel Wreath for Lifetime Achievement Award / 54ste MESS International Theatre Sarajevo, 2014.
- Premio Mayor, Premio Teatro del Mundo, category "Translations", for the translation by Micaela van Muylem of the *Sad Face | Happy Face trilogy*, University of Buenos Aires, 2014.
- Barcelona Critics Prize 2015 - International Dance Performance was awarded to *The blind poet*, 2016.

# NEEDCOMPANY

Needcompany is an artists' company set up by the artists Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey in 1986. Maarten Seghers has been a member of Needcompany since 2001. Lauwers, Barkey and Seghers form the core of the company, and it embraces all their artistic work: theatre, dance, performance, visual art, writing, etc. Their creations are shown at the most prominent venues at home and abroad.

Since the very beginning, Needcompany has presented itself as an international, multilingual, innovative and multidisciplinary company. This diversity is reflected best in the ensemble itself, in which on average 7 different nationalities are represented. Over the years Needcompany has put increasing emphasis on this ensemble and several artistic alliances have flourished: Lemm&Barkey (Grace Ellen Barkey and Lot Lemm) and OHNO COOPERATION (Maarten Seghers and Jan Lauwers).

Needcompany revolves around the individual artist. Everything is founded on the artistic project, on authenticity, necessity and meaning. The medium itself is continually questioned, and there is constant examination of the quality of the content to be conveyed in relation to the form it takes. Needcompany believes in quality, cooperation and innovation. Needcompany is a leading voice in the social debate on the urgency and beauty of art at both a domestic and an international level.

## JAN LAUWERS

Jan Lauwers (Antwerp, 1957) is an artist who works in just about every medium. Over the last thirty years he has become best known for his pioneering work for the stage with Needcompany, which was founded in Brussels in 1986. In the course of this period he has also built up a substantial body of art work which has been shown at BOZAR (Brussels) and McaM (Shanghai) among other places. From 2009 until 2014 Needcompany has been artist-in-residence at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Jan Lauwers was awarded the 'Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria' in 2012. In 2014, he was rewarded with the 'Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award' at the Venice Biennale. He is the first Belgian to receive this prize in the theatre category. In 2018, the Salzburg Festival presents 'L'incoronazione di Poppea', the first opera staging by Jan Lauwers.

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 80s, and also made his international breakthrough. Epigonentheater zlv presented direct, concrete, highly visual theatre that used music and language as structuring elements.

Jan Lauwers needs company. He founded Needcompany together with Grace Ellen Barkey. Together they are responsible for Needcompany's 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.

Since Needcompany was founded in 1986, both its work and its performers have been markedly international. And since then, every production has been performed in several languages. Its first productions 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 transparent, 'thinking' acting and the paradox between 'acting' and 'performing'.

## 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).



# NEEDCOMPANY

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