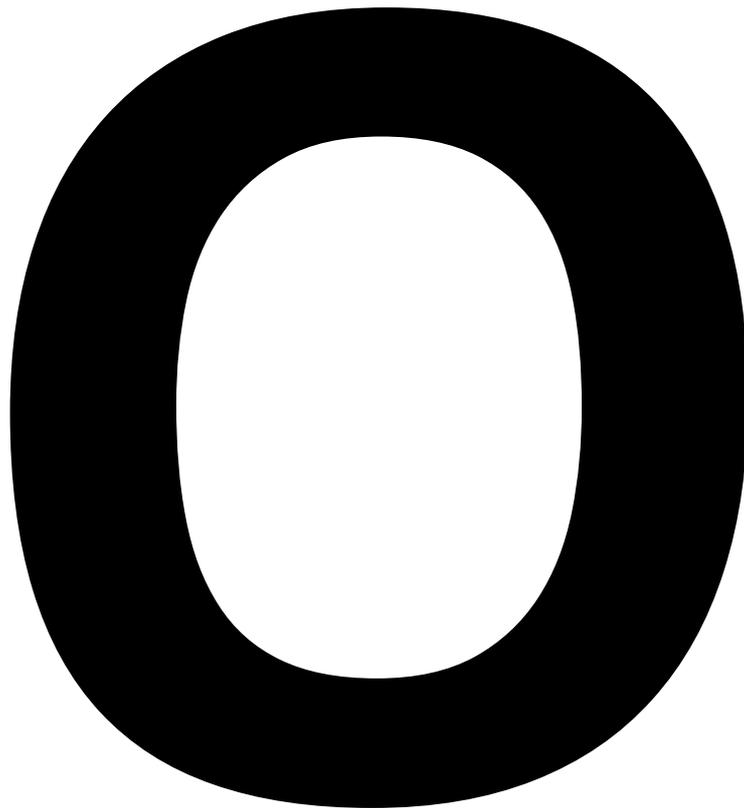


THE CHALLENGE
OF THIS PARTICULAR
SHOW WAS TO
HAVE WORDS
ENDING IN O



Maarten Seghers



or The Challenge Of This Particular Show
Was To Have Words Ending In O

A Needcompany production. In association with Kulturfaktorij Monty and ImPulsTanz.
Thanks to La Raffinerie. With support from the Flemish authorities.



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A performance by Maarten Seghers,
in a confrontation with the artists, musicians and dancers
Fritz Welch, Simon Lenski, Nicolas Field and Mohamed Toukabri,
for whom he wrote an invocatory song about the noisiness of comforting.

Five Don Quixotes in a ragged row

Jan Lauwers

'Maarten Seghers is an artist who gnaws on bones, which he throws onto a heap and then views this new image with wonder. Whereas in his last production, "WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHAT DO YOU MEAN AND OTHER PLEASANTRIES", he found his finiteness rather dull as he was alone and lonely, in "O" he enters into confrontation with four other troublemakers. Together with Seghers himself, Fritz Welch, Nicolas Field, Simon Lenski and Mohamed Toukabri are five Don Quixotes in a ragged row.

In Seghers' work it is as if beauty arose quite casually, but in fact everything is carefully considered and requires tremendous control from the performers. They are all virtuosos who scrape their nails across the blackboard in the hope of improvement.

Seghers is a fighter who gives history hell. The dreadful beauty of Cage, the obstinacy of La Monte Young, the terror of muzak, Beuys' musty sculptures, the wrath of Magritte who, in the face of so much incomprehension, painted broken creatures, but also the purity of a poem by De Andrade that says that in 'the middle of the road there is a stone lying in the middle of the road'.

Seghers is always concerned with material and form: they and nothing else define the content. And also (grinding his teeth as he thinks about it): what does an image mean at present, when the limit of tolerance has become so high in our Western world that meanings conceal themselves in fashionable drivel.

Images that examine themselves. Music whose score is corroded by nostalgia. Nostalgia for clarity in dark times. Images as silent witnesses: carpets dry as dust feeling sorrowful and singing 'oh so sad' in panic, a tender three-part song, as if carpets always sang. Simon Lenski's cello is the beating heart, sublime in its yearning for a cello sonata by Bach. Lenski collapses and with a small movement of his right foot changes the time. The time that the spectator anxiously catches up with. Fritz Welch showing that a cow is not aware what freedom is. But it beats the bell round its neck against the fence and this clanging becomes a requiem for a dead blackbird. Nicolas Field, who is convinced that there are four empty spaces between three blocks of wood. At such a lucid insight he modestly takes off his hat, which suddenly turns into a tart. Mohamed Toukabri finds it logical that if life is a reproduction, a stage performance must not be one. Out of sheer joy he leaps in the air and gets stuck there. And then there is Seghers himself, who laughs at his images because they hide from fearful eyes. Because they are themselves afraid of being misunderstood. This is the joy of perception. Look beyond what is known and you will see that the carpets have become elephants that make up a *corps de ballet*.

“O”, a world of men who look over their shoulder and find that their truth is worthy of existence, but that they would never go down on their knees for it. It is a world where one cannot spend too long because it chafes too much there. But to which one always returns simply because it’s necessary. At a time when art is held hostage between the art market and political commitment, it is a breath of fresh air to see a piece that goes against the flow. This is the mission Seghers and the O-Band have set themselves. Because, as we all know deep down in our soul, art cannot change the world, but the world changes because of art. But only stumblingly, by the backdoor, sometime during a walk in a street that’s too narrow.’



Maarten Seghers on the intention behind 'O'

'Several years ago it blew my mind when I visited an exhibition at the Kunsthalle in Zurich. Dozens of paintings by Kai Althoff were being shown in a series of rooms that were clad in fitted carpet from top to bottom. The richness of this abundance of works and statements transformed into the intensity of a single sculptural suggestion. All the statements, convictions, truths and facts could immediately be buried again under the possibility of something else. The material was musty, muffling and laden with melancholy. Large voids full of chance colours and metres of canvas exuding atmosphere. I remember it as a confusion of surface and content, a confusion between experience and understanding.

Much earlier, it blew my mind when I saw the news pictures in which shouting youngsters took hold of another shouting youngster by the ankles and wrists and threw him over the railings of a high bridge like an eternally soulless stone. They also all had a stick with a strip of fabric attached to it. Vague, faded flags that flapped as violently as the flying boy's arms. I remember it as a confusion between yes and no.

Much later, it blew my mind and those of my children when we saw a photo in the newspaper in which two boys dangled from a pole above a mass of people looking at them with curiosity. They had bags in white cloth over their heads and a noose around their necks. They were young and had the untrue sexual inclination. On the white cloth bag over the head of one of these two unlucky boys you could see – where his open mouth would have been – a dark, probably wet, circle. O. Something like that. Possibly out of astonishment.

O is of course the symbol of astonishment. O is of course the symbol of the snake eating its own tail and so vanishing into itself. O is of course the symbol of the arrow indicating the direction that is so long that, going around the globe, it points to itself. O is of course the symbol of the fence around the meadow. O is of course the symbol of the opening from which a new beginning emerges. O is of course the symbol of the symbol. O is of course the symbol of the open mouth of silent marvel.

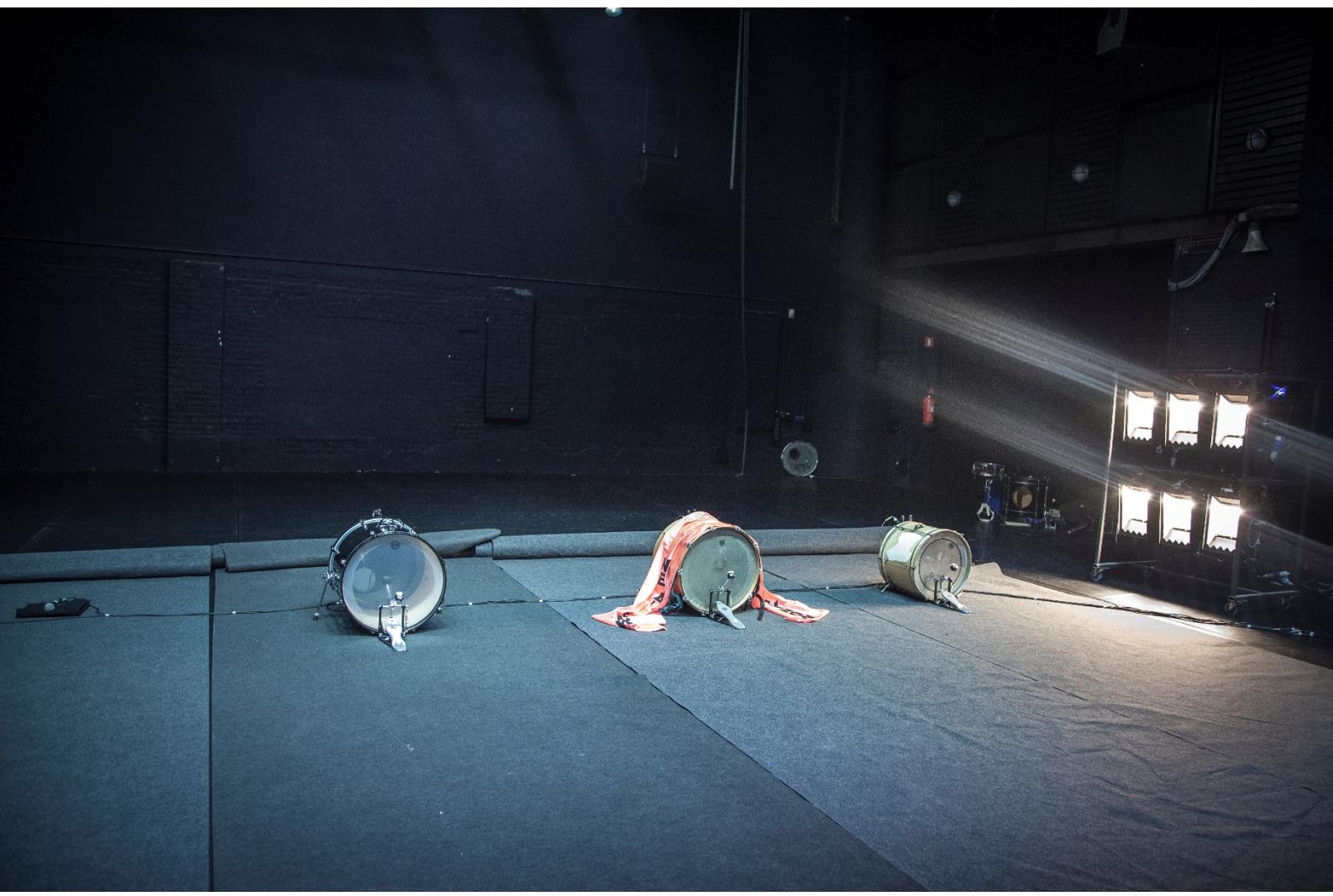
I am aware of 2 silences. John Cage's silence. It is prepared, requires no effort and is full. And Fritz Welch's silence. It is sensory, works itself to death and remains empty. I have never witnessed more fully the confusion between two media – music and performance – than when undergoing Fritz Welch's performances. The tragedy of a man who has to refer to what he knows to express himself on what he does not know. I understood it to be a concert, I experienced it as a drama, I saw it as a dance and I remember it as a philosophy.

Later, in Berlin, I saw how Fritz Welch confronted his skilful, intuitive here-and-now mentality with the massive illogicality of the drum virtuoso, electronics composer and installation artist Nicolas Field. He is one of the most well-versed and highly-trained drummers of his generation. Through extreme improvisation and headstrong sound sculptures he peels away the well-understood musical logic and amazes me by consistently transforming his knowledge into ecstatic feeling.

Much earlier, at the Monty in Antwerp, one of the finest, rawest theatre venues, I saw a cello playing Simon Lenski. This moving fusion, whose only purpose was 'sincerity', changed me into a believer. It had the least manipulative, theatrical intention, and yet it was burnt into my memory as one of the most physically evocative images. A body that can do nothing other than be what music is. Remote from deconstruction and questioning, I understood the belief in the basis, emotion, narration and effective actions.

Meanwhile, somewhere on a beach in Tunisia, while everyone is keeling over, Mohamed Toukabri is standing on his head waiting for the rest of the world to turn upside down. This is how I first encountered this marvellous young dancer. Immobile yet bursting with the desire for eyes he can believe in. Because he doesn't believe his own eyes. He has been in Europe for 5 years now, so silently that you can hardly bear to hear it.

It is for these men that I am writing this new evocative song that leaves nothing to chance. A song about merry beheadings, the noisiness of consolation, the relativity of content and the future of tap-dancing. A struggle between dogged rhythmicality and melodious syrup in the ritualization of the sale of truth. A truth which, like all truths, says it is the 'real truth', in contrast with the other truths: the amazement at almost nothing. This is all that remains in this silence which follows the great raid on everything that has ever been true. And that is enough.'



A performance by **Maarten Seghers**,
in a confrontation with **Fritz Welch, Simon Lenski, Nicolas Field** and **Mohamed Toukabri**.

Dramaturgy Elke Janssens | **Costumes** Lot Lemm | **Sound** Pierrick Drochmans | **Production** Gwen Laroche
Light and technique Gwen Laroche, Sibren Hanssens | **Trainee director** Nao Albet

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ON TOUR

Kulturfaktorij Monty, Antwerp - 18, 19 March 2016

FIDENA, Schauspielhaus Bochum - 5 May 2016

Latitudes Contemporaines, Lille - 8 June 2016

Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt - 8 October 2016

hTh, Montpellier - 16, 17, 18 November 2016

Performatik17, CC Strombeek - 30 March 2017

L'Arsenic, Lausanne - 20, 21 June 2017

Dansand, Ostend - 2 July 2017



INTERVIEW WITH MAARTEN SEGHERS

With thanks to Benoit Hennaut and humain TROP humain, CDN Montpellier

Your artistic personality is fundamentally rooted in music. Can we see *O* as the transposition of a musical score to theatre and performance?

I see making a work as presenting myself with a problem. The things I write are simple; they just travel in a nice straight line. Then it has to go through a filter. And then I make it as difficult as possible. In that way I seem to end up with Sisyphus, who had the impossible task of rolling a rock up a mountain, only to see it roll back down again. The mountain is so high that the point when it rolls back down again is never reached. We keep on going, straight ahead! In good spirits.

It is best to view "*O*" as a piece of musical writing. An attempt to perform this musical writing by simply doing what it says. Composing is structuring. You can write chaos, of course. The ambiguous link between introducing structure into chaos and introducing chaos into structure is both a formal choice and the very substance itself. I have a lot of experience making music that is to be used to provide support and must therefore be transformable. The difference is that when I write for something I'm directing myself, the music becomes only a starting point to inspire people on a stage and to end up with a portrait. In "*O*", the specific musical writing makes it a struggle to perform and that contributes to a humanly tragic quality. The form of the performance is based on the performance of the written music. The content is written by the concentration and the people's attempt to achieve it. The tragedy comes from the chance of failure in all its glory.

The whole performance builds up a tension that is expressed at several levels, and that goes through several stages depending on the performers' actions. Did you devise these lines separately for each performer before bringing them together, or did the creation come about directly with the group?

I put the group together very intuitively. But also driven by a sense of necessity. These four men are my heroes. I had already had a huge 'appetite' to show them to an audience. In that sense, it is almost inspiration that predominates. There is of course a recognition of humanity, tragedy and miraculousness, which underlines the content around which I mould my work.

For "*O*" I wrote obstacles for a group of individuals. Not an individual course. The individual qualities and above all the storytelling powers – or even dramaturgy – emerge from the personal ways of dealing with the shared obstacles. I watch in amazement the way people are able to show the intensity of their fullness by performing something simple and minimal. The less there remains, the more is revealed.

Your show can be described as 'highly performative'. But what definition do you currently give for 'performance', what do you think its place is, or the importance of its legacy on the contemporary stage?

There is a difference between performing a deed and telling about a deed. There is the emotion of doing and the pathos of pretending. Or is it the other way round? That's what intrigues me. Presenting a real attempt shows a person in a fascinatingly honest way. At the moment I am not so curious about illusions. And yet a world of imagination can open up that comes very close to recognisability. People sometimes talk about monstrous Bosch idiots when they describe the figures in my work, although these figures are actually just the people themselves.

Perhaps the present time is the time when it is hyper-fascinating to see a person as they are, their embarrassing aspect. Theatre originates in the fantastic tradition of the masquerade. Everything that is performed represents something, symbolising something that the masked person himself is not. I can imagine that for the Greeks, and even as late as the Middle Ages, this was a welcome way to talk about another superior idea of humanity. Everything in everyday life was 'as real as it could get'. 'Man to man.' Always. Nowadays it never is. Truly, hardly ever. The masquerade is 'all around'. 'Thank god.' As a result we live more safely and more easily. But all at once this will start to fascinate. A person and me and nothing in between. Performance may mean a person and what he does. But in fact this difference doesn't interest me much, and it's a question of taste. After all, a person who is 'pretending' is also doing.

In addition to music and the performing arts, you also work as a visual artist. In what way do these various forms of expression currently come together in your projects? Could you tell us briefly about the most important influences on each of these areas?

In itself it's actually quite odd that we might still say anything about interdisciplinary differences. On the other hand these various media remain artistically inspiring and turn out still to be sufficiently confusing to keep an audience on its toes.

In a museum or concert hall, the spectator's free will is self-evident. Theatre has a more dictatorial side because it exacts attention from the spectator. If you want to leave, everyone sees you. This makes theatre more exciting and intense in its relations with the witnesses. Making theatre means opting for a problem of looking and being looked at that is shared with the spectators. Apart from that, I show the same thing in a theatre as I would show in a museum or a club.

After 15 years of making and performing in theatre, performing and the showing of performance has truly developed into an inspiration for my work: something I like and consider to be an added value. For example, I understand little of my memories of the electronics scene. By not showing man at play, but simply putting him at a computer screen, it has completely erased performance and ended up with a sort of pure ear. Away with the fear of affectation! It seems to me that I hold onto the challenge of challenging the traditional stage with its expectations and perspectives.

I am someone who scraps a lot of material as I work towards the result. Sometimes until there is hardly anything left. But I will not easily get rid of the person who may or may not have to do 'the thing'. That's why I chose theatre. Even if in the end this person has nothing left to do. After all, a person with nothing else to accompany them is still more exciting than all sorts of stuff but without a person.

Music was my first sleepless night and it still is. My work starts out either from the aim of making a world-shattering record or on the basis of a world-shattering sculptural ambition. But when it comes to plans to make records, John Cage starts gnawing at my brain too much and only a few of my sculptures ever got to the front door of a museum. Because I usually throw my work all over the place just in time and call it a performance.

Maarten Seghers

Maarten Seghers makes objects, installations, performances and music. In his production, 'WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHAT DO YOU MEAN AND OTHER PLEASANTRIES' (2014) he smartly and inimitably exposed art practices with apparent absurdity and with beauty and hilarity ploughed through the inevitability of our woes. This feast of feelings contained a human life full of love and tragedy. For this production he was nominated for the 2015 Prix Jardin d'Europe for choreographers.

In 2006 Maarten Seghers set up OHNO COOPERATION in association with the artist Jan Lauwers and the musician Elke Janssens. Together, they create performances, video works, installations and music. OHNO COOPERATION also invites other artists and musicians to join it, and it presents these joint ventures in series of international exhibitions and concerts. Performances, exhibitions and concerts by OHNO COOPERATION have been seen and heard at BOZAR (Brussels), Festival Temps d'Images (La Ferme du Buisson, Marne-la-Vallée), La Condition Publique (Roubaix), CC Strombeek, Gr!M (Marseille), SPIELART (Munich), AIR ANTWERPEN (Antwerp), Campo (Ghent), Künstlerhaus Mousonturm (Frankfurt) et al. Confrontations with other artists and musicians including Jean-Marc Montera, Eric Sleichim, Nicolas Field, Rombout Willems, Egill Sæbjörnsson, Michael Fliri, Nico Leunen, Fritz Welch, Peeesseye, Pontogor, Idan Hayosh, Rachel Lowther, Jaime Fennelly, Roberta Gigante et al. are crucial to the work of OHNO.

Maarten Seghers has been a member of Needcompany, the international company of artists founded by Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey, since 2001. In addition to his presence as a performer in the work of both these theatre-makers, his compositions make a substantial contribution to their productions.

As well as taking part as a performer, he has written music for Jan Lauwers' productions 'Images of Affection' (2002), 'Isabella's room' (2004), 'The Lobster Shop' (2006), 'The Deer House' (2008), 'Marketplace 76' (2014), 'The Blind Poet' (2015), 'Needlapb' and 'The House of Our Fathers', Grace Ellen Barkey's '(AND)' (2002), 'Chunking' (2005), 'The Porcelain Project' (2007), 'This door is too small' (for a bear) (2015), 'Odd? But Tue!' (2013) and 'FOREVER' (2016) and 'Just for...', 'All Tomorrow's Parties' and 'The time between two mistakes'.

He also composed music for 'No Comment' (2003), 'The art of entertainment' (2011) by Jan Lauwers and 'The Unauthorized Portrait' (2003) – a film about Jan Lauwers by Nico Leunen.

Maarten Seghers receives full artistic and production support from Needcompany. Some of his visual work is in the permanent collection of FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais.

Nicolas Field

Nicolas Field is a sound artist and drummer. He studied drums and percussion at the Amsterdam Conservatoire (1996-2002) and sonology at The Hague Conservatoire. He has worked in a variety of projects encompassing contemporary music and jazz, improvisation and electronics. He also builds sound installations. Nicolas Field has collaborated with Tetuzi Akyama, Anders Hana, Akira Sakata, John Hegre, Cactus Truck, Didi Bruckmayr, Fritz Welch, Buttercup Metal Polish with Alexandre Babel, Phô with Morten J. Olsen & Bjørnar Habbestad, Le doigt de Galilee with Jaime Fenelly, Cask Strength, Aethenor, The Same Girl with Gilles Aubry, Peeesseye, Damo Suzuki, Otomo Yoshihide Jazz ensemble, Keiji Haino, Antoine Chessex, Æthenor, Jacques Demierre, Michel Doneda, Seijiro Murayama, Rova 4tet, Tom Tlalim, Robert van Heumen and Anthony Pateras and has given concerts in Europe, Japan, Korea, Australia and the USA. Nicolas Field is a founding member of the n-collective. He has received many awards and was artist-in-residence at the Swiss Institute in Rome in (2010-2011), AIR Antwerpen in 2011 and Johannesburg (South Africa) in 2015.

Simon Lenski

Simon Lenski studied the cello at the Conservatoire in Antwerp. He is a cofounder of Die Anarchistische Abendunterhaltung (DAAU). In 1994 DAAU issued its first album. They have now brought out six albums and have toured the world, performing as the supporting act for Björk, Tortoise, Sixteen Horsepower and others. In addition, Simon Lenski has collaborated with andcompany&Co, EISBÄR, Wunderbaum, Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods and Wim Vandekeybus, and is much in demand as a guest musician. He has composed music for three feature films, including Pieter Van Hees' 'Waste Land' (2014).

Mohamed Toukabri

Born in Tunis, Mohamed Toukabri began dancing at the age of 13, starting with breakdance. Later he joined the Sybel Ballet Theatre led by Syhème Belkhodja. When he was 16, Toukabri started training at the International Academy of Dance in Paris. In 2007 he returned to Tunisia to study at the Mediterranean Centre for Contemporary Dance. In 2008 he joined P.A.R.T.S. and in 2010 he took part in the Eastman production 'Babel'.

Mohamed Toukabri's collaboration with Needcompany started in Grace Ellen Barkey's production 'MUSH-ROOM' (2013). Apart from this he also took part in 'Raar? Maar Waar!' (2013) and 'FOREVER' (2016) by Lemm&Barkey, the durational performance 'The House of Our Fathers', the one-off projects 'Just for...' and 'All Tomorrow's Parties', 'The time between two mistakes' by Grace Ellen Barkey and Jan Lauwers, and the production 'The blind poet' (2015) by Jan Lauwers.

Fritz Welch

Fritz Welch is an artist, musician, walker, talker and performer. He makes installations in which he uses drawings, sculpture and psychological traces. In his solo performances he uses drums, rubbish, microphones, objects and writings. He has exhibited at the Drawing Center (New York), Kunsthalle Exnergasse (Vienna), the Transmission Gallery (Glasgow) and elsewhere. He has performed at the Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville, the Experimenta Club Festival (Madrid) and the Tectonics Festival (in Glasgow, Reykjavik, Tel Aviv and New York). Fritz Welch has taken part in performances with Moya Michael, Ultimate Dancer, Iain Campbell Findlay-Walsh and Juliette Mapp. He is currently a member of the bands Asparagus Piss Raindrop, FvRTvR, Lambs Gamble and Tripping Landlocked Infidels. He has performed with Daniel Carter, Nicolas Field, Olivier Di Placido, Acrid Lactations among others and was a member of Peeesseye. He originates from Texas. After living in Brooklyn for some time, has now settled in Glasgow (Scotland).



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