

huba
de
graaff



SOETKIN DEMEY

PORNOPERA

FESTIVAL-EDITON MUSIC HUBA DE GRAAFF DIRECTION SANNE VAN RIJN
HARP EKATERINA LEVENTAL EN EVA TEBBE

CREDITS

composition Huba de Graaff

direction Sanne van Rijn

with Soetkin Demey

harp duo Bilitis (Eva Tebbe and Ekaterina Levental)

staging Sascha van Riel

lightdesign Floriaan Ganzevoort

sounddesign Vid Ahacic

sound engineer Nina Kraszewska

production Jasper Hupkens

managing director Britt Verstegen

publicity Lonneke van Eden/bureau TamTam

graphic design Emmy Visser

photography Bowie Verschuuren

The first version of 'Pornopera' was also with actor Hans Dagelet



THE PORNOPERA

Many great stories and operas are about desire, craving, sex.
But this opera focusses directly on the essence.
In the Pornopera the orgasm is elevated to Art.

No it is no 'porn!' and it is not about the dubious side of porn.
One orgasm (and everything just before) with a total duration of
one and a half minute becomes an epic orgasm of 35 minutes,
as a slowly slipping organic ritual.
Three moaning voices come to a painfully slow built-up culmination.

The performance takes place in the semi-darkness, on the border
of visible and invisible. Pornography is mostly visual, but the sound
of porn may touch deeper.

After her successful Apera, composer Huba de Graaff returns the
genre of opera inside out. In her research into the origins of singing,
she presents the fascinating twilight zone of the deep human moan.

THE PORNOPERA shows what precedes the singing:
breath, sigh, panting, moaning. Embedded by harps and electronics,
Soetkin Demey reaches an unrivaled climax.
This is beautiful music theater, which takes place in the semi-dark
domain of secret and sensual pleasure.







WHAT IS 'SINGING'?

If I try to sing myself it always starts with a small amount of moaning: a hoarse cough-like gouching quality. Then it takes quite a while before my voice becomes a clear (almost) stabilized pitch: singing.

Just before the vocal cords close, just before they start to vibrate regularly, there is always a small noise: moaning. With an untrained voice, this effect is stronger than with a trained opera voice.

Pop singers emphasize this personal, expressive sound in their voice, while opera singers are trained to eliminate all the superfluous noise.

But this tiny 'moan' is what makes a voice really expressive and highly individual.

When you do not have to reach the back row of La Scala in Milan but only want to sing close to someone's ear or to the microphone, a world of unprecedented subtleties can be heard: moaning, hoarse sighing, panting, all kind of junk-noises and other really interesting sounds.

I've been looking for authentic moaning sound material. Yes, people do groan and moan a lot while exercising sport, but the ultimate art of moaning is of course: sex.

So I started collecting pornographic audio-material: all the vocal sound of building towards an orgasm. Next I analyzed the audio by splitting the sound-material into (ultra) short samples, and categorized these fragments into different vocal techniques.

I wrote down this apparently "universal" structure and translated it into a longer musical form: an opera.

These are overall the different types of moaning:

A moan can go outside (exhaling) —>

Or inhale <— inhalation

A moan can stay at one steady pitch, or energy level.

Or falling (almost always falling, ascending rarely occurs).

A moan can get louder or softer (with more or less air pressure), be shorter or longer.

And with the vocal cords closed or freely vibrating.

A moan can be very complex or simple, straightforward.

For example, a moan can start neutral and softly, and then loud going down.

A moan can be so beautiful and so fascinating and rich in frequencies and overtones.



The art of the female orgasm

... and everything just before.

(Normally this takes about 1'30, but we're doing everything really slowly: it is an opera for connoisseurs, so it takes ... 35 minutes.)

I started creating a series of 'opera's' by doing research on monkeys: I wanted to know if monkeys are able to sing. And yes, some monkeys definitely do sing, so my conclusion is: in the evolution of mankind first there was singing, and much later hominides became able to talk. If you listen to demented elderly who almost forgot how to speak: they still love singing. Or very young children: they always love singing, it is very obvious. Also in many languages there are still remnants of singing: so-called tonal languages in which the use of pitch serves to distinguish lexical or grammatical meaning.

My research on the origins of singing resulted in the 'Apera', an opera in which 4 barok-singers sing my monkey-transcriptions, but then: very slowly.

Monkeys even do use small melodies, which they sometimes repeat.

(But they never sing together. This is typically human.)

Very funny

Isn't it like all finales in romantic classical music tend to imitate the rhythm of a male ejaculation?

Listen to the climax of Bruckner symfonie nr 8, or 7, Mahler: Symphony No. 3, Wagner : Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg finale, Tsjaikovski - Ouverture 1812, Shostakovich: Symphony No. 5, Mendelsohn no5, Brahms no 2, etc. etc. etc....

It's one big sexual sublimation.

Imagine a hot summer evening, all windows are wide open, and everywhere you hear women screaming, while having orgasms. It sounds like... singing. And the whole world is sighing, panting and moaning, vibrating, oscillating, and then, finally: the climax.

Everyone loves listening to singers when they are completely relaxed, and letting themselves go. Singing feels like a relief, kind of liberation.

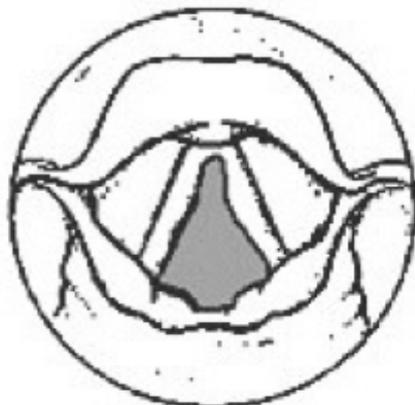
Porn is often dirty, vulgar and fake. We make something beautiful: a high-brow PornOpera.

Huba de Graaff, Amsterdam, november 2017

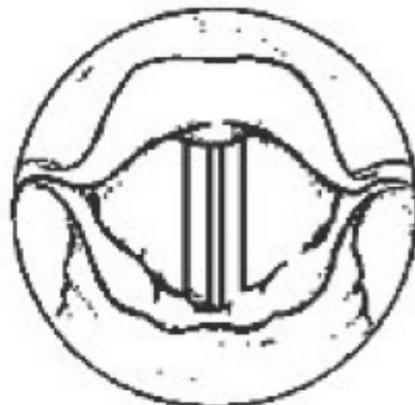
from: Susan McClary - *Feminine endings*:

... “Yet there are many areas of human experience that Adorno overlooks or denigrates as regressive, such as pleasure or the body.”...

... “Our academic music disciplines tend, ..., to deny the presence even of expressive (let alone erotic) components in music. ... the tendency to deny the body and to identify with pure mind underlies virtually every aspect of patriarchal Western culture.” ...



**Vocal cords
abducted
to breathe**



**Vocal cords
adducted
to speak**

BIOGRAPHY



Huba de Graaff (Amsterdam, 1959) takes an exceptional place in the landscape of contemporary music. She has produced a series of unique music-theatre works in the last 25 years. She studied violin, sonology and composition, with a.o. Gilius van Bergeyk, Louis Andriessen, Dick Raaymakers and Fredric Rzewski. Her work is not limited to writing 'notes'. Often she is on stage herself. In the 80's she played violin in bands like The Tapes and Transister. Later she developed self-made instruments, such as a metal dress, which enabled her to control all kinds of electronics. She is always running around with mixing tables, laptops and electronics and gives lectures on her fascinating and extremely original projects.

For Huba, composing is also inventing, researching and asking essential questions. Writing good notes is the aim of every composer. But why? What does it mean? Nevertheless, Huba is never pleased with only pure aesthetic standards. Why should it be sung like opera? And what is actually: singing?

Nothing is self-evident in her music. Singers are also actors or devices. There are contradictions, questions asked, topics enlarged and rushed over the top. She is looking for new interactions between acoustic and electronic instruments and creates own software or app's if necessary to design unorthodox sound systems.

She rarely writes pure concert music for an instrumental ensemble. Rather, she is looking for collaboration with theater makers, designers, artists from other disciplines. But without fixed hierarchy of text, sound and image. That distinguishes her music theater from traditional opera.

The traditional concert practice (and the classical way of listening) are constantly put upside down. Regularly she chooses the low-fi quality of analogue devices. Noises have a major role: the swishes and buzzing of cassette-tapes or rattling mechanics of old school Revox taperecorders. Or vice versa: in 'the death of Poppaea' the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra sounds in an unprecedented surround sound, to illustrate the terror of the sound design.

For many years she organized concerts, where composers, musicians and spectators were chased out of their comfort zone. The stage is sometimes placed outside, in the street, in gyms, parks. In large-scale location projects, she used the entire city as a stage.

In spite of the experimental approach and the often unusual instrumentation, her work is not 'difficult', on the contrary, it has melodic qualities so strong that they are difficult to get out of your head, even after listening only once.

Speakers play a part in many pieces of Huba.

In the legendary Lautsprecher Arnolt (2003), the speakers turn, vibrate, swing and jump and transform into credible dramatic characters.

In another work Diepveles (2008), "a tapping opera for soft singing men", microphones and tape recorders perform as lead instruments.

In everything she makes she tries to find the essence and to translate this into a musical format. Often she plays with sound-reproduction and reversal of perspective. Usually with the necessary humor and irony.

In recent years, Huba is doing fundamental research in singing. What is singing, where does it come from, how does it work? This resulted in an opera (Apera, 2013) entirely based on recordings of monkeys and Pornopera (2015) that is not sung but completely groaned and moaned.

A highlight in Huba's work is the opera 'The Naked Shit Songs', which was premiered at the Holland Festival 2017. More than ever the lyrical qualities of Huba's music reach their full potential. Also in this work, an existing audio recording forms the basic material: an interview by Theo van Gogh in 1996 with the British artist duo Gilbert & George. A musical reconstruction of the interview evolves from babbling conversation to a big Gesamtkunstwerk with choir and a virtuoso five-men live band.

Gilbert & George, who were present at the premiere, praised the work as "... a truly unique opera of great originality. And a real 21st century work of art. "

Soetkin Demey (1984) after graduating with distinction in Germanistics at the Ghent University, she obtained a diploma 'Master in Drama: acting' with great distinction at the 'RITCS School of Theatre and Performing Arts' in Brussels. Since then she worked as an actress in plays of Manah Depauw (Johnson&Johnson, Eden Central fase 1,2 en 3) - which were performed at the Theaterfestival en Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Leentje Vandenbussche, Peter Aers and Tijs Ceulemans (X – een oefening in verdwijnen / Medium), Michaël Bijmens (La Linea) and Sarah Eisa.



However, Soetkin identifies mainly as a theater maker. During her study she created 2 solo-performances framing in a wide-ranging research about physicality and body image / shape: "Insert Picture Here"(2010) about anorexia and "Song from the childhood" (2011) about growing up.

The Jury-text of the ITsfestival 2011 for the Guest Award: *"In an almost speechless, intense and painfully physical performance Soetkin portrays not only a person with anorexia, (...) but asks the big question of identity. What is my body? Am I the result of my body or is the body my object? Who am I? What makes me me? The performance is strong in form, personal and sincere. (...) the combination of clear aesthetic choices, personal approach and interpretability make this an impressive statement."*

She continued doing research with a new commissioned work for the Baroque Bodies-festival at the Beursschouwburg: "i am some body parts", in which she dissects a striptease to the bone and questions the genre. With Sara Vilardo she created a performance about gender and 'the male gaze' (I'm looking for the face I had before the world was made) and with L.A. Raeven she made in 2013 the piece 'DSM IV-TR' in residence at 'De Brakke Grond Amsterdam'.

In 2017 she premiered 'Liebesleid' - a gym-opera, another HubadeGraaff-production.



Sanne van Rijn is a director and advisor. She studied classical ballet, photography and ArtScience. She worked as a director and actress at Zuidelijk Toneel / Hollandia and NTGent, nowadays as freelancer. She has radically specialized in theater that falls outside the existing frameworks. Her work is frequently appreciated with prizes and nominations. About her work she says: 'Art benefits from simplicity and precision.'

Duo Bilitis (named after the `Musique de scene pour les Chansons de Bilitis` by Claude Debussy) has made a name for themselves since their establishment in 2004, by their remarkable line-up, captivating and talked-about programs and intense interplay. Besides their passion for the same instrument the harpists Eva Tebbe and Ekaterina Levental also share a musical mentality; they gladly seek new adventures and avoid concessions and compromises. Ekaterina Levental's double-role gives the duo an unique position within chamber music circles and music festivals at home and abroad.



The duo performed at renowned venues, theatres and concert halls such as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Varna International Music Festival (Bulgaria), Mosel Musik Festival 2011 (Germany, Luxembourg), Ruttihubeliade Festival (Switzerland), International Chamber music Festival Schiermonnikoog (the Netherlands), the International Music Festival in Baku (Azerbaijan), the Grachtenfestival Amsterdam, Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, The Tenth World Harp Congress, De Doelen in Rotterdam, Vredenburg in Utrecht.

Duo Bilitis' substantial repertoire includes 20th century music and contemporary music, with a special focus on thematic concert programs and music theatre. Dutch composers such as Jeff Hamburg Chiel Meijering, Boudewijn Tarenseen and Daan Manneke have written for the duo.

Their own music theatre programme 'Un ballet realiste' about Jean Cocteau. Was produced and premiered in 2013 by concerthall De Bijloke in Gent (Belgium). In May 2015 they premiered a new theatre production by Huba de Graaff, touring in autumn of 2015. In December 2015 the music theatre piece EICHMANN (production company Diamantfabriek) was premiered in the Muziekgebouw aan't IJ (Amsterdam).

They released their debut CD *Le Jardin Feerique* at Brilliant Classics/Foreign Media, which is being sold worldwide. Their new CD 'L' *Heure Espagnole* was very well received: "This known repertoire starting a new life with a touch of recognition as well as estrangement: it's wonderful" - Lex Bohlmeijer.

Duo Bilitis won the international chamber music competition in Almere, Holland, the fifth edition of the UITMARKT chamber music competition in Amsterdam and is finalist of the International Jewish Music Competition 2010.

"Ekaterina and Eva are gifted with extraordinary musicality, professionalism and dedication. Because of the interesting combination of their ensemble and their stunning performance capacities, they manage to captivate any audience." Emmy Verhey, concert violinist.



Theaterkrant.nl

...the vocal performance of Soetkin Demey is varied and rich; we can call her the nightingale of the human mating act...



SCORE

17. inhaleer

Reiken aan loef ^{vagina} intenseer ^{more intense}

MYRRHA

op kaspraktzanden

2X *p* *ah...* 2X *paale*

inhale ^{zelf kiezen}
inhaleer - zukt ^{Eva is coming already}

4X

← Samen met Eva ^{together with Katja}

3X ^{Eva komt al}
tot slot 1 X lang: Samen met Katja ^{together with Katja}

bij hoge ⇒ inhaleer ^{op toonhoogte}

geen rotte vis ^{no rotten fish}

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piece titled '17. inhaleer'. The score is written on a staff with various musical notations and annotations. At the top, the title '17. inhaleer' is written in a box. Below it, the lyrics 'Reiken aan loef' and 'intenseer' are written, with 'vagina' and 'more intense' written in red above them. The score is for a character named 'MYRRHA'. It starts with a piano (p) dynamic and a '2X' marking. The first part of the score is a single note on a staff, with 'ah...' written below it. This is followed by a '2X' marking and the word 'paale'. The score then moves to a higher register, indicated by a blue line and the word 'inhale'. There are several '4X' and '3X' markings, and a 'tot slot 1 X lang:' marking. The score ends with a 'bij hoge ⇒ inhaleer' marking and a 'op toonhoogte' marking. There are also some red annotations: 'Eva is coming already' and 'Eva komt al'. At the bottom, the phrase 'geen rotte vis' is written, with 'no rotten fish' written in red below it.

Exerpt from score - with comments Soetkin

QUALITÉ DE LA SEMAINE

“Un marathon se gagne au mental”

LE MARATHON DE BRUXELLES A LIEU CE DIMANCHE. PRÉFACE AVEC LA BRUXELLOISE SOETKIN DEMEY, VICTORIEUSE VOICI UN AN POUR SA PREMIÈRE EXPÉRIENCE

Dimanche, des milliers de participants partent à l'assaut du Bel-lus Brussels Marathon, qui se conjugue également avec un semi très populaire, un cinq kilomètres et des courses pour enfants avec pour cadre, notamment la Grand-Place de Bruxelles juste avant l'arrivée Place de la Bourse.

Si les coureurs étrangers seront présents en nombre, les athlètes belges ont pour habitude de s'illustrer dans les rues de la capitale sur la distance reine. Il y a un an, la Bruxelloise Soetkin Demey remportait le marathon auquel 5.000 personnes avaient pris part. Une course maîtrisée à la perfection que la lauréate, en tête du début à la fin, a savourée. “J'étais très fière après ma victoire. Pendant une semaine, ce sentiment d'euphorie ne m'a pas quitté. Je sentais que j'étais forte, capable de tout réussir”, explique-t-elle.

“PHYSIQUEMENT OU MENTALEMENT, SEMI ET MARATHON SONT TRÈS DIFFÉRENTS”

Un succès étonnant puisque la Bruxelloise n'avait jusqu'alors jamais participé à un marathon. Tout au long de la course, elle n'a cessé de se poser des questions. “C'est seulement après 5 km que j'ai compris que j'étais la première femme. J'avais toujours un vélo à côté de moi et je me demandais pourquoi. J'ai finalement compris qu'il accompagnait la première

dame. Ensuite, je me suis demandé si j'étais capable d'aller au bout. J'avais un bon tempo mais comme je n'avais jamais couru un marathon, je ne savais pas si je pourrais finir. J'avais aussi peur qu'une autre concurrente me dépasse dans les derniers kilomètres. Je ne savais vraiment pas à quoi m'attendre.”

Au final, Soetkin Demey a pu savourer cette victoire. Un succès qui aurait dû en appeler d'autres. Malheureusement, la suite ne s'est pas déroulée

comme elle l'aurait souhaité. “Je me suis blessée gravement au genou et j'ai eu besoin de quelques mois pour récupérer. Pire, comme c'était une blessure spécifique des coureurs à pied, le médecin m'a dit que je pouvais pratiquer n'importe quel sport... sauf la course à pied. Tout ça a été très dur à accepter car, après ma victoire à Bruxelles, je me sentais capable de réussir n'importe quoi.”

Aujourd'hui, cette blessure est de l'histoire ancienne et la Bruxelloise a signé un retour gagnant en s'imposant sur le 12 km lors du semi-marathon de Nivelles. “Il s'agissait de ma course de reprise. Je voulais y aller en douceur avec mon corps et, au final, je l'emporte. C'est très positif.”

Dimanche, Soetkin s'alignera sur le semi-marathon. “J'ai l'habitude de m'entraîner à Cinquantenaire et dans Woluwe, ce sera un plaisir de retrouver cette ambiance. Sur le plan sportif, ce sera un bon entraînement en vue du marathon d'Amsterdam.” Car le marathon lui va si bien. “Cette distance est bien plus lourde que le semi, que ce soit physiquement ou mentalement. Un marathon se gagne au mental.”

Un conseil que chaque coureur tentera d'appliquer dimanche...

■ Sébastien Sterpigny

Victorieuse du 12 km à Nivelles voici dix jours, Soetkin Demey revient en forme avant le rendez-vous bruxellois. ■ STERPIGNY



Soetkin Demey in excellent, breathtaking shape (Soetkin wins the Brussels and Bruges Marathon)



press-quotes

Haarlems Dagblad

...very subtly built up, a fascinating collection of sighs and moans...

...an almost spiritual experience: the subtle, soft harp sounds, the solemn atmosphere, and the sober light... an impressive end...

Cultuurkrant

...accompanied by an incredibly beautiful soundscape...

...an extremely clever approach to a completely new form of Opera Experience... very special...

Vrij Nederland

...moaning is directed inwards.

Moaning is something very intimate ...

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