

hyba
gde
graff

THE NAKED SHIT SONGS

THEO VAN GOGH MEETS
GILBERT & GEORGE
IN RETROPERA

A RETROPERA



CREDITS

music Huba de Graaff

direction Marien Jongewaard

dramaturgy Erik-Ward Geerlings

cast

Xander van Vledder (Theo van Gogh)

Nigel Robson (George), tenor

Christopher Robson (Gilbert), countertenor

musicians

Kristján Martinsson, *repetitor keyboard/flute*

Wiek Hijmans, *electric guitar*

Tim Sabel, *piano/keyboard*

Vasilis Stefanopoulos, *double bass*

Onno Govaerts, *drums*

in cooperation with

Galakoor **conducted by** Yt Nicolai,

reArt Wereldmuziek Koor conducted by Selim Doğru

Jasper Hupkens

additional pre-recorded choir Nederlands Kamerkoor

conducted by Peter Dijkstra

pre-recorded music Trio Escapada (Emma Breedveld,

Bence Huszar, Sebastiaan van Delft)

set design Juul Dekker

sound design Vid Ahacic

costume Bernadette Corstens, Siebe ten Dam (*intern*)

video projection Willem Weemhoff – PIPslab

light Wilfred Loopstra

hair and make-up Nienke Algra

subtitling dutch/english Bart Boone

subtitling arabic Bakhcha Mohamed

stage manager Janneke Lindner

producer Geertje Spaan

publicity Lonneke van Eden/bureau TamTam

graphic design Emmy Visser

scene photography Bowie Verschuuren,

Janiek Dam

photography London Chris Gloag

managing director Britt Verstegen

coproduction

Huba de Graaff, Nieuw West/Marien

Jongewaard, Holland Festival

after an idea by Jan Elbertse

Theo van Goghs 'Een Prettig Gesprek' with Gilbert & George is a television programme by Theo van Gogh, Olivier Jansen en René van Praag ©1989-2017 TVAmsterdam/RVP Produkties, Amsterdam'.

Compilation video at

<https://vimeo.com/233477912>

www.hubadegraaff.com





THE NAKED SHIT SONGS

About an immense loss

An opera based on the television interview from 1996 of Theo van Gogh with the British art duo Gilbert & George. Theo van Gogh, who was murdered in 2004, was known as a provocateur and defender of free speech. In this interview they talk about art, money, sex and religion, Muslims, tolerance, love and death.

Huba de Graaff used the complete interview as a libretto, including mistakes and laughing: everything (six scenes of thousand words) is being sung. Directed by Marien Jongewaard, actor Xander van Vledder is Theo van Gogh, Nigel Robson and Christopher Robson singing Gilbert & George, and a choir*.

*‘We believe in democratic pictures.
That a child of 5 can see them and understand
in some level, and a person of ninety.’*

Gilbert and George’s approach to art has always been anti-elitist. Adopting the slogan ‘Art for All’, they aimed to be relevant beyond the narrow confines of the art world.

Gilbert Proesch (born 1943 in Italy) and **George Passmore** (born 1942 in the UK) work together as the collaborative art duo **Gilbert & George**. They are two persons but one artist, with one vision. They live and work together in London from 1968, starting their artistic career with performances as ‘living statues’ (and also ‘singing statues’). Their first presentation outside England was in 1969 at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, where they stood on the stairs as living sculptures. In 1996 the exhibition ‘The Naked Shit Pictures’ was presented also at the Stedelijk Museum.

‘The Naked Shit Songs’ is about an immense loss. Loss of freedom, loss of a certain era.

*This (amateur-)choir will consist of a local choir-combination: a gay and lesbian choir, as well as a choir with muslim-background. In Amsterdam we worked with GALA-choir (Gay And Lesbian Amsterdam) and the Reart-Wereldmuziekkor which is a Turkish choir. Participation of the local gay-community as well as the local muslim-community is a very important issue for us, for The Naked Shit Songs: **‘Art for All’** (Gilbert& George)

THE NAKED SHIT SONGS

by Huba

Why does anybody sing?

It seems that – in evolutionary terms – mankind first sang, and from there emerged speech. Monkeys also do sing (see my earlier composed Apera), demented elderly like to sing, children sing before they can talk, stutterers have benefit from singing as well. Singing is something deeply nested in human nature.

But singing is quite strange, it seems you have to make extra effort to sing. People talk all day, but they hardly sing. And why would you sing at all?

With these thoughts in mind I met one day an old friend, Jan Elbertse, who gave me a tape of the interview, and he asked me if I we could do something with it. So I began to create songs based on the Dutch subtitles, but realized more and more:

This should be Grand, great, big.

1996 seems so long ago.

They were drinking wine and smoking cigarettes during the interview, meanwhile discussing everything, frankly. About gay people, about Muslims, about art, about Christian values, about money, shit, and about love, tolerance and death.

These spoken words are very impressive, and should be emphasized. Moreover, we know what happened to Theo van Gogh in 2004.

So I decided to write an opera.

We go back in time, to 1996, and we'll cherish those words, and save them.

Moreover, we are going back from speech to singing.

I decided to use the entire spoken interview to sing instead of making some songs based on the Dutch subtitling. So I had to transcribe the interview. I came across the following questions:

Which words?

Everything.

We go back from speech to singing.

All spoken words, including all the wrong words and all the giggling and stuttering included. Ultimately, there is a (small) part of the interview I skipped. An artistic choice. The rest is all sung literally. Hahaha and hehehehe too.

An opera or ...?

What form? One 'nice' aria after the other?

Or use an idiom in which you can make a compositional construction to create the notes which will be sung?

Or just a translation of the speech in common pitches and rhythmic?

No, of course.

I wanted to sing the words instead of speaking. Like people 'just' sing:

'underneath the arches' or

'Bend it, bend it, just a little bit

And take it easy, show you're likin' it'...

or whatever.

This opera feels like a tribute to three very special artists. And you do not want to punish the audience with "difficult" modern music.

It's sung speech.

Also: **Art for All**, which is the credo of Gilbert and George.

The London taxi drivers must understand their art as well.

So they should understand and be able to sing this opera as well.

Only 'nice tunes'?

But then you're stuck as a composer, very quickly. The listener cannot stand one hour and a half filled with songs. It quickly gets annoying, this overdose, one song after another. (For one-hour interview).

And most important, the textual content needed to create something big: a big compositional form.

Oratorium, or whatever.

I chose a Cantata form à la Bach.

To avoid 'kitsch' sentimentality and my own subjective interpretations, I chopped the text into pieces, rigorously.

Every scene now consists of exactly 1000 words

and is divided into 8 parts of 2 x 50, 2 x 100, 2 x 150 and 2 x 200 words, in alternating sequence.

6 Scenes, and finally a coda.

I created a musical form structure, comparable to the art-presentation of Gilbert and George.

What is musical 'shit'?

How to choose the musical material?

The interview took place during the exhibition 'The Naked Shit Pictures' in the Stedelijk Museum.

I made a musical translation.

I started with a 'turd' theme, shit theme, each time differently notated. In scene 2 this theme (a simple bass line) sounds just straight, but pitch reversed in the third scene. And then pitch and position reversed, and finally position reversed.

So every scene makes use of the same theme but always in a different perspective.
Interspersed with a 2nd theme: a reference to the AT5-tv tune, and finally a 3rd theme:
a cassette tape - which I found somewhere: junk material.
(Retro-cassette has a prominent place in this opera, as instrument and sound object).

Modern composer – what the fuck?

Composers are capable of using compositional techniques to create a large musical form.
Of course, music is just music, organized sound, but it requires a 'different' technique to keep the audience one and a half hour listening.
For me it was a compositional challenge to compose a 'grand majestic' form – with very simple and recognizable (for all!) base material.
So the choice of musical material was not about for instance interval series such as 'A - C # - b - a # - Es' or whatever, but 'tralala, humdumdumdeeedum, Tiddle-ee-um pompom, obladee, etc.

Tralalala, and that's it?
No, that won't work. Moreover, there is a build-up in the interview.
I chose a dramatic musical structure: the form is enlarging and multiplying all the way through.

In the 1st scene they are only just "chatting", in the 2nd scene they start to sing in the style of 'Underneath the Arches' (the successful act of Gilbert and George as singing statues) and gradually it expands towards opera-singing: so the tempo is forced down, and it gets monumental.

From exactly halfway, at the intersection point in the musical form Theo starts singing as well. Also more singers are joining: Art for All.
Finally the entire Gay and Lesbian Amsterdam Choir (the Gala choir) sings along as well as a Turkish choir.

What happens with the content of speech when it is being sung?

Why do people sing songs?

Traditionally they sang the lyrics, the words, to keep and to cherish, to hold and to pass on to future generations. (Troubadours, liturgical singing, etc.)

Finally, we know what happened in 2004.
How is it that so much has changed in such a short time?

"Art Has to ask questions, that's it." (Gilbert and George in 1996)

BACKGROUND



Huba de Graaff (Amsterdam, 1959) studied violin, sonology and composition, with a.o. Louis Andriessen, Gilius van Bergeyk, Dick Raaymakers and Fredric Rzewski. Over the last 25 years she has produced a series of remarkable music-theatre works. Her work is not limited to writing down music notes. Often she is performing on stage herself. In the 80's she played violin in bands as The Tapes and Transister. Later she performed with self-made instruments, such as a metal dress that enabled her to steer all kinds of electronics. She is always busy with mixing consoles,

laptops and electronics. Besides she gives lectures on her ever fascinating and extremely original projects.

For Huba, composing means inventing, researching and asking essential questions. Writing good music notes is the aim of every composer. But why are those notes there? What does it mean? Huba never settles for only pure aesthetic standards. What is it that makes singing necessary? And actually: what is singing?

The traditional concert practice (and the classical way of listening) are constantly put upside down. Very often 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 tape recorders. Often she plays with sound-reproduction and reversal of perspective. And always: with the necessary humor and irony.

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.

In everything she makes she tries to find the essence and to translate this into a musical format. 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.

In the opera 'The Naked Shit Songs' the lyrical qualities of Huba's music reach their full potential more than ever. Gilbert & George, who attended the premiere in Amsterdam, qualified it as "...a truly unique opera of great originality. And a real 21st century work of art."



Marien Jongewaard (Amsterdam, 1951) is a Dutch director and choreographer. He started in 1978 together with author Rob de Graaf and actor Dik Boutkan the Amsterdam theatre company 'Nieuw West'. In 2006 Jongewaard was rewarded the VSCD Mimeprijs. In 2010 *Kokoschka Live!*, coproduction of Nieuw West / Marien Jongewaard with De Warme Winkel and the Veenfabriek / Touki Delphine, was selected for the Vlaams Theater Festival.

Jongewaard is always looking for cooperations with other creators, especially with young theatre companies, like Jetse Batelaan,

Sanne Vogel, Bambie and De Warme Winkel, Dood Paard, and also with composer Huba de Graaff. Jongewaard worked with Kas & De Wolf (*De Jantjes*, *Mensch durf te leven*) and filmmaker/performer Cyrus Frisch (*Jezus/Liefhebber*). Together with dancer Truus Bronkhorst he created a series of dance performances like *Wonderful world*, *Goodbye body*, *The Fall* en *SOUL*.

Xander van Vledder (Sittard, 1985) is an actor. After his graduation he played at Dutch National Theatre, and has played roles in *As You Like It*, *Emilia Galotti* and *The Birthday Party*. He has also played with Het Toneel Speelt, De Theatercompagnie, Het Zuidelijk Toneel, Nieuw West, Theatergroep Suburbia, Toneelschuur Producties and Joop van den Ende Theaterproducties.

For some time he had a role in the hit musical *Soldaat van Oranje*. Van Vledder became famous on television for playing the leading role in the series *Feuten*. He was also cast as the young Freddy Heineken in the television series *Freddy*, *Leven in de Brouwerij*, and played roles in the series *Van Gogh; een huis voor Vincent*, *Ramses*, *Smeris* and *De Maatschap*. He was also featured in the films *Gooische Vrouwen 2*, *Mannenharten* and *Tonio*.



Nigel Robson (Argyleshire, Scotland) is a British lyric tenor, known for his Baroque and 20th-century opera repertoire. He is especially noted for his performances of music by Benjamin Britten. Among the major Britten compositions he has sung in major venues are *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Billy Budd*, *War Requiem*, *Spring Symphony*, *Serenade for tenor, horn, and strings*, *Curlew River*, and *Peter Grimes*. He is also known for his performance in *Troilus and Cressida*.


Others of his roles were in *Tamerlano*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, *Jenufa*, *Idomeneo*, and *Theodora*. He has performed at the Welsh National Opera, Lisbon Opera, Opera North, the Grand Theatre of Tours, Glyndebourne, the Edinburgh Festival, the Almeida Opera Festival, the Orchestre National de Lille (where he sang in Bach's *St. John Passion*), St. Petersburg, Prague, Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, Paris, Milan, and Rotterdam. Christopher Robson is his brother.



Christopher Robson (Falkirk, Scotland) is a countertenor, and has a wide repertoire ranging from the baroque to the present day. He has created many roles in opera and on the concert platform. He made his debut with the English National Opera in 1981. Robson's engagements have included appearances with the Royal Opera Covent Garden, English National Opera, Scottish Opera, New London Consort, Houston Grand Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera, New York City Opera, Sao Paulo Opera, de Vlaamse Opera in Antwerp and Ghent, the Bolshoi in Moscow and in Kiev. Engagements in 2017 include *L'incoronazione di*

Poppea on a tour across Germany, the German premiere of George Benjamin's *Dream of the Song* with the Münchener Philharmoniker and this world premiere of Huba de Graaff's *The Naked Shit Songs* at the Holland Festival.



A man with glasses, wearing a brown suit, white shirt, and yellow tie, is speaking into a green microphone. He is seated at a table with a white cup and saucer, and a glass of water. The background is dark and out of focus.

Dan doen wij dat to
-We zijn smerige si

A man in a brown suit, white shirt, and green tie is seated at a table. He is holding a small potted cactus in his right hand. The background is a dark blue wall with a purple curtain on the left. A glass of water is on the table in front of him.

ch ook.

gnori.

- WE ARE DIRTY SIGNORI.

INTERVIEW WITH DRAMATURG ERIK-WARD GEERLINGS

by Constant Meijers, Theatermakers



- The Opera is called *The Naked Shit Songs* and that refers to ...?

It refers to the “Naked Shit Pictures”, an artwork by the British artist duo Gilbert & George that was shown in 1996 in the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum. “Naked Shit Pictures” consisted of large photo collages on which they portrayed themselves in all possible positions, often without pants, and in combination with huge turds and other obscenities, but also big symbols like crosses and...

- You think turds are an obscenity?

It is an obscene event, of course, at least, in those days maybe more than now; nowadays we are used to everything, and there has been some kind of inflation. But of course, it is a dirty mess.

- What did they want to express?

They explain that to Theo van Gogh in an interview that same year in the program “A nice conversation” (Een

prettig gesprek?) for the local AT5 television. It was broadcast around that exhibition and G & G tell why. And yes, they are programmatic in everything actually, they make a kind of conceptual art, very ironic, but also sincere. You never really can figure it out. They provoked, but they also really wanted their work to be accessible to everyone, and that’s how it was.

- Is it true that they wanted to raise a topic about children in the third world? And that they said: People find the image of a turd shocking, but children in misery in the 3rd world do not shock them; maybe we must portray those children like a turd, so that people understand how shocking it is?

I do not know this anecdote, but it will undoubtedly be true. Because this is how they also are. They are looking for the essence of being human, as universal as possible and as accessible as possible. And yes: sex, religion, money, fame, those still are their topics.

- Someone had this interview sitting on the shelf?

- Jan Elbertse, a befriended actor with whom we worked together a number of times, had a video tape of the interview, for which he had written the Dutch subtitles. It seemed to him a nice script, which, at one point, he gave to Huba. She started working on it, but it did not work really well, and then she decided to do it in English, in the original language. And to do it quite literally, including all slips of the tongue, hesitations, exactly as it happened at that time, by accident or not.

- So, did someone then typewrite this recording?

- Huba did that, and it became the libretto for the opera, which starts in a speaking mode: initially, there is just a conversation; only after 1000 words Gilbert & George will sing. After every 1000 words something changes, and then Theo starts singing, and so on; it gets bigger and bigger and bigger.

- Theo van Gogh is of course also a choice that involves a certain purpose. It is not only Gilbert and George, but them in conversation with Theo van Gogh ...

- Yes, Gilbert and George were provocateurs, but, as we know, Theo van Gogh was at least equally...

- Yes, he also could be very subtle...

- In that conversation, he does not do that, he is a very good interviewer, very curious, and he stays within the limits of the conversation. But of course, we know how it went, we all know how ... and any reference to it, any

flash forward ... The interview took place in 1996, seven years before he was killed, after his provocations. The conversation is about all kinds of subjects, partly also about religion, and about the great preference that Gilbert and George show to Islam. Muslims are really their friends, it's almost an oath to Islam.

- Fans?

- They are not fans themselves, they contradict themselves all the time, but they emphasize what a friendly people they are, and what funny stories there are in the Quran, and so forth.

- Again provocative of course. And how did van Gogh go in there?

- He was very curious and he did not make a slip. So, he did not give up his own critical attitude, but he asked questions. And as the interview progresses, you could read some kind of sub-text in it, and that's what we actually do with the opera. We get a story line from Theo to the point where death, which is really a topic in the interview, is becoming more and more important.

- And in what way is death a subject?

- They talk about it. Theo asks questions, also about things like being killed. "Wouldn't you think that is terrible?" he asks the artists at one point. "No," they say, "death, oh, that's just one thing, do not make it so important".

- O yes

- Then he asks a few more questions about this; that's something you can designate in a sub-text.

- What's your share in this? Are you the playwright of the performance? Have you edited the text?

- No, just before the end, Huba has taken away a few sentences, in order to get a better end. Not the entire interview is used, it represents 98%; what is being said, and what is being sung comes really literally from that interview. So, I did not have to write a text.

- So the interview is so good that it has a theatrical effect with some kind of dramaturgy, some sort of line?

- Yes, and that's mainly because we accentuate the tragic line of Theo. And we make Gilbert and George as icons bigger and bigger. Eventually, their voices are multiplied by two choirs. It's getting bigger and bigger. Theo, who only starts singing halfway, has some battle to fight here.

There are a lot of themes left that were up to date, but actually, still, even if we finally know, well ... time has not stopped since then.

So, when it comes to tolerance – about multicultural society, about artistic freedom or provocations, about: how do you deal with each other – then a lot has happened since.

- Could such a conversation be carried out today?

It could, if Theo was still alive, because he did not let go of anything or anybody.

- Yes, I think Gilbert and George haven't changed very much, so they would say the same, more or less. They are very enthusiastic about the whole plan, so far they totally agreed. They will attend the performance.

- Did you have to ask them permission?

- That's what Huba did, and she received a lot of beautiful handwritten letters in which they write that they love to give that permission and that they love the idea.

Has new music been composed?

- Yes, I think it is Huba's most beautiful piece so far, a big work of 100 minutes, where there is room for what she calls "tunes", but those are really beautiful melodies, ...

- But there you say something characteristic because ... very often in new contemporary compositions there are no tunes, right? You cannot whistle along.

- No, the melody is back. As far as that is concerned, we are already beyond post-modernism, one isn't ashamed anymore. Of course, it is all about what you do and how you use it.

This music actually sounds quite accessible, although there are also edges of electronics and other things, but it's very hard to sing, so it's always different. It is especially funny, I can say that.

- Should I imagine 3 characters? Theo and Gilbert and George?

- That's right. For Gilbert and George, two British singers were engaged, two brothers, who had been working together before, in 1996: Nigel Robson and Christopher Robson, a tenor and a countertenor, so that's a lot of fun. Men of age, more towards Gilbert + George's present age.

And Xander van Vledder plays Theo van Gogh.

- You say, the tenor and the counter-tenor can of course sing well, they are trained to read notes; but Xander van Vledder is an actor, as far as I know. Will he also be singing?

- Certainly! Certainly he will sing, also the difficult parts, and he works very hard, although he has fewer notes than the brothers, and he is doing very well.

We consciously opted for an actor, for this role we need more that actor than the singer. That he sings less perfectly, is part of this choice.

- Will it be a combination of 'Sprechgesang' and opera?

- No, it's definitely not a 'Sprechgesang'; it starts speaking, acting, dialogue, and Theo just continues to talk longer. At one point he also starts to sing, and that's where the show tilts: Theo becomes a dramatic character. Before that, he's really just an interviewer and a straight man.

From that moment on, also for him things start to shift.

- And is the question-answer form also abandoned?

- No, the libretto is used from A to Z.

- The interview is being sung after as it were?

- Yes. Yes. However, the musical form is an artificial form. It sometimes has musical-like qualities, yet it is constantly interrupted by that hard 'shape'.

- Why is it a retroopera?

- We are actually looking back to something that happened in 1996, and the awareness about what has taken place since then, not only with Theo but also with the rest of the world, and all the issues that occur; that awareness plays role in how one looks at it. So it's both looking back and looking forward, and it is asking ourselves how we want to deal with our Muslim friends in particular. It is a big question, and it is being dealt with urgently.

- What is the instrumentation? Is there a big orchestra? A chamber ensemble?

- There is a five-piece band, 2 keyboardists, a drummer, double bass and electric guitar. Actually, pop and jazz-like. They are musicians who can do everything, and who have a background from contemporary composed and improvised music.

In addition, there are 2 choirs, which are added at the end. They double the voices of Gilbert & George.

So, it becomes an increasingly massive voice, also in line with Gilbert and George's philosophy: "Art for All", art for all of us, mass entertainment.

- I saw the artists in 1967 in the famous London pop club 'The Marquis', and there suddenly one evening, between the rock'n roll bands, two men suddenly came across with a table and a chair, and those were G + G, very young yet. Does it dissolve into something at the end? Does Theo's death play a role? Just the reproduction of an interview seems too little to me.

- Oh, I do not want to get ahead, but the tragic side of Theo will be visible, yes. Something is going to happen. Yes, there is a drama. It also plays with themes of the zeitgeist, and there is also a lot of drama.

- Is there a decor design that matches the subject?

- We started with the idea of a studio, with a table; but it has become different and more abstracted. And there are some kind of stands like you have in a television studio.

- Theo was an excellent interviewer ...

- He was, yes ...

- Always smoking, by the way, huh?

- Smoking and drinking.

- Legs crossed, leaning backwards, his big belly forward,

- Very intense and very quickly speaking, very quickly speaking.

- Are we going to see him like this?

- No, not literally. But in a way, there will be some reference.

- Now I am very curious whether the audience will get a cactus afterwards.

- The audience?

- You know that Theo always gave his guests a cactus, which they had to unpack,

- O yes

- It was also a small thing to bother people, because you had to rattle with that paper and the spines. Sometimes he had a little cactus and sometimes he had a big one ...

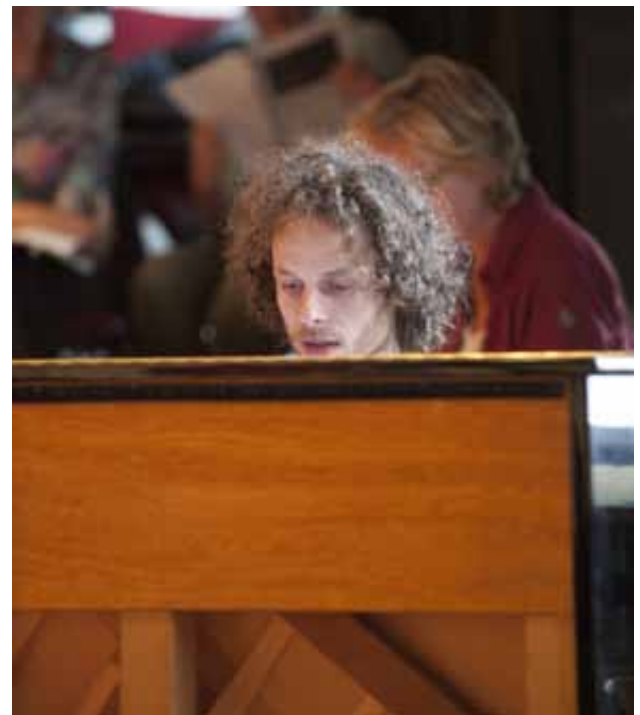
- I'm afraid the cactus goes by for us, although it's a prickly performance, I hope, but the literacy of that conversation is not integrated in every part.

- All the best with the world premiere of the Naked Shit Songs, Erik-Ward. Thank you.

- You're welcome.

translation: Bram Buijze

REHEARSALS



THEATERKRANT

★★★★☆ Opera

22 juni 2017 - Holland Festival, Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam

Opera as nostalgic propaganda

Published by Marijn Lems June 24, 2017

In 1996, Theo van Gogh had the British artist duo Gilbert & George, whose controversial photo exhibition *The Naked Shit Pictures* was in the Municipal Museum at that time, visiting his interview program *A Pleasant Conversation*. It was a widespread maintenance of the value of art, tolerance, religion and provocation. Composer Huba de Graaff used the integral text as libretto for her new opera, which yields a barbarous, politically challenging pamphlet. Not one but two makers at the Holland Festival use a mix of documentary and opera. Where Thomas Bellinck converted into conversation with Frontex employees to music theatre form in *Easy as ABC # 2: Keep Calm and Validate*, Huba de Graaff does so with an existing 20-year interview. In both cases, it creates an exciting deconstruction of the text, which gets extra layers because of being sung. There is, however, an important difference: where Bellinck was clearly critical of his material, it seems that De Graaff would like to convey Gilbert & George's statements just as a sacred scripture.

This is partly due to the fact that the singing parties of the gentlemen (interpreted by the brothers Nigel and Christopher Robson) are increasingly strengthened and taken over by a choir, and partly directed by Marien Jongewaard, who is a great acting Xander of Vledder as Theo van Gogh can be confused visually by hearing what he hears. Meanwhile, Gilbert & George have no doubt at all about what they have to report, and because of the build-up of music, which produces an exuberant crescendo, the performance becomes an ode to the mind of the art of the duo.

This produces an interesting voltage. The ideas that are propagated are quite dated: a blend of conservative libertarianism and radical tolerance, as much as the unrecognized privileges of the well-to-do artist duo as well as the more innocent time in which their intellectual beliefs arose. In particular, the plea for colour blindness versus race and the generalizing remarks about "Islam" based on conversations with Muslim friends are rather problematic at the present time.

Because of the misplaced nostalgia to simpler times, *The Naked Shit Songs* is a performance that allows you to engage in fascinating dialectics, which is in line with the inherent contradictions of Gilbert & George himself. The power of *The Naked Shit Pictures* is largely due to the fact that they look like gentlemen, but in their images all taboos break through the human body - an artistic strategy represented in the piece by some crazy dances that classically dressed Make gentlemen. The fact that the artists resolutely reject each personal privilege ('we're not famous', 'we do not have much money', 'we live in a working class neighbourhood, it's not possible to be lower class than us') Fits perfectly with their carefully constructed self-image as democratic artists who make art for everyone.

"Good art must provoke," Gilbert and George say at one point. In this respect, *The Naked Shit Songs* is sure to succeed. The title has been chosen a bit odd - it is after all the theatricalization of an interview, not the exhibition with the comparable name - but the hagiographic approach that De Graaff uses annoys such that the performance raises many interesting questions about the relationship between artistry and politics. Commitment, the contextuality of political ideas and the origin of the stubborn sentiment that "used to be all better", as well as being able to master the left and right sides of the political spectrum as well.

press-quotes

NRC

...from a 'nice conversation' to compelling musictheatre. Actor Xander van Vledder as a convincing Theo van Gogh: messy, cheerful, impatient, sharp, with sense of humor and absurdity. (...) Those seconds in which he crawled across the stage and raised a defensive hand were shocking and well-timed.

... Gilbert & George : beautiful roles of the brothers Christopher en Nigel Robson.

Parool ★★★★★

... the direction of Marien Jongewaard ensures the right moments for theatricality and dynamics in the mise-en-scene. He is well helped by the intelligent, surprising compositions that De Graaff made on the transcription, performed exquisitely by cast and musicians.

23 juni 2017 – Sander Janssens

Theaterkrant ★★★★★

... the building of the music, which works towards an exuberant crescendo...

... 'Good art has to be provocative', as Gilbert & George say at some point. In this respect *The Naked Shit Songs* is sure to succeed.

Theaterkrant

Most gratifying new development: young audience in the hall at *The Naked Shit Songs* van Huba de Graaff.

Thea Derks

De Groene

about Holland Festival 2017:

But the most surprising was to me a new opera of Huba de Graaff with the not so attractive title *The Naked Shit Songs*.

Maar het meest verrassend was voor mij een nieuwe opera van Huba de Graaff met de niet zo aantrekkelijke titel *The Naked Shit Songs*.

GILBERT & GEORGE

12, FOURNIER STREET, LONDON E1 6QE
TELEPHONE & FAX: 020 7247 0161

Monday the 3rd of ~~June~~ July 2017

Dear Hula,

We are still stunned
and amazed by the brilliance
of your NAKED SHIT SONGS.

We love it very much
and it must surely be seen
in other countries.

What a hit!

The reaction of the audience!

It is a truly unique opera
of great originality. And a real
21st Century work of Art.

We send you and all
concerned our love!

x Gilbert & George x



hyba
gde
graff

