

SONGS OF DISCONNECTION

a **NEEDCOMPANY** production A song cycle by **MAARTEN SEGHERS**

In collaboration with **AYA SUZUKI, SIMON LENSKI,**
GEORGE VAN DAM en **MICHAEL SCHMID**

with support from **ICTUS** and the **Flemish authorities**



SYNOPSIS

and the front is the backside of the back

Libretto

With **Songs Of Disconnection**, Maarten Seghers, together with percussionist Aya Suzuki, cellist Simon Lenski, violinist George van Dam and flautist Michael Schmidt, explores the potentially tragic relationship between entertainer and spectator, in accordance with the irresistible urge to share and the impossibility of doing this. The piece searches for meaning in 'unintelligibility'. These new songs are a confused outburst, because everything 'could be' and nothing 'is'; they are a generator that concocts the absurd idea known as 'together'.







A wise man from the East always asked the gods in his prayers to spare him from a life in an interesting era. Because we are not wise, the gods have not spared us and we live in an interesting era. Our era enforces our interest from us in every way. Today's authors know this. When they speak they are criticised and attacked. When they are modest and stay silent, their silence is loudly resented.

Albert Camus, 'Create Dangerously', 1957

The working title 'fragment of wall painting depicting duck on water (Songs of Disconnection)' alludes to an old, carefully preserved piece of wall painting on which a duck on a pond is depicted. The attraction to this unladen archaeological artefact reveals a craving for the undramatic.

MAARTEN SEGHERS: "Putting this tableau centre stage as inspiration in a new work provokes an inevitable reflection on 'involvement'. Social, political, societal... The way in which the spirit and the subject of this historical art object contrasts with our time is thrilling and inspiring; this juncture at which global emancipatory forces are at work; this era in which artworks must relate to the unmistakable need for engagement and activism."

With **Songs of Disconnection**, Maarten Seghers searches for meaning in ‘unintelligibility’;

“The abstract-sounding libretto at the heart of **Songs of Disconnection** oscillates between involvement and indifference and explores what intensity this clash can elicit. The libretto becomes tragic in its unintelligibility, a central idea in my work: *communication only becomes clear when it fails*.

These new songs are a confused outburst, because everything ‘could be’ and nothing ‘is’; they are an exuberant statement that originates from an excited illusion of unattainable places and incomprehensible times; they are a generator that hatches out the absurd idea known as ‘together’.”

In addition to their virtuosity in their grasp of, and performance of, musical writing, Aya Suzuki, Simon Lenski, George van Dam and Michael Schmid are also autonomous artists who - in their own work, each in their own way - fundamentally question music in order to arrive at sound and music as physical material. Seghers’ mainspring is to convert not only their profession, but also themselves and their bodies into matter.

This is where a contemporary music ensemble and a performance collective like Needcompany differ from one another, as well as intersect. The former starts out from the logic of the performative in order to arrive at music, while the latter starts out from the logic of the musical to arrive at performance.

In his poem An die Nachgeborenen [To Future Generations] which he wrote in the 1930s, Bertolt Brecht explicitly asks himself: “Was sind das für Zeiten, wo/ Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist/ Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!” [“What are these times where/A conversation about trees is almost a crime/Because it suggests silence about so many misdeeds!”] In the meantime, modern art has made these ‘Untaten’ [misdeeds] its most important topic of conversation. Thus in the current context, the working title of one of Maarten Seghers’ new projects - ‘Fragments on wall painting depicting duck on water (Songs of Disconnection)’ – sounds somewhat provocative (...)

Erwin Jans





THOUGHTS ON A PERFORMANCE

by **MIKE LYNCH**

Songs of Disconnection investigates the combination of music, words, sounds and movement in a complex and inventive fusion. Composer and director Maarten Seghers (vocalist) is accompanied by an ensemble consisting of Simon Lenski (cello), George van Dam (violin), Michael Schmid (flute) and Aya Suzuki (vibraphone / percussion). Seghers has always been keen on challenging accepted forms of musical and performative expression, seeing how they can potentially interact while exploring their alternate states of tension and cohesion. A source of inspiration for this show was a simple fragment of a wall painting, displaying a duck on water. Lurking behind this serene image, Maarten conjured up a backdrop of division and conflict. And so began the process of transforming this seed into a vibrant, collaborative, contrastive musical performance. The title of the piece, **Songs of Disconnection**, prompted the association with William Blake's 'Songs of Innocence and Experience', in which the radical visionary artist explored what he called the "two contrary states of the human soul".

The performance is set in concentric circles; a chaotic sea of cables, wires and technical sound devices forms the center, enclosed by the circle of musicians with the public making up the final ring embracing the spectacle. It's like an expressive ripple emerging from chaos, finding expression in the musicians and finally embracing the public for interpretation.

In the beginning, the musicians are challenged to simultaneously play their respective instruments with a single hand and rhythmically motion with the other independently. They literally physically engage with the music: stand on chairs, dance encircling the other players, beat out rhythms with their feet. The music is coordinated by Seghers' primal vocal gestures from which marvelously rhythmical and lyrical vocal sounds emerge.

As the performance evolves, texts emerge from the music, urging a sort of union or coming together. The musicians coalesce at the center of the circle, in intimate proximity – a brief moment of unity and connection contrasting the thematic 'indifference' and 'dislocation'. Seghers' duet with percussionist Aya Suzuki is a melody of lyrical beauty that ends with the two in a close embrace, Seghers clasping his score to her chest.

There are also moments of dissonant musical tension like when the cello and percussion engage in a combative rhythmical discourse. The subsequent song - in contrast to an earlier floating melody - takes up a deep, violent and distorted tone accompanied by the compulsive beat of the instruments. This dialectic of contrasting sounds, rhythms and tones is a recurrent theme throughout the performance and reflects one of Maarten's artistic convictions: that communication only becomes clear once it fails. This piece is an experiment, testing the limits of vocal, musical and performative engagement.




One of the highlights was Suzuki's dance to a strictly notated rhythm, moving arms and legs while conducting the beat: transfixing the audience. At this point, the musical score triggers a choreography, at once as a dance for the musician herself and as a conductor's matrix for the other musicians.

When viewing or listening to a contemporary performance I frequently ask myself what the creator is trying to communicate, consciously looking out for seeds of meaning. It's only when I become completely absorbed that answers come to me unforced. This is the experience I had with Songs of Disconnection. One could say I took to it like a duck to water...







Since 'WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHAT DO YOU MEAN AND OTHER PLEASANTRIES' (2014) Seghers has consistently had 'the orchestra' appear as the protagonist in his performances. First as a frontman and notional accompanying band. Later, in 'O or The Challenge Of This Particular Show Was To Have Words Ending In O' (2016), both as a contemporary bass drum ensemble, and as a lowing herd of cows and muzzled Gregorian choir, then as a rock band who've gone downhill in 'Concert by a Band Facing the Wrong Way' (2018), and now as a wandering chamber orchestra in **Songs of Disconnection**. In all these works, the orchestra – and therefore the 'entertainer' – becomes an almost archeologically excavated artefact.





*i oo oo o aa oo e
i oo ohh o ohh oo e
ih ohh oo a eh oo e
ae ohh e e oh e
o ... oo e
ohh i e
ih ohh i a eh i e
oh ae ohh i oa oo
ohh ae i oo
ohh i e ih ohh i a eh i e
ih ae e ohh i oa ehh
o ... e ehh
o ohh e e
ih ohh e a eh e e
I do not know what you mean
with what you say when you speak
that's not easy for me
oh can't you see
what I mean
with what I say when I speak
oh that's not nice for you
what can I do
what I mean with what I say when I speak
is that it's not nice for us
oh can't we just
know what we mean
with what we say when we speak*



SONGS OF DISCONNECTION

Composition, libretto, direction MAARTEN SEGHERS

By and with SIMON LENSKI, AYA SUZUKI, GEORGE VAN DAM EN MICHAEL SCHMID

Sound PIERRICK DROCHMANS

Production management RUNE FLORYN / MARJOLEIN DEMEY

Production NEEDCOMPANY

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Photos OLYMPE TITS

NEEDCOMPANY

Gabrielle Petitstraat 4 box 4, 1080 Sint-Jans-Molenbeek, Brussels

Artistic direction MAARTEN SEGHERS, GRACE ELLEN BARKEY, JAN LAUWERS

Company manager PIETER D'HOOGE pieter@needcompany.org

Dramaturgy ELKE JANSSENS elke@needcompany.org

Technical production RUNE FLORYN rune@needcompany.org

Tourmanagement / communication VIBE STALPAERT vibe@needcompany.org

International bookings : Key performance / Koen Vanhove koen@keyperformance.se