

dossier

creation 2021

première: 7 August 2021, ImPulsTanz Wien (AT)

Gardenia, 10 years later

Frank Van Laecke, Alain Platel, Steven Prengels

NTGent & laGeste (les ballets C de la B + kabinet k)



photo © Luk Monsaert

WRITTEN
BY
THE
BODY

laGeste

Gardenia, 10 years later

Frank Van Laecke, Alain Platel, Steven Prengels
NTGent & laGeste (les ballets C de la B + kabinet k)

“*Gardenia* draws pictures of what it means to have lived a queer life in decades past with the grace of age; tempered by sorrow, but ultimately of such intense beauty as to take the breath.”

Sophie Robbins in DIVA

25 June 2010 - the curtain in the Ghent city theatre opens and *Gardenia* première. Inspired by the penetrating film *Yo soy así* (by Sonia Herman Dolz), in which the closing of a transvestite cabaret in Barcelona affords us a glimpse into the private lives of a memorable group of old artists, directors Frank Van Laecke and Alain Platel and composer Steven Prengels said yes to a project that can be called unique in every respect. *Gardenia* is a singular account, the most intimate of tales about hope and cherished or lost illusions. Seven older individuals who seemingly effortlessly navigate the twilight zone between being male and being female. In contrast and harmony with a “young guy” and a “real woman”. Each on a quest. Each with their own intriguing story.

10 years on, the cast is reunited. Or not quite. Andrea has left us forever. And as she went, so did Tina Turner. Eight of them now, they continue. Eight individuals so special you will want to get to know them. Want to embrace them.

What binds them are the marks scored deep on their souls.

What drives them is the unimaginable will to survive.

In the hope they will succeed.

Through transformation. Or not.

In the knowledge that the price is incredibly high. Even today.

Ready to take the stage by storm. To move and surprise. To laugh and keep silent.

To sparkle and shine, one more time, somewhere over the rainbow.

foto: *Gardenia, 10 years later* (2021) © Luk Monsaert



CREDITS

directors Frank Van laecke, Alain Platel

music Steven Prengels

based on a concept of Vanessa Van Durme

created and performed by Vanessa Van Durme, Griet Debacker, Andrea De Laet (†), Richard 'Tootsie' Dierick, Danilo Povolo, Gerrit Becker, Hendrik Lebon, Dirk Van Vaerenbergh, Rudy Suwyns

set design Paul Gallis

costume design Marie 'costume' Lauwers, Dorine Demuyneck, Lutje Tamsin

light Kurt lefevre (ontwerp), Jan Mergaert, Bennert Vancottem

sound Sam Serruys (ontwerp), Brecht Beuselinck, Jo Thielemans

stage manager Wim Piqueur, Luc Laroy

costumes realized by atelier NTGent o.l.v. An De Mol

coiffures Claudine Grinwis Plaat Stultjes, Dian Vandecruys

set realized by decoratelier NTGent

photography Luk Monsaert

production manager Valerie Desmet

tour manager Katrien Van Gysegem

set transport Maurice Van de Velde

trainee Jesse Vandamme

production NTGent & laGeste (les ballets C de la B + kabinet k)

coproduction Le Volcan Scène nationale du Havre

original coproducers (2010) NTGent, La rose des vents (Villeneuve d'Ascq), TorinoDanza, Biennale de la danse de Lyon, Tanz im August (Berlin), Théâtre National de Chaillot (Paris), Brighton festival, Centro Cultural Vila Flor Guimarães, La Bâtie-Festival de Genève, Festival d'Avignon

with thanks to Yan Tax, Kryolan

supported by de Vlaamse Overheid, Stad Gent, Tax Shelter maatregel van de Belgische federale overheid



Vlaanderen
verbeelding werkt

FLANDERS
TAX
SHELTER

PRACTICAL

duration 1h 40min (no interval)

performance in Dutch/French/English (depending on the language of the theatre)

en avant-première: 1-2 July 2021 - Festival de Marseille (FR)

en avant-première: 16-25 July 2021 - NTGent (BE)

première: 7 August 2021 - ImPulsTanz Wien (AT)

IN THE PRESS

About *Gardenia - 10 years later* (2021)

« *Gardenia - 10 ans après* est une mélancolie tout en dentelle. C'est avant tout un plaisir pour l'œil et l'oreille. C'est une ode à la vie que l'on devrait vivre dans un corps qui permet de s'épanouir comme une rose. »

Els Van Steenberghe in Focus Knack, 20 juli 2021

[https://focus.knack.be/entertainment/podium/gardenia-tien-jaar-later-is-eeen-kantwerkje-melancholie-me-eeen-scheute-gentsche-umor/article-review-1756605.html?cookie_check=1626857021](https://focus.knack.be/entertainment/podium/gardenia-tien-jaar-later-is-een-kantwerkje-melancholie-me-eeen-scheute-gentsche-umor/article-review-1756605.html?cookie_check=1626857021)

“*Gardenia* expose les frontières et les préjugés, nous emporte dans le grand tourbillon de la vie. Leur version du boléro de Ravel est sans doute l'un des plus beaux. Il suffit d'un geste, même lent, et surtout d'une envie et d'une intention pour que la danse soit là, quel que soit l'âge.”

Marie-Eve Barbier in La Provence, 3 juli 2021

<https://articles.cafeyn.co/4ea334/la-provence-marseille/2021-07-01/gardenia-10-ans-apres-le-cabaret-de-la-derniere-chance>

“*Gardenia* is a collage-like portrait of gender fluidity, the joys and pains of ageing, and the transformative power of performance. But to view *Gardenia* simply as a showy demonstration of the art of performing en travesty would be limiting. Abetted by a genius soundtrack from the composer Steven Prengels, the work is deeper, darker and more richly layered than that.”

Donald Hutera, *The Times* **** - 17.11.2021

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gardenia-review-sadlers-wells-dance-gender-fluidity-joys-ageing-b63vlgw2>

“A drag cabaret's frail, moving swansong.

Vanessa Van Durme walks falteringly to the mic, shoulders stooped, lifts her chin just enough as to say, I'm still here. And she sings *Over the rainbow* in a growl to rival Tom Waits.”

Lyndsey Winship, *The Guardian* *** - 17.11.2021

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/nov/17/gardenia-10-years-later-review-sadlers-wells-london>

“So why revive the production a decade later, when the original cast of a story about ageing queens have themselves aged? This is why: for two hours, eight Drag Queens, a younger man and a cisgender woman drew pictures of what it means to have lived a queer life in decades past with the grace of age; tempered by sorrow, but ultimately of such intense beauty as to take the breath.”

<https://divamag.co.uk/2021/11/30/gardenia-10-years-later-review/>

“This deconstructed drag show in reverse works every cliché of itself with a parade of icons emerging to the recorded applause for a moment: Liza Minnelli, Carol Channing, Norma Desmond. But to say there are moments of melancholy is not to say the piece is sad. The performers pick up energy as they transform - but perhaps not as conveniently as the audience might wish. It is riveting, uncomfortable, painful and beautiful.”

Mary Beer in London Theatre 1

<https://www.londontheatre1.com/reviews/gardenia-10-years-later-at-sadlers-wells/>

About *Gardenia* (2010)

“*Gardenia mon amour, Gardenia mes amours, voudrait-on leur crier pour les remercier. Seulement, ça ne passe pas tant on a la gorge nouée.*”

Télérama, 11.07.2010

“Cinq cents spectateurs debout, en larmes, en joie, la tête ailleurs, tout près d’eux pourtant. *Gardenia*, la mélodie du bonheur, façon transsexuelle.”

Le Temps, 12.07.2010

“It’s a privilege to spend time with this brave and unusual cast of performers. For *Gardenia* is not, in essence, about achieving a pastiche of femininity, it’s about the act of metamorphosis and, ultimately, about the dream of transcendence.”

Luke Jennings, The Guardian 03.07.2011

“*Gardenia* est une pièce émouvante. Elle est cruelle. Elle est drôle parfois aussi. Très tendre avant tout. Si spectacle il y a, c’est celui de l’intimité de ces gens qui ont accepté de revivre en quelque sorte leur passé et d’en témoigner en confiance pour être acceptés, reconnus. Impossible de ne pas être captif de ce cadeau-là. Les entrelacs délicats de la mise en scène de Platel et Van Laecke, - qui avaient déjà chacun travaillé avec Vanessa Van Durme -, le choix des musiques (Dalida mais aussi Schubert), dessinent une carte du travestissement et du genre très humaine. Avec ses amis, Vanessa Van Durme recolle les morceaux de sa vie pour une photo de groupe inoubliable.”

Rosita Boisseau, Le Monde 11.07.2010

“Razen tegen het doven van het licht. De voorstelling gaat over anders zijn, maar meer nog over verliezen, winnen, oud worden, de vrees daarvoor en de schoonheid daarvan.

Gardenia is soms schrijnend, soms hilarisch, vertederend en woest. En omdat je weet dat het voor velen in de cast de vervulling is van een levenslange droom om ooit op een groot podium te kunnen schitteren, en dat ze dit nu op het einde van hun loopbaan ook kunnen doen, is het tegelijk aangrijpend en ontroerend. Het is een voorstelling die je raakt, en een groter compliment kan je theatermakers eigenlijk niet maken.”

Yves Desmet, De Morgen 28.06.2010

“Die Möglichkeit zur Veränderung, die damit verbundenen positiven Energien, aber auch das Wissen, dass der Preis der Veränderung unglaublich hoch sein kann - davon erzählt *Gardenia* auf vielen Ebenen. Inspiriert von dem spanischen Film *Yo soy asi*, in dem es um den letzten Abend eines Kabaretttheaters geht, nahm man diese Situation der letzten Metamorphose der alten Leute auf der Bühne als Ausgangspunkt. Alles weitere Material kam von den Darstellern: echte, schöne Geschichten. Doch *Gardenia* ist keine Dokumentation, es ist eine Theaterproduktion, ein Tsunami zwiespältiger Emotionen”, wie Platel es fasst. Ein fröhliches Kabarett, unter dessen Oberfläche der Schmerz bedrohlich nahe liegt.”

Judith Staudinger, Der Standard 05.08.2010

photo: *Gardenia, 10 years later (2021)* © luk Monsaert





photo: *Gardenia, 10 years later* (2021) © Luk Monsaert

TRANSFORMATIONS OVER TIME

Stan Monstrey is plastisch chirurg en een wereldautoriteit op gebied van transgenderchirurgie. In gesprek met Alain Platel en Frank Van Laecke opent hij de deur naar zijn wereld en ervaringen en blikt hij terug op *Gardenia*.

A: Stan, how did your interest in transgender surgery develop?

S: You don't make important decisions in life, they are made for you. I was actually destined to become a civil engineer. I was good at maths, my father was a physicist and my college was a breeding ground for engineers. But at sixteen, after a serious car accident, I ended up at UZ Gent, the University Hospital of Ghent, in the plastic surgery department with Prof. Dr Matton. This experience made such an impression on me that I wondered why I wanted to become an engineer and not a plastic surgeon, or at least a doctor. Later, I also wondered whether being homosexual played a role in that choice. It is sometimes said that a homosexual person feels more connected to a trans person, that there are similarities such as the coming out, but I think it just has more to do with who you are. And it's also like psychiatrist De Cuyper once said: "Once you're dealing with these patients and you dedicate yourself to them, you can't help but be an advocate for their cause." That's how I gradually grew into it.

A: How did you experience *Gardenia*, the performance that took place ten years ago? What memories do you have of it?

S: *Gardenia*... I have seen it three times. When I think of the performance, it's mainly the scene to Ravel's Bolero. I have seen transitions happen so many times in my life, especially in the past when we saw the patients going through the change from the beginning. Now we see the patients more at the end, when they have already gone through the social transition. I remember a man who was small and sturdy in stature and who I thought would meet hardship in the social acceptance of his transition to a woman. But when I saw her six months after the operation, though her stature had not changed, she radiated so

much femininity... No artificiality, no make-up, she was just who she was, but she had changed so much and I couldn't tell what had changed, she wasn't wearing different clothes, but she was radiant. Such a transformation is so comprehensive and that is what they radiate, I think.

So when in *Gardenia*, during Ravel's Bolero, I saw the transformation as in a time lapse, I thought "That's it!" I go through that on a daily basis and you were able to imagine it in ten minutes. It still gives me goose bumps. One of the most beautiful scenes...

I also have a bond with several people from that team, so that made it special for me as well. Andrea was our first patient, in 1988. That was the early stage of trans surgery in Belgium.

In the 1980s the gender team at UZ Gent consisted of three people: Dr Guido Matton was a surgeon, Dr Griet De Cuyper a psychiatrist and Dr Robert Rubens an endocrinologist, he prescribed the hormone therapy and was very committed to transgender people. I was a final-year assistant at the time, and the team wanted to expand the services. We went to see how things were done elsewhere: from Amsterdam, which was the Mecca of transgender surgery at the time, to a very experienced surgeon in Lausanne who also worked in a multidisciplinary manner. That was an eye-opener for us. I also went to America, where I learned about microsurgery and reconstructions with free vascularised flaps. Free flap surgery is a technique of transferring tissue from one place on your body to another. A penis is made of tissue from the forearm and that is then connected at the bottom to blood vessels and nerves in the groin area. This is how we started in Ghent in the early nineties. Now we do an average of two phalloplasties a week and even more breast surgery/reconstructions and vaginoplasties.

So I partly ended up in my specialisation in trans surgery haphazardly.

F: Looking back on it now, what has changed?

S: In the past, people thought more in terms of man or woman. You had a man or a woman and you could understand that someone wanted to change from one gender to the other. A patient who used to come to us was expected to 'go all the way', you couldn't stop halfway. Now you see that within the 'gender spectrum' there is so much in between. It used to be normal for trans men, over the course of years, to first undergo a breast reduction or, more often than not, a complete removal of the breast, which was then typically followed by a removal of the uterus and a penis reconstruction. But now there are also patients who only want a breast correction and don't want to go any further, who don't need a penis to feel like a man. In the past, a transvestite was seen as something completely different, whereas now we realise that there are many more transitions and similarities in the whole male-female spectrum.

That's the beauty of *Gardenia* by the way - are they transgender, are they transvestites? - it is a wonderful mix.

A: Do you feel in your practice that after their transition, people no longer want to be reminded of their past?

S: I remember an expression of psychiatrist Griet De Cuyper: "A transition is successful to the extent that the person can also give the 'previous life' a certain place." Transgenders who want to eliminate their past completely, who can pretend it did not really exist, are sometimes convinced of their own lie. Trans women who say 'I was not born a boy' and who are totally convinced of this, may not be the ones who have the best chance of being happy. Because no matter how well the operation has gone, perfection, the real thing, is never achieved.

F: Someone told me about the transition from man to woman: you think by doing this, you will finally achieve what you want to be: you want to be a woman and be accepted by society as a woman. But it turned out that that person had never felt as much of an outcast as after the operation. I don't know whether that person was happier before or after the operation. But in the search for happiness, this transition does play a role. How have you experienced that in your work?

S: Whichever way you look at it, it is quite dramatic to realise that you were born in the wrong body, so to speak. And you are constantly confronted with this from a very young age. It can only be frustrating. Whatever we do, it is never the real thing, never.

I know a very attractive homosexual trans man, who tells me that he can count on a lot of interest from other men. But when it comes down to it, i.e. in bed, they don't go for it. He does have a beautiful penis, everything is well reconstructed, but it is not the real thing.

But still, most transgender patients are really happier after their operation and we have few people with

regrets. We have had a few suicides over the years, but that is also true of the general population. We have had a total of three regrettants after just a breast operation. There was someone for whom we had performed a mastectomy - not followed by a genital operation, which already says something - and who came back afterwards to have a breast enlargement. This was someone who had been abused as a girl. She had quite large breasts and she saw that as a cause. This was an element that played a part in her decision. The expectations of such an operation are sometimes very high. People have a number of problems and think that they will all be solved with surgery. Which, of course, is not the case.

A: Has a play like *Gardenia* helped change attitudes?

S: I am convinced of that. A lot has changed in the last ten years. People sometimes tell me that the media attention surrounding transgender is a bit exaggerated, but I think it is a good thing. It should continue to be spoken and written about, to show the diversity within the community.

I remember a newspaper clipping from the 1980s that Dr Matton had received: it described transgender people as psychiatric patients for whom perhaps castration was the only remedy. The way it was written was so denigrating.

When *Gardenia* played in 2010, you didn't read that much about transgender people in the newspapers or magazines. When you told me about the idea of doing a performance with older transvestites and transgenders, I had my doubts: are people waiting for this? But I never heard any negative reactions, not even through the grapevine. At the time, people did not talk about it that much, but in *Gardenia*, the non-binary comes up in a different form. And of course, it is also about getting older, something that everyone is confronted with sooner or later.

A: How do you see the future with what is now happening in the blurring of sexual identities?

S: In recent years we have seen a huge increase in operations, which worries us a little. Until about seven years ago, we used to do the breast and uterus surgeries together for trans boys and we would do two a day. We had one or two such operation days per month, which means that we did a maximum of four such operations per month. If I look at the last four years, I see that we are doing four a week. And this increase is worldwide. We have no idea where this increase is coming from, but we can't keep asking 'are you sure'?

F: Why can't you ask that?

S: We are allowed to, but we are moving more and more towards a situation where the patient has a say. We used to make the decisions about who was and was not allowed to do it, and how. Now that is completely gone, which is a very good thing. We listen to the patients and also make them aware of their responsibilities. This applies to medicine in general, but even more so in the case of transgender surgery. With us, you have a whole team. A patient is first guided through an assessment, which is largely completed by the group of psychologists and psychiatrists.

A: Sometimes I think: there should be another play, not only about transitions, but also about sexuality and the experience of sexuality. This was one of the things I was confronted with when working with the actors of *Gardenia*. How far can you go in this or how broad can you deal with it. This discussion is still insufficient.

S: Gender or identity is indeed separate from sexual preference. Half of trans women, those who were born as men but are women, have a lesbian relationship with a woman. You also have people in a heterosexual relationship who stay with their partner after their operation. Sometimes people say that this is for reasons of convenience or financial motives, but many also say: we just love each other and you continue to love that person even after the transition.

I have also been thinking about what *Gardenia* does not highlight about transgenderism. I was thinking about the recent development of young people. There are some who are already being monitored here as children, for whom we temporarily stop puberty, so as not to impregnate their bodies with the wrong hormones. If they continue with the trajectory, they sometimes already have a social transition at the age of sixteen (including the breast amputation for trans boys). And then there is the question of whether we will perform genital surgery on them at eighteen. Often, young people have such high expectations: that if they have the perfect breasts or penis, they will have a perfect life. Those young people are not in *Gardenia*, that is another discussion.

F, A: Stan, thank you so much.

S: Thank you! And I was so happy when I heard about the re-release.

Interview with Stan Monstrey, Frank van Laecke and Alain Platel.

Written down by Tessa Daluwein and Nele Dhaese.

photo: *Gardenia, 10 years later* (2021) © Luk Monsaert



January 2021. The cast meets again for a costume fitting, in preparation for the reprise of *Gardenia*. Between the fitting they look back on the performance they made ten years ago with Frank Van laecke and Alain Platel. A reflection of that flashback from the perspective of Tessa Daluwein, who followed the preparations during her internship:

The world has changed a lot in the past decade. Our society is in transition and on that shaking, trembling ground, *Gardenia* welcomes her daughters back to the stage.

A bouquet of flowers welcomes you with all its colours and thorns.

In *Gardenia*, many lives come together in many people, a collection of experiences from different angles.

These are eight portraits that step out of their way, overlap and contradict each other, embrace and push each other away.

"I think people are overwhelmed by the whole cast. You don't have a lead in Gardenia, the lead is that cast. And this worked wonderfully with all the clichés we could imagine."

Everyone who walks the stage of *Gardenia* brings their own life story. *Gardenia* is in transition, just like its actors and the world that surrounds it.

In *Gardenia*, clichés are transcended. Eyelashes are glued on, wigs are straightened, songs are sung and vulnerability becomes strength. You see mere illusions, only to dispel them minutes later.

You see people as male and female, transgender and homosexual, old and young. Above all, you see the space between this binary representation of what someone can be. People in all variations, people in intermediate stages, people who openly share what identity can be.

"We did an exercise to be a 'model' on the catwalk. I fantasised about it, but that's something where you think, 'Yeah, that's never going to happen anyway'.

We could do that here.

And it was a party every time. That's why I did it with such conviction: 'Here, now I'll show what I can do.'"

Gardenia is about saying goodbye, about the end of an era. Growing older is inevitable but this knowledge does not make it any easier to accept. Ten years pass, not from twenty to thirty but from sixty to seventy. The body moves differently, her neck holds her head high, her legs struggle with the sloping stage even more, her hips sway to a different rhythm. Time passes differently, lives do not change as quickly as before but the change itself is insurmountable.

Gardenia starts from the end to the beginning. We have left people behind; we have thanked our audience. The garland has lost a flower. We hold a minute's silence.

The sloping stage challenges, the dressing table becomes the storage bin, the scene a landscape that keeps changing. The fight has no clear sides, no clear winner. They hold on to each other, push the other away, seek redemption with all their zest for life. Their transformation is not without sacrifice.

"That is a fight with myself. The opponent is a part of me. The two things that I have in me. Both masculinity and femininity. Vulnerability but strength. Continuing and giving up. Beauty as well as ugliness. Attracting and repelling. Holding on and pushing away."

Beauty does not expire but reaches further and further until every unknown territory is its own. *Gardenia* is a performance that gives beauty a new face. A face that grows older, is made up and transformed. Above all, it exposes a truth and shows you transience. *Gardenia* is a gift to you, a togetherness you have not yet known.

"Un merveilleux bouquet de fleurs."



photo: Steven Prengels, Alain Platel, Frank Van laecke (2021) © Luk Monsaert

BIO'S

Frank Van laecke | ° 1958, Ghent (BE)

Author and director Frank Van laecke has established a versatile international career over the past decades. His widely acclaimed theatre work has earned him numerous national and international awards, including the Herald Angel Award, the Dora Mavor Moore Award and a nomination for the British Lawrence Olivier Award.

Millions of people saw his work all over the world.

He was the director of many musicals including *Hollywood by Night*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *She Loves Me*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, *Annie*, *Oliver!*, *Yours Anne*, *Rembrandt*, *The Sound of Music*, *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot*, *The King and I*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Tell Me On a Sunday*, *Dracula*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Little Mermaid*. He was the author and director of *Kuifje en de Zonnetempel*, *Jubilee 15*, *Sacco & Vanzetti*, *Domino*, *Ben X*, *Pauline & Paulette*, *De Rozenoorlog*, *Iedereen Beroemd*, *14-18*, *Daens* and *40-45*.

Frank Van laecke also directed the opera's *La Bohème*, *La Traviata*, *Nabucco*, *Aïda*, *Carmen*, *I Pagliacci*, *Cavaleria Rusticana*, *Don Pasquale*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Faust*, *Tosca*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Peter Grimes*, *Maria de Buenos Aires*, *Kat'a Kabanová*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Hamlet*, *The Maid of Orleans* and *Capuleti e Montecchi*.

With the greatest of ease, Frank Van laecke returned to directing works with a purer aesthetic and theatrical productions. From an intense collaboration with Alain Platel and les ballets C de la B, emerged the much acclaimed *Gardenia* (2010), followed by *En Avant Marche* (2015), the performance that was awarded the Herald Angel Award at the Edinburg festival and the Dora Mavor Moore Award in Toronto. Frank Van laecke is also the author of '*The echo of the scream*', a literary thriller that was received very warmly by the press and readers.

www.frankvanlaecke.be

.....

Alain Platel | ° 1956, Ghent (BE)

Alain Platel is trained as a remedial educationalist, and is an autodidact director. In 1984 he set up a small group with a number of friends and relatives to work collectively. *Emma* (1988) signalled his concentration on directing. He was responsible for *Bonjour Madame* (1993), *La Tristeza Complice* (1995) and *Iets op Bach* (1998), with which les ballets C de la B (as the group was now called) rocketed to the international top. In the meantime his collaboration with Arne Sierens had a similar effect on the Ghent youth theatre company Victoria, with the three plays *Moeder en Kind* (1995), *Bernadetje* (1996) and *Allemaal Indiaan* (1999).

After *Allemaal Indiaan* he announced that he was stopping making productions. But shortly afterwards Gerard Mortier persuaded him to do *Wolf* (2003) based on Mozart for the Ruhrtriennale. The choir project for the opening of the new KVS marked the start of close collaboration with the composer Fabrizio Cassol. *vsprs* (2006) proved to be a turning point in his career. So far his work had been exuberant in both the diversity of performers and the themes, but now it became more profound and intense and revealed a world of passion and desire. And violence, as in *Nine Finger* (2007) with Benjamin Verdonck and Fumiyo Ikeda. After the baroque *pitié!* (2008), *Out Of Context - for Pina* (January 2010) is an almost ascetic reflection of the movement repertoire of spasms and tics. Platel consistently continues to search this language of movement for incarnations of feelings that are too vast. The yearning for something transcending the individual is becoming more and more palpable.

In collaboration with director Frank Van Laecke, he created *Gardenia* (2010), a production in which the closing of a transvestite cabaret affords us a glimpse into the private lives of a memorable group of old artists. In 2015 Platel and Van Laecke renew their collaboration, joined again by composer Steven Prengels, for *En avant, Marche!* a performance about a society inspired by the tradition of fanfare orchestras and brass bands.

In 2012 Gerard Mortier convinces Platel once more to work with the opera's from Verdi and Wagner: *C(H)EURS* becomes so far Platel's biggest project. Together with his dancers and the Teatro Real choir he examines how 'dangerously beautiful' a group can be.

The political connotation in performances such as *tauberbach* (2014) and *Coup Fatal* (in collaboration with Cassol, 2014) lies in the joie de vivre and energy that is displayed on stage to show how people sometimes live or even survive in undignified circumstances. "Lust for life" as a way of rebellion. It's this lust for life that pushes the dancers in searching the possibility for transformation in *nicht schlafen* (2016), a performance on music by Mahler, that carries the restlessness and sense of foreboding doom of an accelerating society.

The theme of death had always featured significantly in Platel's work, but never before it has been so central as in *Requiem pour L.* (in collaboration with Cassol, 2018). By writing a book of the same name, Platel digests the heavy process of this Requiem's creation.

Meanwhile, Platel is also focusing on the development of connexions in his hometown, Ghent. Together with Lisi Estaras and Quan Bui Ngoc, he unites 300 townspeople of all ages and backgrounds in an unprecedented performance of *Le Sacre du Printemps* (2018).

But let it be clear, Platel is not just into large scale projects nowadays. In the recent past, he worked on small projects such as *Nachtschade* (for Victoria in 2006) and coaching work for amongst others Pieter and Jakob Ampe and their production *Jake & Pete's* big reconciliation attempt for the disputes from the past (in 2011). Two projects which have had a significant influence on his way of perceiving theatre.

He also almost surreptitiously entered the arena of the dance film together with the British director Sophie Fiennes (*Because I Sing* in 2001, *Ramallah!Ramallah!Ramallah!* in 2005 and *VSPRS Show and Tell* in 2007) and solo with *de balletten en ci en là* (2006), an impressive view of what goes on in a twenty-year-old dance company, taking us all the way to Vietnam and Burkina Faso, but also and mainly being an ode to his hometown Ghent.

Steven Prengels | ° 1978, Zele (BE)

Steven Prengels is a Belgian composer and artist. He studied at the Lemmens Institute, the University of Leuven, the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp and the Conservatory of Amsterdam. At the latter two he studied composition with Wim Henderickx.

He works mostly for theatre, dance and opera. In recent years he collaborated with national and international artists as Alain Platel, Frank Van Laecke, Johan Simons and Arno Synaeve; and companies as les ballets C de la B, NTGent, Opera Ballet Vlaanderen, Symfonieorkest Vlaanderen, Ruhr Triennale, Teatro Real Madrid and Münchner Kammerspiele. For les ballets C de la B he collaborated as music director on *Gardenia*, *C(H)OEURS*, *tauberbach*, *En avant, marche!*, *nicht schlafen*, *C(H)OEURS 2020*, *Gardenia 10 years later* and *Mein Gent*.

For coming years, collaborations are planned with les ballets C de la B, Opera Ballet Vlaanderen, the Manchester Festival, Athens Epidaurus Festival, Bochum Schauspielhaus and Leipzig Schauspielhaus.

He divides his time between composing and working as a visual artist.

Steven Prengels is professor of composition at the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp.

Vanessa Van Durme | ° 1948, Ghent (BE)

Vanessa Van Durme studied drama and theatre at the Conservatory in Ghent. Vanessa's career starts on the scene of the Nederlands Toneel Gent, now known as the NTGent. She made the difficult but inevitable decision to undergo a sex change and as a result left the company and gave up a career in theatre. Twenty years later she picked up the thread once more and devoted herself to writing comedies. She wrote dozens of television screenplays for various broadcasting companies, including the complete sitcom series *Liefde en Geluk* for the VRT national channel, and was responsible for directing the actors. She was a popular radio personality for five years and had the longest running comedy act on Belgian radio. She has written about twenty plays for the stage.

Her breakthrough in theatre came when the Belgian choreographer and theatre-maker Alain Platel cast her in the role of the mother Tosca in *Allemaal Indiaan*. After touring for two years with this production she moved to the Victoria theatre company in Ghent to act in *White Star*, which was based on an idea of hers. She then toured Europe for two years with this production.

She wrote her book, *Look mummy, I'm dancing*, and from it distilled the monologue of the same name, which she will perform in four languages all over Europe and America. In her monologue, in which she speaks openly about her transition, she hoped to remove public prejudice and show that people who are 'slightly different' are also ... people. Tolerance and accepting someone who is 'different' are important items on Vanessa's agenda.

photo: © Luk Monsaert



Her latest production *Femme Blanche*, is set in colonial Morocco in the last century. Her aim in this piece is to spotlight today's rapidly growing racism, intolerance and the 'Banlieu hazard'. For her theater monologue about Alzheimer *Avant que j'oublie* (2014) she received the prestigious Prix de la meilleure comédienne du Syndicat de la Critique and in 2015 she was nominated for a Molière Award for Best Actress.

.....

Griet Debacker | °1964, Roeselare (BE)

After obtaining a degree in speech therapy (1985) and a First Prize in Drama (1989) at the Ghent Conservatory, Griet worked as a freelance actress with numerous Belgian and Dutch theatre companies. She played in a number of sitcoms for the Belgian public television broadcasting company VRT and made several guest appearances in Flemish fiction series.

In 2005 she founded the Swan lake company together with Vanessa Van Durme and produced *Kijk mama, ik dans* (*Look mummy, I'm dancing*) under the direction of Frank Van Laecke. Since then, she coached Vanessa during the world tour of this production. Their second production, *Femme Blanche*, saw its première performance in November 2009. It was directed by Jan Steen. In 2014 they created a theater monologue about Alzheimer, *Avant que j'oublie*. In 2010 Griet Debacker played in *Gardenia* directed by Frank Van Laecke and Alain Platel, followed by a world tour for two years. The collaboration with Van Laecke-Platel continued in 2015 with *En avant, marche!*

.....

Hendrik Lebon | ° 1980, Ghent (BE)

Hendrik Lebon played and danced as a youngster in productions by Theater Neon, the Kopergieterij/ Speeltheater Ghent and the Royal Ballet of Flanders, among others. In 2005 he graduated as a modern performing dancer at the Fontys Dance Academy in Tilburg and subsequently won the Jacques De Leeuw Young Top Talent award. Since then, he has worked for various companies at home and abroad and performed as a dance soloist in, among others, the opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Opera Zuid, Maastricht) and sang and danced the title role of *Bach in Tranen van Bach* (Muziektheater Hollands Diep). Directed by Frank Van Laecke, he sang and danced in *Dracula* (Music Hall) and played the role of Sigismund in the operetta *In het Witte Paard*. As a circus performer, he shared the role of Harlekino with Danny Ronaldo in *Minnevozen* by Theater Leporello and played in *Première neige* (co-production théâtre Vélo and Kopergieterij). For the Scottish group Curious Seed he is currently dancing in *Chalk about* and with them he is actively involved in the global network of dance for young audiences.

Besides dancing, he has continued to develop as a singer, acrobat, actor and musician, and also learned to play the trombone for the performance *En Avant Marche!*, a production by les ballets C de la B and NTGent. He sings in the Ghent music group les Quatre au Quai, does Burlesque with Cabaret Cuberdon, works as a circus performer in family park De Sierk and does advertising and television work. This year, he founded his own company Goodone productions BV and produces his own work.

.....

Richard 'Tootsie' Dierick | ° 1952, Lokeren (BE)

'A dream comes true'. After a delightful and warm childhood, Richard completed secondary education at a school where classical humanities (Latin and Greek) were part of his curriculum in 1970. He sought something that reflected his commitment to society and enrolled in a paediatric nursing programme. After graduation in 1973 he was able to start working as a nurse at the Queen Paola Children's Hospital in Antwerp. During three wonderful years of study Richard, who was a late bloomer, experienced an identity



photo: © Luk Monsaert

crisis and came to understand that he was homosexual. He soon made peace with this and is still gay today.

To counter the heavy workload presented by his job, Richard found an escape in the world of entertainment. He took classes in declamation for six years and spent three years at a school for dramatic arts and took jazz dance, African dance and tap dance classes. His irregular working hours made it difficult to join a theatrical company. Finally, Richard ended up in the fantastic world of transvestite theatre. He was on stage for thirty years and enjoyed giving voice to the theatrical animal hidden within his innermost being. He is pleased to contribute his experience and talent to *Gardenia*: the icing on his cake.

.....

Danilo Povolo | ° 1954, Vaux-Sous-Chevremont (BE)

Danilo Povolo grew up in the Walloon Provinces and took courses in the Dutch language. When he completed his secondary education he worked as a white-collar worker in Brussels, Liege and Antwerp. Danilo has travelled across the globe in his spare time with the Mama Roma Show, a transvestite theatre company, since 1978. They made frequent guest appearances throughout Europe and all over the world (even as far as Guadeloupe). In 1995 Danilo left the theatre company and moved to Antwerp. This is where he joined Cabaret Follies, a comic transvestite theatre company that tours Belgium. Danilo also enjoys theatre and cinema.

.....

Gerrit Becker | ° 1944, Amsterdam (NL)

Gerrit Becker was trained as a furniture upholsterer in Antwerp and subsequently took a number of computer courses. A versatile man, his activities extend into many fields: he worked in the catering industry, as a hairdresser, a wallpaperer and a painter. He actively contributes to improving the situation of older ex-prostitutes and is currently vice-chairman of the charitable organisation Pandora.

.....

Dirk Van Vaerenbergh | ° 1954, Aalst (BE)

Dirk Van Vaerenbergh is an actor with a passion for languages. He taught Swedish language and literature at the University of Ghent, but at the end of the last century he definitively opted for theatre. He played in the musicals *Company* (Royal Ballet of Flanders) and *Amadeus* (Music Hall), *De Collega's* and *Getuige ten laste* (Loge 10). He acted with Ensemble Leporello in *Macbethbranding*, *Fool for Love* and *Hoe het varken aan zijn krulstaart kwam*. He often worked together with director Frank Van Laecke: *Kuifje - de zonnetempel*, *Im Weissen Rössl*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Don Pasquale*, *Pauline en Paulette*, *Ben X* and even twice in *Daens - the musical*. He played guest roles in *Spoed*, *De Man*, *De Kotmadam*, *Wittekerke*, *Aspe*, *Niet voor Publicatie*, *Hof van Assisen* and *Booh!*). Children know him as the lazy servant Kamiel in the series *Prinsessia*. Together with Dirk Brossé, Dirk created *Ont-roerd*, a musical theatre production about death and burial. To be seen this autumn.

Dirk likes to read, travel, drink too much coffee and study Chinese.

It is a gift to take on this production again, to find his colleagues again and to discover that the dresses still fit him.

This *Gardenia* is for his husband Rob, stepson Sebastian and of course Nelly.

www.dirkvanvaerenbergh.com

Rudy Suwyns | ° 1944, Ghent (BE)

At the age of five, Rudy Suwyns took his first steps on the stage of the Ghent Opera House. He studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Ghent and the Academy of Music in Gentbrugge. He was affiliated with the Ghent theatre company Romain Deconinck in the Minardschouwburg for thirteen years (1968-1981) and is a permanent staff member of the biannual Festivaria outdoor operetta and musical festival held at the Donkmeer lake in Ghent. He was engaged as a director and actor at the Kortrijk Lyrical Theatre Company, Kunst Veredelt Roeselare and the Tielt Operetta Podium. He participated in opera productions of *Nabucco*, *La Bohème*, *Carmen*, *Aïda*, *La Traviata* and *Don Pasquale* at Music Hall and toured with them throughout Europe on several occasions. He played in the theatrical production of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and worked together with director Frank Van Laecke in the musicals *Kuifje en de zonnetempel* (*Tintin and the Temple of the Sun*) and *Daens - the musical*, '14-18 and 40-45. Rudy Suwyns also makes frequent appearances in films and television series.

photo: *Gardenia, 10 years later* (2021) © Luk Monsaert



PRODUCENTEN

laGeste (les ballets C de la B + kabinet k)

laGeste came into being in 2022, from a fusion of les ballets C de la B and kabinet k. The two Ghent dance companies had a long history of collaboration and a great artistic affinity in the search for visceral storytelling. They decided to join forces and continue their work under the new name laGeste: a home both for the intergenerational practice that Joke Laureyns and Kwint Manshoven developed at kabinet k, and for the legacy of choreographer Alain Platel, who was the pivot of les ballets C de la B for more than thirty-five years.

laGeste, written by the body.

Each project is “un monde des possibles” populated with a diversity of bodies. Bodies carry a history. They can be weighed down by it, scarred by it, permeated by it to every pore. But a body is not a prison, a scar not a condemnation. The body also holds the promise of transformation. Bodily practices emerge from that deep connection between place and time, between individual and community. We prefer movement, produced by that connection, to words, but without excluding language.

The body is a battlefield on which the great social battles are fought. Cisgenders versus fluids, the enterprising versus the unproductive, the excellent versus the limited, the identitarians versus those who think they can become anything and anyone, the privileged versus the decolonised, the old scarred by historical traumas versus the young threatened by ecological disasters, the haves versus the have-nots. This polarisation has increased enormously in the last five years, and intensified in times of pandemics and other crises. With our work, we hope to create temporary spaces where we can bridge the gap between people again.

We are building an inclusive narrative, not on the margins, but right at the heart of what we do. We aim for diversity and mixability at all levels. We would like to see more reality in the represented bodies and at the same time fight for the possibility of transformation, play and poetry, of singing our way out of the boxes we keep each other in.

www.lageste.be

The logo for laGeste, featuring the word 'laGeste' in a blue, handwritten-style script.

NTGent

As a city theatre, NTGent wants to question, motivate and rouse a diverse audience. It does so by making and presenting high-profile productions and by mobilizing theatre for social debate. Since March 2018 artistic leadership has been in hands of the Swiss director, sociologist and theatre maker Milo Rau. Stefan Bläske, his permanent dramaturg, functions as his right hand man and Steven Heene is artistic coordinator.

www.ntgent.be

The logo for NTGent, featuring the letters 'NTGent' in a bold, black, hand-drawn style.

CONTACT

Helena Elshout (spreiding)
helena@lageste.be
+32 485 32 70 58

Caroline Eliano (communicatie & pers)
caroline@lageste.be
+32 486 52 60 75

laGeste

Bijlokesite, Bijlokekaai 1
B-9000 Gent
E/ info@lageste.be
T/ 0032 9 221 75 01



www.lageste.be

WRITTEN
BY
THE
BODY

lageste