

Dossier
Created 2023
Premiere 1 February 2023, Opera Ballet Vlaanderen (BE)

Grandpa Puss; or how God disappeared

Lisaboa Houbrechts | laGeste



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“It is a dark tale. It opens wounds and sewers. It is about how children are trapped in a chain of violence. The urge to break that chain can release a tremendous life force and imagination.”

Lisaboa Houbrechts

Lisaboa Houbrechts writes and stages a family epic that spans three generations. She looks back at the times of her grandparents, her parents and her own generation. She goes in search of how the small is interwoven with the large, the intimate with the political, and the past with the present. The main character is a twelve-year-old girl who stands at the end of a long history and dives into the hidden traumas of the past. Lisaboa Houbrechts elaborates the fictional story in images, text, dance and music.

The twelve-year-old Granddaughter of All Granddaughters looks back into her grandfather's past. His childhood, the war, sexual abuse in the fraternity school and the cruel marriage with Grandma Puss.

The Granddaughter of All Granddaughters is magical. She struggles through the pool of memories to visit the children of the past. The violence done to children determines the violence of tomorrow.



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Grandpa Puss; or how God disappeared tells the story of a family breakdown in which Grandpa Puss and his son sacrifice their faith and nail Jesus to the Cross. This to the despair of Grandma Puss who wants to keep her family pious and pure in a world that is becoming more and more secular in the 1970s.

In a profound collage of intense images, texts and music, Lisaboa Houbrechts interweaves fragments of Bach's St John Passion with her own texts and she connects Bach with folk music. She tries to shape the ineffable; how the death of Jesus is linked to the secret suffering of those marked by trauma.

For this grand narrative, Lisaboa Houbrechts works with players, singers and musicians of all ages. From children to young adult performers to some established theatre monuments. She builds a house of magic and poetry in which the children of today play with the young versions of their parents and grandparents.

Lisaboa Houbrechts: "It is a dark tale. It opens wounds and sewers. It is about how children are trapped in a chain of violence. The urge to break that chain can release a tremendous life force and imagination, but it can also implode into a cycle of destruction. The space between theatre and opera is the perfect form to bring this most intimate to a radical expression."



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CREDITS

text & direction Lisaboa Houbrechts
arias, chorals and recitatives J. S. Bach
musical direction & arrangements Pedro Beriso
with Alberto Martinez, Boule Mpanya, Driss Vandekerckhove, Eddie Dumont, Elisa Soster, Elsie de Brauw, Ferre Vereecken, Jules Dorné, Pieter Ampe, Philippe Thuriot, Stefaan Degand, Wolf De Graeve, Zofia Hanna.
arrangements for accordion & tenor Philippe Thuriot
composition & realization music score Bert & Stijn Cools (granvat)
scenography & puppets Filip Peeters
costumes Oumar Dicko
lightdesign Fabiana Piccioli
dramaturgy Hildegard De Vuyst
musical dramaturgy Piet De Volder
orchestra (recording) Orkest Opera Ballet Vlaanderen
light technician Bennert Vancottem
sound technician Brecht Beuselinck
realization costumes Oumar Dicko in collaboration with costumes atelier Toneelhuis (Kathleen Van Mechelen, Kasia Mielczarek, Lieselot Osselaer, Monique Van Hassel)
realization set & puppets Filip Peeters in collaboration with atelier FroeFroe (Marc Maillard)
stage director assistant Lieselot Siddiki
spreiding Helena Elshout / laGeste

production laGeste (BE)
co-production Opera Ballet Vlaanderen (BE), Toneelhuis (BE), Le Phénix Scène nationale de Valenciennes (FR), MC 93 (FR), Opéra de Lille (FR) and Holland Festival (NL)
thanks to De School van Gaasbeek
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PRACTICAL INFO

Duration: 1h45 (no interval)

Language: Dutch, French, German (with subtitles in Dutch, French or English)

19 people are on tour: 13 cast (4 of whom are children of ages 9-12) and 6 crew.

The premiere took place on the first of February '23 in the Ghent Opera.

The tour is spring'23, then in spring and autumn 2024.

PLAYLIST

- 1, 2, 3/02/2023 Opera Ballet Vlaanderen, Gent (BE)
- 9, 10, 11, 12/02/2023 Bourla, Antwerpen (BE)
- 28/02 en 1/03/2023 Phénix Scène nationale Valenciennes (FR)
- 3, 4/03/2023 KVS in co-presentatie met Kaaitheater, Brussel (BE)
- 9, 10/03/2023 Opéra de Lille (FR)
- 16, 17, 18/03/2023 MC93, Seine-Saint-Denis (FR)
- 16, 17, 18/06/2023 Holland Festival, Amsterdam (NL)
- 2, 3/02/2024 Lessingtage, Thalia Hamburg (DE)
- 14/05/2024 De Spil, Roeselare (BE)
- 16, 17, 18/05/2024 Bourla, Antwerpen (BE)
- 21/05/2024 C-Mine, Genk (BE)

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Presentation text, credits, biographies, photos, trailer, interviews, video and radio interviews and written press can be found here: <https://www.lageste.be/en/creations/grandpa-puss-or-how-god-disappeared>

High-resolution photos and the trailer can be downloaded at this link.
<https://www.lageste.be/en/touring/grandpa-puss-or-how-god-disappeared>

BIOGRAPHY



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Short version:

Lisaboa Houbrechts (b. 1992) obtained her Master's in Drama from the School of Arts | KASK Ghent in 2016. She is a writer and director of theatrical work at the crossroads of visual arts, opera and text theatre. Houbrechts evokes history and classical repertoire through a ritual deed and shows humankind in a series of passions. The productions by Lisaboa Houbrechts are baroque and brazen but also playful and disarming. "Charming and challenging theatre," said *De Morgen* of her total spectacle *Bruegel* (2019). Together with composer Fabrizio Cassol she created *I Silenti*. It starts with the story of the musician Tcha Limberger about the forgotten Roma genocide. *I Silenti* is like a poem that tells not only about the Roma but also about everyone who has been silenced. Lisaboa Houbrecht's latest creation *Grandpa Puss; or how God disappeared*, which she created at laGeste and premiered Feb. 1, 2023, at Opera Ballet Vlaanderen in Ghent, goes one step further in integrating music and storytelling and leaves no one unmoved.

Long version:

Lisaboa Houbrechts made her first shows as a writer and director of the company Kuiperskaai. From the start her productions typically involved a large cast, a vibrant interaction between image and text, and an intelligent cross-fertilization of various disciplines: performance, music, choreography, literature and visual arts. This was already discernible in a.o. *De Schepping/The Creation* (2013) and *The Goldberg Chronicles* (2014), which was described as "an immense clash of energies" in the press: "the language is colour, the acting is images, the music is paint". In 2016, Lisaboa made a huge impression with her sparking adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*; and in September 2017, the production *1095*, based on a text by Victor Lauwers, came out. "Full of spirit and performing pleasure," wrote Lotte Philipsen in *Knack*.

From 2017 on she was part of the PULS-trajectory (Project for Upcoming talent for The Large Stage) at Toneelhuis. In her idiosyncratic adaptation of *Hamlet* (which premiered at *Love at first Sight III* in 2018) she focused on the female perspective, placing Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, at the heart of the performance.

Bruegel (2019) travels back in time to paint a kaleidoscopic portrait of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the age in which he lived. The main figure, however, is Dulle Griet (also known as Mad Meg), the master's most infamous creation: a woman denigrated as a 'battle-axe' because she purportedly went out plundering for the sake of Hell. In Houbrechts' interpretation, she is actually trying to save those objects - testimonies to vulnerable and nameless lives - from being annihilated by history and the forces that determine its course. At the same time, and with growing despair, Griet has doubts about her own identity. Far beyond any binary kind of thinking, this production speaks about the desire to acknowledge, embrace and manifest as fluid that which people call ambiguous and distasteful. The live music - both composed and improvised - conducts an exciting dialogue with the sparkling action on stage. The Baroque ensemble Harmonia Sacra from northern France and kamancheh player Mostafa Taleb provide a rich musical pallet that spans several centuries and cultures.

Houbrechts is continuing her interest in live music on stage with *I Silenti* (2021). Fabrizio Cassol, with whom Lisaboa became acquainted during her apprenticeship with les ballets C de la B for *Requiem pour L.*, a joint creation by Alain Platel and Fabrizio Cassol, asked her to direct *I Silenti* for the Théâtre de Namur. This intriguing story starts with the figure of Tcha Limberger, a famous blind Roma musician. *I Silenti* connects the Porajmos, the forgotten Roma genocide during World War II, with excerpts from Monteverdi's madrigals that speak of love and war. These two worlds merge into each other. Limberger is accompanied by a very strong ensemble of singers and musicians, while the Indian dancer Shantala Shivalingappa echoes the lost mother, she evokes the lost Indian origins of Tcha and his people.

Lisaboa Houbrechts is currently touring with *Grandpa Puss; or how God disappeared*, a creation she created at laGeste and which premiered Feb. 1, 2023, at Opera Ballet Vlaanderen in Ghent.

All other biographies: <https://www.lageste.be/en/creations/grandpa-puss-or-how-god-disappeared>

IN THE PRESS

"Taking head on a burning topicality, she sketches a poem full of tension and roughness. The proposal is dense, demanding to the point of aridity. The gesture is incredibly masterful. It cannot leave one unmoved and confirms the great talent of a rare artist, a virtuoso, clearly one to follow.."

L'oeil d'Olivier - Olivier Frégaville 02.03.23

"Lisaboa Houbrechts shows the unbearable, in a poetic manner infused with visual and musical beauty."

*Knack ****- Els Van Steenberghe 14.02.2023*

"Nothing remains untouched in Lisaboa Houbrechts' new performance. Not the body, not the soul, not Bach's St John Passion. With *Grandpa Puss*, Houbrechts proves that she is not afraid to burn her fingers on icons."

De Morgen **** - *Evelyne Coussens* 03.03.2023

"... in *Grandpa Puss; or how God disappeared*, the Flemish artist intertwines music and classical singing performed live, acting, dance and scenographic movements to generate a baroque universe capable of embracing the most antagonistic aspects of the human soul in a single movement."

Les Inrockuptibles - *Fabienne Arvers* 02.03.23

"Lisaboa Houbrechts gives her excruciating story a theatrical form that could hardly be more visceral both aesthetically and physically. ...

The young director is the creator of intimate and spectacular images in the service of extreme experiences. ...

Among the various theatrical languages she employs, music plays a magnificent leading role."

Sceneweb.fr - *Christophe Candoni* 03.03.23

"*Grandpa Puss* is not a piece to get cheerful about, but it is great as a production. ... Also, the talents of laGeste - the new name of les ballets C de la B and kabinet k -, Opera Ballet Vlaanderen and Froefroe all melt wonderfully together in this performance.

Special mention also goes to Boule Mpanya who, with a bell of a voice, as a spiritual force, can single-handedly counterbalance Flemish Catholicism and still provide a glimmer of hope in all the gloom."

Het Nieuwsblad **** - *Magali Degrande* 02.02.2023

"Houbrechts manages to capture this family epic in a fluid, hybrid form with a dozen player-singers. This is, more than opera, musical theatre. Nervous theatrical dialogues devolve into dance and hushed visual poetry. The St John Passion (with the addition of the aria *Erbarme dich*) sounds lofty, thanks to Opera Vlaanderen's soloists and the imploring singer-dancer Boule Mpanya, but never bombastic, thanks to Philippe Thuriot's accordion and ominous keynote."

De Standaard *** - *Gilles Michiels* 03.02.2023

"It's a stage UFO, this masterful and twilight performance that denounces so bluntly, and over three generations, the way in which rape and moral harassment perpetrated by the Church have been able to destroy children and their family history. "

Télérama - *Fabienne Pascaud* 07.03.2023

"By pointing out the apparent contradiction between the ethics of forgiveness and the transmission of trauma, Lisaboa Houbrechts challenges our perspectives on such a vast and somewhat mined subject."

mouvement.net - *Agnès Dopff* 16.03.2023

"In this ambitious, intense and shocking performance, Lisaboa Houbrechts skillfully exposes the uncertainties and questions of a personal quest."

Hugues Le Tanneurs - Transfuge Magazine March 2023

"Put in religious terms, Houbrechts shows a path to hope and love, and thus to something that, quite in the vein of J.S. Bach, may be called divine."

Etcetera - Klaas Tindemans



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THE PRESS ABOUT PREVIOUS PERFORMANCES BY LISABOA HOUBRECHTS

About *I Silenti*:

"Monteverdi in the mix with the Roma music of Tcha Limberger. An ode, not to silence, but to red-hot life. Surprising, rich, multicoloured and challenging."

*Annemarie Peeters in De Standaard **** 2 July 2021*

About *Bruegel*:

Laudatory words about Lisaboa Houbrechts: "one of the new talents of the Flemish theater scene,"

Béatrice Delvaux in Le Soir, 9 January 2020

"*Bruegel* is a fresque in which theatre, dance, visual arts, strong Bruegelian scenes and music mingle. The cast, consisting almost entirely of outstanding young female actresses, like Anne-Laure Vandeputte (25 years old) who is famous in Flanders for her tv performances and plays the Dulle Griet, ensures a great energy."

Guy Duplat in La Libre Belgique, 8 December 2019

"In *Bruegel* Lisboa Houbrechts pulls out all the stops: this is visually stunning theatre in which a wealth of ideas is spread open."

*Jan Dertaelen in De Morgen **** 8 December 2019*

WRITTEN
BY
THE
BODY



laGeste

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

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