

WIM MERTENS

The Belgian composer Wim Mertens (born 1953) is an international recording and performing artist who has given several concerts, as a soloist and with his ensemble all over Europe, in North and Central America, Japan and in Russia. Wim Mertens studied at the Conservatory of Brussels and graduated in political and social sciences at the K.U.Leuven and Musicology at the R.U. Gent. He plays piano and classical guitar. He sings in a characteristically highpitched voice, using a carefully crafted personal language.

Since 1980 he has composed many pieces in different formats, from short, accessible songs or Lieder to magnanimous and complex three and four parts cycles, and for different settings: from piano solo to chamber music ensembles and symphonic orchestra. He often writes for unusual instrumentations: twelve piccolos, ten basstrombones, thirteen clarinets. Since his recording debut in 1980, titled *For amusement only*, an electronic composition for pinball machines, Wim Mertens has released more than 60 albums.

He wrote *American Minimal Music (1980)*, the first book which deals in depth with the school of American repetitive music. Early landmark albums are *Vergessen (1982)* and *Struggle for pleasure*, including *Close cover*, still one of his classics.

The 1985 album *Maximizing the audience*, marks the introduction of the vocal element in Mertens' music. Throughout the years the composer has expressed the increasing vocal inspiration of his music on piano and voice albums such as *A man of no fortune, and with a name to come (1986)*, *After virtue (1988)* and *Stratégie de la rupture (1991)*, *Jérémiades (1995)*, *Der heisse brei (2000)* and *Un respiro (2005)*.

Mertens also released albums for various ensembles: *Motives for writing (1988)*, *Jardin clos (1996)*, *Shot and echo - A sense of place (1992)*, *Integer valor - Intégrale (1999)*, *Skopos (2003)*, *Partes extra partes (2005)*, recorded with the Brussels Philharmonic and *Receptacle (2007)*, performed by a group of 17 musicians, all women and *L'heure du loup (2008)*.

Started in 1991 with the trilogy *Alle dinghe*, the ambitious cycle *Qua*, covering 37 cd's, followed by the tetralogy *Gave van niets* in 1994, the trilogy *Kere Weerom* in 1999 and the tetralogy *Aren lezen* in 2001. The whole cycle *Qua* is released as a box set in 2009. Other special releases included the 1997's guitar album *Sin embargo* and *Moment (2003)*, a 13 albums box set covering the period 1980-1989 with 80 compositions.

In 2006, first DVD live recording, *What you see is what you hear*, including 16 compositions selected from 25 years' career. Since July 2003 several scores by the composer are published.

Particular projects include the composition and live performing of original music for piano and voice for the silent movies *La femme de nulle part* by Louis Delluc and *The land beyond the sunset* by Harold Shaw in 1993 and original composition for the new men collection Christian Dior Homme, performed live with the Wim Mertens Ensemble during the fashion show in Paris in early 2008.

In 2002, Wim Mertens started with the release of a live series entitled *Years without history* composed of live recordings completed since the 80's. The series includes so far 7 albums : *Moins de mètre, assez de rythme (2002)*, *In the absence of hindrance (2002)*, *Cave musicam (2002)*, *Not yet, no longer (2004)*, *With no need for seeds (2004)*, *The promise kept in advance (2008)*, only included in the 6 cd's box set *Years without history vol. 1-6 (2008)* and *Nosotros (2008)*.

Wim Mertens also works for the theatre and the movies. He wrote several scores such as Jan Fabre's performance's *The Power of theatrical madness (1984)*, Peter Greenaway's film *The belly of an architect (1987)*, *Je pense à vous* by the brothers Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne (1992), Marion Hänsel's film *Li - Between the devil and the deep blue sea (1992)*, Paul Cox's *Father Damien (1999)*, among others.

Actually the artist is performing with different settings : Solo piano, Duo (violin or clarinet, piano), Trio (violin or clarinet, cello, piano) with different Ensembles and also with Symphonic Orchestra.

2009's releases include the box set *Music and film*, composed of three cd's covering a large selection of Mertens' film music and the re-release of the 1999 soundtrack album *Father Damien*.

In June 2009, EMI Classics gathers together for the first time the cycle *Qua*, started in 1990 avec *Alle dinghe*, followed by *Gave van niets* in 1994, *Kere weerom* in 1999 and *Aren lezen* in 2001. The 37 albums are now available in an elegant box set. At the same time, the Wim Mertens ensemble studio album *The world tout court* is released.

Zee versus Zed has been released in 2010. With this album, Wim Mertens releases 10 pieces for an ensemble composed of strings, brass, harp and guitar. With titles such as *Zusammensetzen*, *Zing'up*, *Zoet'kemiesch* and the vocal *Z's rival*, the last letter of the alphabet serves as fil conducteur for the new album.

2011 has been a special year for Wim Mertens :

With *Series of ands - Immediate givens*, his new double album, the composer achieves an enlarged musical scale. In total, more than 30 musicians participated to this ambitious production.

A complete scale of strings, horns, guitars, harp and even an authentic harpsichord (it's the first time that Mertens includes this instrument in his music) ensures a hyper orchestral sound and a striking development of the composer's palette.

For the Festival van Vlaanderen in Gent, Belgium, Mertens composed *A Starry Wisdom* and performed two sold out concerts in the Cathedral St Baafs (solo piano) and with his Ensemble in the Capitol, september 2011.

Wim Mertens released the double CD - □ DVD *Open continuum*, the live recordings with the Tenerife Symphony Orchestra (OST) in de Sala Sinfonica del Auditorio de Tenerife Adan Martin in Spain on 28th June 2008. Mertens, who played the piano and also sings, presents 19 compositions from his extensive repertoire for this special setting for symphonic orchestra. The composer sees a new relation between the pianist-□singer and symphonic orchestra, 'an interaction within the 3 players: soloist-orchestra-conductor'.

For the opening of the new building for the laboratory Education and Research 4, on 8th December 2011, he presented with a large ensemble the title *Telles Quelles* a work that Mertens - himself a former student of the university KU Leuven - has composed especially for this occasion. He has been inspired by, among others, the scientific literature by the researchers Bart Destrooper, Peter Carmeliet and Catherine Verfaillie. The Spanish video artist Cristóbal Vila has been asked to create a 3D video for the track.

In 2011 Wim Mertens has also been commissioned to write and present live a composition by the city of Guimarães, Portugal, Capital of Culture 2012. On March 7th 2012 Wim Mertens performed with the Fundação Orquestra Estúdio directed by Rui Massena at the CC Vila Flor in Guimarães the world premiere of *When tool met wood*.

On the 5th of March 2012, precisely 30 years after the release of *Struggle for pleasure*, Wim Mertens releases the double album '*Struggle for pleasure - Double Entendre*'. Included are 10 previously unreleased compositions from the Mertens- Archive, all composed in the same period 1980-1982. He also rerecorded 2 titles *Salernes* and *Gentleman of Leisure*. These pieces were all performed on 15 en 16 March 2012 by the Wim Mertens Ensemble during the Rewind Series at the Ancienne Belgique in Brussels.

Also in 2012 the composer released the *A starry wisdom* album.

On the October 28, 2014 in Sint-Maartens Cathedral in Ypres was the world premiere of *Voice of the Living*. The evening's work is carried out by the extensive Wim Mertens Ensemble. *Voice of the Living* is a composition commissioned by the Chancellery of the Belgian Prime Minister in the context of the commemoration organised by the Belgian government for the hundredth anniversary of the First World War 1914-1918. The concert was offered to the citizens of the town of Ypres.

The new studio album *Charaktersketch* is been released in May 2015. First part of a triptych.

What are we, locks, to do? is the second part in the triptych *Cran aux Oeufs* (2015-2016)

Part I, *Charaktersketch* (2015), takes Europe and Brussels anno 2015 as a central theme and refers to the changed position of Central Europe as a carrier of culture and economical power.

Mertens situates the second part in Egyptian Alexandria in the third century B.C.

The composer links his compositions among other things to the poet Callimachus, the royal family Ptolemy and the figure of Queen Berenice II, who promises to cut her hair if her husband returns safe from war. *What are we, locks, to do?* mixes myth and reality and investigates the political power and the cultural influence in the Egypt of the third century B.C.

What are we, locks, to do? will be released on March 2016.

The third part will be an orchestral production.