Dear,

Hereby included you can find more background about the concept of our Chamber Opera.

The Nightingale’s own page will be online from 5/11/2022.

The libretto link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zzUA9EtXZOHzaTcg834RK_QRJanxsSmQ/view?usp=sharing>

Sincerely Yours,

SS DayDream

***THE NIGHTINGALE***

*Chamber Opera*

*for*

*mezzo-soprano, bass*

*piano, cello, flute*

*DJ, dancer & wallpaper film*

*fairytale based on H.C. Andersen*

*adapted by & music composition by Sigrid Keunen*



PROJECT DESCRIPTION: 2

PRELUDE

SYNOPSIS

TRANSDISCIPLINAIRY APPROACH

LIBRETTO

MUSIC

STRUCTURE of THE STORYLINE

STAGING: 5

ON STAGE

BACK STAGE

DECOR

WALLPAPER FILM

MECHANICAL NIGHTINGALE

DANCER

RIBBONS

COSTUMES

TECHNICAL DETAILS 10

BACKGROUND DRAMATURGY STORY. The Nightingale flies into… 11

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

PRELUDE

The Nightingale, based on H.C. Andersen’s fairytale, is rearranged in a particular, creative and contemporary fashion by Sigrid Keunen.

It will be performed by a Storyteller (mezzo-soprano), Emperor (bass), Lord Chamberlain (dancer), Court Lord (piano), Lackey (cello), Major (DJ), Nightingale (flute), Mechanical Nightingale (recorded flute).

It is an opera, presented from a contemporary vantage point, where acting, dance & body language, contemporary music and wallpaper film (papercuts of H.C. Andersen and an animation film, see page 6) go hand in hand.

Via the fairy tale, the story that has symbolism in abundance, it is our scope to offer the audience an experience in which they feature as travellers from across the world. The musicians and dancer are fellow fairy travellers and, ultimately, we will all sing a laud together. The many layers, both visible and invisible, that make up the tale are invitations to (self-)reflection.

The Nightingale is an innovative and touching opera about giving and taking, happiness and sadness, man and woman, nature and technology, freedom and structures, and being rich beyond appearances. H.C. Andersen’s fairytale confronts us with those contrasts. And along with the elements of antitheses, woven through the storyline, the Nightingale becomes a metaphor for freedom, a symbol of singing from the heart and a task to dance with nature.

Together with the Emperor, we undertake a journey to a place where intensity and beauty reign supreme. Just as the Swedish soprano, Jenny Lind, was Andersen’s muse while writing his fairy tale, so is H.C. Andersen the present-day muse for our chamber opera.

SYNOPSIS

The Emperor resides in a palace in an immeasurable and royal distant country. The country lacks nothing. Everything is of the highest quality. In a newspaper article he reads that in this place of perfection the Nightingale reigns supreme. The Emperor did not know this! He orders the Lord Chamberlain to find the bird and bring it to the palace to hear it sing. But no one in the palace knows how to identify the bird, except the small blind blond girl who helps in the kitchen. So off they go on their quest: the small blind blond girl, the gardener and the woodman. And in a forest, where the trees kiss a sandy beach, they come upon the Nightingale who is singing fiercely. He would very much like to sing his most beautiful sing for the Emperor at the palace. The Emperor sheds a tear. Unexpectedly, the Emperor receives a gift from the King of the Box: a decorated mechanical bird. Both birds sing together. The Emperor is so smitten by the splendour of the mechanical bird that he loses all interest in the real Nightingale, upon which the bird returns to the forest. The mechanical bird sings the same song forever and a day until it breaks down.  
The Emperor, then breaks down too. He falls seriously ill. Disease-struck, a Ghost, his ghost whispers dark and gloomy words to him.  
The Emperor requests the Lord Chamberlain to ask the Nightingale to sing for him and chase away the Ghost. Which is what the Nightingale does.

The Emperor recovers and finds happiness again and decides to plant a tree in front of the palace in which the Nightingale can makes the most beautiful songs resound. The ribbons that once served as a leash, have become flowers. Flowers in the tree. Flowers to signify wishes. Heartfelt wishes for everyone’s benefit.And as a gift to the Emperor, The Nightingale offers a Laud or an all-together-song.

TRANSDISCIPLINAIRY APPROACH

This chamber opera presents itself as a transdisciplinary performance.

The Nightingale keeps one foot in the great tradition, and steps boldly onto innovative pathways. We perpetuate the classical storytelling tradition by proposing a gripping thriller with surprising plot twists and passionate action, with endearing, intriguing and intimidating characters.

Also, in the scenography we refer to the great tradition, deliberately making use of a lo-fi, proto-mechanical and vintage apparatus, and confidently showing it on stage. A way to evoke Andersen’s time. While all this might please and entertain a more casual audience, the pointy and outspoken dramaturgy, the contemporary music score and wildly lyrical storyline will certainly appeal to the more adventurous spectator. In this it differs by definition from the bulk of music theatre.

This transdisciplinary approach proudly confirms its original vocation as a story told by different dimensions where content and synthesis of all art forms correlate where music, libretto, movement and staging go hand in hand.

LIBRETTO

In her own writings, Sigrid Keunen’s conception of language is at the same time very visual. Whether those are stories, poems or more reflective writings, the abundance and strength of their imagery always immediately appeal to the reader’s fantasy. The text is very playful and great material with musical and rhythmical noteworthiness in every word and sentence.

She cherishes and explores the interaction with a younger public and the inner child of the adult.

In adapting this fairytale, Sigrid has thoroughly and deeply explored the meaning of the original storyline and the spiritual meaning of the characters. As is the case in Andersen’s stories, nothing is as it first appears, everything has multiple layers.

The Nightingale is an innovative out-of-the-box concept where the intersection between the arts is equal and forms a junction where artists meet and converge.

This fairytale arouses the audience deeply and consciously due to the animistic cosmos of H.C. Andersen. His power of storytelling, his universe showing a (hidden) reality, a reality that survives time or hasn't lost its power. A universe where human and animal characters display their souls.

A universe where love and perseverance can bring you anywhere.

A universe that continues in the written wishes of the audience.

A universe that continues in a public dance event.

MUSIC

For Sigrid, her music acts like a chameleon. It can therefore be adapted in relation to word, storyline, rhythm and movement. All these converge into a whole that makes music sing from the heart. Music and body language are equally important keys to the magnification of our being. These languages are intense, vivacious, brisk, animated, keen and all come with a pinch of salt.

The Nightingale will be told by 4 voices: breath, beat, strings & wind, whereby décor and light amplify those voices.

The music in itself is tonal as it underscores the power of the storyline. The rhythm and samples of the DJ have an essential significance. The DJ’s intervention adds a smile to the whole performance, to the spectator and also to the inner voice.

In her way of composing, co-creation is an important component. “Not the What, but the How, is what I leave as a composer to the musician. In other words, I’m the tone-setter with a clearly defined musical outcome where I invite the singer and musician to become a composer of her / his own score. In this context, the final score (written in Sibelius Ultimate) will be noted without any sign of expression.”

STRUCTURE of THE STORYLINE  
The chamber opera will take approximately 60 minutes and will be divided into 3 Acts and 8 scenes.

*Wallpaper film can be video animations, actual shadow play or alternatively: overhead projectors with live animations. It acts as decor, counterpointing actions, supporting or even taking over the storyline. It serves the storytelling in many different ways, opening up different options to the audiovisual creatives involved.*

**PRELUDE**

When the audience enters the venue:

Recorded natural nightingale sound is sound across the theatre and plus video on stage.

The Emperor is sitting on his throne with his back to the audience.   
Storyteller: Introduction + Laud or all-together-song

*Walls are not used, white lit, the emperor on his throne.*

**ACT 1. Scene 1: Once upon a time …**

The Narrator continues introducing the story.

Lord Chamberlain and Court Lord enter the stage.

The Nightingale is in the back of the hall and plays discreetly some random notes.

*Pot of 5,5cm slides, pulled by a rope from C.J. to C.C.*

**Scene 2:** **The Emperor rings a bell**

The Emperor on his throne is turned around whilst festive modern music resounds.  
Conversation between Emperor and Lord Chamberlain.

*Walls: newspaper clippings, topcam on desktop from the emperor’s chair, or slides from overheadprojector.*

*The Lord Chamberlains uses different bird sounds to communicate. Those bird exclamations are depicted by ornithological visuals of the referred birds.*

*Pot of 10cm with a branch and 2 leaves slides, pulled by a rope from C.J. to C.C.*

**ACT 2. Scene 3: Walk**

The quest / Nightingale found

Nightingale remains on venue for daily promenades with 12 ribbons.

*Walls: little blond girl in the Kitchen, cutting vegetables, each time a yes or a no comes it’s a social media like thumbs up/down*

*Animals transforming: 3D morphings of the used animals (cow, rabbit)*

*Pot of 20cm with a branch and 4 leaves slides, pulled by a rope from C.J. to C.C.*

**Scene 4: The Nightingale**

Nightingale enters scene (côté jardin) to perform at the court

Concert of the 2 Nightingales

Nightingale disappears from the scene.

*Walls: Lord Camberlain continued bird species pictures*

*Flute / nightingale is tied with 12 ribbons to the emperors chair, either stretching or winding in/out eventually getting stuck*

*Pot of 30cm with a branch and 6 leaves slides, pulled by a rope from C.J. to C.C.*

**Scene 5: Knock, knock**

Present from The King of the Box.

The Mechanical Nightingale, unperturbed, keeps on singing and eventually breaks down while the

Physical Box comes dropped from the sky

*Walls: the King of the Box, with the two boxes, full frame 3 sides, transforming to logo’s, pictograms,*

*Pot of 50cm with a branch and 10 leaves slides, pulled by a rope from C.J. to C.C.*

**ACT 3. Scene 6: The Emperor eats**

The Storyteller exits and will hence be heard through the speakers.

*Walls: many interactions possible between live and video/ animation.*

*The boundaries get blurred between real and projected.*

*shifting ‘imago’s’.*

*Pot of 60cm with a small tree slides, pulled by a rope from C.J. to C.C.*

**Scene 7: Ghost**

The Emperor eats lots and lots, he eats too much, he falls ill, very ill.

*Visions, illusions, nightmares, pipe dream and dialogue with phantom (by the Storyteller).*

*Walls: complete takeover of the storyline, while the physical actions stay present as their own shadow.*

*Pot of 70cm with a small tree slides, pulled by a rope from C.J. to C.C.*

**Scene 8: Awakening**

The Emperor suffers a transformation: he descends from his throne  
The ribbons turn into flowers that represent wishes.  
The Nightingale gifts the present to the Emperor: close harmony of the laud.  
*Film: branches and leaves*

*The Nightingale returns.*

*Conversation between Emperor and Nightingale*

*Walls: back to white walls, no images. intimate.*

*Pot of 1m with a tree and 12 ribbons slides, pulled by a rope from C.J. to C.C.*

**DANCE PARTY by the DJ for the audience in the entrance hall (or TBD)**

STAGING:

ON STAGE

Storyteller: Inez Carsauw *mezzosoprano*

Emperor: Kevin Neville *bass*

Lord Chamberlain: Oriane Varak *dancer*

Court Lord: Katrien Vercauter *piano*

Lackey: Dina Meunier *cello*

Major: Mika Oki *DJ*

Nightingale & Mechanical Nightingale: Meinse Verhulst *flute*

BACK STAGE

*Stage Design & Visual Scenography: Sam Vanoverschelde*

As a director and visual artist, Sam Vanoverschelde builds bridges in time, reflecting on topics as identity, ecology and ideologies.

From spearheading VJ collective Visual Kitchen and the Cimatics Festival to teaming up with performance icon Davis Freeman. From going wild at underground raves to his explorations of the experimental classical music world transforming musical scores from the likes of Xenakis, Stockhausen, Berio or Feldman into imagery.

Storytelling is key, be it abstract or classically formal. (www.12-13.be)

*Costume Design: Sophie Paternotte*

Knitwear, crochet, needle lace, embroidery, boutis, bead weaving, macramé ... all these techniques are mastered by this needle wonder. Touched by everything, she has collaborated with theatres and opera houses in Lausanne, Munich, New York, Amsterdam and… Berlin. She created all the knitwear for the film " La femme de Gilles " by Fréderick Fontein and hosted international workshops at the highly reputed fashion design section of the La Cambre art high school in Brussels and the AKDT institute in Libramont. No surprise many Belgian designers come to her for the realization of their unique pieces.

*Light Design & Technical input: Michael Janssens*

Light anyone? Michael has put his experience and skills at the service of numerous music venues and festivals, artists and bands. Under the many illustrious names, he worked with, we find festivals such as Pukkelpop (alternative rock), Bâtard (vanguard performance and theatre) and the internationally renowned KunstenFestivaldesArts, musicians like Scala, Arno and Stef Kamiel Karlens and scenic artists amongst whom Katia Dreyer, Hugo Dehaes, Jan Fabre and of course… Sigrid Keunen.

DÉCOR

The decor with its analogue, old theatre techniques, furnished with digital projections. The features of the  visuals  are abstracts, a micro-macro bodily expression of music and words suggesting extra dimensions. They are sparsely present and stand for the mystical and intangible, woven into the web of emotions, intertwined with the harmony and storyline.

WALLPAPER FILM

This movie is part of the décor and contains the slow moving papercuts and drawings by H.C. Andersen and an animation film for the Mechanic Nightingale and at the end, the tree with leaves and flowers (ribbons).

The video scenography will expose an extra dimension to the whole, in other words it becomes an overlay to complete the expression of the characters.  
Sigrid Keunen coined this term. The use of wallpaper has been a creative and practical way to color the interior since the Middle Ages. In her artistic opinion, the wallpaper designs an atmosphere that adds value to and somehow affects the atmosphere of the place. It's not like this movie will be a different character on stage as we can see from other artists. It will be just a wonderful moving wallpaper showing at one point the in circles flying Mechanical Nightingale.

To make transformation even more powerful, those papercuts will boost an opportunity for all:

*“The papercuts were not only meant to be a pleasure for the eye but also a challenge to the mind. Often there was a hidden meaning in the paper-cuttings - in the same way, as we know it from the fairy tales: on the surface it could amuse, in the depth it would amaze.”*

*From: http://andersen.museum.odense.dk/klip/billedstart.asp?language=en*

MECHANICAL NIGHTINGALE

The King of the Box has sent a small package. The box is dangling from a cord. The box is opened but proves empty because the Mechanical Nightingale is set free to fly in the animation film.

In Andersen’s tale the mechanical bird was state-of-the-art, top-notch, awe-inspiring. We put a premium on it by giving it a life on screen. The 2D screen has become a prime provider of visual incentives. And when the power dies, there is no flying.

DANCER

The Lord Chamberlain or dancer is the central figure and a dignitary of the Emperor, storyline and music. On the one hand she makes everything flow together and on the other hand she has her own typical way of moving. And to strengthen her pigheaded and headstrong character, she is only communicating in sprechgesang (somewhere between speaking and singing). Her language consists of onomatopoeia, and in this story only word-sounds of birds.

Body expression with movements is very important in our chamber opera. In the corporality of each performer when they are not playing their instrument, so that their bodies, through a posture, a targeted tension, continue to tell us the fable that runs through them.

We are committed to the physical quality of each artist, in the sense that he embodies a character, beyond his musical instrument. Thus, each character will be characterized by his, own gestures. It is not strictly speaking about dance, but rather about a physical work aiming at creating a repertoire of movements to incarnate a figure. We will seek to establish an organic intertwining of music, text, and body by creating porosity through the body. Punctually, the physical score will suspend the narrative and the music, generating a transitory poetic space.

The physical scores will be approached around the specific dynamics of each human and animal-character.

RIBBONS

They make up a sort of leash that is used to guide the Nightingale around on their daily walks through the palace. At the end of the performance, those 12 ribbon chords turn into flowers in the tree. What we see resembles a Tibetan tree to which wishing flags are tied.  
And those flower-wishes become tangible and real for the public: on the way out, there are boxes available, provided with ribbons and ballpoints. Each member of the audience can write down a wish. Ultimately, the ribbons do not tie anyone down, but instead give a tangible form to a sense of freedom. A wish by and for each and everyone, all incentives to fly.

Sigrid Keunen is an artist in the broadest sense of the word. As composer of this narrative her main purpose is to gift the audience immaterial presents. The presents comprise all transdisciplinary elements that are part of the chamber opera. They represent and present the narrative. The immaterial ribbon is a subtle invitation to immerse ourselves in our body of knowledge and experience. Keunen does not see a right way of unwrapping the gifts. She shows the audience the ins and outs of the gift, a true act of affect and hope. And this brings us to Keunen’s concept of ‘The Artistic Perpetuum Mobile’. Like the pebbles, that draws circles in the water surface, creative acts expand and generate non-stop movements.

COSTUMES

Costumes, headgear & shoes turn singers and musicians into sculptures. They, individually and collectively, become a universal character that invites the audience to participate in the quest for freedom.

STORYTELLER: white long skirt + white t-shirt & vest + white gymnastics shoes

EMPEROR: long golden / blue / red cloak + white Aladdin pants & t-shirt + crown + white moccasins

NIGHTINGALE: brown jacket with a red upright collar and a piece of red tail

his suit is finished with a light gray shirt + light gray Aladdin pants + brow moccasins

LORD CHAMBERLAIN:

Black Swallow-Tailed Coat + white shirt + black Aladdin pants + black gymnastics shoes

+ white paper claw fingers with extra-long right forefinger (refers to a conductor’s baton)

COURT LORD & LACKEY:

Black Swallow-Tailed Coat + white shirt + black Aladdin pants + white gymnastics shoes

MAJOR: White Swallow-Tailed Coat + white shirt + white Aladdin pants + black gymnastics shoes

*For the 4 members of the COURT: white snapback caps*

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Needed decor:

White background / 2 white sloping sidewalls / white ballet floor

High Throne of the Emperor or Tennis Court Umpire Chair (aluminium or wood) / on 2 or 4 wheels

Tabouret for the cellist & a wooden music stand if necessary

Small wooden white portable table to attach to the DJ with white ribbons

Mechanical Nightingale (descending yellow cardboard box + image of bird 🡪movie)

Pulley system for the box of the Mechanic Nightingale

8 trees in a pot: one for every scene (plastic or ceramic) & sliding from C.J. to C.C.

from very small to large (pots from 5,5cm high to 1m high)

Ribbons: in yellow, light red and light blue

For the walk of the Nightingale: 3 ribbons of ca. 5m

Ca. 1,5cm x 10cm: 12 pieces pinned to the last presented tree

Ca. 1,5cm x 10cm: depending on the number of spectators

in a big green wooden box for the audience

+ presented blue markers to write the wishes

Platform: minimum of 10m wide x 8m deep

Light design

Mixing console for lights

Rotating light props on stage + stationary spots on actors

3 beamers

Sound: Mixing console for DJ

Technical requirements:

Request for the use of the basic theatre equipment

Maintenance of costumes & iron and board

Other possible details will be given after our notion of the technical data sheet of the venue

No further special requests regarding the construction.

BACKGROUND DRAMATURGY STORY.

The Nightingale flies into...

The task to dance with nature wherein the basic idea is: “*It is only with*

*the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” -A. de Saint Exupery-*

The Nightingale flies into...

Transformation of the Emperor:

He has been emperor from childhood onwards. The Nightingale touches and opens his heart, but so does the Mechanical Nightingale and that renders him ill. He becomes very ill and after a horrific dream the Nightingale wakes him up. He would like to return a favour to the wondrous bird: a tree! A tree as a safe haven for the Nightingale and other birds.

The Nightingale flies in between history and today...

At present this quote is still relevant:

A bird is known by its note and a man by his talk. Every creature expresses and manifests itself in their unique way, sculpted by nature and nurture.

The Nightingale and his mechanical likeness or natural beauty versus artificial is all about being confronted with the antithesis between the natural world and the virtual world that are parts of our daily existence.

What’s the impact of the internet and social media on the way we genuinely communicate?

When Andersen composed his tale in 1843, people were still living the first industrial revolution.

Is Andersen’s tale still topical?

Do we see nature still as an object that we are not attached to?

Is the fourth industrial revolution (propelled by A.I.) that we are living at present about a shift in awareness? Are we striking a balance? Will deep learning give us deeper insights?

How do we preserve our natural being and inner strength when algorithms and robots impact our lives? How do we juggle publicity, development, screens, attitudes, creativity and humour in children’s education and development?

What we try to establish is a homecoming in every sense of the word.

We urge you to embrace yourselves unconditionally, to follow your heart and inherent nature. And as Friedrich Nietzsche said:*“We like to be out in nature so much because it has no opinion about us.”*  
The Nightingale flies into...

What is the Nightingale’s message?

Loes Vrolijk describes it perfectly on [www.kerncoaching.nl](http://www.kerncoaching.nl):

*The Chinese Nightingale by H.C. Andersen is a fairy tale that centres on authenticity, on doing what you like and what comes natural to you. The Nightingale sings from the top of his voice. It sings because it deeply enjoys singing. The appreciation of the listeners is not his central concern. Passion and talent outweigh popularity and success. The narrative invites you to look for the things that energize you. The Nightingale is not triggered by reward nor punishment. What matters are freedom, intimacy (the emperor’s tears) and meaning. He fully gasps what renders him powerful, he can perform as no other. In the course of the tale, scene by picturesque scene, the audience will be invited to seek out their talents and passions. What makes you reach towards the stars?*