

# MOCKUMENTARY OF A CONTEMPORARY SAVIOUR

*Wim Vandekeybus / Ultima Vez*

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*Interview by Pieter D'Hooghe*

It was 1987 when Wim Vandekeybus amassed international recognition with *What the Body Does Not Remember*. Thirty years later the producer continues to search for ways to challenge himself and surprise his audience. “I really have no interest in producing two identical performances. I much prefer to explore virgin territory and seek out the authenticity of the unexpected.”

“When, at the end of the 80s, I saw Martin Scorsese’s *The Last Temptation of Christ* about the final days of Jesus, I was fascinated by this biblical story. Ever since then I have been playing with the idea of producing a piece with a religious slant to it. With *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour* I’m putting one of my oldest ideas onto the stage.”

**What stopped you from putting words into deeds for so long?**

“Religion is no simple and crystal-clear matter. I thought it important to know exactly what I was dealing with and allowed myself the time to research the subject. Over the years I have dug steadily deeper into it. That’s how I came across the *Apocrypha*, stories that were once part of the Bible but were later censored from the Book. I looked further than Christianity and detected both contrasts as well as similarities between the various religions. A phenomenon that recurs in many of the religions is the presence of or the waiting for a Messiah or a Saviour.”

**Why did the idea of a Messiah appeal to you so much?**

“The whole idea of a figure who sets himself up as a divine messenger and evangelist of all knowledge is of all ages. In a world where people are searching for the meaning of life, you’ll always have people who will propagate the definitive answer. In the Western world we are probably less involved in this on a religious level. However, you notice that

at present fear and hopelessness are again surfacing and also religion is winning more followers once again. Because: ‘When do we like God? When we need him.’ It’s also exactly in such periods of crisis that there are always a few people who use the situation to appoint themselves as the evangelists of all answers. False prophecy interspersed with impossible to redeem promises and truths. Such Saviours manipulate humanity at its weakest moment. In *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour* this is one of the predominant subjects.”

**You opt for a science-fiction setting. This mockumentary is not set in the present but in the future.**

“I’m not someone who opens the newspaper, reads about a particular event and thinks: Right, I’m going to produce a piece about it”. Burning flags or openly proclaiming extreme standpoints about today’s society on the stage is too closely linked to the present. By working with a possible future – since it isn’t the actual future – you free yourself from concepts such as ‘time’ and ‘place’. Disposing of a defined setting in a story gives one the freedom to approach a critical subject such as religion from a human standpoint, ridding oneself of the present socio-political undertones. We treat religion as a man-made product and science fiction lends itself extremely well to it. Ursula Le Guin once wrote: “*Science fiction is not prescriptive; it is descriptive.*” Sci-fi doesn’t make any predictions regarding the future but works from the now. This imaginary futuristic world on the stage questions humanity in a mockumentary way. And just like the false saviours we too owe answers.”

**How does the world look?**

“Our future is twofold. On the one hand there is an outside world that has become unliveable through a profusion of information. As soon as something happens we’re overwhelmed with reports which translates into a *white noise*. Even before something

happens and is reported the next incident is already there. It results in a paralysis of time and evolution and leads to the human brain simply crashing. The abundance of manifestations also leads to the relativity of truth. The overdose of information transforms into utter disinformation resulting in total implosion. This outside world is unbounded in the literal sense of the word. There are no countries anymore. All that remains are remnants of cultures in the form of languages, customs and vague memories. The boundless endlessness and arbitrariness lead to unremitting fury. Humanity is balanced on the ever-present border with madness. The Chosen Ones are saved from the *white noise*-dominated earth and brought to the *safe room*, another world, as well as being the space where this *mockumentary* plays itself out. In our eyes, the future is a visual game of abstracted primal elements in which man occupies a lasting central role. For what concerns the development of the scenography, we worked together with Meyrem Bayram, a visual artist who works with basic materials and keeps man in mind as a part of the stage landscape. The costumes are the work of Isabelle Lhoas, an old hand at Ultima Vez. Her outfits flirt with the 70s. The fashion back then of flared trousers and oversized collars gives a wonderful futuristic feeling. Think of the typical sci-fi films from that time like George Lucas' *THX 1138* and *Star Wars*. Moreover, the cultural background of *The Chosen* was also taken into account."

### **The Chosen?**

"That's right. A diverse group who are saved by an infantile Messiah figure who brings them one by one to the safe room. Now, not everyone feels 'saved' right away. The space is sterile and stripped of materiality. Immortality reigns and the chosen are doomed to live together for eternity in this silent space. Moreover, they are also plagued by unanswered questions such as: 'Why is it precisely us who are chosen? What is our hope? Is this so-called deliverance a curse or a blessing?' Doubt reigns."

### **As producer you yourself invariably play God while choosing the cast. How did you put together the group?**

"To be able to work with as diverse a group as possible is extremely important to me. Jason

Quarles is Afro-American, Yun Liu represents the Chinese one-child policy, the Siberian Maria Kolegova is level-headed and has an inner instinct for survival and Saïd reflects the mystery of the Arab world. Flavio, Anabel and Dan represent the remnants of Western culture. Human as they are, cultural conflicts are not excluded. The text – together with dance and music – guides us through this performance and came about during the creation process, something which guaranteed its organic character. Right from the start Bart Meuleman played an active role in the rehearsals. The writer is master in putting into words the shrewdness of humanity in distress without losing sight of putting oneself in perspective and the lyricism of human humour."

### **The world is in a negative spiral and the Saviour only safeguards a number of people... With a view to a new beginning after total destruction, I would imagine that he only picks out perfection?**

"You'd be wrong. The chosen are the anti-heroes, *a bunch of losers*. The fact that nowadays everyone's striving for perfection means we've lost the *loser value*. The Messiah chooses his people precisely because they're imperfect. They're unsure, they lie and are a touch perverse and victims of their desires and instincts as well as of social conditioning. These people are prejudiced, power hungry and materialistic. Self-interest prevails and doubt dominates. Behind their apparent steely façade often hides much misery and insecurity."

### **Music has always played a prominent role in your performances. I'm trying to imagine a soundtrack to go with it all...**

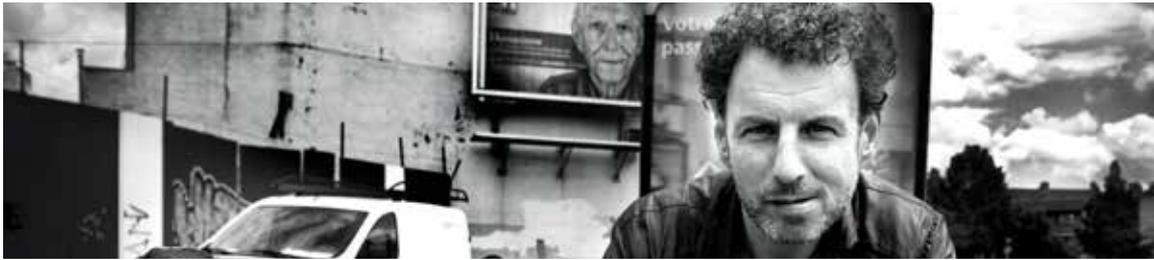
"In creating the soundtrack we worked with the composer Charo Calvo. She was assisted by Manuel Poletti of the IRCAM, the French institute that specialises in the development of sound software. They are masters in the manipulation of sound. They are able to magnify and multiply sounds and voices so that it appears that thousands of people are all talking at once. Just like Meuleman, Calvo was also closely involved in the creation process. The soundtrack came about during the period of rehearsals. Rather than simply having a supporting function, the sound has its own identity. It integrates with and sometimes even revolts against *The Chosen*."



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📄 [MORE INFO & PHOTOS](#)

**DIRECTION, CHOREOGRAPHY** WIM VANDEKEYBUS **CREATED AND EXECUTED BY** ANABEL LOPEZ, MARIA KOLEGOVA, YUN LIU, DANIEL COPELAND, SAÏD GHARBI, JASON QUARLES, FLAVIO D' ANDREA **TEXT** BART MEULEMAN & ULTIMA VEZ **ARTISTIC ASSISTANT** JERRY KILLICK, AÏDA GABRIËLS **SET DESIGN** WIM VANDEKEYBUS, MERYEM BAYRAM **DRAMATURGY** AÏDA GABRIËLS, JERRY KILLICK **MUSIC & SOUND DESIGN** CHARO CALVO **CO-CREATION** **SOUND DESIGN & DESIGN OF COMPUTER MUSIC IRCAM** MANUEL POLETTI **VOICE SAVIOUR** MAXIM DAISH BELAY **MOVEMENT ASSISTANT** GERMAN JAUREGUI **LIGHTING DESIGN** DAVY DESCHEPPER, WIM VANDEKEYBUS **COSTUME DESIGN** ISABELLE LHOAS ASSISTED BY ISABELLE DE CANNIÈRE **TECHNICAL COORDINATION** DAVY DESCHEPPER **SOUND ENGINEER** BRAM MORIAU ASSISTED BY MARTIN ANTIPHON (IRCAM) **STAGE MANAGER** TOM DE WITH **SFX** ZEPHYR WILDLIFE, SASKIA VERREYCKEN **PRODUCTION** ULTIMA VEZ **COPRODUCTION** KVS (BRUSSELS), IRCAM (PARIS), DESINGEL (ANTWERP)



## **Wim Vandekeybus**

**Wim Vandekeybus** was born in Herenthout (Belgium) on 30 June 1963. His father was a vet. After finishing secondary school, he moved to Leuven to study Psychology. In 1985, however, he decided to follow a completely different path and auditioned for Jan Fabre, who gave him a part in *The Power of Theatrical Madness*. One year later, he founded Ultima Vez.

His first show, *What the Body Does Not Remember*, was an international success, earning him a Bessie Award (New York Dance and Performance Award) for its innovation. And now after almost 30 years and a whole series of films and videos, Wim Vandekeybus is still searching for novelty and innovation. “For me, the form has to be different every time,” he explains. “This is why on one occasion I might create an extremely musical show (*nieuwZwart* or *Speak low if you speak love...*), then for my next project base a film on the experiences of one man (*Monkey Sandwich*), why I then might switch to a classical mythology play (*Oedipus/bêt noir*) or even an analytical piece in which theatricality plays a major part (*booty Looting* or *Talk to the Demon*).”

In all these very different productions, Ultima Vez nevertheless remains true to its own movement idiom. Tension, conflict, body versus mind, risks and impulses. Physicality, passion, intuition, instinct. These are essential elements that will always be part of Vandekeybus’ work. But on each occasion they are given a completely different appearance.

This variety is made possible partly through collaboration with dancers, circus performers, actors, musicians and other artists from a whole range of disciplines. Music and sound have naturally become the common thread running through his work. Peter Vermeersch, Thierry De Mey, David Byrne, Marc Ribot, Eavesdropper, David Eugene Edwards, Daan, Arno, Charo Calvo, Mauro Pawlowski, Roland Van Campenhout and

Elko Blijweert have all composed music for his shows. As a general rule, their compositions are written during the rehearsal stage so that the show and the music develop symbiotically. However, photography and the lyrics and lines are equally important. In *booty Looting*, Danny Willems took photos – he walked around the stage among the performers, his eye to the lens, and presented his photos live. The writer Peter Verhelst has worked on scripts for Vandekeybus four times (*Scratching the Inner Fields*, *Blush*, *Sonic Boom* and *nieuwZwart*) and Vandekeybus used Jan Decorté’s adaptation of *Oedipus*, for *Bêt noir*, no less than three times before he had finally finished with this text.

In December 2012 Vandekeybus received the Keizer Karel prize from the Province of East Flanders. This prize is awarded every three years to an artist as a mark of his exceptional talent in the field of art and culture, his commitment and his work with younger generations. One year later Wim Vandekeybus and Ultima Vez became the 6th laureate of the Evens Arts Prize. They receive the Prize for their important contribution to European contemporary dance, for their multidisciplinary work and for their social and cultural commitment.

2015 sees the screening of *Galloping Mind*, Vandekeybus’ first full-length film. It was shot in Hungary and on the Black Sea in Romania and tells a dramatic story of family ties, betrayal and triangular relationships, with Jerry Killick, Natali Broods and a gang of children on horseback in the leading parts.

In 2016 Ultima Vez has been around for 30 years. To celebrate this, the dance company publishes the long-awaited book *The Rage of Staging*. It presents an exclusive insight into Vandekeybus’ mind and soul and, in addition to written contributions by fellow artists and previously unpublished writings and notes, it contains more than 400 unique pictures illustrating his repertoire.



## BIO'S



### **Maria Kolegova**

was born in Russia and graduated from the Center of Contemporary Art in Yekaterinburg as a contemporary dancer. She has been part of the National Russian Ballet of Moscow for more than six years and has been working together with several well-known choreographers. Kolegova debuted at Ultimav Vez in 2012 during the revival of *What The Body Does Not Remember*, followed by *nieuwZwart*, *Spiritual Unity*, *Speak Low If You Speak Love* and now *Mockumentary Of A Contemporary Saviour*.

### **Daniël Copeland**

born in Kent, was trained at Drama Studio London and is a fixed value within the British theatre scene. Notable performances are the epic 24-hour play *The Warp*, performed in a techno club under London Bridge Station, *The Hobbit* at the Queens Theatre, *Othello* at Nottingham Playhouse and *The Jungle Book* at West Yorkshire Playhouse. On television Daniel was to be seen in *Casualty*, *Six Experiments That Changed The World*, *The Day Britain Stopped* and *Walter*.



### **Yun Liu**

was born in Taiwan. At age eight she started contemporary dance classes, four years later she enrolled at a martial arts school. Throughout her teenage years she joined different dance performances as well as wushu games. Yun Liu came all the way from Taiwan to participate in the new creation *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour*.



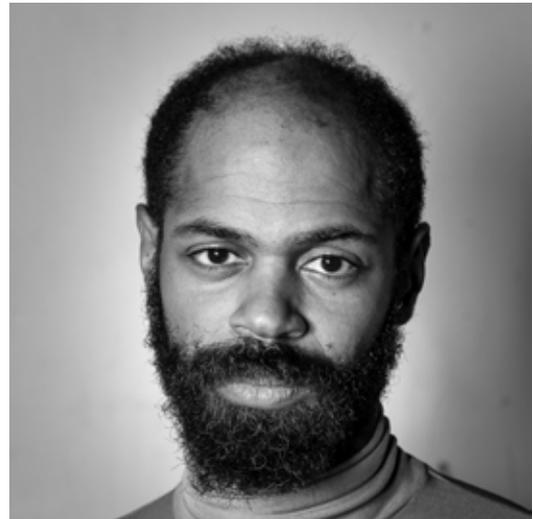


### **Flavio D'Andrea**

born in Italy, graduated in dramaturgy and performing arts at the Paolo Grassi School of Drama in Milan. After several years of collaboration with Flic Circus School (Turin) and the new circus company Magda Clan Flavio joined Ultima Vez in 2015 for the remake of *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting*.

### **Jason Quarles**

was born in Philadelphia and currently resides in Antwerp. Previously, he lived and performed in New York City for nearly two decades. Credits include: *Fathers and Sons* from Davis Freeman, Toshiki Okada's *The Sonic Life of the Giant Tortoise*, *Trainer* at Toneelhuis, *From the House of the Dead* directed by Patrice Chereau and Hoi Polloi's *All Hands*.



### **Anabel Lopez**

is Belgian-Spanish and studied Drama and Anthropology in California and graduated from the Conservatory of Liège in 2007. She has been working for a wide variety of directors like Jacques Delcuvellerie, Arthur Nauzyciel, Frank Castorf, Pietro Varrasso and appeared in movies like *Bullhead*, *Demain Tout Commence* and *Iron Sky 2*. *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Savior* is her first collaboration with Wim Vandekeybus.



### **Saïd Gharbi**

was born in Morocco, moved to Belgium in the late 60s and became blind at age 14. In 1993 he collaborated for the first time with Wim Vandekeybus for *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul*. Afterwards several projects followed. Saïd founded his own company Les BGM for which he creates and performs.

### **Artistic team**

For the text of *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour* Wim Vandekeybus collaborates with **Bart Meuleman** (Toneelhuis) and **Jerry Killick** (Forced entertainment). Bart Meuleman is a playwright, essayist, poet and director. His work encompasses a wide range of genres and subjects and he is always careful to choose the most suitable genre for the subject in question. Since 2010 Wim Vandekeybus has been collaborating intensely with Jerry Killick. First on *Monkey Sandwich*, a portmanteau film which was selected for Venice International Film Festival. Later on two stage productions: *Booty Looting* and *Talk to the Demon*.

In collaboration with IRCAM (Paris), sound designer **Charo Calvo** creates an extensive soundscape for *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour*. Charo Calvo is one of the founding members of Ultima Vez. Since 1999 she has been collaborating with several dance and theatre companies as a composer and sound designer. Her acousmatic works have been presented at festivals in Belgium and abroad and are played on radio stations all over the world. IRCAM, Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique is a French institute for science about music and sound and avant garde electro-acoustical art music. **Manuel Poletti** from IRCAM is responsible for the development of the software used by Charo Calvo to transform the soundscape into an auditory total experience with extraterrestrial touch.

For the scenography Wim Vandekeybus cooperates with scenographer and visual artist **Meryem Bayram**. A recurring theme in Meryem Bayrams work is the investigation of the common ground between people and their surroundings, between abstraction and figuration. With various materials, such as wood, cardboard and elastic band she assembles constructions which outline the escape routes of the environment. Moreover, they reveal a parallel network of immaterial forces. They constitute areas of tension between the social and the political, between helping hands and obstacles.

Costumes are designed by **Isabelle Lhoas**. She has been standing next to Wim since his early creations for costume design styling and sometimes even scenography. Besides Ultima Vez Isabelle is active as a freelance designer and art director for several projects. For this production she will be assisted by **Isabelle De Cannière**.