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Gardenia

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PROGRAM NOTES

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, actress Vanessa Van Durme collected a number of transsexual and transvestite friends for a project that can be called unique in every respect.

Gardenia goes deep into the turbulent lives of nine striking people. 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 his/her own story. In their minds the sounds of the past. In their eyes doubts about tomorrow, but also a healthy dose of hope.

Nine individuals. What bind 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. Each one is searching. Each lives in a world that is sometimes strange, sometimes not, sometimes overwhelming, sometimes not. Everything is still open. The path can lead us everywhere. Also to things we wish to avoid. And above all to things that mustn’t be denied. This choreography of genders. This journey or this struggle toward an identity. This bizarre world, sometimes dark and at the same time so luminous.

The journey is so dear to us.We advance without hurrying.And every second is a magical discovery.An immense treasury of information.An unforgettable encounter that is certain to change our lives.

—*Alain Platel and Frank Van Laecke May 2010*

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Alain Platel (Director; b. 1956, Ghent, Belgium) is trained in remedial education and is a self-taught director. In 1984 he organized a small performing group of friends and relatives to work collectively. *Emma* (1988) signaled 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) achieved international acclaim. His collaboration with playwright Arne Sierens had a similar effect on the Ghent youth theater company Victoria, with the plays *Moeder en Kind* (1995), *Bernadetje* (1996), and *Allemaal Indiaan* (1999).

After *Allemaal Indiaan*, Platel planned to stop directing, but Gerard Mortier persuaded him to do *Wolf* (2003), based on Mozart, for the Ruhrtriennale. The choir project for the opening of the new KVS Theater in Brussels marked the start of close collaboration with the composer Fabrizio Cassol. *vsprs* (2006) was a turning point for Platel. So far his work had been exuberant, but now it became more profound and revealed a world of passion and desire—and violence, as in *Nine Finger* (2007). After the baroque *pitié!* (2008), *Out of Context* (2010) was an almost ascetic reflection of the movement repertoire of spasms and tics. The yearning for something transcending the individual was becoming more and more palpable.

Platel entered the arena of dance film together with 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), a view of what goes on in a 20-year-old dance company, taking us to Vietnam and Burkina Faso, but also being an ode to Platel’s hometown, Ghent.

Frank Van Laecke (Director; b. 1958, Ghent, Belgium) wrote a number of TV series (including *F.C. de Kampioenen* and *Het Koekoeksnest*) for the Flemish public television company VRT before making a name for himself as a director of plays and operas. He gained international fame directing musicals (*Hollywood by Night*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Jekyll & Hyde*) and extravagant theatrical productions. In the past few years, he has had successes with the musicals *Kuiffe en de Zonnetempel* (*Tintin and the Temple of the Sun*), *The Prince of Africa*, *Dracula*, *Rembrandt—the musical*, *Pirates Pirates!*, and *Daens*, often working together with composer Dirk Brossé.

Van Laecke was the artistic and actors’ director of *Booh!*, a youth series for Belgian television station VTM that was nominated by the press as the best program of 2005. A second series soon followed. Van Laecke returned to directing works with a purer aesthetic, such as the theatrical production based on the love letters of Anton Chekhov, *Jouw hand in mijn hand*, in 2006. That same year saw the premiere performance of *Kijk mama, ik dans* (*Look, Mummy, I’m Dancing*), a monologue directed jointly with Vanessa Van Durme that later toured the world. Van Laecke received numerous awards, both in Belgium and abroad, for his direction. He was appointed Ambassador of the City of Ghent in 2002.

Vanessa Van Durme (Concept, Creator/ Performer; b. 1948, Ghent, Belgium) studied drama and theater at the Conservatory in Ghent and began her performing career with the Nederlands Toneel Gent, now known as the NTGent. She made the difficult decision to undergo a sex change and, as a result, gave up her career in theater. Twenty years later, she picked up the thread and devoted herself to writing comedies. She wrote many television screenplays, including *Liefde en Geluk* for the VRT national

channel, and directed 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 20 plays for the stage. Her breakthrough in theater came when the Belgian director Alain Platel cast her in the role of the mother, Tosca, in *Allemaal Indiaan*. After touring with the show for two years, she moved to the Victoria theater company in Ghent to act in *White Star*, which was based on an idea of hers. She toured Europe for two years with this production.

Van Durme wrote her book, *Look, Mummy, I’m Dancing*, and the monologue of the same name, which she performed throughout Europe and America and in which she speaks openly about her sex change. Tolerance and acceptance are important items on Van Durme’s agenda. 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 and intolerance.

Griet Debacker (Creator/Performer; b. 1964, Roeselare, Belgium) obtained a degree in speech therapy (1985) and a First Prize in Drama (1989) at the Ghent Conservatory. She then worked as a freelance actress with many Belgian and Dutch theater companies. She played in a number of sitcoms for the Belgian public television company VRT and made guest appearances in Flemish fiction series. In 2005 she co-founded the Swan Lake company with Vanessa Van Durme and produced *Kijk mama, ik dans* (*Look, Mummy, I’m Dancing*), directed by Frank Van Laecke, and coached Van Durme during the show’s world tour. Their second production, *Femme Blanche*, directed by Jan Steen, premiered in 2009.

Timur Magomedgadzhiev (Creator; b.1985, Makhatchkala, Russia) was born in the Caucasus. As a child, he danced with a folklore ensemble and acted in secondary school. While attending GITIS-RATI, the School of Dramatic Art in Moscow, where he obtained his diploma, he was confronted with the discrimination against the Caucasian population in Russia. He decided to leave Russia and spent five years trying to find his way in Europe. Waiting for the necessary travel and identification documents and his inner struggle made him a stronger person.

Hendrik Lebon (Performer; b. 1980, Ghent, Belgium) acted and danced with Kopergietery and the Royal Ballet of Flanders as a young man. In 2005 he graduated in modern dance performance from the Fontys Dance Academy and worked for various companies while developing his own work. In 2007, at the start of the tour of his own solo show, a player piano fell off the truck onto his foot, obliging him to focus more on singing, circus, and acting. He was a dance soloist in *Le nozze di Figaro*, sang and danced the title role of Bach in *tranen van Bach*, and acted in *Première neige*. He also toured with his solo shows and wrote the monologue *Tenderness forever* (2010).

Andrea De Laet (Creator/Performer; b. 1952, Niel, Belgium) had two dreams as a child: to become a nursery school teacher or study at the Antwerp Academy of Dramatic Art. At that time, the first dream was reserved only for girls and the second dream found little support from home. She took a job but in her spare time took courses in foreign languages, typing, and dramatic arts. She spent four years taking classes in protest culture at the Internationale Nieuwe Scène, a Belgian theater company. De Laet played the part of a transvestite for a dozen years in a production hosted by a restaurant in Antwerp. Being in *Gardenia* is like a dream come true.

Richard “Tootsie” Dierick (Creator/ Performer; b. 1952, Lokeren, Belgium) completed secondary school in 1970 and, seeking something that reflected his commitment to society, enrolled in a pediatric nursing program. During his three years of study, Dierick came to understand that he was homosexual. He soon made peace with this and is openly gay today. To counter his nursing job’s heavy workload, Dierick took classes in the dramatic arts, jazz dance, African dance, and tap dance. Finally, he ended up in the world of transvestite theater and performed for 30 years. He is pleased to contribute his experience and talent to *Gardenia*: the icing on his cake.

Danilo Povoło (Creator/Performer; b. 1954, Vaux-Sous-Chevremont, Belgium) grew up in the Walloon Provinces and took courses in the Dutch language. After completing his secondary education, he worked at white-collar jobs in Brussels, Liège, and Antwerp. Since 1978, Povoło has traveled across the globe in his spare time with the Mama Roma Show, a transvestite theater company. In 1995 he moved to Antwerp, where he joined Cabaret Follies, a comic transvestite theater company that tours Belgium.

Gerrit Becker (Creator/Performer; b. 1944, Amsterdam, The Netherlands) was trained as a furniture upholsterer in Antwerp and subsequently took a number of computer courses. A versatile man, he has worked in the catering industry and as a hairdresser, wallpaperer, and painter. He actively contributes to improving the situation of older ex-prostitutes and is currently vice chairman of the charitable organization Pandora.

Dirk Van Vaerenbergh (Creator/ Performer; b. 1954, Aalst, Belgium) taught Swedish language and literature at the University of Ghent before choosing a career in acting. He acted in musicals such as *Company* (Royal Ballet of Flanders) and *Amadeus* (Music Hall) and worked with director Frank Van Laecke in *Kuiffe en de Zonnetempel*, *Im Weissen Rössl*, *Die Fledermaus*, and *Daens—the musical*. As a member of Ensemble Leporello, he acted in *Macbethbranding*, *Fool for Love*, and *Hoe het varken aan zijn krulstaart kwam*. He has also appeared on TV and in films. This is the first time in his life that he has worn a dress.

Rudy Suwyns (Creator/Performer; b. 1944, Ghent, Belgium) began performing at age five. He studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Ghent and the Academy of Music in Gentbrugge. He worked with the theater company Romain Deconinck (1968–1981) and is a permanent staff member of the biannual Festivaria festival in Ghent. He directed and acted at the Kortrijk Lyrical Theatre Company, KunstVeredelt Roeselare, and the Tielt Operetta Podium. He participated in opera productions at the Music Hall and toured with them throughout Europe. He worked with director Frank Van Laecke in the musicals *Kuiffe en de Zonnetempel* and *Daens—the musical*. Suwyns also appears in films and TV series.

Steven Prengels (Music; b. 1978, Zele, Belgium) studied at the Lemmensinstituut, the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, and the conservatories of Antwerp and Amsterdam, where he studied composition with Wim Hendericx. In 2004 he won the award for Most Original Composition by a Young Belgian Composer at the International Film Festival of Flanders and the Prize for New Music of East Flanders in 2007. He writes music for theater, dance, orchestra, and ensemble, and his work has been performed by (among others) the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, the Brussels Philharmonic, the Chamber Orchestra of Belgium, the Nieuw Ensemble Amsterdam, and the Spectra Ensemble. He is also a visual artist.

Paul Gallis (Set Design; b. 1943, Amsterdam, The Netherlands) created his first professional set design for the Holland Festival in 1974. For seven years he was a member of the artistic board of Netherland’s Globe Theatre Group and was the head of design at the Theatre Group Amsterdam for 13 years, since its founding in 1987. Gallis has created over 300 set designs for theater, opera, ballet, musicals, and film, working in, among others, the Schiller Theater and Deutsches Theater (Berlin), Schauspielhaus Bonn, the Thalia Theater (Hamburg), the Colosseum Theater (Essen), the Apollo Theater (Stuttgart), Opéra de Nice, Det Ny Teater (Copenhagen), Teatro La Scala (Milan), the Eilandje and the Stadstheater (Antwerp), and Opéra de la Monnaie (Brussels). On Broadway, he designed *Cyrano: the Musical*. Other musicals include *She Loves Me*; *Joe! The Musical*; *Evita*; *Elisabeth*; and *West Side Story*.

Marie “Costume” Lauwers (Costume Design; b. 1945, Beerse, Belgium) began her career as a dresser for and assistant to costume designer Yan Tax on productions including *Daens* in 2008. As an independent designer, Lauwers has done many stage productions and films, working with directors such as Eric Barbier, Adrian Brine, Vincent Rouffaer, Marion Handwerker, Berend Boudewijn, Jules Royaards, Franco Dragone, Ruut Weissman, Christiaan Nortier, Edward Albee, and Peter Oosthoek. She is also the regular designer for Dutch cabaret artist Sanne Wallis de Vries. Lauwers designed the costumes for the last dance film directed by Willem van de Sande Backhuizen for the Scapino Ballet, headed by Ed Wubbe.

Kurt Lefevre (Lighting Design; b. 1973, Menen, Belgium) worked for five years in the Vlaamse Opera in Ghent and Antwerp. He also was a light engineer for the Operastudio Vlaanderen and the light and sound designer for *Dark Speeches* (2008) by Lazara Rosell Albear. He has toured as a light technician with *vsprs* (2006) by Alain Platel and *IMPORT EXPORT* (2006) by Koen Augustijnen. He has been a member of les ballets C de la B since 2007 and designed the lighting for *Aphasiadisiac* (2008) and *Under Erasure* (2010, for Aphasia Dance Company) by Ted Stoffer; *Ashes* (2009), *Au-delà* by Koen Augustijnen, and *primero-erscht* (2010) by Lisi Estaras.

Sam Serruys (Sound Design; b. 1977, Ostend, Belgium) is a guitarist/composer who graduated from the Dutch Tilburg-based Rockacademie (1999–2003). In addition, he attended the audio engineering training course at the School of Audio Engineering in Rotterdam. He toured Belgium and Holland as a member of Bertus Borgers’s band. In 2005, he started working at les ballets C de la B, moved to Het Toneelhuis (Antwerp), and returned to les ballets C de la B as sound engineer and composer of electronic music for Koen Augustijnen, Ted Stoffer, Lisi Estaras, and Alain Platel.

ABOUT THE COMPANY

les ballets C de la B, from Ghent, Belgium, was founded by Alain Platel in 1984. Since then, it has enjoyed great success at home and abroad. Over the years it has developed into an artistic platform for a variety of choreographers, taking its inspiration not only from Alain Platel but also Christine De Smedt, Koen Augustijnen, and Lisi Estaras. Hans Van den Broeck and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui were previously also members. The company still keeps to its principle of enabling artists from various disciplines and backgrounds to take part in this dynamic creative process. As a result of its unique mixture of artistic visions, les ballets C de la B is not easy to classify. It is nevertheless possible to discern something like a house style (popular, anarchic, eclectic, committed), and the company’s motto is, “This dance is for the world, and the world is for everyone.” www.lesballetscdela.be

les ballets C de la B is represented by Frans Brood Productions, www.fransbrood.com.

Acknowledgments

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<p>Read more on <i>Gardenia</i> at Insite, our online forum, at www.peakperfs.org/insite.</p>

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Theater

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Peak Performances presents:

American Premiere!
les ballets C de la B
Gardenia

Directed by **Alain Platel, Frank Van Laecke**
 Based on a Concept by **Vanessa Van Durme**
 Created and Performed by **Vanessa Van Durme, Griet Debacker, Timur Magomedgadzhiev/**
 replaced by **Hendrik Lebon, Andrea De Laet, Richard "Tootsie" Dierick, Danilo Povolo, Gerrit Becker, Dirk Van Vaerenbergh, Rudy Suwyns**

Music by **Steven Prengels**
 Set Design by **Paul Gallis**
 Costume Design by **Marie "Costume" Lauwers**
 Costumes Realized by **atelier Anette De Wilde, atelier NTGent o.l.v. An De Mol: Mieke Van der Cruyssen, Sul Hee Mys, Helena Verheyen**
 Coiffures **Claudine Grinwis Plaat Stultjes**
 Lighting Design by **Kurt Lefevre**
 Sound Design by **Sam Serruys**

Stage Manager **Luc Laroy**
 Set Realized by **Scenography atelier NTGent**
 Sound Technician **Sam Christiaens**
 Stage Technician **Wim Piqueur**
 Production Management **Valerie Desmet**
 Tour Management **Emilie De Roo**

Produced by les ballets C de la B.

Co-produced by 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.

Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes, no intermission.

In consideration of both audience and performers, please turn off all electronic devices. The taking of photographs or videos and the use of recording equipment are not permitted. No food or drink is permitted inside the theater.

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