

# KAAI THEATER

## Simon Mayer / Kopf Hoch **Sons of Sissy**

**27/11/2016 – 15:00 – Kaaitheater**  
dance • 65 min

**EXTRA** This performance is made accessible to persons with a visual impairment with an **Audio Description**.

**MATINEE KADEE** While you attend the performance, your child can discover the principles of folk dances, like the Jig and the Magic Circle!

## WAYS OF SEEING DANCE

**nl/ Dans ervaren op nieuwe manieren: iemand die slechtiend of blind is kan net zo goed genieten van een dansvoorstelling.** Je voelt de aanwezigheid van het publiek rondom je, voetstappen trappelen over de scène, een luchtstroom strijkt langs je gelaat, aanzwellende muziek trekt je mee. **Het Kaaitheater wil nog een stap verder gaan door via een hoofdtelefoon een extra gelaagdheid aan de voorstelling toe te voegen:** een dans-professional beschrijft live de bewegingen en handelingen van de dansers.

**fr/ Vivez la danse de manière nouvelle: une personne mal voyante ou non-voyante peut profiter tout autant qu'autrui d'un spectacle de danse :** elle sent la présence du public autour d'elle, elle entend les pas des danseurs sur scène, elle sent sur son visage l'air que déplacent leurs mouvements et ressent le crescendo entraînant de la musique. **Le Kaaitheater veut franchir un pas de plus avec une strate supplémentaire du spectacle par le biais d'écouteurs :** des professionnels de la danse décrivent en direct les mouvements et les gestes des danseurs.

**en/ Experiencing dance in new ways: persons with a visual impairment can enjoy a dance production just as much as anyone else.** You can feel the presence of the audience around you, hear the footsteps of the dancers on the stage, feel wafts of air on your face, and be carried along by the swelling music. **The Kaaitheater aims to go one step further by adding an extra layer of the performance through headphones:** a dance-professional will describe the movements and actions of the dancers live.

## CREDITS

### idea, choreography, performance, music

Simon Mayer

### performance, music

Matteo Haitzmann, Patric Redl,  
Manuel Wagner

### special instruments

Hans Tschiritsch

### stage and costume design

Andrea Simeon

### light design

Hannes Ruschbaschan, Martin Walitza

### artistic consultant

Frans Poelstra

### production

Sophie Schmeiser, Elisabeth Hirner

### co-production

Kopf hoch, brut Wien, Gessnerallee Zurich,  
zeitraumexit Mannheim, Tanz ist Dornbirn

### touring production

Hiros, Kopf Hoch

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### thanks to

Simon Zöchbauer, Julian Rubisch, ALMA (Marlene Lacherstorfer, Julia Lacherstorfer, Evelyn Mair, Marie-Therese Stickler), Godi Burgstaller, Chris Standfest, Andrea Amort, Munderfinger Goaßlschnalzer, Altstädter Bauerngmoa, Pramtaler Volkstanzgruppe, Elio Gervasi/Raum 33

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## SONS OF SISSY

**nl/** Vorig seizoen kon je Simon Mayer aan het werk zien in de solo *SunBengSitting*. Als jonge danser verwekte hij daarin tradities uit zijn geboortestreek, zoals volksdansen, folkmuziek en jodelen. Oeroude rituelen en hedendaagse interpretaties verweefden zich tot een mysterieus en humoristisch geheel.

In *Sons of Sissy* zet Mayer zijn zoektocht naar traditie verder, ditmaal met drie andere dansers die zich op scène ontpoppen tot muzikanten. Traditionele Alpenmuziek, groepsdansen en rituelen ontdoen ze behendig van hun regels en conservatisme. Interpretaties versmelten en nieuwe, tijdelijke betekenissen ontstaan.

De 'Sons of Sissy' doen alles wat ze kunnen om hun naam waar te maken: ze worden een vreemdsoortig folkmuziekkwartet en een experimenteel, ritueel danscombo. Met veel gevoel voor humor breken ze met de stereotiepe mannelijke rolmodellen die in tradities vaak hardnekkig overeind blijven.

De tradities en gewoontes die Simon Mayer in zijn voorstellingen verwerkt, zijn volgens hem ook in de huidige samenleving relevant. Niet op de manier waarop ze door politiek en bepaalde ideologieën gebruikt worden, maar door de spirituele rol die ze in de maatschappij spelen. Los van de kleine nuanceverschillen, ziet Mayer veel gelijkenissen tussen de tradities en gewoontes in verschillende landen en culturen. Eerder dan de nadruk te leggen op wat ons van elkaar scheidt, is het belangrijker om te kijken naar wat ons bindt.

- Simon Mayer studeerde aan de dansafdeling van de Weense Staatsopera, danste er een jaar in het corps de ballet en vervolgde zijn studie bij PARTS in Brussel. Hij was als danser, choreograaf en musicus betrokken bij voorstellingen van Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Wim Vandekeybus en Zita Swoon.

**fr/** La saison passée, on a pu voir Simon Mayer à l'œuvre au Kaaitheater dans son solo *SunBengSitting*. Ce jeune danseur originaire d'Autriche et formé à PARTS revisite les traditions de sa région natale, comme les danses et la musique folkloriques et le jodel. Rituels séculaires et interprétations contemporaines s'imbriquent dans un ensemble mystérieux et humoristique.

Dans *Sons of Sissy*, Mayer poursuit sa recherche sur la tradition, cette fois avec trois autres danseurs qui, sur scène, se révèlent aussi musiciens. Ils dépouillent avec adresse la musique traditionnelle des Alpes, les danses de groupe et les rituels de leur conservatisme et de leurs règles.

Les fils de Sissy font tout ce qu'ils peuvent pour être dignes de leur nom : ils se transforment en quatuor de musique folklorique et en combo expérimental de danse rituelle. Débordant de sens de l'humour, ils anéantissent le stéréotype du modèle de rôle masculin que les traditions maintiennent avec persistance.

Selon Simon Mayer, les traditions et coutumes qu'il intègre à ses spectacles sont pertinentes pour la société actuelle. Non pas sur le mode dont la politique et certaines idéologies s'en servent, mais par le rôle spirituel qu'elles peuvent occuper dans la société contemporaine. Hormis quelques nuances, Mayer voit de nombreuses similitudes entre les traditions, les us et coutumes de différents pays et cultures. Plutôt qu'accentuer ce qui nous sépare, il est bien plus important de se focaliser sur ce qui nous unit.

- Simon Mayer a étudié au département de danse de l'Opéra d'État de Vienne, y a dansé un an avec le corps de ballet et a ensuite poursuivi ses études à PARTS, à Bruxelles. En sa qualité de danseur, de chorégraphe et de musicien, il a participé à des spectacles d'Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Wim Vandekeybus et Zita Swoon.

**en/** Last season, you could see Simon Mayer at work in his solo *SunBengSitting*. As a young dancer – originally from Austria and a graduate of PARTS – he incorporated traditions from his home region, such as folk dances, folk music and yodelling. Age-old rituals and contemporary interpretations were woven together to create a mysterious, humorous whole.

In *Sons of Sissy*, Mayer continues his search for tradition, this time with three other dancers who emerge as musicians on stage. They adroitly strip traditional Alpine music, group dances and rituals of their conservatism and rules. Interpretations merge and new, temporary meanings come into being.

The 'Sons of Sissy' do everything they can to live up to their name: they become a strange kind of folk music quartet and an experimental, ritual dance combination. In a humorous way, they break with the stereotypical male role models that stubbornly live on in traditions.

According to Simon Mayer, the traditions and customs that he integrates into his productions are also relevant to contemporary society. Not in the way in which they are used by politicians and in certain ideologies, but through the spiritual role that they play in society. Apart from the minor differences of nuance, Mayer sees many similarities in the traditions and customs of various countries and cultures. Rather than focusing on what separates us, it is more important to emphasize what unites us.

- Simon Mayer studied at the Vienna State Opera's dance department, danced there for a year in the corps de ballet, and continued his studies at PARTS in Brussels. He was involved in performances by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Wim Vandekeybus and Zita Swoon as a dancer, choreographer and musician.

## **“MOST OF THE RITUALS NEED THIS MOMENT OF LETTING GO”**

excerpts of an interview with Simon Mayer for maculture (by Guillaume Rouleau, 18/07/2016).

**Meeting with the Austrian choreographer and dancer Simon Mayer at the Odeon theatre – Vienna, where his 2014 performance *Sons of Sissy* was scheduled during ImPulsTanz – Vienna International Dance Festival. Together with Matteo Haitzmann, Patrick Redl and Manuel Wagner, Simon Mayer tracks back traditional Austrian dance (Schuhplattler), singing (Jodeln) and instrumentation in a fascinating and unconventional ritual.**

**More generally speaking, has *Sons of Sissy* evolved since 2014, the year of its production?**

We've changed the end. There was no sound in the end when we did the premiere of the piece. We were just standing together. One of the great opportunities to play a piece several times is that you really find a certain energy that you want to represent, a certain atmosphere that can only be found by repetition and by going in it deeper; especially when you have the aspect of ritual inside the performance. These traditions are linked to the past, to past luggage and habits that we want to liberate ourselves from. It's good but not easy to do a ritual in front of an audience. On the one hand, you can say that theatre itself is a ritual but on the other, if you want to put something on stage to make a ritual, you need time to get into it, into the mood. After having done the performance twenty times we're slowly getting there. The conditions are good enough: you can let go. Most of the rituals need this moment of letting go.

**With your three companions (Matteo Haitzmann, Patric Redl, Manuel Wagner), you're singing and playing different traditional songs before and during dancing. You use the traditional formation with two violins, a contrabass and an accordion...**

We begin *Sons of Sissy* by playing three songs which are always played today in Austria. They are not popular in the whole of Austria but some people can recognize them. There are three parts in which we use traditional songs (there is this difference between traditional songs and folk songs; folk song, in English, is more the pop version of traditional song). When we are standing naked in front of the stage, you cannot understand what we sing because it's a fantasy language. We mixed different dialects from around here and did our own. The last song is also a traditional song. Everything that is in between is music we developed during the process. I was very interested in extracting the ritual from the traditional dance and music. To find back the ritual in it, find back the healing qualities, they got lost a bit during their uses. What I'm trying to do is to bring them back even more. For example, there is this song in which the bass is playing (*Simon sings the rhythm of the bass part*), the other instruments (*Simon sings the melody of the other parts*). At the end rests the basic layer. The basic layer was always there. If you take all the instruments away and you keep the bass, there is the background, this music layer which is very close to other traditional background. Regarding dance, for example, schuhplattler has similarities to gumboot dance from Zimbabwe.

**Do you practice traditional dances since a long time? How did you adapt them for *Sons of Sissy*?**

Matteo Haitzmann and I, we have been doing traditional dance since we are children. Patrick Redl and Manuel Wagner learned it for *Song of Sissy*. For the gesture, we adapted it because these dances are couple dances danced by men and women and we are always four men. We dance in couples or alone. We have partners of the same sex. We changed the gender roles for the performance. Then we also do couple dances with invisible partners. In the choreography, you get this part where there is normally someone behind you but the partner is not there because we are just four people. Most of these dances are still done by a whole group of people and that's another kind of adaptation. We were finding how to show a group dance, dance in couples just with four people.

**On stage, there is a bench, bells on a harness. The lights are low most of the time. There is no background. Could you tell me more about the sobriety of the scenography?**

There are few essential things. For me it's always important that there is a relation between materials and textures. In this case, there is a lot of wood and metals and it's important that these elements fit together, that they keep a certain atmosphere. The other reason why there aren't so many props is because it's easier to travel. If you can take all your props in only one or two suitcases, it's easy to travel and it's also ecologic (*laugh*).

**And you use some of the props, as the whip, to engage the audience...**

The loud noise of the whip is traditionally used to chase away the bad spirits. When the winter is nearly finished and the spring is coming with those whips you smashed them away, you tell all the winter spirits to leave. It's used in the piece to chase away some parts of the heritage. It's a way to liberate our body, our head from these conservative, narrow, nationalistic practices. When I scream, it is more a scream of the inside. I address the audience "Look there is a way to liberate yourself!", "Look, that's how you can do it!"

**There is also in *Sons of Sissy* this reflection about the exhaustion, the fatigue due to the intensity and the duration of the performances. The transitions between the sequences often insist on the respiration, the relaxing breaks...**

The breath is an important thing in the piece. There is this inspiration at the beginning of the piece and this expiration at the end. It's even dramaturgic, a red line in the piece. As I don't really make a difference between sound and movement, breath is somewhere the link between sound and movement in performing. From the moment there is movement, there is breath, the moment that there is breath there is movement. As soon as there is movement, there is sound, and as soon as there is sound there is movement; and there is breath. All the time. It's hard for me to say if I'm a musician or a dancer. It doesn't matter. Do you see movement or do you see music? There is always sound and there is visual. Dance is nothing else than visual music. That attention also comes from the fact that we work with rituals. The breath and the awareness are important in rituals. We try to work with meditation; a meditation which is based on the rising and falling of the abdomen by breathing.

**Could you tell me why you have chosen to be dressed with traditional clothes in the first part and being naked in the second part? What were the intentions behind a second part fully undressed? Furthermore, are the traditional clothes really traditional, like the skirt Matteo Haitzmann wears?**

The costumes in the first part are not traditional costumes. There are some elements of the traditional costumes, in the texture, the colours and the symbols for example. All the costumes are made for the performance, like mine with the pink stripes. There is this idea of being really neutral with the material that we use but then of course, nudity is not really neutral. It's like another costume. The nudity is also there because of this topic of ritual. There are some rituals that are done naked, some initiations. It makes it more an act of liberation, taking off the cloth. There is this German world, "selbstverständlich", something like "it's normal", as it is normal to be naked and to play our instrument, as it is normal to be naked and to sing together and stand together, like it is normal to do this dance with two men. This is a very important task in terms of the expression, in terms of the activity we do on stage, to show some kind of solution by acting like it's normal. We do this as if it was a tradition. I was also looking how to be as far away as possible from a traditional costume and the nudity was the furthest way that I could imagine because nobody will stand in a traditional dance evening on stage naked. The nudity is the furthest way from the conservatism.

**The title, *Sons of Sissy*, is a reference to the Empress Elisabeth of Austria but it is also a term used to describe a soft man; a man who's out of the norm...**

There are a lot of national songs, as the one of Austria ("Home to great daughters and sons") with the reference to the sons. The name sounds also like a band name, a name of a music group, and fit very well to what we do on stage. Originally we were a traditional (music) band which we transformed into something else.

**Through the nudity and the solo, duo and four partners parts, there is also something like a claim with regard to questions of complicity between men and eroticism (the proximity of the bodies, the transpiration, etc).**

This is again the part where we go "selbstverständlich". We present more a way of living or a solution than a problem. A world where it is normal that men touch each other. In a seemingly erotic way as well. And where they can dance in couple without necessarily being homosexual or heterosexual or whatever other limitation or prejudice you would want to give it from outside. Just a touch. An aimless and not goal oriented touch between two men. The purest form of love. Unconditional love.

**I'm curious to know which kind of feedback you had since you perform *Sons of Sissy*.**

When we played the premiere in Vienna, there were some people coming from the traditional dance group, from my hometown. They were very enthusiastic about *Sons of Sissy*. They were very happy when they recognized some traditional dances that we use and it also opened their mind about what you can do with them. Others were a little bit confused. But the reaction was good. It could be amazing to have the chance to perform in front of a very conservative audience – with traditional dancers and musician – to see what it does to them. I think that we will have this opportunity at the end of July.

I played the previous solo *SunBengSitting* in the countryside. It was really nice to hear the reaction of people. A lot of times they react about the nudity. People get so stuck on the nudity. They don't see anything else anymore. A lot of people asked me why I was working with naked bodies on stage, "it's not interesting anymore, it's not shocking anymore" but it's not true, it's very shocking. There are a lot of very shocked and confused people, even in the cities. And as long as people are shocked about nudity we'll keep on performing naked. But in a sharing and sensitive way, not only to provoke.

## more work from the #nxtgeneration

**Niko Hafkenschied,  
Hedvig Biong &  
Pablo Castilla**  
*Syden*

Syden means 'South' in all the Scandinavian languages. It evokes a Southern holiday destination: warm, cheap and with every amenity. The musician and composer Niko Hafkenschied, the visual artist Hedvig Biong and the film-maker Pablo Castilla explore the mystery, authenticity and perversity of this parallel universe.

Kaaistudio's • 6>7/12 • performance/music

**Michiel Soete  
& Globe Aroma**  
*CAPSAICIN*

CAPSAICIN is that feeling you get when you have eaten a hot chilli pepper. But it could also be a place: a new Cape of Good Hope as a place of refuge. Together with Globe Aroma and newcomers to Brussels, Michiel Soete deals with longings that refuse to be thwarted by powerlessness, anger or fear.

Kaaistudio's • 21>23/12 • theatre