

PAULETTE VERLEE BIOGRAPHY

Neoclassical piano music with a touch of electronics: Brussels based Paulette Verlée is clearly a child of her time. At the tender age of five, she found herself irresistibly attracted to the upright piano in the family home. Hence she started fondling the black and white keys way before she could read or write. 'While my brother went to soccer training, I got my first music lessons from my mum and right away playing the piano felt as natural to me as breathing. Later on I also learned to play guitar and drums, but my passion for the keyboard exceeded everything else'.

As a matter of course Paulette Verlée (the artistic alter ego of Veerle Pollet) went on to study piano at the renowned Lemmens Institute in Leuven. 'The technique required to master the classics takes a lot of training and discipline. It's somewhat like preparing for an Olympic achievement. But as a way to relax I have always practiced songwriting as well, churning out dancefloor friendly pop music with my band Call Me Lucy. It was a relief not to be bound by a score for a change, to give free reign to my spontaneity and enjoy the freedom to do my own thing.'

At one point, Verlée was involved with a jazz trio called One Trick Po. She even ventured into chamber music. 'The fact that I could have it all created some kind of balance in my head', she says. 'To me, all those genres are branches of the same tree. They are all near to my heart and cater to different sides of my character. I do not mind things to be a little complex, but I also need clarity and simplicity'.

Verlée's compositions are usually meditative and drenched in melancholy, although at times they manifest some frivolous traits as well. 'I hate things to be far-fetched, so it's a conscious decision to keep my work concise and accessible'. Paulette Verlée prefers creating an atmosphere, evoking familiar emotions, creating images in the listener's mind. Neoclassical music with a pop structure? Well, yes. The artist's fully instrumental first album suggests that after a number of detours, she has finally made it home.

Even though she writes repetitive piano pieces, Verlée does not shy away from computer beats or distorted sounds. At times she even beckons to electronic dance music, a genre she is curious to explore a little further as she is getting along. 'I do not stick to a set routine', she explains. 'As soon as I get an idea, I let myself be guided by the inspiration of the moment and be surprised at where it will take me. Don't expect any big statements from me. I just do what feels right. Thanks to the possibilities of modern technology, I can experiment as much as my heart desires. But it's always a matter of trial-and-error.'

The figure of Eric Satie was an inspiration for this project from the get-go. The French composer lived in Paris during the belle époque and is the founder of minimalistic and repetitive music. No Cage, or Reich without Satie, thus. But it was not only Satie's music that spoke to Paulette. The entire universe of this "enfant terrible", filled with irony and a second degree sense of humour greatly appealed to her. Both like to colour outside the lines. And so she named her album after one of Satie's chamber music works, "Choses vues à droite et à gauche (sans lunettes)".

Today Paulette can relate to the works of Nils Frahm and Ólafur Arnalds. 'I'm fascinated by the way Frahm makes use of sequencers and all kinds of machinery.

Arnalds sounds more melodic, but the way he uses bowed strings really appeals to me', she says. Closer to home she feels connected to the work of Wouter Dewit and Noah Vanden Abeele, who, like her, teaches piano at the music academy of St. Agatha Berchem.

On her debut album Paulette Verlée is assisted by guitar player Jan Viggria (a member of rock band The Guru Guru), who adds some abstract soundscapes, and the fragile baroque cello by Michel Boulanger. On stage, where Verlée combines her music with old animated movies and other visuals, the latter has since been replaced by Maaïke Organe.

As a composer, Verlée is a Jack of all trades. For instance, she wrote the soundtrack to an audio book about Gnome Korsakov (Het Geluidshuis), an advertising campaign by the supermarket chain Delhaize ('Max and the magic veggies') and 'The Rainbow is Black', a British feature film by Marie Delanote, about a woman who is plagued by psychoses and other mental issues. Yet through all these different projects runs a common thread: Paulette Verlée holds on to her individuality and wants to explore as many musical worlds as possible.