



NIELS RØNSHOLDT

ME QUITTE

SCENATÆT

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**ME QUITTE**

**SCENATET**

featuring

**ANNA KATRIN EGILSTRØD**

& **NIELS RØNSHOLDT**, vocals

1. **Berceuse** (5:12)
2. **Chanson (L'homme)** (4:12)
3. **Gospel** (6:01)
4. **Sérénade (La femme)** (5:15)
5. **Chaconne** (3:04)
6. **Sérénade (L'homme)** (3:32)
7. **Chanson (La femme)** (3:55)
8. **Marche (Blues)** (5:01)
9. **Chaconne (Soul)** (5:25)
10. **Marche** (3:08)
11. **Berceuse II (by the campfire)** (5:10)

Total: 50:01

## PATHOS AND EMBARRASSMENT

– on Niels Rønsholdt's song cycle *Me Quitte* by Sanne Krogh Groth

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"In *Me Quitte* I make a complete fool of myself. I was certain that this would be the last work I would ever compose. Making these songs is in itself embarrassing and going just too far, even if they are so definitively cast in a conceptual construct. But the actual material, it's just so..."

(Niels Rønsholdt, March 2016)

In *Me Quitte* (2012-13) Niels Rønsholdt has taken his starting point in Jacques Brel's (1929-78) chanson *Ne Me Quitte Pas* (Don't Leave Me) 1959. Jacques Brel was a Belgian-French singer-songwriter, later actor and director, especially well known for his *chansons*. Brel's songs are political and humorous but also, like the best known of his chansons, *Ne Me Quitte Pas*, romantic and lyrical. The songs have been performed by artistes all over the world in both translated and French versions, but Brel's own performances of the songs remain unique. In his version of *Ne Me Quitte Pas* we sense behind the words and notes a longing and desperation in the performance. Brel's sobbing voice is so credible that the listener finds it hard not to empathize with the heart-rending performance. But at the same time, the performance, for all its gripping French pathos, becomes a cliché, dripping with sentimentality, unrequited love and red-checked Parisian tablecloths.

In *Me Quitte* Rønsholdt has found the inspiration for his concept and his material in this French chanson. "Love is beautiful – obviously," says Rønsholdt; "but it also leaves destructive tracks in our lives. And it is the source of as much strife and unhappiness as of the good. But in popular culture, and perhaps as a legacy of Christian religiosity, only the person who speaks through love is considered good. In any given 'now', we are perhaps either just before or just after finding the 'one and only'. But *when* we achieve love, it is as if we enter a paradisiac state where everything is happiness. I am very much of the opinion that the way we associate love so strongly with happiness is established in popular culture. And for me its breeding-ground is to be found in the *chanson*; it contains all of it – Paris, romance, ideal love etc. That is why I take that music, but turn it around so that in a way you see it inverted, in the magician's distorting mirror: love as a kind of demonic power that seduces with a beautiful exterior, but turns out to involve



NIELS RØNSHOLDT

the opposite, destruction. Just as the Antichrist is the inversion of the good, this in a way is the opposite of the love song, the chanson. That's why the title, too, is a kind of inversion, only the negation is removed. And that's why I sing myself – my powerlessness on the stage is an inversion of the crooner's engaging virtuosity."

Rønsholdt – as he himself puts it – has composed "the best songs I possibly could – sort of without distance. They aren't just pastiches. They have to be devoid of irony – I wanted to get as close to the material as possible." The close relationship with the material is to be found not only in the composition process, but also in the performance of the work: "I see it rather as a kind of method acting – that is, I have taken on a role as crooner and chanson composer. Minimizing the distance to the material creates a situation where the identification becomes so strong that the separation between what is me and what is the role is effaced."

Rønsholdt's text consists of the words of *Ne Me Quitte Pas*, but in *Me Quitte* they are scattered in fragments over all ten songs. The fragments are unrecognizable, since they are sung backwards. As part of the preparation and rehearsal process, Rønsholdt recorded his own tunes, played them back backwards and transcribed them. Then he added text fragments to these inverted tunes. He recorded these inverted songs and afterwards reversed the recording again and arrived at the desired result: Rønsholdt's lyrical tunes with Brel's fragmented text – sung backwards.

This final recording became a tool with three purposes: to draft the score, to rehearse the nonsense text, and to study and transfer 'the sound of backwards'. By doing so, the initial attack of the sounds is removed so that they appear instead as in small 'crescendos'. Rønsholdt transfers the manipulated sounds to his composition for acoustic voices and instruments. All that remains of electronic manipulation is the backward piano at the beginning of the work. However, the specific concrete sound continues in the instrumentation, where it lives in the form of instrumental vinyl noise – the clattering sounds of 'prepared piano', bows on violin cases, knocking on guitar cases and scraping on drum skins. In the singing voices, too, a concrete sound aesthetic is established in the form of harshness in the tone and brittleness in the phrasing. One especially hears this concrete sound aesthetic in the composer's own voice, which is neither taught nor trained as convention normally demands.

**"Arp e tichemen yl  
paiven esj é larp é  
nga sjo se de rbmol"**

from *Berceuse*

At the same time, the music is performed as if it is an abstraction in itself, with pathos-soaked instrumentations, yearning melodies, dramatic dynamics, and fervent phrasing. This expression contrasts with the concrete sound universe that lurks both rhythmically and tonally in and behind the lyrical, seductive verses.

The contrast is strongest in the last song, where a drum intervenes with powerful beats in the campfire-like idyll that the two singers, one now with a guitar, try to establish. "It's a massacre of the phenomenon 'a song' and the demonic is formulated quite unmistakably," Rønsholdt says.

Rønsholdt uses this contrast to present two concepts in the music. On the one hand, he turns imaginary Hollywood love inside out. On the other hand, the music itself is subjected to powerful resistance.

In this approach lies what Rønsholdt himself has identified as the core of his work: "My whole practice is in many ways to get to the essence of things. This is driven by a critique of contemporary music, which, as I experience it, is characterized by a layer of distance; for example a distance in the craftsmanship through an excessive focus on structures, in the way the music is performed, and a distance from any content. But then what is actually the content of music?"

For Rønsholdt the exploration of this issue becomes a search for a mode of expression that does not hide behind too many layers and which appeals directly to the audience. By cultivating a pathos bordering on the expressively banal in works that are relatively simply composed, he embarks on a journey where the exploration of limits is not only of musical forms but also of the actual situation in which they are performed. In this process, the relationship with the audience comes to play a special role.

In his effort to establish a situation where a closeness to the audience can potentially arise, 'the embarrassing' comes to play a central role: "When something feels embarrassing, it's because it's true. At the moment when an embarrassing situation arises between two people, it's because there's some truth that they realize: 'This just won't work,' for example. For example, if we are on a blind date and there's an embarrassing silence, that moment contains a truth. It's embarrassing because it's true. And it's true because we both know that nothing will come of this."

On the new experimental music scenes, people like to imagine that anything goes, but there, too, conventions prevail that can be transgressed, so that the embarrassing can be provoked. For example, it's embarrassing when somebody takes over the stage because they have the power

to do so, but perhaps lack the ability. It is therefore embarrassing that Rønsholdt as a composer insists on performing his own work, even though he is an amateur singer, while the rest of the ensemble (and the culture in general) consists of professionally trained musicians. It is also embarrassing to introduce pathos and fervency on a stage where intellect, subtlety and intertextuality are the prevailing forms of language. And it is embarrassing when for example in the one-man opera *Word for Word* Rønsholdt chooses to be staged in nylon stockings, tied to a chair.

As a member of the audience I have experienced embarrassment on his behalf, and have, as a consequence, not felt entirely comfortable in the situation. Why does Rønsholdt, for instance, go for banal music when there are a wealth of other ways to go? Why does he take off his shirt when I'm sitting only a metre from him? Why does he bring a submissive, half-naked, young woman on to the stage with him and thus directly provoke the feminist in me? Why does he have to go so far? But amidst all this embarrassment I feel surrounded by a framework that doesn't let the embarrassment develop into panic. The resistance in the captivating melodies, the clear formal musical devices, and Rønsholdt's insistent performance make me want to stay and experience the embarrassment with him. To feel my way towards it, to explore it, and listen to it, and to find out where it takes me. This is precisely where Rønsholdt differs from Brel.

With Rønsholdt we are not to be seduced by emotional dreams of the unattainable. Instead, there is a shuddering clarity in the situation itself that we feel in our bodies – whether it is the awkward format of the concert, the problematic abstraction of the music, or the hopeless human relations that form the conceptual focus of the work.

"Embarrassment is a sincere feeling. If we feel something we have arrived at something."

*Sanne Krogh Groth is Ph.D. in Musicology from the University of Copenhagen (2010). She is currently affiliated at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, conducting the research project "Composers on Stage" concerning 21st century composers. She is also, since 2011, editor-in-chief of the online journal Seismograf.org.*

*Me Quitte* is published by Edition · S and is available in versions for either ensemble or orchestra. It can be performed as a full cycle or in smaller sets of songs.

*edition-s.dk*

The Faroese artist **Anna Katrin Egilstrød** studied electronic composition at the Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus, and as a singer she has toured 25 countries with, among others, the acclaimed folktronica group Valrav. In the field of modern classical music she has performed Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and Niels Rønsholdt's song cycle *Me Quitte* with the renowned ensemble SCENATET. She has written music for the awarded performance ensemble Mute Comp and has released her own songs under the alias AKAT. Spring 2016 sees the world premiere of *BEINTA* – a symphonic song cycle, co-composed with Allan Gravgaard Madsen.

*stereocillia.tumblr.com*

The composer **Niels Rønsholdt** trained at the Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus, under Karl Aage Rasmussen and Bent Sørensen; he also studied in Berlin with Helmut Oehring. Rønsholdt works with experimental opera, concert music, installations and performance. He has received awards, scholarships and grants for his work, and he is frequently performed by leading new music ensembles and festivals.

*nielsroensholdt.dk*

**SCENATET – ensemble for music and art** was founded by artistic director Anna Berit Asp Christensen in 2008 and moves in a cross-genre field of music, drama and happenings towards areas with yet undefined genres. The ensemble aims to create conceptual art works of high quality, where music is part of a larger whole. SCENATET creates many types of productions; theatrical and artistically unique as well as more classic ones, including many new works in close collaboration with composers, directors, artists, filmmakers as well as festivals and art spaces. SCENATET is a permanent constellation of 12 musicians and is recognized as one of the most innovative and experimental ensembles for music and art in Europe. SCENATET is highly visible on the international art scene and has toured much of the world, often with world premieres at renowned venues. The ensemble's concerts, however, may also be encountered in unexpected but yet familiar surroundings such as shopping malls, backyards and private homes. The ensemble has performed at established festivals such as Ultima (NO), Shanghai New Music Week (CHN), MaerzMusik (DE) and Warszawa Autumn (PL).

*scenatet.dk*

## PATOS OG PINLIGHED

– om Niels Rønsholdts sangcyklus *Me Quitte* af Sanne Krogh Groth

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"I *Me Quitte* blamerer jeg mig fuldstændigt. Jeg var sikker på, at det her bliver det sidste værk, som jeg kommer til at kunne lave. Det er så pinligt og for langt at gå, bare at lave de sange her, som så ganske vist er støbt ind i en konceptuel konstruktion. Men altså selve materialet, det er simpelthen..."

(Niels Rønsholdt, marts 2016)

Niels Rønsholdt har i *Me Quitte* (2012-13) taget udgangspunkt i Jacques Brels (1929-78) sang *Ne Me Quitte Pas*, 1959 (*Forlad mig ikke*). Jacques Brel var en belgisk-fransk visesanger, senere skuespiller og instruktør, der er særligt kendt for sine franske *chansons*. Brels sange var politiske og lystige, men, som det gælder det mest kendte af hans numre, *Ne Me Quitte Pas*, også romantiske og lyriske. Sangene er opført af kunstnere verden over i både oversatte og franske versioner, men Brels egen opførelse af sangene står dog som noget helt særligt. I hans version af *Ne Me Quitte Pas* oplever vi, bag ord og toner, en længsel og desperation i fremførelsen, der med en grådkvalt stemme river os med til en sådan grad, at sangen og dens afsender bliver så troværdige, at lytteren har svært ved ikke at indleve sig i den hjerteskrærende fremførelse. Men samtidig bliver fremførelsen også, i al sin medrivenhed og franske patos til en kliché, der driver af sentimentalitet, ulykkelig kærlighed og rødtertede parisiske duge.

I *Me Quitte* har Rønsholdt fundet sin inspiration til både koncept og materiale i denne franske chanson. "Kærligheden er smuk – klart," siger Rønsholdt, "men den er også noget, som trækker destruktive spor igennem menneskers liv. Og den er årsag til lige så meget splid og ulykke som til det gode. Men i populærkulturen, og måske som en kristen religiøs reminiscens, opfattes kun den, der taler gennem kærligheden, som den gode. Ganske vist er vi i nuet måske lige lidt før eller lige lidt efter den eneste ene. Men når vi opnår kærligheden, så er det som om vi træder ind i en paradisisk tilstand, hvor alt er lykkeligt. Det, at vi forbinder kærligheden så stærkt med lykke, det mener jeg i høj grad er noget som etableres i populærkulturen. Og arnestedet er for mig at finde i *chansonen*, den rummer det hele – Paris, romantikken, den ideelle kærlighed etc. Derfor tager jeg den musik, men vender den om, så man på en måde ser spejlvendt, gennem et



troldspejl: Kærligheden som en slags dæmoni, der forfører med en smuk overflade, men viser sig at rumme det modsatte, destruktionen. Ligesom antikrist er det godes omvendning, er dette på en måde chansonens, kærlighedssangens, modsætning. Derfor er titlen også en slags omvendning, kun nægtelsen er fjernet. Og derfor synger jeg selv – min magtesløshed på scenen er en omvendning af croonerens indtagende virtuositet.”

Rønsholdt har – som han selv formulerer det – komponeret ”de bedste sange jeg overhovedet kunne – sådan uden distance. De er ikke bare pasticher. De skulle være blottet for ironi – jeg ville gå så tæt på materialet som muligt.” Den tætte relation til materialet er ikke kun at finde i kompositionsprocessen, men også i opførelsen af værket: ”Jeg ser det lidt som en slags method acting, altså at jeg her iklæder mig en rolle som crooner og chanssonkomponist. Ved at minimere afstanden til materialet opstår en situation hvor identifikationen bliver så stærk, at adskillelsen mellem hvad der er mig, og hvad der er rollen, udviskes.”

Rønsholdts tekst består af ordene fra *Ne Me Quitte Pas*, men er i *Me Quitte* fordelt i fragmenter over alle 10 sange. Fragmenterne er uigenkendelige, da de synges baglæns.

Som en del af udarbejdelles- og indstuderingensprocessen indspillede Rønsholdt sine egne melodier, afspillede dem baglæns og transskriberede dem, hvorefter den fragmenterede tekst blev sat til de omvendte melodier. Rønsholdt indspillede herefter disse sange, for siden at vende denne indspilning igen, og kom frem til det ønskede resultat:

Rønsholdts lyriske melodier med Brels fragmenterede tekst – sunget baglæns. Indspilningen blev et redskab til både udarbejdelsen af partituret, til indstuderingen af nonsens-teksten og til at studere og overføre ’lyden af baglæns’: at lydenes anslag fjernes, så de i stedet fremtoner i små ’crescendoer’. Rønsholdt overfører de manipulerede lyde til sin komposition for akustiske stemmer og instrumenter. Tilbage af elektronisk manipulation bliver kun det bagvendte klaver i værkets begyndelse. Den konkrete lyd videreføres dog også i instrumentationen, hvor den lever i form af instrumenteret vinylstøj – skramle-lyde af præpareret klaver, buer på violinkasser, banken på guitarkasser og skraben på trommeskind. Også i sangstemmerne etableres en konkret lydæstetik i form af hæshed i klang og skrøbelighed i frasing. Dette høres måske især i komponistens egen stemme, der hverken er skolet eller trænet, som konventionen ellers foreskriver det.

**“Arp e tichemen yl  
paiven esj é larp é  
nga sjo se de rbmol”**

fra *Berceuse*

Samtidig fremføres musikken også, som var den en abstraktion i sig selv, gennem patosfyldte instrumentationer, længselsfulde melodier, dramatiske dynamikker og inderlige fraseringer. Dette udtryk bliver en kontrast til det konkrete lydunivers, der undervejs lurer både rytmisk og klangligt i og bag de lyriske og forførende strofer.

Effekten kommer stærkest til udtryk i den sidste af sangene, hvor en tromme med kraftige slag intervenserer i den lejr balsagtige idyl, som de to sangere, nu den ene med en guitar, forsøger at etablere. ”Det er en massakre på fænomenet ’en sang’ og dæmonien formuleret helt umisforståeligt”, siger Rønsholdt.

Med denne kontrast præsenterer Rønsholdt os for to koncepter i musikken: Dels vender han den forestillede Hollywood kærlighed på vrangen, og dels er det musikken i sig selv, der bliver udsat for kraftigt modspil.

I dette greb ligger det Rønsholdt selv har beskrevet som kernen i sit arbejde: ”Hele min praksis har på mange måder handlet om at finde ind til kernen af noget. Dette er til dels baseret på en kritik af samtidsmusikken, hvor jeg oplever et lag af afstand; eksempelvis en afstand i håndværk gennem for meget fokus på strukturer, i den måde musikken bliver opført på, og en afstand til et indhold. Men hvad er så egentlig indholdet i musikken?”

For Rønsholdt bliver undersøgelsen af dette spørgsmål en søgen efter at nå frem til et udtryk, der ikke er gemt væk bag alt for mange lag, og som appellerer direkte til publikum. Med en dyrkelse af patos, grænsende til det banalt ekspressive, i de kompositorisk relativt enkle værker begiver han sig ud på en færd, hvor grænseundersøgelsen ikke kun bliver af musikalske former, men også af selve situationen de opføres i. Her kommer relationen til publikum til at spille en særlig rolle.

I sin stræben efter at etablere en situation, hvor der kan opstå en nærhed til publikum, kommer ’det pinlige’ til at spille en central rolle: ”Når noget føles pinligt, så er det, fordi det er sandt. I det øjeblik, der opstår en pinlig situation mellem to mennesker, så er det, fordi der er noget sandt, man indser: det her – det går ikke, for eksempel. Altså, hvis vi sad her på en blind date, og der så opstod en pinlig tavshed, så er det et øjeblik, der rummer en sandhed. Det er pinligt, fordi det er sandt. Og det er sandt, fordi vi begge to ved, at det her ikke bliver til noget.”

På scenerne for ny eksperimenterende musik kunne man tænke sig, at alt er tilladt, men også her hersker konventioner, der kan overskrides, så det pinlige kan provokeres frem. Det er for eksempel pinligt, når nogen indtager scenen fordi de har magten, men måske ikke evnerne til det.

Det er således pinligt, at Rønsholdt som komponist insisterer på at opføre sit eget værk, selv om han blot er amatørsanger, mens resten af ensemblet (og kulturen generelt) består af professionelle, uddannede musikere. Det er pinligt at introducere patos og inderlighed på en scene, hvor intellekt, spidsfindighed og intertekstualitet er de herskende sprog. Og det er pinligt, når han eksempelvis i en-mandsoperaen *Ord for Ord* vælger at lade sig iscenesætte i nylonstrømper, bundet til en stol.

Som publikum har jeg oplevet at blive flov på hans vegne og dermed ikke føle mig helt tilpas i situationen. Hvorfor søger han mod den banale musik, når der nu findes et hav af veje at gå? Hvorfor tager han skjorten af, når jeg kun sidder en meter fra ham? Hvorfor skal han omgive sig med en underlagt, halvnøgen ung kvinde, og dermed direkte provokere feministen i mig? Hvorfor skal han gå så langt? Men i al denne pinlighed føler jeg mig også omgivet af en ramme, der ikke får pinligheden til at udvikle sig til panik. Modstanden i de medrivende melodier, de klare musikalske formgreb og Rønsholdts insisterende performance giver mig lyst til at blive og opleve pinligheden med ham. At mærke efter, undersøge den og lytte med, og finde ud af, hvor den fører mig hen. Det er netop her, Rønsholdt adskiller sig fra Brel.

Hos Rønsholdt skal vi ikke forføres af emotionelle drømme om det uopnåelige. I stedet er det en rystende klarhed i situationen selv, vi mærker i kroppen, – hvad enten det er koncertens akavede format, musikkens problematiske abstraktion eller håbløse menneskelige relationer, der er værkets konceptuelle omdrejningspunkt.

"Det pinlige er en ægte følelse. Hvis vi føler noget, er vi nået hen til noget."

*Sanne Krogh Groth er Ph.D. i Musikvidenskab fra Københavns Universitet (2010). Hun er for tiden tilknyttet Det Kgl. Bibliotek, hvor hun står for forskningsprojektet "Composers on stage" om komponister i det 21. århundrede. Siden 2011 har hun været ansvarshavende redaktør for onlinemediet Seismograf.org.*

*Me Quitte* udgives af Edition S og findes både i ensemble- og orkesterversioner. Det kan opføres som fuld cyklus eller i mindre sæt.

[edition-s.dk](http://edition-s.dk)

Færøske **Anna Katrin Egilstrød** har studeret elektronisk komposition på Det Jyske Musik-konservatorium og har som sanger turneret i 25 lande, bl.a. som forsanger i den anmelderroste folktronica gruppe Valrav. Inden for moderne kompositionsmusik har hun opført Schönbergs *Pierrot Lunaire* og Niels Rønsholdts sangcyklus *Me Quitte* med det anerkendte ensemble SCENATET. Hun har komponeret musik for det prisvindende performance-ensemble Mute Comp og udgivet egne sange under aliaset AKAT. I 2016 har hun verdenspremiere på *BEINTA*, en symfonisk sangcyklus komponeret sammen med Allan Gravgaard Madsen.

[stereocillia.tumblr.com](http://stereocillia.tumblr.com)

Komponisten **Niels Rønsholdt** er uddannet fra Det Jyske Musik-konservatorium hos Karl Aage Rasmussen og Bent Sørensen og privat i Berlin hos Helmut Oehring. Rønsholdt arbejder med eksperimenterende opera, koncertmusik, installationer og performance. Han har modtaget priser, legater og stipendier for sit arbejde og er opført af samtidsmusikkens topensembler og festivaler.

[nielsroensholdt.dk](http://nielsroensholdt.dk)

**SCENATET** blev grundlagt i 2008 af ensembles kunstneriske leder Anna Berit Asp Christensen og bevæger sig i et tværkunstnerisk felt fra instrumentalteater og musikdramatik over happenings til områder med endnu undefinerede genrer. Ensemblet er kendetegnet ved at skabe konceptuelle kunstværker af høj kvalitet, hvor musikken er en del af en større helhed. SCENATET arbejder rutineret med mange forskellige formater; sceniske, stedsspecifikke og kunstnerisk unikke såvel som mere klassiske, og udvikler mange nye værker i tæt samspil med komponister, instruktører, kunstnere, filmmagere samt festivaler og art spaces. SCENATET består af 12 faste musikere og er anerkendt som et af de mest nyskabende og eksperimenterende ensembler for musik og kunst i Europa. SCENATET har turneret i store dele af verden på berømte venues og ofte med uropførelser på programmet. Ensembles koncerter finder også sted i uventede, men alligevel velkendte omgivelser som bl.a. indkøbscentre, baggårde og private hjem. SCENATET har oprådt på anerkendte festivaler som bl.a. Ultima (NO), Shanghai New Music Week (CHN), MaerzMusik (DE) og Warszawa Autumn (PL).

[scenatet.dk](http://scenatet.dk)





Anna Katrin Egilstrøð and Niels Rønsholdt in the first performance of *Me Quitte* at SPOR festival 2013. (screenshots from the video recording of the concert which is available on YouTube at [bit.do/mequitte](http://bit.do/mequitte))



Players of SCENATET recording at The Village

**SCENATET** – on this recording:

Kirsten Riis-Jensen, violin  
Karolina Öhman, cello  
Frederik Munk Larsen, guitars  
Sven Micha Slot, piano  
Mads Bendsen, percussion

**DDD**

Recorded at The Village and at NOA Studio, spring 2014

Recording producer and sound engineer: Peter Barnow

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Mastering: Morten Bue

Artistic director: Anna Berit Asp Christensen

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