



“Society says: don't think about that, it happens to someone else”

Interview with The Tiger Lillies

The Tiger Lillies are currently rehearsing the play *Woyzeck* in cooperation with the Vereinigte Bühnen Wien, which premieres on the 24th of September 2011. We had the chance to meet them for a personal interview.

The title of the current issue of SYN is “kurios” which corresponds to “curious”, “strange” and “funny” in English. What do you associate with this term?

✧ Jacques: Our lives as the Tiger Lillies, that’s curious. Curiosity shops, I suppose. Stout: Antiques. Things you can find in old shops. They might have a strange history and you don’t know anything about them. We go to junk shops a lot and we find strange things there. Sometimes you don’t even know what they are or where they’re from. Or our songs [...] Also your characters [pointing at Jacques], they’re curious. A lot of strange people appear in your songs.

Your music and lyrics, but also your art of performing are often considered as “curious”, sometimes even tagged with strange definitions like “Brechtian gypsy cabaret”. Do you intentionally follow the model of “opera aperta”?

✧ Jacques: I think we started off trying not to fall into one category. We were trying to be ambiguous. If you go to a record shop there are all these old-fashioned categories that used to exist, for example the jazz-section. We never fitted into those categories. That was on purpose.

We know that you've already worked with a lot of different artists, theater troupes and musicians. What can you tell us about the present collaborators?

✧ Jacques: I was asked to write some songs. So when we arrived the songs had already been written and recorded. The director and the team of people knew the songs already. They had listened to the CD. It was all planned and pretty organized.

✧ Stout: I think Stephanie looks at the words that Martyn has written in the songs and then she decides how to integrate the actors, lines and other things. She finds ways to fit the acting with the music and the music with the acting. It all has to work together. Stephi has to collate everything into some sort of shape.

✧ Jacques: It's not really only Stephanie though. That's simplifying it. It's actually a whole team of people. The dramaturge is very involved. It's a team of people, not only one person.

✧ Stout: We're still adjusting the arrangements and working with the other musicians, trying to present the songs the best way in the respective contexts. The order might still change, like breaking up a song into sections and having dialog in between.

✧ Jacques: The actors were here a few weeks before we came and are currently rehearsing somewhere else. Now they're trying the Brass band and the acting on the same stage, trying to link everything together. And in a couple of weeks we'll have to start it going and if it runs till the end we'll really be happy.

We read that two actors perform the role of Woyzeck. What can you reveal to us about your part, Mr. Jacques?

✧ Jacques: I think the band is supposed to be elements of Woyzeck's personality. We're more kind of psychological aspects of him.

Do you think that Raphael von Barga plays more the part of a down-to-earth person? Would you say there's sort of a division of the character?

✧ Jacques: Yes, in a certain way it's true.

✧ Stout: He is straighter and we play what is going on in his head, as well as certain sounds he keeps hearing all the time and that are integrated in his thoughts.

✧ Jacques: Sometimes when I'm singing I am Woyzeck. I am a manifestation of Woyzeck.

✧ Stout: There are also certain elements that are being kept moved on stage, like Marie's dress, which I happen to wear at a certain moment.

♦ Huge: Things aren't really clear, because you're not supposed to know everything immediately otherwise it becomes boring.

Will you be using the medium of your mask in the play? How do you use the mask in other performances?

♦ Jacques: My mask changes through the years. It depends on what show it is. In this show the last time I talked with the costume designer, we were talking about going back to a skull-face. A non-color-thing. In general I have always felt more comfortable wearing the mask. It seems to be more appropriate to the kind of character that I am on stage. Maybe being musicians it's more interesting to wear make-up, because it's more unusual. It sort of creates more mystery. It's not being so real. It's something more theatrical. It's being one step back from being a heart-on-my-sleeves-singer. It gives me a certain distance. I like that theatricality. I don't really want to be someone that's actually just a human being on stage, telling you how he feels. I don't want to do that. I don't want people to understand what I am. That's the idea really. I think I succeeded in it, because a lot of people don't understand who I am. That's the thing about being ambiguous. I really like that. A journalist recently said, reviewing a show, that with the mask, 'he' doesn't have a moral position when he sings about things. It's true in a way. What I am singing is not necessarily what I believe. On this show I feel very distant to the person I am representing. I sing a song called "jealousy". I sing it with such anger and hate. I don't remember the last time I felt jealous. I am not a jealous person. I really understand jealousy, I think. I did use to feel jealous, like many many years ago. I can still remember what I felt like. Now I feel relaxed singing about it. For me, it's so not me. So I love it actually. So I can be so angry—but as soon as the song is over (Jacques makes sound "puuh")—it doesn't mean anything to me.

Mr. Huge and Mr. Stout, do you perform certain characters on stage?

♦ Stout: Yes, but it's more instrumental in the current show. It's not a strict alignment with us in *Woyzeck*. We're an aspect but not strictly defined.

♦ Huge: We haven't got that yet. I said: "Should I be twitching my legs crazy?" But we'll work on that later.

♦ Stout: It's more about Martyn and Raphael trying to find a relationship.

♦ Jacques: But don't you think though really that when it's the three of us, performing as the Tiger Lillies, in that situation, with you two, there are only three

ways to look. There are three people on stage, so the audience looks either at you or at you.

✧ Huge: We are three different characters on stage.

Is Woyzeck a curious character?

✧ Stout: I don't know what to think at the moment. Today I thought he could be an incredibly weak and cowardly man. And his kind of madness is a little bit of an excuse for him to feel powerful. He ended up sort of using it to murder someone.

✧ Jacques: He even eats fake peas!

✧ Stout: The forces in the play oppress him. And the soldiers—they are big men with guns, but actually quite small and weak-minded. They end up being quite violent once they get half a chance. I don't know if I can sympathize with him.

✧ Huge: I think he's interesting. I can't wait to see what's going to happen to him!

Do you see a lot of Woyzecks in today's society?

✧ Stout: Yes. He's very neurotic. He has troubles with the world and is worried about what happens underneath it. He knows his place and is submitted to authorities until he goes mad.

✧ Huge: The whole base of the story behind it is just as real these days as it was when it was written hundreds of years ago and probably a hundred years from now. Tragedy, mental disease and stuff that is every day life for some people, I think. Not me, of course.

In one of your songs that you perform together with Alexander Hacke ("Mountains of Madness") you sing: "What is under surface is easily disturbed, but what is deep inside you is hard to perturb." Do you think we might miss out on something if we fear or ignore certain aspects of human existence?

✧ Jacques: In this show, in Woyzeck, it's at least in some way a study about someone going mad. We're doing a show called "Hamlet" next year, written by William Shakespeare. That's also a study of madness. I have written quite a lot of songs about people going—it's obviously not superficial, it's going deep inside—crazy. So they end up killing, murdering. I think on the other hand that Hamlet or Woyzeck are positive in a sense, that when you're watching it and you listen to the songs or read the play you actually could think at some point: "Oh...! I wonder if I could end up killing!"

‡ Huge: Like... “It could happen to me!” A lot of people come to concerts and they say: “Oh my God! You sing about suicide, all these dark subjects.” But we don’t say: “You should do this, you should do that”. That opens people up a little bit and they might come up saying: “Oh my God, I got my wife killed herself a few years ago and hearing that song about suicide just sort of finished it off for me, thank you very much.” Or someone once came up to me and said: “My sister killed herself last week, how dare you sing that song. I want an apology.” Things like that. People tend not to think about bad things happening, like deep psychological traumas. We’re not even thinking about old age for example and we’ve got some songs about that. Society says: don’t think about that, it happens to someone else.

Interview: Claudia Piechocki, Hannah Schwegler
Wien, September 2011