

# VERA TUSSING & QUATUOR MP4

## Tactile Quartet(s)

**K A A I**  
**T H E A T E R**

PREMIÈRE | 19/10 20:30 + 20/10 15:00 | KAAITHEATER  
DANCE & MUSIC | 75 MIN

**NL** In *Tactile Quartet(s)* bouwt Vera Tussing verder op haar choreografische praktijk waarin ze het potentiële zintuiglijke engagement van het publiek onderzoekt. Deze keer nodigt ze het strijkkwartet Quatuor MP4 en drie dansers – Yoh Morishita, Zoltán Vakulya, Esse Vanderbruggen – uit op scène voor een speelse ontmoeting tussen beweging en geluid.

Wat gebeurt er wanneer we de bewegingen van een strijkkwartet serieus nemen als een choreografie, en meedansen? De vier muzikanten spelen passages uit zowel de bekende stukken van Franz Schubert en Florence Price als hedendaagse werken van Georg Friedrich Haas, Michael Picknett en Caroline Shaw. Ondertussen wagen ze zich aan één-op-één aanrakingen met het publiek, waardoor een fysiek tegenspel ontstaat. Alles vloeit voort uit aanraking – een strijkstok op een snaar, een arm op een schouder, een akoestische gewaarwording op je huid. De dansers bemiddelen de ontmoeting tussen muzikaliteit en tastzin, hun choreografie slingert heen en weer tussen voelen, zien en horen. Op het punt waar de banen van dans en muziek elkaar kruisen, word je uitgenodigd om binnen te treden in de caleidoscopische partituur. Geef een hand of arm!

- Choreografe Vera Tussing focust al langer op zintuiglijkheid, zoals met *T-Dance*, *Mazing*, *The Palm of Your Hand* of *Duet the City*. Sinds 2017 is ze artist-in-residence in het Kaaitheater.

**FR** Dans *Tactile Quartet(s)*, Vera Tussing s'appuie sur sa pratique chorégraphique de longue date pour explorer les potentialités sensorielles du public. Dans ce spectacle, elle invite le quatuor à cordes MP4 et trois danseurs – Yoh Morishita, Zoltán Vakulya, Esse Vanderbruggen – à une rencontre ludique entre mouvement et son.

Que se produit-il quand on prend les mouvements d'un quatuor à corde au sérieux, comme s'il s'agissait d'une chorégraphie et qu'on se joint à cette danse ? Les quatre musiciens jouent des passages, allant des œuvres connues de Franz Schubert et Florence Price à des œuvres contemporaines de Georg Friedrich Haas, Michael Picknett et Caroline

Shaw. Entre-temps, ils se risquent à toucher individuellement les membres du public, créant de la sorte un contre-jeu physique. Tout découle du toucher – l'archet contre une corde, un bras sur une épaule, une sensation acoustique sur la peau. Les danseurs se posent en médiateurs du spectacle entre musicalité et toucher, leur chorégraphie oscille entre ressentir, voir et entendre. Là où se croisent la danse et la musique, nous sommes invités à entrer dans la partition kaléidoscopique. Tendez une main ou un bras !

- La chorégraphe Vera Tussing se focalise depuis longtemps sur la sensorialité, comme dans *T-Dance*, *Mazing*, *The Palm of Your Hand* ou *Duet the City*. Depuis 2017, elle est artiste en résidence au Kaaitheater.

**EN** In *Tactile Quartet(s)*, Vera Tussing builds on her longstanding choreographic practice in exploring the sensory potentialities of the audience. In this piece, she has invited the string quartet Quatuor MP4 to join three dancers – Yoh Morishita, Zoltán Vakulya, Esse Vanderbruggen – onstage for a playful encounter between movement and sound.

What happens when we take the movements of a string quartet seriously as a choreography, and dance along? The four musicians play passages from canonical works by Franz Schubert and Florence Price, as well as contemporary works by Georg Friedrich Haas, Michael Picknett, and Caroline Shaw. As they play, the musicians engage in one-on-one tactile encounters with the audience, creating physical interaction. Everything arises from touch – a bow on a string, an arm on a shoulder, an acoustic sensation on your skin. The dancers mediate the encounter between musicality and tactility, their choreography oscillating between touch, sight, and hearing. At the point where the orbits of dance and music intersect, you are invited to enter the kaleidoscopic score. Lend a hand, or an arm!

- Choreographer Vera Tussing has focused for many years on the sensorial, such as in her works *T-Dance*, *Mazing*, *The Palm of Your Hand* or *Duet the City*. She has been an artist-in-residence at Kaaitheater since 2017.

## ON TACTILE QUARTET(S)

thoughts by JS Rafaeli and Vera Tussing

**How do individuals become groups? What process of authority and submission must be negotiated for a 'group' to become something more than the sum of its parts? In what ways is this process coded? In what ways is it embodied? How can it be performed?**

The string quartet is one of the most specifically coded constellations in western cultural heritage. Two violins, viola and cello – each element with their prescribed role. Without the monumental grandeur of the orchestra or the absolute intimacy of the solo, the quartet has traditionally meant music for the domestic space – where wider cultural codes are most intimately passed on. The 'group of four' also occupies a specifically coded place in dance history as the 'pas de quatre' of classical ballet, perhaps most famously exemplified by the *Dance of the Cygnets* in Lev Ivanov's choreography of *Swan Lake*. The 'pas de quatre' was generally made up of young women, required to look similar and move in absolute unison. In *Tactile Quartet(s)* these histories are playfully referenced, interrogated and subverted.

The formation of any 'group' carries certain narratives of authority – a process clearly observed in the relationship between musicians and composer. As Georg Friedrich Haas notes, 'there are very few moments in society when one person can tell another exactly how to move their fingers – and how to breathe'. However, just as musicians receive coded instructions from the composer, in giving their work over to the interpretation of others, the composer in turn places themselves in a position of vulnerability. This is a complex dynamic, an embodied process that plays out in our bodies and on our skin. It resonates in the relationship between choreographer and dancers – and in the wider 'choreography' of society at large.

*Tactile Quartet(s)* is an exploration of how this process of 'group making' functions – the processes of authority and consent by which communities are created and engaged in performativity. There are three 'communities' in the piece – the quartet of dancers; the musicians of the Quatuor MP4, and the audience. All three of these 'communities' carry its own formative and coded rules of conduct. All three come to inhabit the entire theatre space in perhaps

surprising ways, and are eventually brought into direct physical contact.

The musicians play excerpts of quartets from canonical works by Franz Schubert and Florence Price, to contemporary pieces by Georg Friedrich Haas, Michael Picknett and Caroline Shaw. The dancers mediate the encounter of musicality and tactility through a choreography that oscillates between the felt, the seen and the heard. Everything arises from touch – a bow on a string, an arm on a shoulder, a sound on your skin. At the point where the orbits of dance and music intersect, the audience is invited to enter into this kaleidoscopic score and asked to lend a hand – or an arm.

For approaching a decade, Vera has been creating what she calls the *Tactile Cycle* of her work, examining the sense of touch in performance – and how the direct tactile contact between performer and audience can function in the theatrical context. Touching, being in touch, is an intrinsic part of the human experience at large.

Through touch we learn how to situate ourselves in the world. Yet, our culture – particularly our performance culture – privileges (one could say fetishises) the sense of sight. The evolution and ubiquity of smart-phones and 'screen culture' has in many ways accelerated this process – putting us in communication, but out of touch.

Essential to this 'cycle' of work has been the idea of consent – how any touch that occurs must be approached with absolute agency, must be the site of negotiation and agreement, not coercion or exploitation. The recent explosion of consciousness around the #MeToo movement has brought these concerns into particular focus, widening the concerns to broader questions of how groups are made. Each of Vera's creation process begins with the acknowledgement of the people she invites into the studio – what does each individual bring to the work, how does that amplify each of the other collaborators?

*Tactile Quartet(s)* is an attempt to situate these explorations within the formalised coded zones of aesthetic production – and ultimately, gently, on our skin.

## CREDITS

**CREATION & DIRECTION** Vera Tussing | **MUSICAL COLLABORATION & TECHNICAL DIRECTION** Michael Picknett | **CO-CREATION & DANCE** Esse Vanderbruggen, Vera Tussing, Yoh Morishita, Zoltán Vakulya | **CO-CREATION & MUSIC** Quatuor MP4 (Claire Bourdet, Margaret Hermant, Pierre Heneaux, Meryll Havard) | **ARTISTIC ASSISTANCE** Muriel Hérault | **LIGHTING PROPOSAL** Caroline Mathieu | **COSTUME & SET** Jivan van der Ende | **CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH & DRAMATURGY** JS Rafaeli | **CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH** Sebastian Kann | **REHEARSAL SUPPORT** Bun Kobayashi | **PRODUCTION** Hiros | **CO-PRODUCTION** Kaaitheater | **RESIDENCIES** STUK, Kunstenwerkplaats Pianofabriek, wpZimmer, workspacebrussels, Arts Printing House Vilnius | **IN COLLABORATION WITH** Universal Edition Wien, Auteursbureau ALMO Antwerpen | **SUPPORT** Flemish Government | **THANK YOU** Clara Levy & Quartet partners (Sinouhé Gilot, Hugo Boulanger, David Dupouy, Anastasia Laurent, Dorelle Sluchin, Esther Singier, Victor Guaita) for their extensive contribution to the research, Gorka Gurrutxaga Arruti, Ehren Verrelst, Ruben Martinez Orio, IN/FINITY, Eglé Maceinaitė, Pierre Kouzmenko, Premiere Music Group | **MUSIC EXCERPTS** Georg Friedrich Haas (*String Quartet No.2*, 1998) // Florence Price (*String Quartet in G Major*, 1929) // Caroline Shaw (*Entr'acte*, 2011) // Franz Schubert (*String Quartet No. 14 in D minor*, 1831) // Michael Picknett (original score created in collaboration with Quatuor MP4)

## THE MUSIC – SHORT NOTES

### Quatuor MP4

The MP4 Quartet was created in 2008 by Claire Bourdet, Margaret Hermant, Pierre Heneaux and Meryll Havard, graduates of the Royal Conservatoires of Belgium. Their practice is defined both through performing classical masterpieces, and supporting new work. Working almost continuously for over ten years, MP4 have performed and created work with some of the most celebrated names and institutions across Belgium and internationally.

### Georg Friedrich Haas – *2nd String Quartet* (1998)

Georg Friedrich Haas is widely considered to be one of the most important living composers. He is a leading proponent of microtonality – roughly put, the exploration of the sounds that sit between the twelve semi-tones of the traditional Western octave.

This quartet explores a different way of thinking about composition – a process driven technique. Underpinning the surface complexity of the piece is one of the simplest things you can do in music, a single sustained note played on the cello. All other sounds we hear are overtones of this pitch. There is a particular interest in the absolute precision of positioning of the musician's left hand playing a precise pitch that resonates with the cello note – but also in subtle changes of bow pressure, relating to the volume of the notes being played.

Haas has also spoken eloquently about the dynamics of authority and compliance in music creation – particularly related to his own origins as the child of Nazi parents, and his openly BDSM relationship with the American performer and writer, Mollena Williams–Haas.

### Florence Price – *String Quartet in G Major* (1929)

Florence Price was an American composer who lived and worked in the southern states of the US. Her music often reflects the wide landscapes of the south, incorporating elements of southern folk song and church music. After her death, her music was almost forgotten as musical tastes changed. However, in 2009 a large collection of her scores and papers was discovered in an abandoned house which fuelled a resurgence of interest in her music.

The *String Quartet in G Major* frequently structures its melodic lines on a pentatonic scale – familiar as the underpinning of most western popular music. The pentatonic scale and open harmony contributes to the broad, sweeping, 'American' feel of the piece – perhaps reminiscent of early-20th century Hollywood films. For the players, the piece is also characterised

by quick changes between pizzicato plucking and bowing techniques – arco in music terminology. We were particularly drawn to the way the melody passes between the players – each voice is part of a whole, but distinctly individual.

### Caroline Shaw – *Entr'acte* (2011)

Born in 1982, Caroline Shaw is the youngest person to win the *Pulitzer Prize for Music*. As a violinist by training, she brings a particular awareness and sensitivity towards the potentialities of writing for strings. In an interesting reflection on conceptions of hierarchies and authority in music making, Shaw specifically refers to herself as a 'musician' rather than a 'composer'.

*Entr'acte* follows a clear structural journey – moving between lyrical simplicity and atonal complexity, and everything in between. There are a multiplicity of techniques at play in this piece – including pizzicato, Bartok pizzicato, natural harmonics, artificial harmonics, 'fall off gestures', sul tasto and more. This leads to complex and diverse tactile engagement between the player and their instrument – fascinating for both a performer and listener. We return to this work frequently throughout *Tactile Quartet(s)*.

### Franz Schubert – *Death and the Maiden (String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, 1824)*

Despite dying at 30, Schubert left behind a stunningly prolific collection of work, that for many has come to symbolise the transition from the classical to the romantic eras of orchestral music.

This is one of the most famous string quartets of all time – the melody may well be familiar. The piece is sublimely ordered, each part fitting together in an elegant clockwork to create a new whole. We were drawn to how it utilises short repeated patterns that sound simple on their own, but achieve a great sophistication when played together – all providing a bed for the beautiful cello melody.

### Michael Picknett – *Price-Haas Task* (2019)

Michael Picknett holds a doctorate in Composition from Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London. His background is in devised composition, working with musicians in subverting many of the traditional hierarchies often involved in 'group forming' within musical production, interrogating the potentialities inherent in the relationship between the task giver, and the performer.

In building the musical language of *Tactile Quartet(s)*,

Michael created task based scores through which the MP4 Quartet could interact with the other pieces we were working with, and set them in conversation with one another. These tasks were often driven by concepts of following, supporting and leading as compositional techniques. They ask the performers strive for a tactile sensitivity to the music, and the group, drawing awareness to differences between the four musicians and the four composers.

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