

# Mr DIAGONAL and the BLACK LIGHT ORCHESTRA



Spawned from a macabre Christmas pantomime in december 2005, Brussels-based Mr Diagonal and the Black Light Orchestra are fast becoming one of the most singular and intriguing cabaret-pop phenomena in the galaxy.

Combining Belgian surrealism, English pop and classical orchestration, their deranged, wide-ranging theatre music incorporates elements of Brecht and Weil, Noël Coward, Van Dyke Parks, Monty Python, Frank Zappa, Tom Waites, Douglas Adams and the Residents.

The Black Light Orchestra is led by mainman Mr Diagonal (aka Scottish-born pianist/singer/actor Dan Barbenel), hailed as «clearly a genius» (Momus) and «the rightful hier of Van Dyke Parks» (Danni Heyvaert).

He is aided and abetted by 4 crazed multi-instrumentalists from the Brussels scene; on piccolo/alto flute, baritone/alto sax, bass guitar, analogue keyboards, drums, guitar, glockenspiel, typewriter and coconuts.

## **Contacts:**

**websites:** <http://blacklightorchestra.org/>  
<http://www.myspace.com/blacklightorchestra>

**email:** [blacklightorchestra@gmail.com](mailto:blacklightorchestra@gmail.com)  
**bookings:** Dan Barbenel **0032 (0)484 18 76 54**

## **Media:**

**Music:** <http://blacklightorchestra.bandcamp.com/>  
**Video:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOaANhfWr70>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ir3xwOyk11A>

## **A BRIEF HISTORY of Mr DIAGONAL and the BLACK LIGHT ORCHESTRA.**

- Christmas 2005: Musical comedy « the Red Rabbit Revolution » at Theatre Mercelis, Brussels.  
Fans still debate the exact significance of the huge furry leopard-skin egg in act 5.
- February 2006: Music for Belgian national TV's « Atomium In/Out » (RTBF)  
by famous photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart, celebrating the  
renovation of the Atomium in Brussels.
- March /  
September 2006: 2 tours of Japan (Toyko, Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe), playing alongside  
Shibuzashirazu, Daigurutieni and Kodomokyojin.  
2 full-length documentaries broadcast nationwide on BSI « Music Tide »
- 2007 - 2009: Concerts in Brussels (Theatre Marni, le Brass, Recyclart, Ateliers Claus),  
Liège (Le Manège, Festival Emulation), Ostende (Theatre aan Zee, festival)  
Paris (le Java, Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles, l'Ermitage with Surnatural Orchestra).
- March 2008: Release of debut album «BBB» on homerecords.be
- April 2009: 3<sup>rd</sup> Japanese tour (Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Kyoto).  
Airplay on Peter Barakan's show on national radio,  
Toyko gigs supported by Katan Hiviya and promoted by Bigstream <http://www.bigstream.co.jp/>
- Nov/Dec 2009: Recording and mix of 2<sup>nd</sup> album «Late Victorain» for release april 2010.

## WHO REALLY ARE Mr DIAGONAL and the BLACK LIGHT ORCHESTRA ?

Much debate surrounds the true identity of the band members.  
Here we can exclusively reveal:

### Mr DIAGONAL:



Age: -12

Origin: Dundee, Scotland.

Mr Diagonal (aka Dan Barbenel) grew up in a dull suburb of Glasgow where he endured a soviet-style musical education at the hands of Australian jews. He later went on to study social anthropology at Cambridge and Zen Motorcycle Neglect in Japan. After a spell as a frustrated pop-star in North London in the 90s he moved to Totnes to write poetry in a caravan for 2 years. When he got out he accidentally moved to Brussels and so lived happily ever after.

Random Work Experience:

Cocktail pianist on a private island in Japan (spring/summer 1992).

Piano-accompanist with Vivaine Hetzel's School of Dance, Sonja Kristina of « Hair » at Middlesex University, Roy Hart Theatre Brussels, Madiha Figuigui, Costumed Guide to scare the children at Hampton Court Palace (1995-7).

Cave musician in the Pyrenees (2005)

Actor/singer/pianist in « En Blanc » (Phillipe Tasquin, Denis Mpunga, Zahva Seevald);

Pianist for silent films (Bozar, Brussels).

Currently guide at Museum of Musical Instruments, Brussels.

In the band he sings, plays piano and writes most of the songs.

### VIKING:



aka Quentin Manfroy.

Mr Manfroy is a highly intelligent and articulate graduate who prefers to fritter away his talents on light music and blasphemous monologues. Flute Champion of the Brussels Conservatoire and veteran of Orange Kazoo, he has worked with Frederick Rzewsky and given conferences on modern Art at the Centre for Modern Art in theThessalonica (where his friend's dad works). He is held in the highest regard as flautist, bassist and tambourine player.

## **JOHNNY SHIBATA:**



aka Yannick Dupont.

Yannick studied at the Havana Conservatoire, though you wouldn't know it: frankly his style is more Greek than Latin.

He has been gainfully employed with: Anja Kowalski, Marie-Laure Béraud, Opération Dupont, Ivan Tirtiaux, Spacelab Beursschouwburg and as musician/comedian in the circus «les Mains Sales».

Sartorially, Johnny's rôle model is the Butlins Redcoat circa 1957.

In the Black Light Johnny plays drums, glock, axe and dances.

## **CRYSTAL:**



aka Gregoire Tirtiaux.

Youngest son of a noble waloon dynasty, Crystal is a legendary sax improviser and freelance mathematician.

Studied at the Brussels and Havana conservatoires and has worked with:

les Ogres de Barback, Fanfare de Belgistan, Gang Be Brass Band, Pierre Vaiana, Nery and M.

In his spare time he plays Gembré with the Gnawas of north Morocco.

In the Black Light Orchestra he plays sax, bass, coconuts and sometimes dresses as a giant sailor.

## **THE BRAIN:**



aka Eric Bribosia

Eric is an ambidextrous pianist/accordionist, composer and arranger.

Graduate of the Koninlijk Conservatorium in Brussels, he has played with Think of One, Claude Semal, Mathieu Ha, Ivan Tirtiaux and director Michel D'Hoop.

Film music: for Khalas de Borhane Alaouie; and 1<sup>st</sup> prize-winner at the Aoste Festival with Viking.

Among other prizes, The Brain was St Giles Junior Chess Champion in 1987.

The Brain pilots the BLO bank of analogue keyboards.

## MR DIAGONAL and the BLACK LIGHT ORCHESTRA in the NEWS.

<http://jazzques.skynetblogs.be/post/7411264/mr-diagonal-and-the-black-light-orchestra-au-jazzque>

"Comment définir la musique du groupe? Humm... pas facile car celui-ci mélange les genres avec un malin plaisir. Mais heureusement, le plaisir est aussi pour nous.

Mr. Diagonal (**Dan Barbanel** dans le civil) est pianiste, guitariste, compositeur et chanteur. Il nous a été envoyé de son Ecosse natale voici une bonne dizaine d'années. Il a embarqué avec lui un sens de l'humour caustique et absurde ainsi qu'une grande partie de l'esprit *music-hall* de l'entre-deux-guerres.

On y va?

On démarre avec des chansons tendrement désuètes, qui rappellent un peu **Kurt Weil**, avant de glisser vers du rock qui fait un clin d'œil à **Captain Beefheart** ou **Frank Zappa**. Puis, on fait un bout de chemin avec un Brass Band de rue, avec incartade baroque, qui nous emmène vers un jazz tendance stride. Un peu plus loin, on rencontre un peu de blues, un peu de pop music, un peu de valse et nous voilà de retour au music-hall. Les univers se mélangent sans jamais s'entrechoquer. Les compositions, aux propos souvent surréalistes («Sunshine In A Nuclear Power Station» par exemple) sont riches et surprenantes. Ciselées harmoniquement et rythmiquement. Chacun des musiciens passe d'un instrument à l'autre: le batteur (Yannick Dupont) se fait bassiste; le flûtiste (**Quentin Manfroy**) s'improvise guitariste électrique; le claviériste (**Eric Bribosia**) se mue en percussionniste; la joueuse de viole de gambe (dont je n'ai pas retenu le nom – *shame on me!*) joue de la paille dans un verre d'eau et le saxophoniste (Grégoire Tirtiaux) tripote la basse. Ça bouge tout le temps. Et comme si cela ne suffisait pas, tout ce petit monde chante et participe à des chorégraphies farfelues.

Musique, théâtralisation, chorégraphies dérisoires, poèmes surréalistes («La conspiration reptilienne») ou questionnements *philosophico-dadaesque*, («La nature observe-t-elle le sabbat? Que faisait Dieu avant la création? L'Antéchrist va-t-il nous faire attendre encore longtemps?»), tout fait farine au moulin. Et le plus étonnant, c'est que ça fonctionne. Du coup, on passe un trop court moment avec ces excellents musiciens qui se moquent des genres et qui brassent toutes les idées qui flottent dans l'air du temps.

Mr Diagonal And The Black Light Orchestra va bientôt entrer en studio pour enregistrer un second disque. Il sera sans doute différent du premier («**BBB**» sorti chez Home Record) tout en restant dans le même esprit. De toute façon, ce groupe est insaisissable et, à mon avis, il nous réservera encore d'autres belles surprises, drôles, intelligentes et tellement rafraîchissantes. Qu'on se le dise."

<http://imomus.livejournal.com/324787.html>  
(**Momus' blog**)

"Let's start with the Black Light Orchestra.

From the name, I expected them to be super-trendy electro-disco formalists of some kind, but the reference points that sprang to mind when I played material from their forthcoming album (and a DVD of their appearance on a Japanese TV show called Music Tide) were Brecht and Weill, Noel Coward, Frank Zappa, The Tiger Lilies and The Residents. This is a deranged, wide-ranging theatre music, with song titles like My Life is a Broken Bicycle, Midnight Milkman and A Happy Kangaroo Upon the Moon.

It's far too clever and disturbing and creative for pop or dance or fashion audiences (and in fact visually the group is currently a bit dowdy and over-inclined to gurn, though it obviously hasn't put the Japanese girls off), but I predict that Black Light Orchestra will have great success (on the scale of the Tiger Lilies, I mean) if they can find a literary property (something like "Under Milk Wood") and adapt it for the musical theatre. At the second Brussels concert I met the Black Light mainman, Mr Diagonal, self-described "last living survivor of the great Scottish-Jewish music hall tradition". He's clearly a genius."

<http://www.homerecords.be/francais/BLO/BBB.php>

## **Dani Heyvaert Mazzmusikas 093bis**

MAZZMUSIKAS HATS OFF: ALL HITS, NO MISSES !!!

«You should by now be acquainted with the catalogue of this top Belgian label. Michel Van Achter and co. resolutely stray from well-trodden musical paths, and with this CD they have scored yet another bulls-eye. Mr. Diagonal, aka the shipwrecked Scot Dan Barbenel, is very pleasantly dotty and musically over-endowed. He has surrounded himself with 4 young dogs as eager as himself for musical adventure. Musically this translates as a cocktail of cinematic songs and a fragmented vaudeville underpinned by the Barbenel piano and voice, that makes us think more than once of the Tindersticks, but also brings to mind ragtime and monk-jazz.

Mr. Diagonal's lyrics are completely over-the-top. I suspect him to have been raised on a diet of Broothaers, Duchamp and Magritte (3 Belgian surrealists). On this disc nothing is what it seems, and each listen brings fresh discoveries. This amounts to an astonishing record. Once you have pierced the outer shell, you discover a core of pure musical splendor (e.g. "On the Station" with its delightful flute arrangement) and textual masterpieces like the opener "My Life is a Broken Bike" and "A Happy Kangaroo upon the Moon". Variety is the key-word: one moment it's the kicking surf-rock of "Zarrinqx", the next we're in the soundtrack of some dumb movie ("River of Light").

Look, I know this is a dangerous comparison, but I am willing to stick my neck out and say loud and clear that Mt Diagonal is no more nor less than the rightful heir of Van Dyke Parks. Whoever knows and loves his Song Cycle or Tokyo Rose is not far from the universe of this delightful record.

Special praise for the "young dogs" who let Mr. Diagonal sound as he must sound: fresh, surprising, eccentric and adventurous.

Absolutely indispensable for all who have ears on their head!»

## **[www.victoiremag.be](http://www.victoiremag.be)**

Victoire (le Soir), Belgique 20 juin 2009

«The black light orchestra brasse les genres-musichall anglais, jesus rock, after-dinner rock n roll, musique de chambre- et cultive l'absurde. Des dances d'abeilles aux choréographies de panneaux de signalisation routière.»

## **Agenda, Brussels 22-28 may 2009.**

«The excellent scottish author-composer Momus says he is a genius; the Japanese worship him.

Mr Diagonal, however, does not take himself seriously. Quite the contrary. Both in the Black Light Orchestra and in his interviews, the Scotsman shows a strong sense of the absurd.»

<http://www.pingmag.jp/2006/10/23/black-light-orchestra-rules-the-underground/>  
Black Light Orchestra rules the underground

On a cold evening in March this year, a friend wrote me this urgent mail: "One of the best bands ever is playing at Super Deluxe tonight and apparently, I'll be joining the performance as a 'Street Sign'! Drop by if you can!" I thought that sounded weird enough to give it a try. Although the promised love-act between a one-way and a stop-sign eventually *didn't* take place, I still became the biggest fan of the Black Light Orchestra. Pursuing research into the fascinating field of negative harmony, these Belgian performers are certainly everything you need to celebrate life: funny, sentimental, loud, delicate, original, heartbreaking and overall: strange! Now, they are back in Tokyo after a one month Japan tour to perform one last time. Charter the next airplane around the corner and be sure to make it to the event this Thursday!

How could one describe their music? After-dinner rock'n'roll? An impossible galactic glam rock soundtrack with heartbreaking nursery rhymes? This Belgium's premier pocket surrealist pop ensemble have a simple message: **worshipping the Red Rabbit!**

**Daniel:** It's not so much about worshipping, actually. It's more about... quantum physics!

Having started Black Light Orchestra as a one-man-band back in the days, Mr. Diagonal seems to have endless powers to entertain with poetry, dance and a special set of "contemporary music". Here is one example contemporary piece: the Elephant, recorded at the Jazz club NENOHAKO in Meguro and another one called Sad Carrot performed at Brian Eno's exhibition at LaForet a little while ago.



## BLACK LIGHT ORCHESTRA: TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Grand piano (if unavailable, 2 DIs for electric piano)

5 vocal mics

1 sax micro

Drums/percussion mics: 3 overhead, 1 snare, 2 toms if needed, 1 bass drum.

3 DIs for keyboards

1 guitar amp, 1 bass amp if available.

5 stage monitors

