

FANNY & ALEXANDER

NINA



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PERFORMER **CLARON MCFADDEN**

CONCEPT, DIRECTION, LIGHT DESIGN **LUIGI DE ANGELIS**

DRAMATURGY AND COSTUMES **CHIARA LAGANI**

MUSIC CREATION **CLARON MCFADDEN, DAMIANO MEACCI**

ELECTRONIC MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN **DAMIANO MEACCI**

PHOTOGRAPHY **ENRICO FEDRIGOLI**

COACHING **ANDREA ARGENTIERI**

PRODUCTION **FANNY & ALEXANDER/E PRODUCTION AND MUZIEKTHEATER TRANSPARANT**

CO-PRODUCED BY IRCAM / CENTRE POMPIDOU (PARIS), FESTIVAL D'AUTOMNE À PARIS, ROMAEUROPA FESTIVAL AND TEMPO REALE

CO-PRESENTED BY IRCAM / CENTRE POMPIDOU (PARIS) AND FESTIVAL D'AUTOMNE À PARIS

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NINA is a tribute to the life of Eunice Kathleen Waymon, a singer, pianist, writer, and civil rights activist, widely recognized by most as Nina Simone.



The multi-award-winning American soprano and performer Claron McFadden creates a comprehensive mimetic portrait of the artist Nina Simone, drawing from audio documents of radio and television interviews as well as public speeches. Employing the technique of heterodirection (remote acting), a pivotal element in the poetics of Fanny & Alexander, McFadden immerses herself in Simone's voice, bearing witness to the diverse manifestations of the strength of her character and creative spirit. This journey encompasses the most prominent moments in Simone's trajectory, from poetic tension to her advocacy for the rights of women and African Americans, laying bare her most intimate vulnerabilities and wounds.



The show is part of a series of mimetic portraits created by the company Fanny & Alexander, featuring prominent figures from our recent past: writers, performers, and philosophers who have left behind artworks and words that continue to resonate with significance and urgency today. What unites these figures is the abundance of interviews they conducted, many of which were broadcast on radio or television. These recordings now stand as remarkable documents, offering insights not only into their thoughts but also into their concealed wounds and souls. They represent a parallel treasure trove for investigation, shedding new light on the artistic journeys throughout their entire lives.

We are all aware that the voice serves as our sonic 'fingerprint,' with no two voices being identical. In the watermark of a voice, we can discover a wealth of confidential information about the soul and life of its owner.

"Quite recently there was an article in the New York Times on Lorraine Hansberry and a play downtown of Broadway called To be young, gifted in black produced by her and there was a picture of her there... and it was a picture that I have seen many times before... but photography ss you know has its own way of communicating just as all memes do... and all I can tell you is that this picture caught hold of me... and in her eyes this will sound very strange but not to people that are really hip...hmmm... she kept try to tell me something... I was sitting sitting on the bed and I I remember dis- tinctly saying I would keep looking at the picture and keep looking at the picture and and of course the memory of being with her many times kept coming flooding back in my memory but I said and I remember inspiration is very strange thing, sometimes it happens like a light and I remember get- ting a feeling in my body and I said that's it to be young gifted and black that's all..."

[Fragment of a Nina Simone's interview (transcription)]

THE HETERODIRECTION

The technique of heterodirection endeavors to connect a performer with the richness of this treasure in the present moment. The performer dons headphones, listening to the original recorded voice during the performance and reproducing it simultaneously through imitation.

This seemingly dystopian condition—where the performance time aligns with the recording's pace in the ears—liberates the interpreter from any memory-related thoughts, enabling her to channel all her energy into this reenactment. The original voice transforms into a timbre, a soulful garment to be worn. The interpreter must create space for the encounter with this foreign entity that passes through her and resonates within her, demanding a particular concentration reminiscent of meditation.

Throughout rehearsals, the interpreter delves into videos, studies photos, and explores the proxemics of the person she aims to embody. During the performance, these elements surface as instinctive memories that manifest in her body and on her face. It's a slow, potent, and almost magical process of overlap. Instead of reading a book, the interpreter is 'read' by a voice that reacts within their body, akin to a chemical process. She becomes as an 'antenna' capturing a time from the past and transmitting it into the present. The result is sentences so vibrant that they feel as though spoken for the first time, resonating as today's words in the present tense. In this interpretation, nothing should filter a past experience; rather, the interpreter becomes its contemporary tape recorder.



STAGING *NINA*

The idea of a new epiphany of Nina Simone in our times requires a specific venue, stage or setting to authentically bring her back to life. The mimetic reenactment is most effective when presented in a location that Nina Simone could have frequented during her lifetime, where she might have been interviewed, or where she publicly expressed herself. The meticulous selection of the venue enhances the dramaturgy, creating a profound sense that the artist is once again present through us.

In the case of the Fanny & Alexander show 'Se questo è Levi', we opted to showcase the writer Primo Levi in a setting of public assembly, allowing the spectators to engage with him directly. During the KunstenFestivaldesArts 2022, the performance unfolded within the hemicycle of the federal Senate of Belgium. Spectators occupied the seats typically reserved for senators, while the actor took center stage within the hemicycle itself— not on a traditional stage, but within a hyper-realistic dimension.

Here two reviews that illustrate very well how that worked out:

“Se questo è Levi,” created by the Italian company Fanny & Alexander, takes excerpts from interviews given by Primo Levi, an Auschwitz survivor who wrote about his experience in the camp in “If This Is a Man.” The audience plays the role of the interviewer: a list of questions is provided, and they can be asked in any order. As soon as Andrea Argentieri, who plays Levi, is finished with one answer, anyone can chime in, using the microphone on each senator’s table.

It may be artificial, but it is strangely moving, nonetheless, to address Levi, who died in 1987, so personally. When I asked him, “In your opinion, can you erase the humanity of a man?,” Argentieri, who mimics Levi’s demeanor down to the way he rested his glasses on his forehead, looked at me for a few seconds with unspoken pain before replying.

Would it work in other contexts? It’s debatable, but in the Belgian Senate, Levi’s eloquent thoughts on the Holocaust and its legacy had the gravitas of an official hearing, for posterity. Perhaps they should be heard there more often.

[THE NEW YORK TIMES, 13 May 2022]

Words from the past, revived by actor Andrea Argentieri. Each time a hand rises in the Senate galleries to press the microphone button and pose one of the selected questions, the actor allows himself to be immersed in the recording of Primo Levi’s response, transmitted to him through an earpiece. He then resurrects the voice, tone, and inflections, striving for a raw, transparent, and unfiltered restitution.

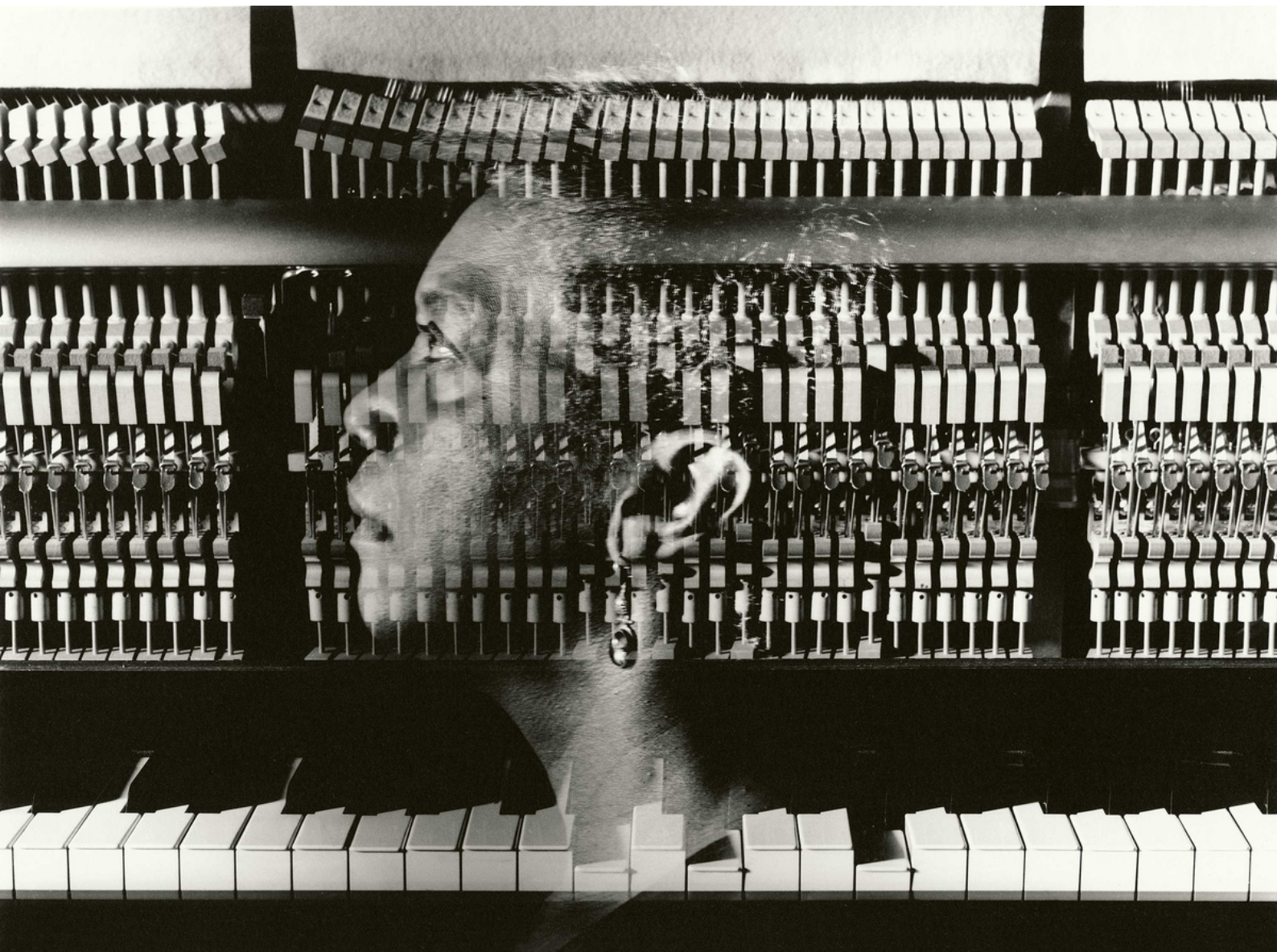
With no embellishment or interpretation, he becomes an immediate channel for a man endowed with unparalleled precision in his words, free from hatred yet brimming with an ultra-sensitive insight. How we wish that every Belgian citizen could, for a brief hour, listen to these potent echoes of history!

[LE SOIR, May 9, 2022]

AT THE ORIGIN OF NINA: A CONCERT

In 1976, Nina Simone delivered a memorable concert at the Jazz Festival in Montreux, Switzerland—a widely acclaimed performance that is easily accessible on YouTube. During this concert, the iconic musician demonstrated an irresistible urge to connect with the audience, shattering the boundaries of the typical concert ritual. Seated at the piano, Simone would often begin to play, only to interrupt herself, engaging directly with the audience without filters. She would leave her piano stool, traverse the stage, return to the piano, initiate singing, interrupt herself once more, delve into dance, laying bare her emotions in a state of trance and special grace.

In NINA, we embark from that precise moment, from the incredible space of freedom she forged during her concert. We delve into her intimate world, exploring her political thoughts, the wounds of her later years, her anger, pain, energy, and bitterness. This journey incorporates musical reconstructions of her songs, seamlessly transitioning from direct audience engagement to suspended moments of pure music.



DRAMATURGY

The dramaturgy of the performance will be centered around Nina Simone's autobiography, 'I Put a Spell on You' and around interviews on radio and television, as well as live concerts from the 1960s to the final years of her life, such as:

- Interview, 1966, CBC, by Martin Bronstein
- Interview, 1968, New York, by Peter Rodis
- Interview, 1969, Black Journal
- Concert, 1976, Live in Montreux
- Interview, 1984 at Ronnie Scott Jazz Club, London
- Interview, Channel 4, Afternoon with Mavis Nicholson, 1987?
- Interview, 1988, CMR, by Tim Prescott
- Interview, 1999, BBC, by Tim Sebastian

IMAGES

Nina Simone was not merely an extraordinary musician; she evolved into an iconic figure of her era.

She left very intense photographic portraits of herself that speak and reveal much about her.

Together with Italian photographer Enrico Fedrigoli, we crafted a series of portraits featuring Claron McFadden, meticulously inspired by the original captures of Simone. This series embarks on a journey that seamlessly bridges the past and present, the essence of the original identity, and its contemporary manifestation.

VENUES

The ideal venues for NINA are: concert halls, clubs, music theaters.

LANGUAGE OF THE SHOW

English (with some French inserts in a French setting, Italian in Italy, etc.). Claron McFadden is fluent in English, French, Dutch, and speaks a good Italian.



WHAT CLARON SAYS ABOUT NINA (VOICE MESSAGE)

Hello, this is Claron McFadden and I would just like to take a minute to say a few words about Nina Simone and what she means to me as an artist, musician, person of color as an American woman.

I know her name and I distinctly heard her music during my childhood, but she wasn't directly connected to my musical landscape and actually I started to hear more about her when I came to Europe. [...]

I was immediately intrigued by her identity, but it was her music that has always touched me, still at a distance.

A few years ago, I heard an interview in which she said that she wanted to be the first black pianist in the history of Europe, and she said (quoting her now): "I wanted to be the first black American concert pianist, I would have been happy, I'm not happy now".

This touched me to the core of my being, and I could never hear anything she was saying from that moment on in the same way. All I could only hear was the sadness, all I could only hear was her saying that she would have been happy but wasn't happy now.

So I had a mixed feeling about it: part of me is glad that she sang and that her music is on earth, but another part of me finds it truly tragic because she couldn't fulfill her dreams and her desire to be a concert pianist.

So I started to be more interested in who she was, what happened with her, how she managed to survive, her journey, how she left America, her bitterness, the anger, and her political side as well.

When Luigi told me about this project I thought: "This is the moment for me to get to know her", to dive into her world, and I think what's truly special about this project is that we're not learning a script, not memorizing text, and not giving an interpretation of how we think she expressed herself.



We are actually letting her speak through me and I find this really beautiful and fascinating, because it's impossible to be passive of course, but with the idea of being as a pure vessel as possible, to let her speak through me, to truly study her words, her movements, how she expresses herself vocally, linguistically and physically. How she connects with the world is something that I really want to get into and I think it's important to be able to let her tell her story through me... Everything, the pain, the joy, the anger, the political injustice, her illnesses, her sorrow, everything; but through me, not by adding something to it. That's why I'm very excited about this project, being a woman of color, a musician who left my country for similar reasons, not as dramatic as hers, but I was lucky to realize my dreams with few obstacles, although I know what it means.

So it's beautiful to be able to have this opportunity to understand, to find out, to discover who she really is through her own words, her own actions, her own way of expressing her connection with the world. That's it, thank you very much.

[Claron McFadden]

LUIGI DE ANGELIS



Luigi De Angelis is a director, set designer, creator of lighting and video, as well as a composer of electro-acoustic music. In 1992, he co-founded the company Fanny & Alexander with Chiara Lagani. His direction and ideas are always based on a relationship between music, sound space, and the stage space, drawing inspiration from visual arts and contemporary music repertoire.

In 2015, in collaboration with Sergio Policicchio, he created a concert/performance dedicated to the composer Giacinto Scelsi, titled "In Nomine Lucis," at deSingel in Antwerp, Belgium. He was responsible for the lighting design and electronic compositions for the project. "In Nomine Lucis" was also presented in 2017 at the International Festival of Buenos Aires at the Teatro Colon. In 2015, he directed Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte" at the Teatro Comunale in Bologna, overseeing the set design and lighting for the performance as well.

In 2017, Luigi De Angelis was responsible for the design, direction, and lighting of the performance "Zmeya", inspired by the life of Sergei Diaghilev, with the Solistenensemble Kaleidoskop of Berlin. This project was commissioned by Klarafestival and produced in collaboration with the Concertgebouw in Bruges and deSingel in Antwerp. The performance was restaged in Berlin in 2018 at the Radialsystem and made its debut in Italy at the Romaeuropa Festival with the new title "Serge".

In 2017 Luigi De Angelis directed a special version of Monteverdi's "L'Orfeo", titled "Orfeo Viajero", at deSingel in Antwerp. The production featured young soloists and musicians from the Summer School of MuziekTheater Transparant, under the direction of director Hernan Schwartzman.

In the summer of 2018, he directed, staged, and provided lighting for "Les Indes Galantes" by Rameau, once again at deSingel. The production featured young soloists and musicians from the MuziekTheater Transparant Summer School, under the guidance of director and harpsichordist Korneel Bernolet.

In 2019, Luigi De Angelis was responsible for directing, set design, video, and lighting for "L'Orfeo" by Monteverdi at the Teatro Ponchielli in Cremona. In 2020, his video installation, lighting, and direction project for "Passion selon Saint Jean" by Scarlatti made its debut at the Klarafestival in Belgium with the B'Rock Ensemble.

In 2021, Luigi De Angelis directed, designed the sets, and handled the lighting for "A.L.I.C.E.," a musical theater project by Muziektheater Transparant, held at deSingel. Subsequently, he premiered at the Romaeuropa Festival with a video/concert polyptych titled "The Garden", featuring Claron McFadden and Emanuele Wiltsch Barberio. In October 2021, he directed, designed the sets, created the videos, and managed the lighting for Joseph Haydn's "L'Isola Disabitata" at the Teatro Alighieri in Ravenna. This production was reprised with a new cast at the Opéra de Dijon in November 2021.

In June 2022, Luigi De Angelis directed, designed the sets, created the videos, and managed the lighting for "Il ritorno di Ulisse in Patria" by Claudio Monteverdi at the Teatro Ponchielli in Cremona.

In November 2022, he directed, designed the sets, created the videos, and managed the lighting for Richard Wagner's "Lohengrin" at the Teatro Comunale in Bologna.

In March 2023, he directed, designed the sets, and handled the lighting for Gioachino Rossini's "Il Barbiere di Siviglia", with musical direction by Giulio Cilona, performed at the Teatro Sociale in Rovigo, the Teatro Alighieri in Ravenna, and the Teatro Verdi in Pisa.

CLARON MCFADDEN



Claron McFadden is a soprano known in both the world of Baroque music and contemporary music. She studied at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and has worked with conductors like Sir Andrew Davis, Frans Brüggen, and William Christie. She played the lead role of Lulu at Glyndebourne and Zerbinetta in "Arianna a Naxos" at the English National Opera. She has also performed Handel's operas at numerous opera houses and international festivals, including the lead role of Semele in Rotterdam. Claron McFadden enjoys participating in interdisciplinary projects that intersect various artistic disciplines, collaborating with artists such as Alain Platel (in the opera "Pitié") and the David Kweksilber Big Band. Additionally, she has collaborated with the Muziektheater Transparant in Antwerp on various projects in recent years. In 2006, she received the Amsterdam Prize for the Arts and was nominated for the Grammy Awards. Claron McFadden is recognized as one of the leading performers of contemporary music and has had the honour of giving world premieres of works by composers such as Michel van der Aa, Wolfgang Rihm, and Joerg Widman. Thanks to her vocal versatility, she is often invited to collaborate with jazz musicians such as Henk Meutgeert and the Jazz Orchestra of The Concertgebouw, Michiel Borstlap, Chris Hinze, and Aka Moon.

Her 2010 TED Talk on John Cage's Aria was selected for publication on the prestigious TED website. Claron McFadden is also an artist in residence at Muziektheater Transparant in Antwerp, where she has created personal interdisciplinary projects, including "Lilith" in 2012, "Secrets" in 2015, "Nightshade: Aubergine" in 2017, and most recently "Façade: The Last Days of Mata-Hari" in 2017 in collaboration with Jean Lacornerie.

FANNY & ALEXANDER

Fanny & Alexander is an artisti alliance founded in Ravenna in 1992 by Luigi de Angelis (director, set designer, and lighting designer) and Chiara Lagani (dramaturge, author, and actress). Fanny & Alexander creates productions that result from the fusion of various artistic languages, including theater, visual arts, music, cinema, and literature. The company produces theatrical shows, live performances, operas, and installations, involving an ever-evolving network of artists from diverse disciplines. Their interaction on and off the stage leads to a reflection on the relationships between tradition and new technologies.

Among their most recent theatrical projects are "Storia di un'amicizia" the theatrical adaptation of Elena Ferrante's tetralogy, "Se questo è Levi", "Sylvie e Bruno", "Manson" e "Nina". In 2019, Fanny & Alexander received the Ubu Special Award, while Andrea Argentieri received the Ubu Award for Best Actor under 35 for "Se questo è Levi."

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