

ELECTRO

EN The best review about a Belgian album that the influential music website Pitchfork ever wrote was about the music of a Brussels-based sexagenarian that nobody has ever heard of. The Listen! Festival will mark the live comeback of Pablo's Eye, the nom de plume of Axel Libeert's collective.

— TOM PEETERS
PHOTO: BARBARA OORTS

BRUZZ wanted to know who was behind the intriguing ambient synth music that the unconventional STROOM label recently compiled on no fewer than three albums – *Bardo for Pablo*, *Spring Break*, and *Dark Matter* – which then, in part with the help of Pitchfork, began an international success story. It wasn't really the beginning. In the 1990s, Axel Libeert (63) distributed the music that he made in his free time through various smaller foreign labels. But though he made remixes for Colin Newman, a member of the British punk band Wire, and he toured around France with Front 242, it was still niche music, and he quietly ended his career around the turn of the century. Or at least that's what he thought. At his TESLAB studio near Meiser, he is now letting us hear and see a melancholy foretaste of the subdued live show that he will be performing at Les Brigittines with singer and violinist Hendrike Scharmann, the most recent addition to his collective Pablo's Eye.

So, how did you end up in Brussels?

AXEL LIBEERT: I have West-Flemish roots. My father made linen from flax and was specialized in painting canvasses. He taught me that making something in function of art, and not merely as art was also exceptionally honourable. That is why I have never shied away from commercial jobs. On the contrary, they have always nourished my creativity. 45 years ago, I was 18, and I started

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studying directing at the RITCS. I started using old tape recorders to make the music for the other students' assignments, and I never really stopped.

And Pablo's Eye was founded when your clients became more professional?

LIBEERT: At first, I made a lot of credits for television shows, including for (Flemish singer and TV host) Bart Peeters's *Villa Tempo*, and I also spent several years working for the SOM, the former Socialist Broadcaster, but most of my clients came from abroad. I often visited Asia, I lived in London for six years in a time when everything was possible, I worked for CBS and for ZTT Records, the label of Franky Goes to Hollywood. It was a golden age, partly because I could get my hands on very expensive sampling equipment that I could experiment with at home. When I would later submit the soundtrack of yet another corporate film, people would sometimes say that my music was more than just atmosphere. That is how it all started.

Whose idea was it to release the music from the 1990s again now?

LIBEERT: Because my vinyl records were becoming rarer, people would sometimes ask me if they would not be reissued. But I was not really interested, until I met Ziggy Devriendt, who works at STROOM. His enthusiasm was infectious.

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What was the effect of the Pitchfork review that gave *Bardo for Pablo* a high score of 8.2/10?

LIBEERT: The difference with the past is that I have gotten to know my audience. The response to my work has become personal. The number of visitors to the website increased tremendously after the Pitchfork review. The day after it went online, there were already 400 visitors. The labels I worked for in the past have also expressed interest. I have also received dozens of requests to release new music. It all makes me very happy, but at 63, I'm trying to take things easy, though Hendrike, who is 29 and has enriched the sound of Pablo's Eye, wants to conquer the world. In any case, we have shows lined up in Finland and Barcelona.

Do you perform live arrangements of what is on the three reissues?

LIBEERT: About half of the 21 tracks consists of recycled pieces that are more than twenty years old. The other half is more recent. The performance with visuals by Johan Coopman and text by Richard Skinner is based on a DJ and live set that I performed at the Tate Modern in London last year. I suddenly saw the whole room go nuts to a quiet ambient track ("Opina" from the 1995 album *You Love Chinese Food*, tp) - incidentally, Hendrike does something wild with it. She remembered it from when it was the opening track of *4Later*, a TV show with chill music that Channel 4 broadcast on people's night out. Everybody went completely crazy. That's when I decided to resurrect Pablo's Eye. Only because I was able to elicit that emotion again. ☑

NL Het eigenzinnige label STROOM bracht de voorbije jaren een trilogie van Pablo's Eye opnieuw uit. Het experimentele synthcollectief rond Brusselaar Axel Libeert viert nu ook zijn live-comeback op het Listen! Festival.

FR Au cours des dernières années, le label unique en son genre STROOM a sorti une trilogie de Pablo's Eye. Le collectif expérimental, formé autour du Bruxellois Axel Libeert, fête son retour en live sur la scène du Listen! Festival.

SHOCK AND AWE

During the Listen! Festival, you can again relish everything that is going on in the underground of electronica, both at home and abroad. Five alternative acts that are guaranteed to give you electroshocks.



Tony Allen & Jeff Mills
17/4, 20.15, FLAGEY

"I don't always want to play the same style, like the artist in the charts. So when Jeff Mills calls, I'm ready." These are the words of the Afrobeat legend Tony Allen, who delves deeper into his rhythm rapport with the techno pioneer from Detroit on the album *Tomorrow Comes the Harvest* as well as at the opening concert of Listen!



Patricia Kokett
18/4, 20.00, LAVALLÉE

On Thursday evening, Listen! will head to the canal zone with free showcases at seven locations. We will be hypnotised by the mystical electro of the Lithuanian Gediminas Jakubka, who is making his Belgian stage debut and whose album debut will be released on the intriguing Knekelhuis label in June.



Kamaal Williams
19/4, 20.00, HORTA GALLERY

An infectious mix of fusion jazz and the raw urban London sounds: this is the successful formula that the producer and synth wizard with Taiwanese roots Kamaal Williams has already tried and tested with Yussef Kamaal, and is now also serving under his own funky name. You may also know him as his DJ alias, Henry Wu.



**Annelies Monseré/
Aponogeton**
19/4, 20.00, LES BRIGITTINES

In addition to Pablo's Eye, the Ostend-based STROOM label is also presenting new work by two promising artists. The ethereal folk of Annelies Monseré moves you on *Happiness is Within Sight*. The cinematic soundscape of Aponogeton, the alter ego of Jachym Vandenabeele, does so on *A Place of Solace*.



**AMMAR 808/
Susobrinho**
20/4, 19.30, VK*

The rousing collective led by the Tunisian local Sofyann Ben Youssef combines Maghreb traditions with electronica. You will likewise be excited during this Rebel Up!-curated evening of global sounds by Susobrinho aka Bart Van Obbergen Pérez who explores his Bolivian heritage through the rhythms of the Amazon.