

## Paul Rans – Singer, Lute Player, Lute Maker and Broadcaster

Paul Rans was born in Leuven, Belgium, where he co-founded a band called RUM in 1969. During the next ten years RUM proved to be one of the major European folk bands whose original blend of traditional and contemporary songs and music proved to be the right touch at the right time. RUM performed not only in Flanders and Wallonia, but also extensively in the Netherlands, France, England, Ireland, Germany and Switzerland.

Besides performing with RUM, Paul Rans also studied classical guitar at the Brussels Conservatoire, but his interest in early music led him from the guitar to the lute. He studied in Cologne with Michael Schäffer and later also in England.

In 1976 he moved to London and later to Dorset, where he divided his time between music and lute making.

In 1979 he recorded the LP *Die Nachtegael int wilde* with lutenist Lieven Misschaert, featuring 16<sup>th</sup> century Flemish songs, lute solos and duets – an LP which enjoyed very favourable reviews well beyond Belgian borders (An exciting record, *Early Music*).

He participated in various Belgian Radio productions such as the *Islandsuite* in 1984 (songs of Flemish fishermen in Iceland) or *Vive le Geus* in 1988, singing 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Flemish revolutionary songs in the company of Wannes Van de Velde and the BRTN Radio Chorus, conducted by Vic Nees. He also took part in a Radio 1 series on Flemish Songbooks, with other prominent Flemish singers such as Wannes Van de Velde, Dirk Van Esbroeck and 't Kliekske.

*Blame not my lute* was a solo LP, recorded in 1987, featuring 16<sup>th</sup> c. Flemish, English and French songs and lute music, again well received by the music press. (Consistently attention-gripping, *Classical Guitar*).

In 1987 he moved back to Belgium and founded the PAUL RANS ENSEMBLE (Philippe Malfeyt: lutes, hammered dulcimer; Piet Stryckers: fiddle, viol, hurdy-gurdy; Paul Van Loey: recorders, dulcian). Soon after their first CD was released, *Mit desen nyewen iare*, Christmas songs from the Low Countries, followed by a second, *Egidius waer bestu bleven*, a selection from the 14<sup>th</sup> c. *Gruuthuse Ms.* These recordings as well as the group's concerts were greatly appreciated by audience and critics alike.

Honest and pure like the flame of a candle (Knack)

Musicians in heart and soul (De Standaard)

Paul Rans is a marvellous singer' (*Early Music Review*, London)

1993 saw another first with the release of a selection of songs from the Antwerp Songbook (1544): A caress for the ear in our stressed-out fin-de-siècle, *Uit-Magazine*.

In February 1994 he took part in a Brussels concert where the European lute was confronted with the Arab 'ud. Here he was in the company of lutenist Philippe Malfeyt and two Moroccan 'ud players, Abid El Bahri and Kamal Hors. This resulted in further Flemish-Moroccan cooperation, RANS & WESHM, an intercultural programme based on Moroccan as well as Flemish roots. A taste of this programme can be heard on the compilation CD *Warande Express*.

Since then the name RANS has been kept and the group has also worked with the *Capilla Flamenca* in performing secular songs and folk songs besides their 16<sup>th</sup> century polyphonic counterparts.

Paul Rans is also the Flemish voice on the Dutch ensemble *Camerata Trajectina's* discs *De Vrede van Munster* (1998) and *Wilhelmus en de anderen* (Amsterdam University Press)

In 2001 he was involved in *Het Project*, a contemporary approach to traditional music, with Marc Hauman, Lode Vercampt, Philippe Thuriot, Philippe Malfeyt and Kim Delcour, directed by Wouter Vandenebeebe who wrote and arranged the music.

More recently RANS has worked with the French singer and hurdy-gurdy player Claude Flagel as RANS & FLAGEL in a programme called De la Seine à l'Escaut / Van Antwerpen tot Parijs – a meeting between Germanic and Latin cultures showing many links between Flemish and French songs. The CD was awarded a CHOC! by the prominent French music magazine Le Monde de la Musique.

In 2002 Paul Rans joined the top Flemish folk band Ambrozijn to perform the longest known ballad in the Dutch language, De Hertog van Brunswyk, also resulting in a CD with just the one ballad, but sung to a variety of tunes.

In 2003 he was invited to take part in the Brussels literary festival Muziek en Poëzie. With stage and film actress Antje de Boeck he devised a programme confronting Middle Dutch songs and poems from the Gruuthuse MS. with the modern verse of Hugo Claus.

In 2005 Paul Rans, Wiet Van de Leest and Dirk Van Esbroeck – the three original members of RUM – reformed to sing in a project with the girl singers of Laïs. Sadly, Dirk Van Esbroeck had become gravely ill and he died on 23 May 2007. His musical friends performed in numerous tribute concerts and the massive attendance showed how popular Dirk had been.

In 2008 there was a Flemish-British cooperation between Rans and Coope, Boyes & Simpson, with Fi Fraser, Georgina Boyes and Jo Freya. In this meeting Flemish Christmas songs got a touch of English colour while the British carols were seasoned with some of the Burgundian Flemish spirit.

In January 2009 the latest Rans & Flagel CD was released, Drie oorlogstaferelen / Trois tableaux de guerre / Three Scenes of War (Fréa Records MWCD 4061) with songs of war from three separate periods, namely 16<sup>th</sup> century, 18<sup>th</sup> century and WW I.

During the tribute concerts to Dirk Van Esbroeck, Paul Rans and his old Rum mate Wiet Van de Leest worked with singer Marc Hauman and guitarist Jokke Schreurs. This encouraged them to follow this up with a new programme together, A la Rum, featuring old Rum repertoire besides totally new material.

Paul Rans started broadcasting for the English language programmes of the Flemish World Service, RVI, in 1985 and in 1993 he started producing and presenting world music programmes for VRT Radio 3, which changed its name into Klara.

In February 2009 he retired from his radio work, but meanwhile he is making lutes again in Dorset, where he lives with his British wife, the artist Nell Race.

And he hasn't stopped singing and playing ...

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