

WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT UNIVERS ZERO'S ALBUMS:

UNIVERS ZERO

RELAPS-ARCHIVES 1984-1986

CUNEIFORM

2009

This album features: **Michel Delory** [guitar], **Daniel Denis** [drums], **Dirck Descheemaeker** [soprano sax, clarinet, bass clarinet], **Christian Genet** [bass], **Patrick Hanappier** [violin, viola], **Andy Kirk** [keyboards], **André Mergen** [cello, alto sax, voice], and **Jean-Luc Plouvier** [keyboards]

“Reissue: Best of the Week: UNIVERS ZERO - Relaps: Archives 1984 - 1986 (Cuneiform) –
...what a collection: selected from four gigs in Germany and Belgium, captured with great quality live sound that does justice to both the five-piece and later seven-piece version of the ensemble.

Once again, there's no moment of filler from Univers Zero. A rich stew of beautiful classical instrumentation - clarinets and sax, violin, cello and viola - with keyboards and rock bass and drums, each complex, driving composition is alive with dangerous energy and crackling tension from beginning to end. They're the seething antidote to the twee and complacent in rock/classical crossover, the Stravinsky- and Ligeti- influenced blast of reality that makes even King Crimson sound like Andrew Lloyd Webber. Other avant-rock bands dabble in dark, 20th-century passages: Univers Zero dive right in, exploring danger and menace and foreboding in all possible nuances...

These recordings catch Univers Zero with powers at full-strength - and fascinatingly, at a terrible time to be making this music, trapped in the shallows of the early 80s, soaring over the heads of the European music industry, ...

These concerts have Univers Zero playing later compositions that have moved on from the more acoustic, often early-music, medieval sound of their first album, with more keyboards and greater use of rock drum-kit. ...It all comes to a shattering climax on 'The Funeral Plain', a work that from quiet beginnings builds and builds layers of fear... its utterly relentless, a soundtrack to induce predator-prey nightmares...that drives on to a quite unique sonic apocalypse. ...

Two years later...they split. Thank goodness...Cuneiform...continued to believe in the band, releasing back catalogue until a generation of listeners were ready for them. Univers Zero was reformed by Denis just before the new millennium... They're one of the great unsung rock bands of the last 30 years, and good enough to earn hesitant respect from the contemporary-classical world too. With its near studio sound and stupendous energy, 'Relaps' is as good a place to start with Univers Zero as their classic debut.”

– Sean, **Organ** [UK] #298, March 13, 2009, www.organart.demon.co.uk

“Quite the revelation here, Cuneiform Records offering up vintage live Univers Zero from the years 1984-1986... It's always amazing how dark, brooding, and often times heavy this 'RIO/chamber rock' institution can get, most of the time utilizing acoustic instruments... ...the world of Univers Zero... is often times unsettling, chaotic, and ominous music, yet there lies a uncurrent of extreme beauty...

The dueling sax and cello outbursts on the extended "Presage" are mindblowing...the band hits you almost as a doom metal band would, tunes like "Emanations", the classic "Heatwave", and "The Funeral Plain" rampages through your speakers with the power of heavy rock, yet with the deft touch of classical or jazz. The version of "Heatwave" here is one of the most startling slices of avant-prog you will ever let your ears feast on, jagged shards of guitar, booming bass, squawking sax, layers of keyboards, soaring violon, and bombastic drum patterns all fighting for supremacy yet the overall effect is grandiose and majestic.

This is amazing stuff, more proof of just how unique and powerful this Belgian band always was, and still is for that matter. If you have a penchant for archival live prog recordings, make sure you add this one to your 'must have' list.”

– Pete Pardo, **Sea of Tranquility**, www.seaoftranquility.org

“...in 1984 and 1987, the Belgian ensemble Univers Zero released two albums that were among the best of an avant-garde scene that defied the cheesiness of the ['80s] era. *Uzed* and *Heatwave* explored electro-acoustic chamber music, with bandleader and primary composer Daniel Denis combining Bartok-ian gloom with dissonant guitar solos and insistent rhythms. *Relaps*...is the only live document of Univers Zero's *Uzed/Heatwave* period...the quality and intensity of the performances...indicate a remarkably practiced band. ...all of Denis' pieces from *Uzed* are included on the disc, along with the two major compositions from *Heatwave*, both...written by...keyboardist, Andy Kirk. While the studio recordings were marred by...dated production, the sound here is excellent-or at least as good a can be expected from 20-year-old tapes. ...The harrowing “Emanations” vacillates between quiet, stark passages and a dark intensity evident in the brief, clawing guitar solo that brings the piece to an epic and somber conclusion. “The Funeral Plain,” a sprawling 20-minute composition is the centerpiece of *Relaps*. ...The last few minutes...consist of an enthralling buildup, as a violin and clarinet share a propulsive theme, over which Michel Delory spews molten, Hendrix-like spasms of electric guitar. ...Denis is clearly in control throughout, his stickwork too complex to scan neatly as rock drumming or classical percussion. It's a good reminder that Univers Zero was ahead of its time, even if it was (and remains) lost between serious and popular music.”

– Brandon Wu, **Washington City Paper**, v. 29. n.4, Jan. 23-29, 2009

“Even some 30 odd years after it first came into existence, Belgian band Univers Zero sounds as though it's intent upon a soundtrack for the last days of the earth, or at least the last days of human life upon it. ... the live setting ensures the performances are even more malignantly visceral than they usually are.

It's often...that composers such as Ligeti are cited as influences or touchstones...but... Henry Cow and Van Der Graaf Generator are equally pertinent...both...fashioned music that stays within the rock idiom even while appearing to have little time for such genre trappings. All three bands have also utilized highly formal structures...

...this is a band with a different aesthetic agenda... The notion of dark fun might just about cover it, but even that does scant justice to such a singular band.”

– Nic Jones, **All About Jazz**, April 27, 2009, www.allaboutjazz.com

“...*Relaps* is an essential piece of work showing that the band's most exceptional moments were indeed live.

Roughly the disc is made of two main chunks of three tracks... The first ... includes mostly tracks from my fave album of theirs: *Uzed*...

...the last chunk comes...mostly from the future *Heatwave* album with ...the 9- mins Heatwave and the 18-mins Funeral Plain are both outstanding versions... Great stuff!!” – Sean Trane, **Progarchives.com**

“...First up are a pair of performances from a quintet version of UZ ...What is so striking about these tracks is the stark difference between this band and the previous version that recorded *Ceux du Dehors*. This is a much more electric UZ. ...more powerful range of dynamics, without changing the overall sophistication and scope of either arranging or playing.

The latter version of UZ, recorded in 1985 and 1986...is the ultimate version of UZ in a live context. The contrasting keyboard sounds...offer a much more sinister and menacing quality to the music. The transformation of "Emanations," from the *Uzed* album, is simply shocking.

... For anyone who has been interested in this band, this set is simply indispensable. ...well worth investigating.” – Thom Jurek, **All Music Guide**

"...*Relaps*' most impressive track *Relaps* is an 18-minute version of *Heatwave*'s "The Funeral Plain" that...builds with the inevitability of a bolero, albeit through a series of movements, towards its relentless and cathartic climax, complete with Michel Delory's screaming guitar and Denis' thundering percussion.

The markers of early UZ remain--a confluence of unorthodox instrumentation and classical references --but *Relaps* leaves little doubt that...Univers Zero of 1984-1986 was more hard-edged and even rockier than it had been in the '70s..." -- John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, www.allaboutjazz.com

Subtitled "Archives 1984-1986", this disc ...contains live performances by the angriest incarnations -- the 1984 quintet and the 1985-86 septet - of Daniel Denis' creature, one of the defining entities of Rock In Opposition... The material, mastered from clear enough archival tapes, comprises exciting renditions of classics such as "Présage" and "The Funeral Plain", pieces delivered with a mixture of high-level technical proficiency, exquisite classical sensitiveness and...scarcely repressed fury...I feel older by the minute, yet the goosebumps that came up during some of these executions, most notably in the fantastic rhythmic unassailability of "Heatwave" (the tune), are the same of a couple of decades ago. What a group. And they're still here..."

-- Michel Ricci, *Temporary Fault*, June 28, 2009, temporaryfault.blogspot.com

"I am ashamed to say that I came close to living out my entire life without ever hearing of them (oh how I love you, Cuneiform Records! Let me count the ways in 13/16th timing). Honestly, this is the holy grail of bent prog: pianos, violin, brass/woodwinds, guitar, kitchen sink, sultry lower back of orgasmic woman (pretty sure that's in there). Play with Birdsongs of the Mesozoic and the names I just dropped, or even Bitches Brew Miles Davis or John McLaughlin's 'Vishnu Orch or goddamned Black Flag or Damn good smoking stuff!!! Recorded live to beat all too. Dang!.... All tracks great, seriously."

-- Your Imaginary Friend, *ZooKeeper online, KZSU Radio*, 2009-04-06, zookeeper.stanford.edu

"...70 minutes of intense live rock in opposition. ...

Imagine chamber music given a healthy injection of ominous overtones and a progressive boost- and you have an idea of what Univers Zero sound like.

...

For all these darkside tendencies, there is a definite ebullience to the music. While menace is overtly present, the tunes celebrate a sense of intensity devoted to life... The compositions are intricate and cerebral...surging passages that...undergo rapid signature changes. A constant level of intensity...even the lulls are drenched with dramatic anticipation..."

-- Matt Howarth, *Sonic Curiosity*, www.soniccuriosity.com

"... This eight-track collection culls...live performances from the mid-1980s, recorded...at four European shows. They emphasize the "rock" in "chamber rock" while stretching the sonic definitions of keyboards, violin, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, English horn and sax with the traditional electric bass/guitar/drum combo."

-- Michale Popke, *Goldmine*, April 10, 2009, www.goldminemag.com

"...Belgium's Univers Zero have always been at the forefront of the progressive rock scene. ... *Relaps* is composed of a series of live shows from the period that produced the *Uzed* and *Heatwave* albums... This is the "electric" UZ, far removed from the acoustic chamber rock found on their debut. The fidelity is amazing... the group's dark, moody arrangements have been reproduced with exceptional clarity. ...it's bizarre that Univers Zero aren't mentioned greater frequency. ..."

-- Bryon Hayes, *Exclaim!*, February 2010, www.exclaim.ca

"This live archival release by Univers Zero provides the prime, avant-rock band's music stripped of its studio sterility. Seventy minutes in length, the best of the band's *Uzed* (1984) and *Heatwave* (1986) albums is here, in spectacular live versions that make the music come off even darker and certainly less technocratic..."

...these recordings sound less industrial and more natural... the instruments to breathe within the pieces. The keyboards, clarinet and saxes are celestial and mind-slicing at the same time, the bass pumps and resonates uninhibitedly, the drums echo violently..."

Recorded over twenty years ago, this music hasn't aged a bit. In fact, it is hard to think of something that surpasses it in terms of modernity! ... This is music that constantly strikes you, ...a true storm ... (9.5/10)"

-- Avi Shaked, *Maelstrom*, www.maelstrom.nu

"...like some sort of malevolent creature from the underground, they keep coming back.

Relaps: Archives 1984-1986 captures the band onstage at a fascinating point in their career... Having exhausted the somewhat acoustic and gothic influences of their early work, Univers Zero was...amplifying their sound in the mid-Eighties. There is also a marked progressive and fusion influence in the music.

... "The Funeral Plain" is the longest track on *Relaps*. The hometown crowd seems to adore this one... It is no wonder, the song has a very foreboding introduction, which just gets darker... The rhythmic drive that emerges is relentless, and is as arresting as the "Supper's Ready" segment "Apocalypse in 9/8" by Genesis. The frenzied latter part builds to a monumental crescendo, then slowly resolves... It is little wonder that the crowd gave them such an ovation at the end.

The other extended track, "Emanations"...was recorded at the Frankfurt Jazz Festival in Germany, 1986. ...this is the most jazz- oriented track on the set. I hear snatches of fusion masters such as *Jack Johnson*-era Miles Davis, Mahavishnu Orchestra, and even Tony Williams Lifetime here. ...there are also some excellent classical segments reminiscent of Bartok, and even Stravinsky.

Univers Zero...relentlessly experimental, and this set captures a glimpse of them at one of their many musical peaks. On one level, *Relaps* is an amazing juxtaposition of some very disparate musical genres. More importantly however, it is a record that is thoroughly engaging, at times stunning, and absolutely fascinating all the way through. It is one of the rare ones that rewards repeated listens."

-- Greg Barbick, *Blogcritics & We're An American Blog*, Jan 1, 2010 & January 6, 2010

"...I thought I'd share my full lists of all the good albums and songs I heard this year. ... REISSUES/ARCHIVES ... [Univers Zero Relaps](#) (Cuneiform)"

-- Jason Gross, *Wei Blog aka Wild Taste*, December 2009