

Excerpts from what the press has said about Univers Zero:

**UNIVERS ZERO**

**UNIVERS ZERO (1313)**

**Cuneiform 2008**

“Historic significance cannot be measured in sales. Music often progresses in near anonymity, its true impact only apparent years after the fact. ...Univers Zero released its first untitled album...in 1977... Those hearing it...knew that this was something that had not been heard before. By combining a guitar-based rock trio with instruments usually associated with classical music, UZ was far more than a clichéd, Ekseption-like attempt to “rock up the classics.” Instead...UZ created a new kind of chamber music for a new assemblage of instruments.

... UZ's debut remains both benchmark and landmark. Reissued numerous times over the years, most often as *1313*...this definitive version finally presents this unprecedented music the way it was meant to be heard, clarifying how—emerging out of nowhere with little history to precede it— UZ has been so vital in changing the way chamber music is perceived.

UZ's music was an antecedent for the kind of instrumental and stylistic interspersions considered normal today by groups including Bang on a Can and Alarm Will Sound. Henry Cow's complex, abstruse writing meets Bartok, Stravinsky, Messiaen and Ligeti, but with hints of early music, especially in UZ's use of spinet and harmonium. ...

The remastered remixes of the album's five tracks, from the original multi-track tape, reveal previously unheard detail. On Denis' fifteen-minute episodic “Ronde,” the presence of the percussion, the rich percussiveness of Michel Berckmans' bassoon and rough edges of Marcel Dufrane's violin lend greater intensity and brightness to the colorful soundscape. Despite UZ's preponderance for composition, improvisation is a component...

A 28-minute bonus track, originally recorded by Belgie Radio Televisie in 1979, provides an early view of UZ in performance, with the line-up of *Heresie*...performing its opening “La Faulx.” Darker and more bleakly melodramatic, bassist Guy Seger's “interstellar chaotic speech” establishes a link between UZ and avant-art rocksters Magma.

... This welcome reissue confirms, once again, that in 1977 a nearly unheard-of group was creating a new kind of chamber music that, in its inclusion of rock instrumentation and the occasional rock stance, would be a blueprint for classical music of the 21st century.”

– **John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, [www.allaboutjazz.com](http://www.allaboutjazz.com), June 13, 2008**

“Although Belgium’s chamber rock band Univers Zéro is lumped into the general rock category, the ensemble should be more closely aligned with modern classical and the avant-garde. One listen to the avant-prog group’s debut, *Univers Zéro*...unveils dense, creatively challenging material that was in direct opposition to the disco, punk, and other genres prevalent when the album was originally released in 1977.

Although the *Univers Zéro* record has been reissued numerous times, this is the definitive version. The five remastered and remixed tracks (plus one bonus piece), lifted from the original multi-track tape, reveal previously unnoticed details. The stereo effects...have been deleted, replaced by a well-rounded resonance. The instrumental balance is improved... The intertwined motifs are more obvious. ... Overall, this remix enhances the music, giving a stronger definition of players acting together in a concentrated setting. Fifteen-minute opener “Ronde” functions as a fulcrum. Raspy violins initiate a striding rhythm, followed by the bassoon, which serves as the tune’s melodic guide... Drummer/leader/composer Daniel Denis contributes equilibrium and tonal coloring... Like the other cuts, “Ronde” revolves and evolves, eventually shifting into a brief, violin-led frenzy. ...interaction is the unwritten law; there are solo maneuvers, but “Ronde” is firmly encased within an overreaching compositional tension.

...this music is not pretentious... auditory darkness...can be found in some pieces, particularly those written by guitarist Roger Trigaux. “Docteur Petiot” and “Malaise” both feature processional rhythms and keyboard interludes, with hints of Prokofiev’s élan or Shostakovich’s fortitude, as well as minimalist elements that could be mistaken for Philip Glass. ...

The reissue’s momentous offering, though, is bonus “La Faulx,” a 30-minute live version...from *Univers Zéro*’s...*Heresie*. It’s decisive post-midnight music. The opus is darker and more theatrically forlorn than anything else encountered on *Univers Zéro*. Bassist Guy Seger’s “interstellar chaotic speech” and the ensemble’s clamor and contortions, that alternate between contemplative and incendiary, create the aural equivalent of Jan Svankmajer’s surrealist cinema or filmmaker Michael Snow’s structuralism.”

– **Doug Simpson, *Audiophile Audition*, [www.audaud.com](http://www.audaud.com), September 09, 2008**

“... the group present here was formed in 1975-6, a septet including bassoon, two violins, guitar, bass, and harmonium which could draw textural comparisons to the Third Ear Band, if it weren’t for the incredible weight of lockstep rhythms placed behind the intricacies of pizzicato violin and muted guitar on the opening bars of such compositions as “Ronde.” The additive nature of the piece, which brings in bassoon and rhythm in gradual martial sections, recalls “In C” at the outset, leading to sashays on seaworthy crests underpinning a lengthy bassoon solo by Michel Berckmans. ...repetition, abstraction and inversion are at the center of their compositional architecture. At this stage, jazz and improvisation weren’t out of their systems yet; in addition to Berckmans’s solo on “Ronde,” violin scrabble and even brief harmonium statements rise from the written fragments.

“Carabosse” seems almost quaint, a plodding courtly dance only turning thunderous when Denis and bassist Christian Genet infuse the proceedings with electrifying, pummeling fists. Otherwise, the unison interplay of bassoon, strings and spinet recall Third Ear Band’s *Music for Macbeth* and Comus at their most reigned-in. Guitarist Roger Trigaux’s “Docteur Petiot” finds a simpler muse from which to spin out swirling, dusky string writing atop ridiculous turn-on-a-dime time signatures, a combination the likes of which recalls the best intentions of Rachel’s music...two decades later.

The key, of course, to what makes this music interesting is the exacting precision with which Denis’ percussion hems in the music’s pulse, drawing brusque black borders on intricate tonal shading. ...dancing inside a box is what Univers Zero’s music is about. ... Coupled with astonishing sound, this is a reissue well worth investigating.”

– Clifford Allen, *Bagatellen*, [www.bagatellen.com](http://www.bagatellen.com), October 26, 2008

“It’s been 30 years since the original incarnation of Belgium’s Univers Zero birthed its well-crafted and powerful version of chamber rock. To commemorate the milestone, Cuneiform Records, long-time supporters of the UZ institution, reissued their debut album with a 16-page booklet, a 28-minute bonus live track, and remastered sound. Many labels claim “Remastered!” only to disappoint... Here, the refurbishing could not be more obvious...

The 2008 version of *Univers Zero*...is radically remixed. The stereo effects that pervade the original CD version from 1989 are gone, in favor of what I take to be a sound more akin to the 1977 band performing live. ...the many interwoven lines of counterpoint are now much more discernible when such instruments as guitar, violin, cello, spinet and bassoon support and vie for prominence with bass and drums. Indeed, it is bassist Christian Genet and guitarist Roger Trigaux who benefit most in this new mix, their playing as prominent and full as it must have been in performance. ...

... The only casualties are Michel Berckmans’ claustrophobic bassoon lines on “Malaise,” once larger than life, now rendered natural – and almost too normal. ...Daniel Dennis’ drumming is magnified throughout, rumbling in powerful accord with Genet’s bass to give the album new depth at almost every turn.

....the disc is augmented by a live version of “Faulx,” the brooding roaring monster that infested the first side of the band’s 1979 offering, *Heresy*. It moans and writhes its way into uneasy life, alternately meditative and explosive, hinting at the visceralgia to come in Roger Trigaux’s offshoot band Present. A shocker that nicely complements the disc’s myriad subtle surprises.”

– Marc Medwin, *Dusted*, [www.dustedmagazine.com](http://www.dustedmagazine.com), Jun. 6, 2008

“Lately, many American groups, such as Zs, Kayo Dot and Normal Love, have been birthing *Tetsuo*-like sonic creatures — all metallic limbs and brash modern classical appendages jutting forth from a deformed prog rock body. Univers Zero’s 1977 debut cast a dark foreshadow on this recent trend. Spinet, harmonium, bassoon and strings paint dissonant filigrees over a doom-laden and decidedly rock instrumental backdrop. The music is consistently ominous... when it occasionally gets dense, it’s a slab of strange, ingenious orchestration you hear, rather than a simple overdriven amp sound. The jagged melodies...recall a perversely gothic version of contemporaries Henry Cow. Yet, rather than building on disjointed convulsive gestures, UZ’s compositional structures surge and ooze. There is still the interplay of uneven rhythmical patterns, and free-jazz informed scribbling, but with greater fluidity. Amidst the musical complexity...one is never battling against overly sober virtuosic displays of musicianship. As with the younger generation that have inherited this approach, there are sufficient amounts of psychedelic mystery and rough edges...”

– Nick Storrington, *Exclaim!*, [www.exclaim.ca](http://www.exclaim.ca), September 2008

“**ALBUM OF THE WEEK**, ... Lovingly reissued by a deeply respectful Cuneiform Records, this is Belgium band Univers Zero's legendary first album. Released in 1977, it was astonishing then: today, it sounds like the hidden source for every one of today's avant-garde rock bands. Chillingly beautiful, driven by the bassoon and cello more than the guitar and synth, each instrumental is both pastoral and burgeoning with terrible life. ...this edition has been carefully re-mastered from the original 1977 tapes. The result sounds glorious, full of clarity and warmth, preserving all the subtleties of the largely acoustic classical instrumentation. ...

... This is edgy beyond belief. It drips tension. Opening track 'Ronde' begins both forceful and restrained, full of the creeping pulse of the soundtracks of Bernard Herrmann and the drive of the Rite Of Spring; ...becomes a sinister act, full of imminent disaster. Yet it never resolves - it ebbs and flows while it keeps the delicious feel of impending action going, along a loping, hunting 11-beat rhythm. There can be few other bands who get their drive and energy from a bassoon (played by Michel Berkman). ...

When Univers Zero shut themselves away in their cellar to record this, after years of rehearsal, they had refined their music into a perfect, relentless intensity. Each piece magnificently refuses to deviate from its mood, its tense, thrilling, growling, restrained focus. Pretty much all of it revolves around whole-tone and diminished scales, the alien, otherworldly scales, the forbidden scales - and though it writhes and twists into different riffs and feels and texture, the teeth of that Devil's Interval will not let it go. Odd-time grooves pile on the danger with percussion...simple, medieval drums and bursts of sharp, sparse kit. ... The whole is like the rare, delicious bits of great film soundtrack that create menace and energy out of nowhere.

The bonus track - recorded live in 1979 - is extraordinary. ... It is genuinely frightening music, more abstract than the rest, full of hellish speaking in tongues and tectonic groans; it's of a kind with the 'orgy in hell' track on the seminal White Noise album, except... more menacing, like Magma gone bad. Twenty minutes best not listened to alone; quite brilliant. A different line up and...Guy Segers

...the menace here is dirty, crushing, nightmarish; the rest of the album suggests the imagined fears of dark woods and scary natural forces.

Univers Zero are a revelation; after delving into rich layers of this debut it's a joy to discover that there's more to digest - a whole back catalogue, leading up to the current day, and critical acclaim and a gigging band. This perfectly presented and restored edition of their debut is the place to dive in. ...”  
– **Sean O., *Organ*, [www.organart.demon.co.uk](http://www.organart.demon.co.uk), #274, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

“In the late 1970s, while America was still mortified at what...records sounded like when played backwards, abstruse European prog bands seemed to be directly summoning up the dark lord for those who played their albums the intended way. Perhaps none of these bands has made as singular an impression as the three-decade-old (and counting) Belgian chamber music group Univers Zero. ... By the release of its first album...the band had abandoned rock instruments altogether in favor of orchestral contraptions like the oboe and the harmonium, a move that howls of Anglophile-proper Canterbury-style aesthetics. That is, until you actually hear the menacing maelstrom that the band came up with.

...*Univers Zero* is a Faustian saga (like the drama, not the band) which plays like a symphonic tour of a Bosch painting. At times it's as taut and controlled as a Carl Stalling Looney Tunes dub, at others as free and chaotic as a Transylvanian peyote orgy.

So what is this exactly? ... You can hear Lovecraft's writing all over the music, the intense cosmic gloom, the deep-seated misanthropy, and the inaccessible and archaic language (in this case, the use of string instruments). “La Faulx”, originally from the 1979 masterpiece *Heresie*, one of the most sinister albums ever recorded, appears here as a live bonus track, featuring some Cthulhu Cult-like low-register chanting that makes it come off like a recording of Anton Lavey's black masses as scored by Stravinsky. Stravinsky and twentieth century classical composers like Bartók, Ives, Penderecki, and Huybrechts proved some of the band's most distinguishing influences, along with its highly respected peers in the similarly apocalyptic Magma, but Univers Zero was distinguished by a secret weapon in its arsenal. Drummer and Lovecraft fanboy Daniel Denis's aptitude for polyrhythms and odd time signature changes straight out of Yes's *Close to the Edge* keeps *Univers Zero (1313)* in constant motion and translates its dense avant-garde operatics into a format palatable to rock audiences...

Univers Zero, along with its more overwrought and scatological Rock in Opposition peers Henry Cow and Mothers of Invention, forged a genre of music that might appropriately be dubbed post-rock, had the term not been coined 15 years too late. ...the Belgians' craft at calculated pomp and nervous precision make Godspeed You! Black Emperor's apocalyptic grandiosity seem like a Michael Bay movie in comparison. In fact, it's a wonder sick minds from Kenneth Anger to Lucio Fulci never offered Univers Zero a film score. Maybe that's because for all of its cinematic and theatrical potential, this is sure-fire listening music... Each song is its own instrumental narrative, puzzle, and invective rolled into one.

The new mix cleans things up brilliantly so that every pluck is enunciated and every space hollowed and filled with looming dread... “Ronde” opens the album with 15 loaded minutes that incorporate minor-chord minuets, terse and screeching bowed strings, sparse but enigmatic organ sounds, and a lurching sense of claustrophobic doom. And that's literally just the beginning. There's rarely a dull or expected moment to follow. [Rating 8/10]” – **Timothy Gabriele, *PopMatters*, [www.popmatters.com](http://www.popmatters.com), September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

“Dark, brooding, menacing, and unwilling to fit into any genre, that's historically been the best way to describe the music of Belgium's Univers Zero. ...Univers Zero were always...in a world of their own...their debut self-titled release (often times also called 1313), here remastered by...Cuneiform, who once again remind us just how important this album really is. Sure, other acts like Frank Zappa, Gentle Giant, Henry Cow, King Crimson, Bela Bartok, Can, and Magma were also pushing the envelope into dark territories as well at the time, but none were able to conjure up such seething menace as Univers Zero. ...

...not your normal rock ensemble... The weaving bassoon, violin, viola, and harmonium melodies are quite unique, and way ahead of its time... Classic tracks like "Malaise" and "Ronde" really have to be experienced to be believed... Often times the music is chilling, even spooky... Honestly, a track like "Complaints" could easily have been the musical score to a 1920's silent horror film...it's that creepy.

Cuneiform has done a masterful job here on this reissue. Not only does it sound spectacular, but they have included a great bonus track, the near 30-minute live "La Faulx" (free-jazz meets avant-garde mayhem!), as well as a wonderful booklet packed with photos and info... If you've never taken the dark journey into the world of Univers Zero, start here and work your way up. ...you'll be glad you took that first step. [4.5 stars out of 5]”  
– **Pete Pardo, *Sea of Tranquility*, [www.seaoftranquility.org](http://www.seaoftranquility.org), July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008**

“... Univers Zero take their cues from 20th century classical music and then amp it up with a rock sensibility. ... we're not talking **Emerson, Lake and Palmer**-style Cheez Whiz here. UZ's almost entirely acoustic sound blurs genre boundaries much more effectively than most any conventional rock band's efforts to set already bombastic Romantic-period classical music to a thumping backbeat. ...if Béla Bartók had lived until the late '70s and became a rock drummer, this is the kind of stuff he might have written. *Univers Zero*, the record, kicks off with its centerpiece, the 15-minute “Ronde.” Scratchy violins set a loping...soon joined by a melodic lead on bassoon... Bandleader/composer/drummer Daniel Denis joins shortly, his drumming never really rock-oriented, instead providing color and accenting, occasionally egging the band on with a driving rhythm. The composition twists and turns,

spotlighting the bassoon and later a violin-led freakout that wouldn't have been out of place on some of the records that, say, **Peter Brötzmann** was doing around the same time. ...an ensemble mentality dominates...

The big treat on the reissue...is the bonus track "La Faulx," a nearly 30-minute live version of the epic opening track from Univers Zero's second album, *Heresie*. It's the ultimate Halloween music; you've never heard a harmonium sound this *evil* before. Indeed, this band only got better as it matured; the debut is nice, but then a run of three near-masterpieces ensued — much of this happening during the cultural wasteland known as the 80s. ...

... If only Denis wasn't pigeonholed as a rock drummer, I could see him leading his group at the Coolidge Auditorium just as well as I could see him at the Velvet Lounge. That's a testament to how well, and how seamlessly, Univers Zero melds intellectual Western classical music with visceral rock."

– **Brandon Wu, Washington City Paper: Black Plastic Blogs, "Label Spotlight: Univers Zero on Cuneiform", [www.washingtoncitypaper.com](http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com), Aug. 1, 2008**

"A very welcome reissue by one Europe's most respected--and cultish--bands ever. Their debut album...is a sophisticated batch of playing and composition that in terms of intricacy recalls the artier works of Soft Machine, King Crimson, Henry Cow and Magma, though sounding very little like any of those bands. Intense, unpredictable and something of a legend in the making, this band was heard by too few people at the time this recording was made; first time listeners today will be stunned that this music is over 30 years old. ... Highly recommended!"

– **Dave DiMartino, Yahoo! Music, [new.music.yahoo.com](http://new.music.yahoo.com), May 20th, 2008**