



Bio information: **UNIVERS ZERO**

Title: **CLIVAGES** (Cuneiform Rune 295)

Cuneiform publicity/promotion dept.: (301) 589-8894 / fax (301) 589-1819

email: joyce [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com [Press & world radio]; radio [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com [North American radio]

www.cuneiformrecords.com

FILE UNDER: ROCK / CHAMBER ROCK / EXPERIMENTAL / CLASSICAL

“...an indispensable release for anyone who believes that "Bartók" and "rock" can fit comfortably in the same sentence.”

– *All Music Guide*

“Univers Zero's vision (is) pretty much unique & for those touched by it, nothing else will quite do...a sound that really couldn't be any other band in the world.” – *The Rough Guide To Rock*

The Belgian band **Univers Zero** is legendary for their uncompromising musical vision – a sound and stance *Keyboard* described as “Chamber music for the Apocalypse”. Simultaneously medieval & modern, its distinctive, dark and elegantly beautiful music has set the standard for “chamber rock”, a New Music hybrid of Francophone origin and worldwide appeal that UZ pioneered. UZ’s singular sound derives from its unique instrumentation (piano and keyboards, violin, clarinets saxophone, oboe, bassoon, English horn, electric bass, drums) combined with brooding gothic imagery, elements of European folk and other world musics, the iconoclasm and intensity of rock, the relentless sonic experimentation of the avant garde, and leader and composer **Daniel Denis**’ classically-inspired writing style, influenced by early 20th Century avant garde classical composers. In the hands of some of the best musicians in Europe, these factors result in a group on the cutting edge of creating a new, vital, and unique fusion of classical and rock music. The band has remained on the cutting edge of New Music throughout the course of a career that began in the ‘70s and continues today, stretching and disintegrating the boundaries of classical and rock music alike to create a new, vital, and unique fusion. Today, several decades after Univers Zero first forged its unique sound, critics cite its oeuvre as the precursor to the best avant-garde rock and classical music of the present day, from post-rock, associated with **Godspeed You! Black Emperor**, **Secret Chiefs 3**, **Kayo Dot**, **Tortoise** and other instrumentally-based rock bands – to the numerous late 20th/early 21st century classical chamber ensembles integrating rock into their repertoire, such as **Bang on a Can**, **Kronos Quartet** and others. When Cuneiform recently released a remastered reissue of the band’s self-titled debut album, critics who heard the band’s music for the first time called it a “revelation”, “..the hidden source for every one of today’s avant-garde rock bands” [*Organ*].

One of the founding members of the “**Rock In Opposition**” [RIO] movement, a late 70s, European-wide coalition for alternative and uncommercial music, Univers Zero was founded in 1974. During its first five years, it was co-led by **Daniel Denis** and **Roger Trigaux**, and released 2 albums. Univers Zero’s first album was called “1977’s darkest musical vision” by *Alternative Press*. Its second album, **Heresie** [1979] is widely considered one of the darkest and most menacing albums of all time. After **Heresie**’s release, Trigaux left the band to found **Present**. Univers Zero continued on with Denis at the helm to release **Ceux Du Dehors** [1981]; **Crawling Wind** [1983], and **UZED** [1984] and **Heatwave** [1986]. Distinctive but never stagnant, UZ’s sound evolved and progressed with each release, with each album getting more distinctly electric, while still keeping their 'gothic elements' intact. **Heatwave** was released on **Cuneiform**, beginning a long term relationship with the label. Shortly afterwards, in 1987, Denis disbanded Univers Zero for a decade.

During the 1990s and very early 2000s, Cuneiform reissued Univers Zero’s entire back catalogue on CD. The music proved timeless; the reissues received an astounding amount of critical acclaim and helped expand the band’s fan base worldwide. In 1990, *Keyboard* remarked: “It’s stunning how well Univers Zero’s 1977 debut holds up, musically and sonically, compared to...anything else happening in so-called new music.” With UZ dormant, **Denis** released two solo albums, **Les Eaux Troubles** [1991] and **Sirius and the Ghost** [1993]. As the decade drew to a close, he reformed Univers Zero for a single, sold out appearance at 1997’s **FIMAV** (Festival International Musique Actuelle Victoriaville) in Canada.

Denis revived UZ as a studio project at the close of the 20th Century, and proceeded to release a series of recordings that thrilled old and new fans alike. The first of these recordings, 1999’s **The Hard Quest**, was greeted as a “Brilliant comeback album by an important avant garde band” [*Crohinga Well*]. UZ’s next release, 2002’s **Rhythmix**, featured UZ’s largest lineup and marked a return to more acoustic palettes. It was praised as “a postmodern work of the first order” [*Pulse!*] and “One of the decade’s masterworks, in any genre.” [*Exposé*] UZ expanded this acoustic palette with electronics, experimental and jazz elements, and more spacious, melodic compositions for its next, 9th CD, **Implosion**, released in 2004. *AMG* noted that “Univers Zero’s excellence lies in its continuing ability to synthesize medieval forms, instrumental prog rock and modern classical dissonance with a splash of jazz, and a taste for the suggestively macabre.”

In 2004, Univers Zero celebrated its 30th anniversary by returning to live performance. Denis assembled a sextet lineup of top-notch musicians. The sextet performed (often headlining) at many of the world’s most prestigious festivals of New Music, world music, progressive music, and jazz. Since their reformation, Univers Zero has played at major festivals world-wide, including **NEARfest** (USA); **MIMI Festival** (France), **Les Tritonales** (France), the **Music Meeting Festival** (The Netherlands), **Rock In Opposition** (France), **Audi Jazz Festival** (Belgium), **Gouevia Artrock Festival** (Portugal), **Nancy Jazz Pulsations** (France) and has also appeared at various high profile venues and festivals in Canada, Mexico, Poland, Czech Republic and Germany.

In 2006, UZ released its 10th recording and first-ever live CD, appropriately called **Live. Sea of Tranquility** gave it 5 stars, stating that:

“This is as good as it gets folks, a live album from six superb musicians, playing music that is so far removed from mainstream culture, yet so accessible and enjoyable to anyone willing to give their complex yet rich style a chance. Highly, highly recommended!”

[*Clivages press release continued on verso...*]

2008 brought forth a stunningly improved, remixed version of the group's classic first album, a landmark recording that marked the birth of Chamber Rock. Called **Univers Zero** (and known alternately over the years as **1313**), it had originally been recorded at a small studio on semi-professional equipment. For the album's 30th anniversary, Denis' long time engineer **Didier de Roos** went back to the original 8-track multi-channel tapes and managed to wring out more sound and better balances from the tapes than was thought possible. Cuneiform's 2008 *Univers Zero* remaster received worldwide acclaim; critics called it "the hidden source for every one of today's avant-garde rock bands" (Organ) and "a blueprint for classical music of the 21st century" (All About Jazz). Shortly after this CD, another archival release, called **Relaps**, came out in in 2009. *Relaps* consisted of previously unreleased concert recordings from 1984-86; *Sea of Tranquility* called it "amazing stuff, more proof of just how unique and powerful this Belgian band always was".

With all this activity in terms of releases, it is easy to overlook the fact that Univers Zero has not had a release of new material in over 5 years. **Clivages** is that release, but much more importantly, it is its first studio release in over 20 years - since 1986's *Heatwave* - to feature the energy and sound of a working, rehearsing, on-going live ensemble performing together in the studio. **Clivages** features Univers Zero's current line-up, which has been playing concerts and working together for quite some time now: **Michel Berckmans** (bassoon, English horn, oboe), **Kurt Budé** (clarinet, bass clarinet, alto sax), **Pierre Chevalier** (keyboards), **Daniel Denis** (drums, sampler), **Dimitri Evers** (bass), **Martin Lauwers** (violin) with guest **Andy Kirk** (who was a member of the band in 1979-1983, 1985-86 and has been an ongoing guest in performances for the last several years as time allows) (guitar and percussion).

Clivages represents both a consolidation of sound from Univers Zero's past 30 years of work, as well as some steps in new directions, as befitting a band that has made forward motion part of its DNA. Most notably, Denis has opened up the compositional duties to other members of the band, allowing Berckmans, Budé and Kirk to contribute some very strong pieces to the UZ 'book' and giving *Clivages* a sound that while recognizable as Univers Zero, also contains some real surprises. Univers Zero is rightly famous for finding the perfect balance between classical and rock influences and drawing on musicians from both worlds. In terms of this, *Clivages* is possibly its best-balanced release. It is perhaps also the album that allows these two sides to separate more than any other album in their catalog, as the title ("cleavages") implies. *Clivages* features chamber works scored solely for the trio of strings, reeds and double reeds within the larger group. But Univers Zero's rock side has certainly not been ignored; in particular, Andy Kirk's piece "Warrior" harkens back to the wild, barely-contained, electric sound of *Heatwave*. *Clivages* is a tremendously strong work from a band that has an astoundingly full catalog of essential discs!

Univers Zero continues to add new material to its repertoire and continues to perform live at festivals and other venues worldwide; see www.univers-zero.com. Three decades after it was first formed, Univers Zero continues to evolve, expand and experiment with the boundaries of New Music, and, to quote *Exposé*, ceaselessly "proving themselves to be one of the best and most important groups on the planet."

For more information, visit Univers Zero online at:
www.univers-zero.com & www.myspace.com/universzero

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS



Digital [High-Resolution / Color] versions of these images are available for download on www.cuneiformrecords.com in the "Press" section.