

UNIVERS ZERO *UNIVERS ZERO* CUNEIFORM 2008 REISSUE W BONUS TRACKS & REMASTER

(alternately known as *1313*; originally releases 1977 by UZ, 1977 by Atem, numerous intervening reissues, 1990 by Cuneiform)
Cuneiform 2008 album features: **Michel Berckmans** [bassoon], **Daniel Denis** [percussion], **Marcel Dufrane** [violin], **Christian Genet** [bass], **Patrick Hanappier** [violin, viola, pocket cello], **Emmanuel Nicaise** [harmonium, spinet], **Roger Trigaux** [guitar], and **Guy Segers** [bass, vocal, noise effects]

“ALBUM OF THE WEEK...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 is edgy beyond belief. ... Each piece magnificently refuses to deviate from its mood, its tense, thrilling, growling, restrained focus... The whole is like the rare, delicious bits of great film soundtrack that create menace and energy out of nowhere. ... Univers Zero are a revelation ...”

– Sean O., *Organ*, #274, September 18th, 2008

“UZ's debut remains both benchmark and landmark. Reissued numerous times over the years...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. ...

... 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, June 13, 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. ...UZ's compositional structures surge and ooze. ... As with the younger generation that have inherited this approach, there are...psychedelic mystery and rough edges...”

– Nick Storrington, *Exclaim!*, www.exclaim.ca, September 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...unveils dense, creatively challenging material...”

– Doug Simpson, *Audiophile Audition*, www.audaud.com, September 09, 2008

“...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 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, October 26, 2008

“...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 ...sound more akin to...performing live. ...the many interwoven lines of counterpoint are now much more discernible...

The disc is augmented by a live version of “Faulx,” ...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*, Jun. 6, 2008, www.dustedmagazine.com

“...*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? ...

Stravinsky and twentieth century classical composers like Bartók, Ives, Penderecki, and Huybrechts proved some of the band's most distinguishing influences, along with ...the similarly apocalyptic Magma...

Univers Zero, along with...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. ...[Rating 8/10]”

– Timothy Gabriele, *PopMatters*, September 8th, 2008, www.popmatters.com

“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. ...Cuneiform...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. ...

... The weaving bassoon, violin, viola, and harmonium melodies are quite unique, and way ahead of its time...

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, July 21st, 2008

“Univers Zero take their cues from 20th century classical music and then amp it up with 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 only Denis wasn't pigeonholed as a rock drummer, I could see him leading his group at the [Library of Congress'] 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, "Label Spotlight: Univers Zero on Cuneiform", *Washington City Paper: Black Plastic Blogs*, Aug. 1, 2008, washingtoncitypaper.com

"Despite occasional stylistic links, Univers Zero always spoke (and continues to speak) with its own voice. 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*

"...The term "modern chamber music" ...still does not quite capture the strange creature we have here. Two violins, a bassoon, and a medieval keyboardist playing harmonium and spinet combine with a rock rhythm section and an occasional clean guitar to create a music that sounds most like works of 20th century composers Bela Bartok and Igor Stravinsky. Even then, the rock rhythm section transforms the sound into something that really exists nowhere else. ...for me...this first, least rock-n-roll, album...is the best of them all.

The music of Univers Zero is dominated by melodic and rhythmic figures that first lead and then support... The opener "Ronde"...is unquestionably dark, but also... jubilant. ...contrast is everywhere... In comparison, the darkest moments of KC's LARK'S TONGUES seem like appetizers for this intricate main course.

1313's strength lies in the variety of emotional scenes portrayed... and in the ability of the compositions to transcend the repetition of melodic themes... This is... music, or...art in general...at its absolute best. It transports you to another place. ...

... one of my favorite UZ songs ever is the track "Docteur Petiot." ... If one song ever truly embodied classical and rock ideals simultaneously, it would be this one. ...

I also appreciate very much that 1313 employs almost none of the clanging, abrupt transitioning that is very much in vogue now... sections move in tonality, instrumentation, and rhythm, but I never feel the clang of the dead stops and turns...

...I should be judging it on a completely different scale than virtually anything else on this site. ...while it is undoubtedly complex, pushes on the outer boundaries of musical genre, and dares to moods far darker than teenage Goths even know exist, this music is good because it allows my inner critic to fall away. It creates scenes into which I am immersed, my imagination alive and absorbed. Among the best of the best. 5/5 [stars]"

– Negoba, *Prog Archives*, www.progarchives.com

"... The bandleader, drummer and composer extraordinaire, Daniel Denis was equally inspired by progressive rock and modern classical music avant-gardes, such as King Crimson, Soft Machine, Magma, Frank Zappa, Igor Stravinsky and Bela Bartok, when he formed Univers Zero back in 1973, though I suppose Arnold Schoenberg's Dodecaphony was also familiar to him... the ensemble's self-titled debut LP ("UZ" hereinafter)... it has been remastered from the analog master tapes and features the original "vinyl" artwork. ...

... Univers Zero is the most classically-inspired RIO band, their debut, in turn, being their most classical-sounding creation, with a rather indistinct rock component and a very strong chamber one instead. ... Though both cohesive and mesmerizing, "UZ" is nevertheless a highly adventurous musical affair... another dimension filled with some unearthly beauty, where the dissonances form a perfect harmony and the crossing parallels float about like those in Lobachevsky's post-Euclidean geometry. ...all the tracks here stand out for their complex arrangements, abounding in angular, highly intricate meter shifts, with – very much like in classical music – each of the instruments involved playing its own, specific, part, and a prominent role being given to the chamber ones. Of the six tracks available on this particular edition of "UZ", the first three, *Ronde*, *Carabosse* and *Complainte*, and also the last one, *La Faulx*, are written by Daniel Denis, while the two core pieces, *Docteur Petiot* and *Malaise*, come from Roger Trigaux's pen. The drummer's compositions are...revealing more textural than dynamic contrasts. ... all of them are full of sorrow... Roger's pieces are rarely slow-paced...are richer in sudden shifts in direction and theme, their main emotional message bringing to mind a sharp sensation of disturbance-bordering-on-panic, particularly...on...*Docteur Petiot*... Originally "Side A" of the band's second LP, *La Faulx* is their longest track ever and its live version presented here... Featuring Guy Segers on bass and vocals, this is one of the most doom-laden and most sinister compositions of all times, including modern extreme Metal in any of its manifestations. A very dark atmosphere... Guy steadily transforms his delivery: from a dark, yet still traditional, singing into something halfway between a brutal roar and a sepulchral voice. It's precisely on *La Faulx* where the real roots of what will later be labeled as death-ish vocals are pioneered, so I wonder why Celtic Frost's front-man Thomas Gabriel and (the late) Chuck Schuldiner from Death still haven't been dethroned as the pioneers of that style. ..."UZ" is...a hallmark creation which set a whole new direction in contemporary music.

... One of the biggest as well as rarest diamonds in the crown of our beloved genre, one of the very first prog rock embodiments of magical realism, this dark, yet so beautiful and attractive fairy-tale was, is and will forever remain a classic..."

– Vitaly Menshikov, *Uzbekistan Progressive Rock Pages, Progressor*, February 9, 2009

"Imagine chamber music spawned in the depths of a haunted forest, where each breeze carries...dire omens along with the resonance of spooky orchestral instruments.

Brass and woodwinds... Their outcries signal the advent of clouds of crows...

Violins... Tension mounts with each sawing chord.

The percussion is complex and notably spry considering the dark sonic pool. ...

The guitar blazes with deadly fervor...

...the keyboards...sweeping phrases and droning tones.

These compositions are slick and cerebral, dragging chamber music into a modern context and then dimming the lights to enhance a subtle uneasiness.

The bonus track exemplifies this edgy tension. ... Naturally, the darkness prevails..."

– Matt Howarth, *Sonic Curiosity*, 2009

"...progressive chamber music in rock format. ... Much of the band's inspiration comes from composers...Igor Stravinskij and Béla Bartók but there are also traces of Frank Zappa... Edgard Varèse.

With staccato passages, dissonance and polyrhythm on strings, bassoon, bass, harmonium, guitar and drums, Univers Zero's debut album...lacks jolly ditties... The music is dark, somber and occasionally, slightly scary. It could easily have been the soundtrack to various expressionistic German silent films from the 1920s. ...

I...recommend Univers Zero's first album...to those who like challenges of the musical kind, this re-release has been augmented by a twenty=eight-minute –long, live recorded bonus track, 'La Faulx', which practically doubles the playing time of the original album. [4 Stars]"

– Lars Fahlin, *Rock 'n' Reel*, Issue 13, Jan/Feb 2009

“... This is a new 2007 remix by one Didier de Roos...sourced from the original multi-track tapes, cleaned-up and enhanced with the latest high resolution digital technology. ...all the instruments are now clean and well defined, all perfectly placed in the stereo spectrum, and so vividly real. ...it does sound good. ...

...Cuneiform...added an unreleased 28 minute live track! *La Faulx* originally appeared as a 25 minute opus covering side one of 1979's HERESIE...
...It's a classic, it's ironic, it's dark and spooky, the roots of a whole new genre of music. ...”
– Alan Freeman, *Audion*, Issue #55

“... Sometimes compared to the...enormously influential King Crimson, Univers Zero was actually much more extreme. ...the earliest versions of Univers Zero were not only more purely classical in their instrumentation (bassoon, violin, viola, cello, harmonium, spinet piano), but much more contemporary in their musical appropriation of the dissonant, jagged 20th century classical styles of Stravinsky, Bartók, Ligeti, and Penderecki... Univers Zero's music... [is] never pretentious...and as for the gloom, there's actually a kind of jaunty gallows humor in many of the pieces on this debut — particularly in the two by guitarist Roger Trigaux, which feature march rhythms somewhat suggestive of Shostakovich or Prokofiev. ...a challenging and highly distinctive listening experience. [4 stars]”
– Bill Tilland, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com