



AIMA and THE ILLUSION OF SILENCE | Music For Certain Rituals

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for "Dark Entries"

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Trouwfest: what was gradually becoming a beautiful tradition, was brutally stopped this year. Not because there would no longer be love in the game, still the engine of our festival, because in that area there is absolutely no reason to complain. No, the reason is already known to you, and will also recall memories of that year that we would prefer to forget as soon as possible when you read this text years later. Covid-19 will easily take first place in the "concerts of the year" section. The pain of all the beauty we have had to miss because of this has been "alleviated" by numerous online events. But come on, isn't this just a meager cloth for the bleeding?

I am not happy with it, so you can write an online version of Trouwfest on your stomach. Rather postpone a year with the same poster than give in to the virtual madness that will reign supreme in 2020.

My own praise stinks, but I still believe that we had put together a heck of a poster this year. I am proud of every name that we have been able to place on our posters every year since 2017 (be it from national acts such as Onrust or Ashtoreth to international clappers such as Wappenbund or Anemone Tube) but this year the joys were even more ecstatic. With AimA, for example, we had not only brought in an artist from our most beloved music country Italy for the first time, but also one of the voices that has blown us off our feet (Leopold II is not the only one) in recent years.

You could already meet AimA in the two very favorable reviews of her works *Di Aima Il Segno* and *Haiku Irregolari In Forma Di Musica*, and her earlier project *Les Jumeaux Discordants* (which she co-created with Roberto del Vecchio from Gothenica, among others) received a honorable mention in our Oud Goud section.

AimA has been working with *Allerseelen* since 2013, also on the Trouwfest poster by the way, and her previous albums taught us that she likes to complement her musical ideas with like-minded artists. A colleague was also involved in the latest album *Music For Certain Rituals*. More specifically Luca Bonandini, who makes music under the title *The Illusion Of Silence* (the review of debut album *Black Rainbow* can be found [here](#)).

Both Italians bundle their shared love for music, poetry and history and found in this a common point that they explore further on this album: the mystery cult of Orphism.

The Orphic Mysteries were the youngest of the Greek Mysteries (other known examples of these Mysteries include the Dionysian Mysteries and the Mithras Cult). Although they are not recognized by any state in Greece, they have nevertheless found widespread distribution and numerous participants. We place it in the spirit of the age: the new Christian faith was on the rise, and Orphism offered a clear expression of how the Hellenic past fought for its survival.

Followers were known as Orphikoi, named after the mythical singer Orpheus, from whom the cult claimed to have received his teachings. The reason for this was because, according to mythology, Orpheus was the first human to descend to the

underworld and return successfully. The Orfici played the main role in the doctrine of life after death. They pursued physical and spiritual purity through ascetic principles, in order to have a better life after death. To this end they were also initiated into special knowledge about the afterlife.

According to the Ophiric doctrine, which was not uniform, man had once been clean and sin-free, but through his own fault he had lost that purity, and thus the human soul was trapped in the body as in a prison. She could not be freed from that punishment by death alone. This could only happen if the soul had made itself worthy to regain its original condition through purification and sanctification. Until then she had to roam, that is, if her casing had turned back to dust, she had to take on yet another casing, sometimes even that of an animal. From this it appears that, according to the ideas of the Orphicists, every person is master of his own destiny, that he can put an end to that unholy wandering himself. After all, if he has made himself worthy through a clean and virtuous life, he can regain his former state of bliss. The foretaste of that bliss at mystical festivals was the drinking of wine, which was given to the participants, and the increased resilience that it generated. The wine had a peculiar meaning, because it was created from the blood of Dionysos-Zagreus. So by drinking the wine they entered into an immediate spiritual communion with that deity, whose mercy and help they most needed to be saved from their sinful condition.

Coincidence or not, but also on the latest *Allerseelen* album *Chairete Daimones* we find a reference to ancient Greece and wine. Not only did Gerhard Hallstatt advise us to listen to the album at night in the company of a good glass of dark red wine, *Chairete Daimones* were also the words that were spoken during a ritual in ancient Greece. With these words they raised a glass in the air, and the wine that ended up on the earth and tombs in this way was regarded as a libation for the demons. Not the evil demons that monotheistic religions would later employ, demons were usually good spirits in pre-Christian antiquity, a kind of guardian angels that would be used later in the Christian conception.

The Orphic Mysteries were not tied to a specific place like that of Eleusis or the Samothrac Mysteries. They were distinguished in that an entire teaching came to the fore and not a dramatic representation of a legend.

The resulting religion, Orphism, was a complex of religious practices, beliefs and texts from classical and Hellenistic ancient Greek culture. Orphism emerged in the sixth century BC. It is not a clearly defined mystery religion, but manifests itself in religion, philosophy and literature, with the mythical Orpheus as the connecting factor. According to classical sources, he is believed to be the founder of various cults and rituals. Orpheus was probably designated as an author of religious and esoteric texts for his shamanic qualities.

Knowledge of Orphism is based on archaeological finds and surviving text material, although the source material is scarce, fragmented and ambiguous. According to classicist M.L. West should not be regarded as interrelated and manifestation of one organized religion. Instead, a text is and was "orhical" as soon as it was attributed

to Orpheus. Orphicists are then persons who somehow link their own beliefs to Orpheus. Furthermore, the identification of source material is complicated by the fact that Orphism was not entirely new, but had interfaces with other movements and cults, such as Pythagorism, the Eleusian and Bacchian mysteries. Moreover, the Orfici did not worship their own deity.

Yet Orpheus' role in this is many, if not all-determining. Orpheus has its origin in Thrace or (possibly) more to the north. He may have been a shaman originally. According to tradition, he possessed the ability to enrapture the animate and inanimate nature with his excellent singing skills and lyre playing. He also found his way to the Hades (underworld), where he persuaded the princes to return his deceased wife Eurydice with his arts. So he knew the secrets of the underworld. Orpheus was killed by being torn to pieces by bacchantes (aka Maenads, nymphs), female followers of Dionysus, who were also torn to pieces and then reborn. This has been referred to as a shamanic initiation ritual. After his death, Orpheus would have continued to speak and give oracles. He was therefore considered an exotic miracle worker for Greeks.

Orpheus as "the great shaman of the past" was initially attributed texts with a religious-shamanic character. For example, texts with magical spells circulated under his name, and must have once existed a "Descent to Hades," in which Orpheus reports on his journey to the phantom kingdom and what he saw there. Then, in the late sixth and early fifth centuries BC, his name was linked to all kinds of texts that would reveal the truth about the destiny of the soul and the sacred history of the gods. Such attributions provided authority to the text or conviction through the authority and perceived age of that mythical figure.

As a mystery religion, orphicists kept much knowledge within the closed circle of initiated individuals. This leads to a scant picture of the beliefs and beliefs that orphicists held. Moreover, Orphism was not institutionalized, but varied. However, some traits seem to have been prevalent among those known as orphicists. Various beliefs that were considered Orphic are set forth in the so-called gold plates (or tablets) found in graves, which contain prayers to ensure a smooth transition for the deceased.

We have already mentioned the importance of the concept of "purity" and the ascetic way of life that was necessary for this among the Orphicists. On the one hand, Zuiver refers to the observance of various rules that distinguish the orphicists, and on the other hand to the observance of purifying rites by the speaker. Cleanness is achieved through vegetarianism, abstaining from beans and eggs, not wearing wool clothes, and renouncing sexuality.

Finally, we look at Orphism through the mythological perspective: in Orphic circles theogonies were known that deviated from Hesiodos' Theogonia (work from the 8th century BC on the origin of the world and the birth of the gods. Homer is the main source of our knowledge of the vision of the world and the gods of the Greeks from the earliest times).

Depending on the version, the goddess Nyx (Night) and Aiōn (Time) are the prime-

val beings and the source of creation. From them a cosmic egg emerges, from which Phanes (who has several names, including Protogonos) is born. This hermaphrodite then produces the gods and disappears into the background. However, several theogonic versions exist. Other important gods are Dionysus, with whom Orphus is connected, and Persephone, queen of the underworld. While asceticism, vegetarianism, and metempsychosis are also pythagorean, there is a point of difference here: Apollo was the god of the Pythagoreans, not Dionysus.

For *Music For Certain Rituals*, AimA and Luca Bonandini based themselves on some Orphic hymns selected from the 87 short poems written in the late Hellenistic era (presumably second or third century AD).

In addition to famous names such as Hecate, Zeus, Nike and Demeter, lesser known gods such as Misa, Hipta and Melinoe are also sung. These probably indicate an origin in western Anatolia and do not appear further in Greek literature. The hymns are written in hexameters (six-legged verse rhythm). They form a uniform whole through style and technique and may have been written by one author. Furthermore, they exhibit syncretism (the convergence of religions) and were used in the ritual context of Orphism, during nightly encounters involving singing and smoking offerings. Most of the songs of the gods (eight) are dedicated to Dionysus, as you now know an important god in Orphism.

The Orphic hymns are part of the Orfica, writings attributed to the legendary Orpheus. The hymns contain references to other Orphics, such as the Rhapsodian theogony. They have been related to the Homeric hymns and hymns of Callimachus and the neoplatonist Proclus. The humanist and neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino translated them from Greek into Latin. During the Italian Renaissance, the Orphic hymns were studied in conjunction with other texts believed to contain ancient wisdom. Examples are the Chaldean oracles and hermetics.

You see, and could already see it on the other AimA albums: thematically, you already have a big chunk with *Music For Certain Rituals*. Again and again she succeeds in throwing at us a subject in which we not only eagerly sink our teeth, but in which we also immerse ourselves with full dedication and with great pleasure. At *Haiku Irregolari In Formi Di Musica*, for example, she focused on this form of Japanese poetry and she successfully converted it into music with the help of a host of guest musicians. *Di Aima Il Segno* was more an overview of previous collaborations, with various themes. Here too we found some songs related to Orphism. An area of interest that with *Music For Certain Rituals* a whole album can assert.

The hymns AimA chose are dedicated to specific deities, as well as cosmic elements and the type of incense used during the rituals. In addition to performing these hymns, two of the gold leaf tablets found in tombs of Thrurii (now on display at the Naples Archaeological Museum) and Hipponium (now on display at Vibo Valentia at the British Museum) were also set to music.

AimA leaves nothing to chance: in addition to the fascinating theme, there is the elaborate elaboration. But also important: AimA also gives shape to the most important basic principle regarding the interpretation of history: two of her own

poems convey all these classic meanings to the contemporary world. Such as "Spiritui Carmen", a purely passionate and uplifting song that she wrote with in her mind another figure that appeals to the imagination: Hildegard van Bingen.

Where her previous two albums still contain a colorful mix of artists, and the musical accompaniment was just as diverse (from neoclassical to industrial to martial) she now does it with only one musician (Camerata Mediolanense's North-gate background vocals on 'Spiritui Carmen' not included): Luca Bonandini. Since 2012 he has been making music under the name The Illusion Of Silence, which is described as dark folk, neoclassical and ambient. He writes calm, melancholic songs in which piano, guitar, strings and ancient instruments are combined. Especially through the use of instruments such as a thirteen-string harp, zither, kanklès (a Lithuanian string instrument) and percussion, he knows how to distinguish himself and forms a dream equivalent to AimA's vocal acrobatics. Although these are rather modest in nature. On her previous albums she sounded like a fusion of Diamanda Galás, Lisa Gerrard and Nico, for Music For Certain Rituals she chooses a less prominent role. The influences are still there, but let it be clear that the ritual itself is the main protagonist here.

Again, with an end result worked out in minute detail. With such force that you are sucked into the ritual from the first second, and the 45 minutes it takes seem to fly by. After this period of time has passed it is like waking up time and time again, and realizing that you have been out of the world all this time. Just what the purpose of these ancient rituals was to bring ecstasy. Both artists have worked very hard on this project, and that is more than evident.

In other words, AimA has done it again: it was not for nothing that we called her an "Italian prodigy" in a previous discussion.

I publish this text on the date that my wife and I have been married for exactly three years. So the intention was to celebrate this joyous event together with AimA and The Illusion of Silence, and when we listen to this album, the fact that this is not possible this year feels a bit more cruel. But because we believe in the power of the ritual, I choose this date for publication and we already count down to June 2021 in the hope that we will be able to present this fantastic artist to the Belgian public.