

Schlachthaus Theater

SO 14.5. | 17:00 | Stammtisch 20:00

MO 15.5. | 20:00 | Einführung 19:30

**Benny Claessens / CAMPO (Gent)**

### **HELLO USELESS – FOR W AND FRIENDS**

Konzept, Regie, Performance: Benny Claessens

Soundscape: Simon Lenski

Für: Bert Neumann

Koproduktion: NTGent

Sprache: Englisch

Dauer: 1h 20min

«I consider Hello Useless – For W and Friends as a celebration of uselessness. On an existential level, that is. It doesn't matter whether art is necessary or not. Nothing is. But why shouldn't it exist?» Hello useless – for W and friends ist eine Performance übers Aussteigen. Das Solo- Stück fordert auf, einen Moment innezuhalten, durchzuatmen und die Dinge mit einem frischen Blick zu betrachten. Es will bedeutungslos sein, ohne Worte und ohne Wissensvermittlung, strukturlos. Es will einfach nur gehört und gesehen werden. Dabei breitet es sich ganz schön aus und pfeift auf den heteronormativen Konsens. Für dieses Stück geht Benny Claessens radikal zurück zum Anfang. Ebenso ehrlich und intim wie exalziert und überschwänglich reißt er Dinge aus dem Kontext, serviert sie uns und offeriert uns damit ein Gegenkonzept zu dem, was wir kennen und allgemein als gut befinden. Das alles macht er ganz ohne Wertung oder Anschuldigung. Er ist einfach da für Sie. Also genießen Sie's.

Benny Claessens hat die letzten Jahre an den Münchner Kammerspielen unter der Leitung von Johan Simons viele Erfolge als Schauspieler gefeiert. Danach war er Ensemblemitglied des NTGent und kreierte nebenbei dieses Solo bei Campo.

#### **Einfach gesagt**

Dieses Stück entspricht nicht den Erwartungen, die man an ein Theaterstück hat. Und Benny versucht für einmal nicht, allen Zuschauer\*innen zu gefallen. Stattdessen spielt er ein Stück ohne Bedeutung.

## ANKÜNDIGUNG DER GRUPPE

*a nightingale and a crow in a singing contest  
a pig walks by  
they engage the pig to be the jury of the contest  
the pig says okay  
the nightingale sings  
flawless  
beautiful  
the crow sings  
squeaking and horrible  
the pig says the crow wins and leaves  
the nightingale cries  
why are u crying the crow asks  
are u crying because u didn't win  
I am not crying because I didn't win  
the nightingale answers  
I am crying because I got judged by a pig*

*Hello useless – for W and friends* is a solo performance about stopping. The performance aims to offer a moment to breathe and take the time to look at things again with fresh eyes. It will attempt to be meaningless. Without words and without knowledge. Without structure, but also without an existing structure to fight against. Just to be seen and heard. An attempt to reconstruct a space where consensus exists. But then from an alien's perspective.

*Hello useless – for W and friends* situates the futility of art alongside the futility of people and objects (according to white male heterosexual consensus), taking its well-deserved time to do so.

For this solo, Benny Claessens radically returns to the base. Both honest and intimate, exuberant and ecstatic, he takes things out of context, simply presents them to you, and proposes other options. Without criticizing, denouncing or making statements. He just returns your time. To watch, think, feel and see for yourself. Enjoy.

Benny Claessens has spent the last few years at the Münchner Kammerspiele with director Johan Simons, whom he followed back to NTGent in Belgium, to be part of the ensemble in 2015-2016. In the meanwhile, he created a solo at CAMPO.

## BIO DER BETEILIGTEN

**Benny Claessens** (BE, 1981) is an actor and theatre maker. In 2003 he graduated at the Studio Herman Teirlinck in Antwerp.

From 2003 till 2006 he worked in Toneelhuis (Antwerp). He there worked with directors such as Luk Perceval, Tom Jansen and Josse De Pauw; together with Sarah Moeremans and Louis van der Waal he created *Jachtkamp*; he directed his own text *Gollygosh no! For a second there I thought I was involved*.

From 2006 till 2010 he worked as a freelancer at CAMPO (Ghent), Jan Decorte/Kaaitheater (Brussels), les ballets C de la B (Ghent), Wim Vandekeybus/Ultima Vez (Brussels), Dood Paard (Amsterdam) and Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz (Berlin). For his role in *Ritter Dene Voss* by Dood Paard he received the Arlecchino Theatre Prize in Amsterdam in 2009.

From 2010 till 2015 he was a member of the ensemble of the Münchner Kammerspiele under the direction of Johan Simons. He worked with directors such as Alvis Hermanis, René Pollesch and Johan Simons.

For his acting in the movie *Bumpy night* by Julie Kreuzer he received a *lobende Erwähnung* during the Film festival of Münster. He also worked as a guest actor for the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg.

In 2013 he created, together with Risto Kübar, his own project *Spectacular lightshows of which u don't see the effect*. In 2015 he made *Much dance* in co-production with Jan Decorte.

In 2015-2016, Claessens was part of the ensemble of NTGent. He performed in *Accattone* (a co-production with the Ruhrtriennale) and *De kersentuin* (both directed by Johan Simons), was guest actor for René Pollesch in Volksbühne am Rosa Luxemburgplatz in Berlin, and developed two new own creations: *Hello useless – for W and friends* (CAMPO) and *Learning how to walk* (NTGent).

<http://www.campo.nu>

Pressematerial (Fotos in druckfähiger Auflösung und Pressedossiers zu den einzelnen Produktionen) stehen auf <http://auawirleben.ch/de/presse> für Sie zum Herunterladen bereit.

Für weitere Auskünfte, Unterlagen zu den Produktionen, Bild- und eventuell Videomaterial wenden Sie sich bitte an +41 (0) 31 318 62 16 resp. [nicolette.kretz@auawirleben.ch](mailto:nicolette.kretz@auawirleben.ch). Wir stehen gerne zu Ihrer Verfügung. Spezielle Wünsche wie Interviews oder Porträts melden Sie bitte frühzeitig an.

## PRESSE

Portrait of a headstrong artist

## THEATRE

21 March 2016, 12.00 noon

**Hello useless - for W and friends isn't a theatre performance. It's a pamphlet, but without a single statement. Benny Claessens deploys poetics without any intrinsic meanings and sits alone on the stage; as an artist and as a human being. Radical and moving.**

'In all honesty, I don't think I've got anything to say. I just want to turn on a tap, point to it, and say: "This is running water."' You can say a lot about Benny Claessens, but he certainly doesn't ride along the waves of cheap topical theatre; with producers who blatantly deplore any crisis whatsoever, such as the refugee issue or climate change, and thereby stress mainly how relevant they themselves are. You can be sure Claessens' poetics are at the other end of the spectrum. He adheres to 'meaningless' theatre, theatre which has no meaning or purpose, but simply gives spectators a sense of 'the one present': time, space, object, bodies. The performer is the one who directs the scene somewhat nonchalantly and points out what there is to see: look, a plastic garden table with two chairs, look, a half-drooping stage curtain in the background, look over there at the ceiling: three huge and shining letters - J-O-Y. In Hello useless Claessens primarily makes it clear what he thinks theatre certainly is NOT: the tedium of constantly repeated poses and gestures, the false modesty of a performer under the spotlight, the obvious illusion of theatre smoke. He strips off the entire symbolic layer of the theatre company, yet he does so without a trace of irony (his demolition job isn't aggressive). Obviously, the question is then what he himself means by 'drama'. After all, if theatre isn't a vehicle for intrinsic messages, what is it? The answer is ridiculously simple: It's the recovery of time in which you can meet a human being. Not the private person Benny Claessens, but the artist, who sings his heart out, dances with charm, and stretches out his arms to the spectators with palms disarmingly facing upwards. Hello useless is an invitation to come closer, sometimes even literally. Obviously, the tragedy is that this isn't possible: we remain imprisoned in a theatrical context in which authenticity is impossible, honesty is as far as we can feasibly get. Yet it's the attempt which is so moving. Hello useless is the portrait of a headstrong artist, who shows himself to be radical without a role or message to hide behind. But is Claessens allowed to act deviously on stage for an hour and then call that a 'performance'? Yes. Because in his hour you understand more about the soul of an artist than in many other hours of acted drama. Also showing on 23 and 24 March in Monty, Antwerp.

Evelyne Coussens  
De Morgen – March 21, 2016

# Benny Claessens is disarmingly honest in 'Hello Useless - For W and Friends'

Els Van Steenberghe

21 March 2016 at 1.30 p.m. – Adapted at 8.41 p.m.  
Source: Knack Focus

**Benny Claessens spent months in CAMPO's rehearsal room. He sketched, sang, and danced with himself, the wall, and the fire extinguisher. The rehearsal time which the Ghent arts centre gave him ensured that *Hello Useless - For W and Friends* is meaningless in a meaningful manner. And wonderful. And funny!**

★ ★ ★ ★ □

**The Play** = Hello Useless - For W and Friends

**Company** = CAMPO / Benny Claessens

**In a sentence** = *Hello Useless, for W and Friends* is a heartfelt, lively, and affectionate performance, which celebrates the futility of 'ordinary existence' and thereby becomes meaningful. It is a surprising and intangible gem, which warms the heart and strengthens faith in joy.

**Highlight** = Claessens stands almost reticently behind the microphone and sings a touching version of Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now*. Not for the first time, he wins over the entire audience.

**Score** = \* \* \* \*

**More information:** [www.campo.nu](http://www.campo.nu)

**'It's a pity I don't have any material about Salah Abdeslam, because we're all thinking about him today, aren't we?' It's the evening of Friday 18 March 2016 and Benny Claessens sits in the middle of the stage as if he were sitting in his living room. At ease, in a dark blue sweater and grey sweatershort, surrounded by his sketch books. He'd already warned at the start of the performance that 'one reviewer thinks this is the most tedious scene' and, some time later, sniggering, he starts this scene with a mischievous grin.**

Claessens isn't just a remarkable actor. He's also a great dancer with a buoyant singing voice. His versions of Rolling Stones' *As Tears Go By* and Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now* really warm your heart.

Yet this scene isn't dull (any more??), thanks to the qualifying manner in which he improvises to 'spice it up'. This improvisation serves as a perfect counterweight to the moments in which he leafs through his sketches and notes in a humming tone and

sometimes decides to show a drawing. For example, he gives us a glance of the humus soil from where this sober and heart-warming gem grew. However, the piece owes its creation to a less noble thought. It emerged from anger, even rage. Last year in January 2015, when Wouter Hillaert (*theatre critic, ed.*) wrote a letter in *Rekto:Verso* to Jan Decorte (*theatre maker/choreographer, ed.*) in which he cut the man down to size, Claessens took up his pen to defend the man whom he appreciates and admires deeply. The fury splattered from the page on which he gave Hillaert his reply. A year later, his fury has subsided. 'Wouter, I love you again,' he said to Hillaert, who was one of the spectators that Friday evening and converted the powerlessness of an artist due to a tough and 'futile' opinion expressed by a critic into inspiration. Inspiration for a highly personal performance about the vulnerability of the performer and, by extension, of all human beings, who venture into the spotlights with their heart and soul. Spotlights which, during this creation, take on all colours of the rainbow or, rather, the discotheque.

Claessens is certainly more than just a remarkable actor. He's also a great dancer with a buoyant singing voice. His versions of Rolling Stones' *As Tears Go By* and Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now* really warm your heart. And he also moves people with the integrity with which he stands on the stage. He welcomes the audience in a disarmingly honest and comically dry manner. He walks around the stage, mentions everything that's on the stage, and explains what the décor means (tops of glitter letters which together form the word JOY). Claessens doesn't want the audience to get lost in cynical finicky work or dark thoughts. Everything that hangs or stands there is no more or no less than what it is. Full stop. This also applies to the performer. You get Claessens as he is, a man in whom the shy lad still slumbers. A lad which bursts forth mainly when that adult body dances, shows fright, or can no longer suppress a roar of laughter.

He sings, dances, plays, tells jokes, and urges the audience onto the stage. In short, he combines genres in himself and embodies those combinations of genres superbly.

During one of the dance scenes, Claessens extends both hands to the full and sways. Or he swivels with one hand on his back and the other one in the air. He says nothing. Yet he reveals a lot. He reveals his vulnerable self, but equally the vulnerability of the homeless who wander the streets with empty hands and enquiring glances. Claessens chats, yells, sings, dances, plays, tells jokes, and urges the audience onto the stage. In short, he combines theatre with stand-up comedy, dance, and music. He combines genres in himself superbly. *Hello Useless - For W and Friends* is a heartfelt, lively, and affectionate performance, which celebrates the futility of 'ordinary existence' and

thereby becomes meaningful. It is a surprising and intangible gem which warms the heart and strengthens faith in joy again. Despite the Salah Abdeslams of this world.