

2005

BEBEABU: A BRIEF MOMENT IN TIME (TILBURG 1982)

The nice thing about cleaning out your closets and digging through stored boxes is to rediscover forgotten or repressed memories, like old cassette tapes filled with recorded stuff from the past, making you wonder what the hell you were doing and listening to back then. Last week I found a series of dust wrapped tapes, recorded in 1982 and recounting a brief moment in time: Bebeabu. This short lived experience took off at the 22nd of February 1982 and died at the 29th of May in the same year. That is only three months, however, in my memories the period lasted much longer. We like to fool ourselves, I guess. Anyway, Bebeabu was considered a band, but I think it was a project. A mixture of music, performance art, philosophy and eighties 'zeitgeist' – it was post punk sonic fiction. And I was part of it.

In those three months we did a lot of gigs, which is quite surprising when you realize that we did not have a single song on our repertoire. We could not even really play instruments (except for the drummer), nor did we take the time to rehearse. All we did was improvising: rehearsals became gigs and gigs were rehearsals. Thinking back, I am amazed we had the guts to do so. It must have been a combination of ambition and pretence, of motivation and arrogance. But we knew we could do it: climbing the stage, saluting the audience and determined to do a set out there. I thought I was cool, however, to be honest, performing without any plan scared the shit out of me. Time and again. Bebeabu turned out to be an attack on my nerves – that is probably why three months appeared to be the limit.

Looking back, Bebeabu fitted perfectly in the cultural atmosphere of Tilburg during the late seventies and early eighties. The city was hosting a very creative, young population. Students were coming from everywhere, attending classes at the art academy or the university and were affected by the 'DIY-culture' of the punk rock movement. They formed bands, clubs, galleries and reading groups, became deejays, artists and organizers, showed interest in new art movements and – more important – provided a cultural audience that had a lot of time to spend at night. There was a whole range of new and newer clubs and live music venues, like Posjet, Paradox, Kijkhuis, Big Ben, X, De Spoel, Een Nieuwe Lente, De Looiersbeurs, KWJ, Café Verkocht, De Harmonie, Café De Egelantier and many more. If you formed a band, you could play almost anywhere. A key role was played by record shop Tommy, which became a meeting place for this new cultural movement. The store did well in selling 'difficult', experimental 'no wave' and art music and attributed much to Tilburg's fame as a Dutch centre of new music. One of its hosts, Rinus de Wildt, turned out to be an educator for a generation – a kind of local John Peel. The city already had a flourishing jazz and free jazz scene, centring around clubs like Paradox, hosting great live musicians like Paul van Kemenade and the Palinckx Brothers. And do not forget the impact of Doe Maar, a popular band that became very famous in the eighties, but in their first years they were serving De Spoel as a kind of house band. Exciting Tilburg live bands I recall from those days were acts like Wimshurts Elektriseermachine, Flank and TAU-Pact – playing free, jazzy, experimental, anarchic music.

As members of Bebeabu we were rooted in this vibrant context. Eric, Marei and Rob were hosting Een Nieuwe Lente; Roland deejayed at De Spoel; Martin played drums in several regional bands and I deejayed in a local club called De Sponz and had played in Zijkanaal F, a local act that did pretty well in their new line up after I had left the band. Eric used to be the singer of the infamous Shopenhauer Smiles and worked at Tommy's. Rob had introduced me to punkrock, fringy and subversive magazines and great Amsterdam bands like The Ex and Oorlogspad. Moreover, all of us were music lovers and record collectors. After doing a Saturday afternoon jam session in Café Verkocht with approximately ten musicians Bebeabu was founded. This was the final line up:

Eric Toornend: vocals & percussion
Marei Smit: clarinet, backing vocals & percussion
Martin de Ruijter: drums & percussion
Rob Kesselaar: guitar
Roland Spinnewijn: bass & percussion
Siebe Thissen: electronics & backing vocals

For us, Bebeabu was a great opportunity to do what we wanted to do: a final assault on pop music and pop culture, liberating all sounds from their musical straight jackets, combining artistic and philosophical ambitions and thus finally becoming of age after years of looking for our own musical tastes and ambitions. Pretentious? Yes. But there was enough humour involved too: our only song "Wo ist die Rolltreppe?" made fun of big philosophical questions and disputes. The name Bebeabu was borrowed from an old French commercial poster that enlightened the walls of our favourite coffee shop: a baby food commercial, expressing a slogan that read '*Bebe a bu son lait mont blanc*'. As a non-word, Bebeabu also paid tribute to our sympathy for art movements like Dada and Surrealism. Our sound was shaped by bands loved by individual members, like Faust, Throbbing Gristle, Einsturzende Neubauten, Cabaret Voltaire, Wire, The Ex, Chrome, Pere Ubu and The Residents.

The start was promising. We were offered a gig at The Green Ship, a night club annex discothèque in Lucca, Italy. An Italian friend of ours lived there and during summertime he used to work in Tilburg. He arranged the show, took care of publicity and offered us an overcrowded venue. I think we rocked out. The next day a local radio station aired the whole concert. I can not remember much of that gig anymore – there were many girls, the crowd seemed pleased, we were hyped up and returned home as would-be stars. Back home we were support act to the Virgin Prunes during their first Dutch tour, hung out with Sonic Youth, Five or Six and Einsturzende Neubauten and thought life was happening.

Three months later, the end came as sudden as the start. There appeared to be too many tensions, personally and musically, and finally the pressures - caused by our desire to liberate music while we were lacking serious musical education? - killed Bebeabu before the summer of 1982 had even started. The last show was performed at V2 in Den Bosch – only three of us showed up there, a solid sign of disintegration. In between these two gigs we also played Tilburg (Een Nieuwe Lente and KWJ), Venlo (Bauplatz), Vlissingen (De Piek), Waalwijk (De Hamer) and probably a few towns I can not recall anymore. And that was it. Although all clubs were packed or

sold out, the decline came much faster than expected. There was no evaluation and no plans for new gigs. That is why Bebeabu had to be a project.

The first couple of years after our crash I frequently met people asking me when we would reunite again. Bebeabu disappeared so suddenly from the scene, that a local myth survived: 'weren't they cool?!' Well, we never reunited – I think we all realized it was not worth the try. I think we also cherished that little secret of Bebeabu. By not revealing it again, we kept our memories alive. As a live experience Bebeabu was exciting and thrilling for band and audience as well, but, to be honest, on tape it all sounded pretty shabby and wacky. Ten years later no one ever talked about Bebeabu again and my cassette tapes were stored in dusty boxes. As life is moving on, I look back at that brief moment in time with warm feelings and a happy smile on my face. Out of the recorded shows mentioned above, I have distilled a one hour Bebeabu-mix. You can find it on the 'Up Fringe' page. It is the first and probably the last time someone will ever mention or play Bebeabu, but hey, they are part of my memories. The sound quality is very poor, recorded with walkman's from within the audience, but I think it gives a nice impression of that authentic Bebeabu sound. May they rest in peace forever.

Download "Bebeabu: The Lost Tapes (1982)" from:

http://www.siebethissen.net/Dr_Auratheft_Audiozine/Up_Fringe/index.htm



BEBEABU 1982: LUCCA & TILBURG

