

"I LIKE BEING POPULAR"

EN For the premiere of *Tirana <-> Brussels*, 1001 Valises and BOZAR have given carte blanche to Gjovalin Nonaj, one of Albania's best accordionists, who received Belgian nationality in 2007. He has put together an impressive programme, in which various aspects of Albanian folklore, dance, and traditional music get an airing.

When we met Gjovalin Nonaj in the Cirio he was as pleased as Punch, as his dazzling smile made plain: "I'm not nervous at all; performing in the Centre for Fine Arts with dozens of virtuoso musicians is really right up my street." His pride is understandable, after years of uncertainty about his refugee status and of underestimation of his musical talent, which meant that he had to make his living playing on the street, in the metro, and in bars. "I'm a professional musician now, but I still find it more important to play for people than for money. I like being popular and I love being among people and creating an atmosphere with my music. Last year the organisers of Balkan Trafik were very pleased when I sat around improvising with musicians from Serbia, Bulgaria, and other countries in the wings of the festival until the wee small hours. At the level of music we really get on together. And the encounter with the different Balkan countries is central to the festival. The Balkans may be known for the bloody wars in the former Yugoslavia or the dictatorship in Albania; but we are actually all brothers with a similar culture and similar music."

In 2007 Nonaj performed at Balkan Trafik with his quartet; this year he will share the stage in the Henry Le Boeuf Hall with a good 40 musicians and dancers in the premiere of his own *Tirana <-> Brussels*. "The aim is

to show the cultural diversity of Albania. For, although it is a small country, each region has its own cultural traditions. I only have an hour and a quarter, which is not much, but I am going to try to give everything an airing and let every musician have his moment of glory. It wasn't easy to get the whole programme organised: we rehearsed in Albania and in Belgium and then you have the problem of getting visas for all the musicians."

World heritage

Before he could persuade Balkan Trafik to give him carte blanche for the music of his country - Albania has not had the same appeal to Western imaginations as other Balkan countries - he first had to win over Nicolas Wieërs of 1001 Valises. "We travelled to Albania together in April 2007 and I gave him a thorough introduction to the local traditions." Wieërs was immediately converted and managed also to persuade

Tony Van der Eecken, who programmes world music for BOZAR. The result is a fine cross-section of Albanian culture: traditional instruments such as the accordion, *gijfeli*, *lahuta*, and clarinet are combined with rhapsodies and polyphonic Albanian singing, which has been recognised by UNESCO as an outstanding example of the world's intangible heritage. The living legend is Gjoke Nonaj, Gjovalin's uncle and teacher, who will be a special guest during *Tirana <-> Brussels*. Now 98, he has been chosen on four occasions as the country's best rhapsody-singer and best player of the *lahuta* (a one-stringed traditional instrument). Others appearing will include Gjoke's grand-daughter Lumturire Nonaj, Gjovalin's Belgian quartet, Luré Boré, and the Albanian groups "Tirana, musique populaire et danses du Nord et du Sud d'Albanie", "Tirana, polyphonies", and Tradita. Specially for the occasion, an Albanian-Turkish-Belgian quartet is being put together, with Gjovalin Nonaj himself singing and playing accordion and *lahuta*. During the show photographs of Albanian landscapes and folklore will be projected.

Gjovalin Nonaj presents *Tirana <-> Brussels*

29.3.2008 — 21.45

Paleis voor Schone Kunsten/Palais des Beaux-Arts

NL Met *Tirana <-> Brussels* laat de Brussels-Albanese topaccordeonist Gjovalin Nonaj ons kennismaken met de rijke folklore en traditionele muziek van zijn thuisland Albanië. Op Balkan Trafik staat hij met liefst veertig muzikanten op het podium. (Originele Nederlandse tekst: www.brusselnieuws.be/agenda)

FR Avec *Tirana <-> Brussels*, l'impressionnant accordéoniste bruxellois d'origine albanaise Gjovalin Nonaj nous présente le riche folklore et la musique traditionnelle de son pays natal. Au festival *Balkan Trafik*, on le retrouve sur scène entouré d'une bonne quarantaine de musiciens.