

Aurelia

Under-rated country, Belgium, when it comes to music.

Jamie Renton has another fine band for your delectation.

Belgian roots trio Aurelia have some serious pedigree between them. Lead singer Aurélie Dorzée is a gifted violinist, well established on the local folk scene; her guitar playing partner Tom Theuns was an original member of the mighty Think Of One, and percussionist Serigne CM Gueye played with Senegal's finest musical export Orchestra Baobab. I've been playing their most recent album *La Création Du Monde* (the 100th release from leading Belgian folk label Home Records) a lot, enjoying its quirked-out mix of folk, blues, West African and classical influences.

So, when it transpired that Aurelia were performing live at the theatre of the Moliere, the Brussels HQ of Musiek-publique, on the very day I was there to interview Malick Pathé Sow and Bao Sissokho (see elsewhere in this issue), I jumped at the chance to chat with them. Although the timing of my train home meant I couldn't stick around for the gig, I did get to hear the soundcheck and was impressed by the power of Aurélie's voice, the bluesy swing of Tom's guitar and Serigne's sensitive way with a calabash.

Aurelia came together in 2005 as a vehicle for Aurélie's beautiful and often rather strange compositions. They initially performed as a duo, unusual in that Aurélie is French speaking and Tom Flemish. "We started rehearsing with an Iranian percussionist," Aurélie recalls. "And then we worked with a jazz drummer." Someone from Home Records was present at their very first gig and decided there and then that they were worth recording. They've since made four albums for the label, sticking to the same acoustic folk-meets-world template they started out with, although new sounds have been explored and vocals (initially from Aurélie, but increasingly Tom and Serigne too) added to what was at first purely instrumental.

La Création Du Monde was recorded in a castle near their home in Ardennes. "This castle has a particular atmosphere in sound," Tom tells me. "So, no matter which musical style you play, it blends into the atmosphere of the castle and you get one line of sound." His favourite English folk group is the Incredible String Band, his favourite song of theirs is *Creation*. "So when Aurélie came with the title *La Création Du Monde* I thought: 'Yes, now we have our own *Creation!*'"

The album's opening track *Pema Ling* is based on a melody that Tom heard performed by a local flute player whilst over in Nepal some years back. "He was playing this melody all day long and so it stuck in my head." *Yashisha* is one of

Aurélie's compositions. "The tune comes from nowhere and the words mean nothing," she says enigmatically. *Délié* shows the West African direction they're increasingly taking. Aurélie visited Senegal and Mali two years ago and planned to bring over a couple of n'goni players to work with Aurelia. When that fell through (as these things often do), the already locally-based Serigne was drafted in to replace the jazz drummer they'd previously worked with and add the West African element they were looking for.

Ste Thérèse De Lisieux is all about an unusual 20th Century nun. "She wrote some poetry for Jesus," says Tom. "But it's very erotic poetry! Which Aurélie recites at the end of the song." *43° Le Matin* is a slow tune reflecting the sweaty time they had on the Mali-Mauritanian border. It features Serigne reciting poetry in homage to the great spiritual leaders of Senegal.

They describe the next track *Mama* as acoustic punk. "Michel, the producer of the album, comes from the punk scene in Brussels," Tom explains. "And he really liked this tune... the distortion!" *Malou* is a tribute to the child of Tom's best mate, David Bovée, lead singer of Think of One and the Brazilian woman he married. "It reflects that mixture," says Tom. "It becomes a Brazilian waltz."

The album was recorded live, but the trio then went back into the studio to add overdubs, excited about exploring the experimental possibilities of the studio. This means that the live versions of the songs are quite different from the recorded ones. "Live, it's a different energy," explains Tom. "You start from a different point of view



with regard to sound. But you have the advantage of being on stage and the connection with the public and you can use that."

"We have to find simplicity onstage," chips in Aurélie. They've previously tried incorporating electronics into their live shows, in order to replicate what you hear on the recorded versions, but have come to the conclusion that simple and acoustic works best. Their sound is fuelled by a love of mystical and religious music (from Europe in the Middle Ages, from Iran and India) married to the more earthy folk tradition. "But I hear earthiness in spiritual music," says Tom. "And a spiritual element in folk."

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