

In memory of Remko Muermans

Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, 2008. It's one of the last Zea tours I do together with Remko and it's in Ethiopia! Terrie and Emma, from The Ex, have invited us to join their music exchange project with Ethiopian musicians and of course we said yes. It's an amazing adventure and even though Remko will jump out of Zea soon to start a new life with Katya in Russia, he doesn't want to miss these last concerts together.

"Who put on the smoke machine!" Remko yells in my ear while dancing around his two tables full of synths, drum-machines, cables, effects, a minidisc player and a sampler, pushing buttons left and right.

"There is no smoke machine!" - me yelling back while playing guitar and diving away from my microphone which is about to be launched by two eskista dancing Ethiopians.

"Then what's going on? I can hardly see a hand in front of my eyes!"

"It's more that one hundred people dancing. I think it's sand!"

We're in a small bar called Le Bateau Ivre in Addis Abeba and it's totally packed. We play in a corner of the floor, the speakers and my small guitar amp are cranked up to the max, everything is totally in the red and everyone in the room is dancing full on. It's an old bar and from under the floor clouds of sand are stamped upwards. The two disco lights, one red and one yellow, make the scene look like we're dancing through the end of times. Remko is sweating like a maniac, his machines are getting wet, creating some extra special effects for bonus. I'm soaked too, it must be around forty degrees inside. We're unstoppable. We made a few Zea versions of Ethiopian songs that land really well. Terrie and Andy, both guitarists in The Ex, join us for a few songs, pushing the heat and the excitement even higher. After five encores finally the DJ takes over and Remko and I fall into each other's arms, carrying a smile that will stick for a week. We feel high, like we just ran a marathon, but not running but dancing, and won!

Remko joined Zea in 1996. Anton, Corina, Michiel and I had just started the band and we were looking for someone who could push buttons and keys; play the Ensonic Mirage sampler Michiel bought and the Juno 6 synth I had tapped on the head. Remko was a friend from university studying psychology with Corina and Anton. He had a good record collection and he was a great dancer so we asked him if he liked to join the band. We didn't think it was a problem that he never learned to play an instrument, he could figure the sampler out along the way and I could teach him some keyboard playing.

It was a perfect match. Remko's energy on stage was fantastic and he found his way through the songs without ever stopping dancing. And when Anton, Michiel and Corina left the band in 2002, Remko and I decided to

continue as a duo and go full on with beats, samples, synths, bass and bleeps, together with my guitar and vocals. And that, always joined by Grrrt doing sound, is how we bounced through Europe, through the USA (three tours), through Canada, Ethiopia and at least five times through Russia where I left him with Katya in 2008.

Remko learned to speak Russian, found a job in Saint Petersburg and became a husband and a father. For some years he was hardly touching his machines, but the music kept itching and he knew he could only dance it off. So he started a duo with Katya on drums called Razmotchiki Katushek. Remko was back on track with old school industrial, break-core, acid, drum 'n' bass and sample madness mixed with experimental live drums and percussion, and it worked a treat. They managed to get to Amsterdam in the summer of 2022. They stayed at our house and did a tour in The Netherlands and Germany, playing a packed OCCII opening up for MATMOS. It was a celebration of life, music and friendship. Last week we were emailing about future plans. He had a tour in the making and they were planning to come to The Netherlands in February next year. And then came the shocking message that Remko had died of a stroke right after a concert he played in Moscow. I can hardly believe it and I am totally devastated. This man, this friend, who was like an incarnation of musical energy on stage, is now no longer with us. Remko, you were the best button pusher, keyboard smasher, tambourine quasher and sample tweaker I have ever seen, with the best moves, by far. You will be remembered and you will be missed. Thank you for the fun, the energy, the sweat, the sound, the rhythm and the dancing. And, you know Remko, I can only smile when I look back at all the adventures we had together and when the sonorous memory of that half broken tambourine rattling in my ears passes by on a quiet starry night. Fuckin' hell!