

BEHIND THE SCREENS WITH TON SCHERPENZEEL

John O'Regan in conversation with Ton Scherpenzeel for Irish Music Magazine.



Photo : Bert Treep

From Hilversum, in the Netherlands, born in 1952 is a keyboardist who was a founding member of the Dutch rock band Kayak, which featured Ton, drummer Pim Koopman and singer Max Werner. They met whilst at the Hilversum Muziek Lyceum. Between 1973 and 2006, Kayak recorded for EMI, Harvest, Vertigo and Mercury records and became one of the best known Progressive Rock bands in Holland. Kayak had several different lineups, the last phase from 2017-2022. In addition to Kayak, Ton played keyboards with UK Progressive Rock band Camel and Dutch band Earth & Fire.

He co-produced two mid 90's albums by Flairck. "I worked as co-producer on *De Optocht* (The Parade,) and *Kamers* (Chambers). We had a common agent who introduced us, and I could very much relate to their musical approach so I said yes. In hindsight, as a producer I wish I could have contributed more though, but their arrangements were pretty much fixed and rehearsed before we went into the studio, and there was little I could really change or adjust as the whole musical structure would probably collapse. On the other hand, there was little I needed to do really because that was simply their style and way of writing and working. But they were all fabulous musicians. I have often asked Annette Visser (flute) to play on many other projects I have worked on."

His solo career has been prolific, his first solo album (1978) was an adaptation of *Le Carnaval Des Animaux* by Camille Saint-Saëns. His second solo album, *Heart of the Universe* (with Chris Rainbow) was released in 1984. Since then, there has been a steady stream of solo and collaborative releases covering acoustic, electronic and ambient music.

His most recent release is *Achter De Schermen* (Behind the Screens) a collection of instrumental pieces written for theatre shows starring Youp van 't Hek. Released through OOB Records (sister label of Friendly Folk Records) set up by music management entrepreneur, Kathy Keller to nurture new talent and showcase established artists from the wide spectrum of genres.

Discussing *Achter De Schermen* Ton explained: "This album is a selection of 40 years of program music that I wrote for the theatre shows of Youp. His shows are built upon a story he's telling and songs he is singing. As there's a lot of humour in these shows, in Dutch he's known as a 'cabaretier'. Usually there were four or five songs in a show as well as music for the opening, ending and to underscore the text.

"The album is called *Achter De Schermen* (Behind the Scenes/Screens) because my work usually took place there, and not in the spotlight. Some recordings date from the mid-eighties, some are as recent as this year, and most of them have been reworked, rerecorded or rearranged for this purpose. Youp did not always tour with a live band, especially in the beginning of his career he used pre-recorded backing tapes that I created. But since 1995 I regularly went on tour with him with a couple of other musicians."

Achter De Schermen is all-acoustic in style and form at Youp van 't Hek's request. "He does not do pop or rock material, and the theatre music comes across better in an acoustic, smaller setting. Of course I did use some synths, but that's always more like an addition or flavour. And I like these contrasts in my work. My previous album (*Virgin Grounds*) was only synthesizers."

While best known as a keyboardist, the Hardanger fiddle and viola da gamba are among Ton Scherpenzeel's favourite instruments. Celtic music and other ethnic Folk styles occupy an important place in his writing. "Yes, but you wouldn't hear that on *Achter De Schermen*, because there is nothing even remotely Celtic or folky in Youp's shows. But Celtic and folk have certainly been a notable

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influence in my other work. That's audible in Kayak (especially *Merlin- Bard of the Unseen* and *Nostradamus- the Fate of Man*), my solo albums (*Velvet Armour* and *The Lion's Dream*) but also in other theatre productions I did when the setting and story required it. I think Celtic and folk music have a timeless quality, and it can be melancholic and sad as well as exciting and jubilant. The combination is part of what makes it so unique. I am no purist or a connoisseur of the genre, but somewhere deep inside me there must be a little Celt."

Get a taste of Ton's music at www.tonscherpenzeel.com or www.oob-records.com

