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Bio information: **UNIVERS ZERO**

Title: **RELAPS (Archives 1984 – 1986)** (Cuneiform Rune 280)

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**FILE UNDER: ROCK / CHAMBER ROCK / EXPERIMENTAL / CLASSICAL**

*“...one of the most important groups of the 1980s ..Univers Zero conceptualize the Europe of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century... dense, desperate and dark; ...above all beautiful and dramatic, strongly marked by the cultural traditions of Europe...Univers Zero may be classified somewhere between Bach and Bartok, Magma and Stravinsky...They represent something new, monumental, and important... a stirring lament over a European continent in physical and cultural decay ... a rare, intense, and magnanimous piece of work, and it is absolutely compulsory for everyone who’s...played their Magma records to shreds, and/or who would have wanted there to be a bit more electric bass and drums on Bartok’s string quartets.”*

– Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Puls* [Norway], Feb 1989

*“Univers Zero...forged a genre of music that might appropriately be dubbed post-rock, had the term not been coined 15 years too late. ...the Belgian’s craft at calculated pomp and nervous precision make Godspeed You! Black Emperor’s apocalyptic grandiosity seem like a Michael Bay movie in comparison. ...”*

– Popmatters [USA]

*“UZ’s music was an antecedent for the kind of instrumental and stylistic interspersions considered normal today by groups including Bang on a Can and Alarm Will Sound. Henry Cow’s complex, abstruse writing meets Bartok, Stravinsky, Messiaen and Ligeti, but with hints of early music, especially in UZ’s use of spinet and harmonium. ... This...nearly unheard-of group was creating a new kind of chamber music that, in its inclusion of rock instrumentation and the occasional rock stance, would be a blueprint for classical music of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”*

– All About Jazz [USA]

*“Released in 1977, [their debut] was astonishing then; today, it sounds like the hidden source for every one of today’s avant-garde rock bands. ... Univers Zero are a revelation;...it’s a joy to discover that there’s more to digest – a whole back catalogue, leading up to the current day, and critical acclaim and a gigging band. “ – Organ [UK]*

The Belgian band **Univers Zero** is legendary for its ominous, unsettling and uncompromising musical vision – a sound and stance that *Keyboard* describes as **“Chamber music for the Apocalypse”**. Simultaneously medieval & modern, its distinctive, dark and elegantly beautiful instrumental music fused classical and rock to give birth to an unprecedented and remarkably prescient new musical genre called “chamber rock”. UZ’s singular sound derives from its unique instrumentation (piano and keyboards, violin, clarinets, oboe/bassoon, English horn, saxophone, electric bass, guitar, drums) combined with brooding gothic imagery, elements of European folk and other world musics, the iconoclasm and intensity of rock, the relentless sonic experimentation of the avant-garde, and leader/ chief composer **Daniel Denis**’ classically-inspired writing style, influenced by early 20<sup>th</sup> Century avant-garde classical composers. The band has remained on the cutting edge of New Music throughout the course of a career that began in the ‘70s and continues today, stretching and disintegrating the boundaries of classical and rock music alike to create a new, vital, and unique fusion. Today, several decades after Univers Zero first forged its unique “chamber rock”, critics cite its oeuvre as the precursor to the best avant-garde rock and classical music of the present day, from post-rock, associated with **Godspeed You! Black Emperor**, **Kayo Dot** and other instrumental rock bands – to the numerous late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> C. classical chamber ensembles integrating rock into their repertoire, such as **Bang on a Can**, **Kronos Quartet** and others. When Cuneiform recently released a remastered reissue of the band’s self-titled debut album, critics who heard the band’s music for the first time called it a “revelation”, “...the hidden source for every one of today’s avant-garde rock bands” [*Organ*].

Back in the 1980s, however, in what was the band’s second decade of existence, Univers Zero stood very much alone, its music well beyond and outside that time. Featuring rock and classical instrumentation and sophisticated, passionate compositions, its dark and daring instrumental music stood in bold contrast to the artistic and cultural wasteland that characterized much ‘80s rock music. This new Univers Zero CD, called **Relaps: Archives 1984-1986**, is an archival project that documents the band in live performance during the mid-late 1980s. The band’s 11<sup>th</sup> CD, it is the only release of live material from the period during which Univers Zero recorded the two studio releases **UZED** [1984-Cryonic, 1988-Cuneiform], and **Heatwave** [1987-Cuneiform]. During that time, with Denis at its helm and some of the best musicians from Europe’s avant-garde at its instruments, Univers Zero created what was perhaps the boldest, most sonically powerful and above all, most overtly ROCK-oriented music of its lengthy career. The stellar performances and astounding music on *Relaps* are proof positive that Univers Zero was one of – and perhaps *the* – most adventurous rock band then playing on the international rock stage. *Relaps* captures the live band that caught Cuneiform’s ear more than 20 years ago, leading it to sign Univers Zero and release its 6<sup>th</sup> album, *Heatwave*, thus beginning a fruitful relationship that continues to the present day.

**Univers Zero** was founded in 1974. It had evolved out of **Necromicon**, a group begun by drummer **Daniel Denis** and trumpeter **Claude Deron** and named after a locale in **H. P. Lovecraft**’s work. By May 1974, the group had begun calling itself **Univers Zero**, named after a book by Belgian novelist **Jacques Sternberg**. During its first five years, under the co-leadership of composers **Daniel Denis** and **Roger Trigaux** (also the group’s guitarist), Univers Zero utilized a mixture of primarily acoustic classical and rock instrumentation to record 2 albums. Its first album, the self-titled **Univers Zero** (also known as **1313**), was released in 1977 in a tiny, limited edition and reissued soon after on **Atem**, the record label led by **Gérard Nguy**, publisher of France’s leading magazine of avant garde music. The power and originality of the band’s recorded debut stunned listeners at the time; decades later, the album continues to astound. Today, **Univers Zero** is acknowledged to mark the birth of “chamber rock”: a new and startlingly original musical genre – a perfect hybrid of classical music and rock – that may conceivably be the Francophone world’s most significant contribution to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century New Music. When Cuneiform released a remastered reissue of the album on its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, new listeners called it a “revelation”, “...the hidden source for every one of today’s avant-garde rock bands” [*Organ*]. Its landmark status self-evident, critics on both sides of the rock and classical camps recognized it as the template for “music that might appropriately be dubbed post-rock, had the term not been coined 15 years too late” and “the blueprint for classical music of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

*(This press release is continued on the next page...)*

Univers Zero landmark debut was followed in 1979 by the band's second album, called *Heresie* [1979-Atem, 1991-Cuneiform], widely considered to be one of the darkest and most menacing instrumental albums of all time. 1979 would prove to be an eventful year for the band.; it also marked Univers Zero's involvement as one of the five founding members of "Rock In Opposition" [RIO], a hugely influential European consortium of avant-garde bands initiated by **Chris Cutler** of **Henry Cow** (UK). Around this same time, shortly after *Heresie*'s release, Trigaux left Univers Zero to found his own band, **Present**. In his wake, **Andy Kirk** joined UZ. With keyboardist Kirk on board and contributing new compositions, Univers Zero released "their most comprehensive catalogue of horrors" [*Boston Rock*], *Ceux Du Dehors* [1981-Recommended/ReR, 1992-Cuneiform]. Live recordings from this period of Univers Zero's career, with Trigaux as guitarist and co-composer, and subsequently with **Kirk** as keyboardist and contributing composer, would be released years later as a Japanese lp and a CD on Cuneiform, called *Crawling Wind* [1983-Eastern Works/ReR Japan, 2001-Cuneiform].

During the 1980s, Univers Zero was without question one of the most adventurous bands on the international rock scene. Distinctive but never stagnant, Univers Zero's sound evolved and progressed with each of several new lineups during this decade, and each subsequent release. Univers Zero began experimenting with electronic elements such as samples, and integrating more electric instruments (keyboards and a more prominent electric guitar) into its sonic mix to produce a bolder and more 'contemporary' sound that was as sophisticated as it was emotive. In a creative surge, composers Denis and Kirk wrote more material during the early '80s than they could find record labels to release; *Ceux du Dehors* featured only a portion of their prolific output. In addition, the all-instrumental group had difficulty finding gigs to perform their classically-influenced, complex compositions live, as most rock bookers (and the audiences they served) preferred No Wave and other trend-oriented rock genres du jour. These stresses, among other reasons, contributed to Kirk quitting the band in 1983.

**Relaps: Archives 1984-1986** documents Univers Zero during the mid-late 1980s, a period in which the band, with Denis as leader and sole composer at the helm, continued to break new sonic ground. Following Kirk's departure, Denis eventually assembled the line-up that is featured on *Relaps*' first four tracks: Denis on drums, **Dirk Descheemaeker** on clarinet, bass clarinet, soprano saxophone; **Christian Genet** on bass, **André Mergenthaler** on cello and alto sax, and **Jean-Luc Plouvier** on keyboards. This version of UZ played a series of shows in Europe in February and March, 1984, previewing new compositions by Denis. *Relaps* features three Denis works that were recorded on March 31, 1984 in a concert at The Pavilion at Hannover, Germany, and a fourth Denis composition recorded on Feb. 25<sup>th</sup> 1984 in Dottignies, Belgium. Several months later, in September-October 1984, the group went into the studio to record this new material for their 5th album, called *UZED* [1984-Cryonic, 1988-Cuneiform]. Released originally on **Cryonic**, *UZED* was reissued and released worldwide 4 years later by Cuneiform, garnering critical praise for its "violent sound...[which] writhes with a sinister energy" [*Goldmine*]

Following the recording of *UZED*, Univers Zero evolved once again with a new, expanded line-up, documented here on tracks 5-8 of *Relaps*. Invited to join the French band **Art Zoyd**, highly active on the European concert scene, Mergenthaler left Univers Zero. In his place, former UZ violinist **Patrick Hannapier** re-joined the fold – as did Kirk, whose keyboard complimented that of Plouvier. A new guitarist, **Michel Delory**, also joined the band, which retained on-going members **Deescheemaeker** (clarinets and saxophones) and Genet (bass). This septet version of Univers Zero performed at two prestigious, large-scale events in Belgium in October, 1985 and played at the **Frankfurt Jazz Festival** in Germany on February 7, 1986. The group performed Denis' newest, post-*UZED* composition, and several previously-unrecorded works that Kirk had written for Univers Zero in 1981-'83. *Relaps* features a recording made at the Frankfurt Jazz Festival of Denis' composition, "Emanations", and recordings made on October 9, 1985 at the Centre Cultura de Seraing in Belgium of two Kirk compositions ("The Funeral Plain" and "Heatwave") and Denis' "L'Etrange Mixture du Docteur Schwartz".

The dual keyboard/Kirk-Plouvier line-up turned out to be an unlikely success. As relayed by **Aymeric Leroy** and **Renato Moraes** in their extensive liner notes for *Relaps*, published in the booklet, augmented by historical photos, that accompanies the CD:

"Andy was into smooth, clean sounds—piano, strings and brass," Plouvier explains. "Our sound became more symphonic, more English, exactly the opposite of what I was trying to achieve. So I would offset that by making ugly noises with the DX7! Andy found this very funny—he had a great sense of humor! It was also great to have Michel Delory. He was a brilliant funk guitarist, very much in the 1980s style, very economical.... Daniel kept begging him to play distorted, Hendrix-style solos, but all he got in return was a vaguely ironic smile!" Kirk too looks back fondly on the septet. "That line-up was incredible. We played with such energy! The versions we did of "The Funeral Plain" were the best ever—with a stupendous guitar solo by Michel."

In July and September of 1986, this septet version of Univers Zero went into the studio to record *Heatwave*. Released early the next year on Cuneiform, *Heatwave* captured the attention of the avant-music press, prompting *Option*, then the leading magazine devoted to experimental music, to comment that "the band sounds much like a mating of **Stravinsky**, **Bartok**, the **Art Bears**, mid-period **King Crimson**, and **Anthony Davis**' *Episteme*." Unfortunately, Denis had decided to dissolve the band by the time they returned from the Frankfurt festival. *Heatwave*, the CD formerly agreed upon as the band's first Cuneiform recording and thus a new beginning for the band – was now intended as its swansong, a document of the final line-up.

Frustrated by his band being relegated to music's fringe during the 1980s, with only limited opportunities for live performances and minimal album sales, Denis dismantled Univers Zero after *Heatwave*'s release. The CD *Relaps* documents the final lineups of UZ's early years, before the band went dormant for nearly a decade. During the 1990s, Denis released two albums of new compositions, called *Sirius and the Ghost* (1991) and *Les Eaux Troubles* (1993) under his own name on Cuneiform, and Cuneiform began reissuing Univers Zero's entire back catalogue. Cuneiform's reissues met with worldwide acclaim; the world was finally catching up to UZ's 'chamber rock'. Denis reactivated the band as a live performing and recording project at the end of the '90s, and has since released a series of releases of new Univers Zero material on Cuneiform, including three studio recordings – *The Hard Quest* (1999), *Rhythmix* (2002), and *Implosion* (2004) – and a live recording made of the band in concert in 2005, called *Live!* (2006). Besides releasing Univers Zero's new material, Cuneiform continues doing augmented reissues of the band's back catalogue, accompanied by bonus material and liner notes, as well as issuing previously-unreleased archival material such as the live recordings on *Relaps*.

[press release/bio text by Joyce E. Nalewajk]

for more information on Univers Zero, please see:  
[www.univers-zero.com](http://www.univers-zero.com) - [www.myspace.com/universzero](http://www.myspace.com/universzero)

## PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS FOR RELAPS: ARCHIVES 1984-1986:



DIGITAL [HIGH-RESOLUTION / COLOR(DEPENDING ON THE IMAGE)] VERSIONS OF THESE IMAGES AND OTHERS ARE AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD ON [WWW.CUNEIFORMRECORDS.COM](http://WWW.CUNEIFORMRECORDS.COM) IN THE "PRESS" SECTION.

### WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT UNIVERS ZERO'S 1980's ALBUMS:

#### UNIVERS ZERO

#### HEATWAVE

#### CUNEIFORM 1987

"*Heatwave* ... is an intricate and monumental piece of work...Univers Zero play the most complex, rehearsal-intensive music since the heyday of progressive rock...The band remains as morbid as ever.... Univers Zero, without any overt politics, stick to an extreme program: mulling over the choice between survival (for whatever it's worth) or destruction (that's all, folks) as close as music can capture it."

—Michael Bloom, *Boston Phoenix*, 8/ 21/1987

"Like every UZ release, *Heatwave* is disturbing, fascinating and profoundly musical...*Heatwave* is the band's most electronics-oriented album ever...The result is a logical extension of UZ's original chamber-music-from-hell sound."

—Michael P. Dawson, *Goldmine*, 11/2/90

"Univers Zero take the rock/chamber music foundation laid by Henry Cow in the early '70s and build upon it. UZ's instrumental virtuosity excels that of Henry Cow's players, and their highly original use of electronics sets their work firmly in the present... "ferocious" and "relentless". On this outing their sound is highly similar to that of Art Zoyd's classic *Les Mariage du Ciel et L'Enfer*, but with a far more brutal percussive power...the instrumentalists' adherence to classical technique precludes categorization as fusion....Challenging, but never difficult, aggressive, but never abrasive, *Heatwave* is a complex, densely textured, and electrifying work of art."

— Michael Draine, *Sound Choice*, #10

"I've been salivating over the very thought of this record ever since I received word of its imminent release. When it arrived, it proved to be every bit as good and then some..The line up is also one of the most electric yet from UZ, causing the music to sizzle and burn...For fans, *Heatwave* is a must; for the uninitiated, it is a superb introduction to the music of Univers Zero."

— Dean Suzuki, *Ear Magazine*, 2/88

"...the band sounds much like a mating of Stravinsky, Bartok, the Art Bears, mid-period King Crimson, and Anthony Davis' Episteme. Throughout their existence, Zero has played this highly uplifting material with an ear for stunning orchestration."

— Russ Summers, *Option*, Nov/Dec 1987

"Hard to say exactly what tradition the extraordinary LP arises out of. Some of the odd-meter riffs on electric guitar and trap set are reminiscent of mid-'70s British progressive work by Gentle Giant and others, but the kaleidoscopic development of the phrases through meticulous orchestration is almost Stravinskian, the willingness to repeat simple material is a tip of the hat to minimalism, and some of the sounds throughout might have been borrowed from the Residents. The mood is dark and intense throughout..a tightly controlled developmental logic is always at work... A must for lovers of adventurous music."

— Jim Aiken,, *Keyboard Magazine*, Oct. 1987

#### UNIVERS ZERO

#### UZED

#### CRYONIC 1984 / CUNEIFORM reissue 1989

"...one of the most important groups of the 1980s ..Univers Zero conceptualize the Europe of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century... dense, desperate and dark; nevertheless, the music of UZ is above all beautiful and dramatic, strongly marked by the cultural traditions of Europe...Univers Zero may be classified somewhere between Bach and Bartok, Magma and Stravinsky...They represent something new, monumental, and important...UZED...to my mind, their finest recording...is a stirring lament over a European continent in physical and cultural decay, and one inevitably thinks of Denis' homeland Belgium ...UZED is a rare, intense, and magnanimous piece of work, and it is absolutely compulsory for everyone who's had enough of the monotony of Laibach, who's played their Magma records to shreds, and/or who would have wanted there to be a bit more electric bass and drums on Bartok's string quartets."

— Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Puls* (Norway), Feb 1989

“Univers Zero is a showcase for the compositions of percussionist Daniel Denis. ...when the fuzz guitar starts wailing you know you’re not in the land of Poulenc and Lihoud any more. Denis is taking chances and he wants you to know it...One thing that separates these artists’ work from the work of more conventional composers is the absence of filler....we’re not sure where Cuneiform Records is finding this stuff, but we hope they reach some sort of audience with it.”  
– Jim Aikin, *Keyboard*, 5/1989

“This is not polite chamber music... but an intense, often violent sound that writhes with a sinister energy...The opening “Presage” may remind listeners of King Crimson’s “Larks’ Tongues in Aspic” series, but...Univers Zero’s musical vision is truly dark, lacking the romanticism that hides withing Robert Fripp’s compositions....Not music for the faint of heart, which is probably as a good a definition of rock ‘n’ roll as any.”  
– Michael Dawson, *Goldmine*, 1/13/89

“an inventive quintet who never fail to impress with their jagged time lapsed piano, dramatic time signatures, bass, reeds, deep cello and busy drums. The music drives along moonless avenues, soundtracks to a world beyond tomorrow.”  
– *Outlet* (UK), #36

## UNIVERS ZERO CEUX DU DEHORS RECOMMENDED/RER 1981 / CUNEIFORM reissue 1992

“If Stravinsky had a rock band, it would sound like this. Blazing, white hot, medieval.” – C.W. Vrtacek, *Advocate Newspapers*, 1/28/93

“...a dark record, utilizing the triple-fusion approach of the Rock-in-Opposition sound (jazz, rock and classical avant-garde), with the classical influence being the most dominant. The tense and brooding influence of the baroque school is felt on every track....The erratic rhythms created by the bass and percussion, as well as the complex arrangement provided by the exceptional composition, give this otherwise medieval sound its twentieth century flavor.”  
–Michael C. Mahan, *Alternative Press*, #54, Dec. 1992

“...this is probably their most comprehensive catalog of horrors, from the ominous minimalist pedal points in “Combat” to the ghostly improvised droning of “La Musique d’Erich Zann”...to the grotesque bassoon/viola tradeoffs in “Bonjour Chez Vous.”  
– Michael Bloom, *Boston Rock*, #133, July/Aug. 1993

## WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT UNIVERS ZERO 1977 DEBUT AND OTHER 1970S ALBUMS

UNIVERS ZERO 1313 UZ 1977 / ATEM reissue 1977 / numerous intervening reissues /  
CUNEIFORM reissue 1990 RUNE 20 / CUNEIFORM remastered reissue 2008 RUNE 1313

“**ALBUM OF THE WEEK** ...Released in 1977, it was astonishing then: today, it sounds like the hidden source for every one of today's avant-garde rock bands. Chillingly beautiful, driven by the bassoon and cello more than the guitar and synth, each instrumental is both pastoral and burgeoning with terrible life. ...this edition has been carefully re-mastered from the original 1977 tapes. The result sounds glorious, full of clarity and warmth, preserving all the subtleties of the largely acoustic classical instrumentation. ...

... **This is edgy beyond belief. It drips tension.** Opening track 'Ronde' begins both forceful and restrained, full of the creeping pulse of the soundtracks of Bernard Herrmann and the drive of the Rite Of Spring; ...full of imminent disaster. Yet it never resolves - it ebbs and flows while it keeps the delicious feel of impending action going, along a loping, hunting 11-beat rhythm. There can be few other bands who get their drive and energy from a bassoon (played by Michel Berkman). ...

When Univers Zero shut themselves away in their cellar to record this, after years of rehearsal, they had refined their music into a perfect, relentless intensity. **Each piece magnificently refuses to deviate from its mood, its tense, thrilling, growling, restrained focus.** Pretty much all of it revolves around whole-tone and diminished scales, the alien, otherworldly scales, the forbidden scales - and though it writhes and twists into different riffs and feels and texture, the teeth of that Devil's Interval will not let it go. Odd-time grooves pile on the danger with percussion...simple, medieval drums and bursts of sharp, sparse kit. ... The whole is like the rare, delicious bits of great film soundtrack that create menace and energy out of nowhere.

**The bonus track - recorded live in 1979 - is extraordinary. ... It is genuinely frightening music, more abstract than the rest, full of hellish speaking in tongues and tectonic groans;** it's of a kind with the 'orgy in hell' track on the seminal White Noise album, except... more menacing, like Magma gone bad. Twenty minutes best not listened to alone; **quite brilliant.** A different line up and...Guy Segers ...**the menace here is dirty, crushing, nightmarish; the rest of the album suggests the imagined fears of dark woods and scary natural forces.**

**Univers Zero are a revelation; after delving into rich layers of this debut it's a joy to discover that there's more to digest - a whole back catalogue, leading up to the current day, and critical acclaim and a gigging band. This perfectly presented and restored edition of their debut is the place to dive in. ...**

– Sean O., *Organ*, www.organart.demon.co.uk, #274, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008

“Historic significance cannot be measured in sales. Music often progresses in near anonymity, its true impact only apparent years after the fact. When Univers Zero released its first untitled album...in 1977, it reached few ears. Those hearing it...knew that this was something that had not been heard before. By combining a guitar-based rock trio with instruments usually associated with classical music, UZ was far more than a clichéd, Ekseption-like attempt to “rock up the classics.” Instead...**UZ created a new kind of chamber music for a new assemblage of instruments.**

... **UZ's debut remains both benchmark and landmark.** Reissued numerous times over the years...this definitive version finally presents this unprecedented music the way it was meant to be heard, clarifying how—emerging out of nowhere with little history to precede it— UZ has been so vital in changing the way chamber music is perceived.

**UZ's music was an antecedent for the kind of instrumental and stylistic interspersions considered normal today by groups including Bang on a Can and Alarm Will Sound. Henry Cow's complex, abstruse writing meets Bartok, Stravinsky, Messiaen and Ligeti, but with hints of early music, especially in UZ's use of spinet and harmonium. ...**

The remastered remixes of the album's five tracks, from the original multi-track tape, reveal previously unheard detail. ...

A 28-minute bonus track...provides an early view of UZ in performance, with the line-up of *Heresie*...performing its opening "La Faulx." Darker and more bleakly melodramatic, bassist Guy Seger's "interstellar chaotic speech" establishes a link between UZ and avant-art rocksters Magma.

**... This welcome reissue confirms, once again, that in 1977 a nearly unheard-of group was creating a new kind of chamber music that, in its inclusion of rock instrumentation and the occasional rock stance, would be a blueprint for classical music of the 21st century."**

– John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, www.allaboutjazz.com, June 13, 2008

**"Lately, many American groups, such as Zs, Kayo Dot and Normal Love, have been birthing Tetsuo-like sonic creatures — all metallic limbs and brash modern classical appendages jutting forth from a deformed prog rock body. Univers Zero's 1977 debut cast a dark foreshadow on this recent trend.** Spinet, harmonium, bassoon and strings paint dissonant filigrees over a doom-laden and decidedly rock instrumental backdrop. The music is consistently ominous... when it occasionally gets dense, it's a slab of strange, ingenious orchestration you hear, rather than a simple overdriven amp sound. **The jagged melodies...recall a perversely gothic version of contemporaries Henry Cow. Yet, rather than building on disjointed convulsive gestures, UZ's compositional structures surge and ooze.** There is still the interplay of uneven rhythmical patterns, and free-jazz informed scribbling, but with greater fluidity. Amidst the musical complexity...one is never battling against overly sober virtuosic displays of musicianship. As with the younger generation that have inherited this approach, there are sufficient amounts of psychedelic mystery and rough edges..."

– Nick Storrington, *Exclaim!*, www.exclaim.ca, September 2008

"... the group present here was formed in 1975-6, a septet including bassoon, two violins, guitar, bass, and harmonium which could draw textural comparisons to the Third Ear Band, if it weren't for the incredible weight of lockstep rhythms placed behind the intricacies of pizzicato violin and muted guitar on the opening bars of such compositions as "Ronde." The additive nature of the piece, which brings in bassoon and rhythm in gradual martial sections, recalls "In C" at the outset, leading to sashays on seaworthy crests underpinning a lengthy bassoon solo by Michel Berckmans. ...repetition, abstraction and inversion are at the center of their compositional architecture. At this stage, jazz and improvisation weren't out of their systems yet; in addition to Berckmans's solo on "Ronde," violin scramble and even brief harmonium statements rise from the written fragments.

"Carabosse" seems almost quaint, a plodding courtly dance...the unison interplay of bassoon, strings and spinet recall Third Ear Band's *Music for Macbeth* and *Comus*.... Guitarist Roger Trigaux's "Docteur Petiot" finds a simpler muse from which to spin out swirling, dusky string writing atop ridiculous turn-on-a-dime time signatures, a combination the likes of which recalls the best intentions of Rachel's music...two decades later.

**The key, of course, to what makes this music interesting is the exacting precision with which Denis' percussion hems in the music's pulse, drawing brusque black borders on intricate tonal shading. ...dancing inside a box is what Univers Zero's music is about. ... Coupled with astonishing sound, this is a reissue well worth investigating."**

– Clifford Allen, *Bagatellen*, www.bagatellen.com, October 26, 2008

"It's been 30 years since the original incarnation of Belgium's Univers Zero birthed its well-crafted and powerful version of chamber rock. To commemorate the milestone, Cuneiform Records, long-time supporters of the UZ institution, reissued their debut album with a 16-page booklet, a 28-minute bonus live track, and remastered sound. **Many labels claim "Remastered!" only to disappoint... Here, the refurbishing could not be more obvious...**

**The 2008 version of Univers Zero...is radically remixed.** The stereo effects that pervade the original CD version from 1989 are gone, in favor of ... a sound more akin to...performing live. ...the many interwoven lines of counterpoint are now much more discernible when such instruments as guitar, violin, cello, spinet and bassoon support and vie for prominence with bass and drums. Indeed, it is bassist Christian Genet and guitarist Roger Trigaux who benefit most in this new mix, their playing as prominent and full as it must have been in performance. ...

... The only casualties are Michel Berckmans' claustrophobic bassoon lines on "Malaise," once larger than life, now rendered natural – and almost too normal. ...Daniel Dennis' drumming is magnified throughout, rumbling in powerful accord with Genet's bass to give the album new depth at almost every turn.

the disc is **augmented by a live version of "Faulx," the brooding roaring monster that infested the first side of the band's 1979 offering, *Heresy*. It moans and writhes its way into uneasy life, alternately meditative and explosive,** hinting at the visceralgia to come in Roger Trigaux's offshoot band Present. A shocker that nicely complements the disc's myriad subtle surprises."

– Marc Medwin, *Dusted*, www.dustedmagazine.com, Jun. 6, 2008

**"... Univers Zero take their cues from 20th century classical music and then amp it up with a rock sensibility. ... we're not talking Emerson, Lake and Palmer-style Cheez Whiz here. UZ's almost entirely acoustic sound blurs genre boundaries much more effectively than most any conventional rock band's efforts to set already bombastic Romantic-period classical music to a thumping backbeat. ...if Béla Bartók had lived until the late '70s and became a rock drummer, this is the kind of stuff he might have written.**

*Univers Zero*, the record, kicks off with its centerpiece, the 15-minute "Ronde." Scratchy violins set a loping...soon joined by a melodic lead on bassoon... Bandleader/composer/drummer Daniel Denis joins shortly, his drumming never really rock-oriented, instead providing color and accenting, occasionally egging the band on with a driving rhythm. The composition twists and turns, spotlighting the bassoon and later a violin-led freakout that wouldn't have been out of place on some of the records that, say, Peter Brötzmann was doing around the same time. ...an ensemble mentality dominates...

The big treat on the reissue...is the bonus track "La Faulx," a nearly 30-minute live version of the epic opening track from Univers Zero's second album, *Heresie*. It's the ultimate Halloween music; you've never heard a harmonium sound this *evil* before. Indeed, this band only got better as it matured; the debut is nice, but then a run of three near-masterpieces ensued — much of this happening during the cultural wasteland known as the 80s. ...

**... If only Denis wasn't pigeonholed as a rock drummer, I could see him leading his group at the [Library of Congress'] Coolidge Auditorium just as well as I could see him at the Velvet Lounge. That's a testament to how well, and how seamlessly, Univers Zero melds intellectual Western classical music with visceral rock."**

– Brandon Wu, "Label Spotlight: Univers Zero on Cuneiform", *Washington City Paper: Black Plastic Blogs*, www.washingtoncitypaper.com, Aug. 1, 2008



**“In the late 1970s, while America was still mortified at what...records sounded like when played backwards, abstruse European prog bands seemed to be directly summoning up the dark lord for those who played their albums the intended way. Perhaps none of these bands has made as singular an impression as the three-decade-old (and counting) Belgian chamber music group Univers Zero.**

**...Univers Zero is a Faustian saga (like the drama, not the band) which plays like a symphonic tour of a Bosch painting. At times it's as taut and controlled as a Carl Stalling Looney Tunes dub, at others as free and chaotic as a Transylvanian peyote orgy.**

**So what is this exactly? ... You can hear Lovecraft's writing all over the music,** the intense cosmic gloom, the deep-seated misanthropy, and the inaccessible and archaic language (in this case, the use of string instruments). “La Faulx”, originally from the 1979 masterpiece *Heresie*, one of the most sinister albums ever recorded, appears here as a live bonus track, featuring some Cthulhu Cult-like low-register chanting that makes it come off like a recording of Anton Lavey's black masses as scored by Stravinsky.

**Stravinsky and twentieth century classical composers like Bartók, Ives, Penderecki, and Huybrechts proved some of the band's most distinguishing influences, along with its highly respected peers in the similarly apocalyptic Magma, but Univers Zero was distinguished by a secret weapon in its arsenal. Drummer and Lovecraft fanboy Daniel Denis's aptitude for polyrhythms and odd time signature changes straight out of Yes's *Close to the Edge* keeps *Univers Zero (1313)* in constant motion and translates its dense avant-garde operatics into a format palatable to rock audiences...**

**Univers Zero, along with its more overwrought and scatological Rock in Opposition peers Henry Cow and Mothers of Invention, forged a genre of music that might appropriately be dubbed post-rock, had the term not been coined 15 years too late. ...the Belgians' craft at calculated pomp and nervous precision make Godspeed You! Black Emperor's apocalyptic grandiosity seem like a Michael Bay movie in comparison. In fact, it's a wonder sick minds from Kenneth Anger to Lucio Fulci never offered Univers Zero a film score. Maybe that's because for all of its cinematic and theatrical potential, this is sure-fire listening music... Each song is its own instrumental narrative, puzzle, and invective rolled into one.**

The new mix cleans things up brilliantly so that every pluck is enunciated and every space hollowed and filled with looming dread...

“Ronde” opens the album with 15 loaded minutes that incorporate minor-chord minuets, terse and screeching bowed strings, sparse but enigmatic organ sounds, and a lurching sense of claustrophobic doom. And that's literally just the beginning. **There's rarely a dull or expected moment to follow.** [Rating 8/10]”

– Timothy Gabriele, *PopMatters*, www.popmatters.com, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008

**“Dark, brooding, menacing, and unwilling to fit into any genre, that's historically been the best way to describe the music of Belgium's Univers Zero. ...Univers Zero were always...in a world of their own...their debut self-titled release (often times also called 1313), here remastered by...Cuneiform, who once again remind us just how important this album really is. Sure, other acts like Frank Zappa, Gentle Giant, Henry Cow, King Crimson, Bela Bartok, Can, and Magma were also pushing the envelope into dark territories as well at the time, but none were able to conjure up such seething menace as Univers Zero. ...**

...not your normal rock ensemble... The weaving bassoon, violin, viola, and harmonium melodies are quite unique, and way ahead of its time... Classic tracks like “Malaise” and “Ronde” really have to be experienced to be believed... Often times the music is chilling, even spooky... Honestly, a track like “Complaints” could easily have been the musical score to a 1920's silent horror film...it's that creepy.

Cuneiform has done a masterful job here on this reissue. Not only does it sound spectacular, but they have included a great bonus track, the near 30-minute live “La Faulx” (free-jazz meets avant-garde mayhem!), as well as a wonderful booklet packed with photos and info... If you've never taken the dark journey into the world of Univers Zero, start here and work your way up. ...you'll be glad you took that first step. [4.5 stars out of 5]”

– Pete Pardo, *Sea of Tranquility*, www.seaoftranquility.org, July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008

**“A very welcome reissue by one Europe's most respected--and cultish--bands ever. Their debut album...is a sophisticated batch of playing and composition that in terms of intricacy recalls the artier works of Soft Machine, King Crimson, Henry Cow and Magma, though sounding very little like any of those bands. Intense, unpredictable and something of a legend in the making, this band was heard by too few people at the time this recording was made; first time listeners today will be stunned that this music is over 30 years old. ... Highly recommended!”**

– Dave DiMartino, *Yahoo! Music*, new.music.yahoo.com, May 20th, 2008

**“Although Belgium's chamber rock band Univers Zéro is lumped into the general rock category, the ensemble should be more closely aligned with modern classical and the avant-garde. One listen...unveils dense, creatively challenging material that was in direct opposition to the disco, punk, and other genres prevalent when the album was originally released in 1977.**

**Although the *Univers Zéro* record has been reissued numerous times, this is the definitive version.** The five remastered and remixed tracks (plus one bonus piece), lifted from the original multi-track tape, reveal previously unnoticed details. The stereo effects...have been deleted, replaced by a well-rounded resonance. The instrumental balance is improved... The intertwined motifs are more obvious. ... Overall, this remix enhances the music, giving a stronger definition of players acting together in a concentrated setting.

Fifteen-minute opener “Ronde” functions as a fulcrum. Raspy violins initiate a striding rhythm, followed by the bassoon, which serves as the tune's melodic guide... Drummer/leader/composer Daniel Denis contributes equilibrium and tonal coloring... Like the other cuts, “Ronde” revolves and evolves...interaction is the unwritten law; there are solo maneuvers, but “Ronde” is firmly encased within an overreaching compositional tension.

...this music is not pretentious... auditory darkness...can be found in some pieces, particularly those written by guitarist Roger Trigaux. “Docteur Petiot” and “Malaise” both feature processional rhythms and keyboard interludes, with hints of Prokofiev's élan or Shostakovich's fortitude, as well as minimalist elements that could be mistaken for Philip Glass. ...

The reissue's momentous offering, though, is bonus “La Faulx,” a 30-minute live version...from Univers Zéro's...*Heresie*. It's decisive post-midnight music. The opus is darker and more theatrically forlorn than anything else encountered on *Univers Zéro*. **Bassist Guy Seger's “interstellar chaotic speech” and the ensemble's clamor and contortions, that alternate between contemplative and incendiary, create the aural equivalent of Jan Svankmajer's surrealist cinema or filmmaker Michael Snow's structuralism.”**

– Doug Simpson, *Audiophile Audition*, www.audaud.com, September 09, 2008

**“Persechetti's nightmare come true is Univers Zero...Worth checking out for fans of gothic classical with a strange twist.”** – *Billboard*, 1/13/90

“...Univers Zero contemplates a dark, often violent sound, which can be oppressive. But **like storm clouds rolling out of the horizon or mad shadows cast in the night, there’s also a dusky ecstasy present here.** Using bassoons, cellos, violins, and harmoniums, the group creates gothic textures and ambiances. On top of that, there are hints of Bartok, Jimi Hendrix, John Coltrane, and King Crimson. **It’s stunning how well Univers Zero’s 1977 debut holds up, musically and sonically, compared to....anything else happening in so-called new music... 1313** is brooding chamber music.”  
– John Diliberto, *Keyboard*, March 1990

“**Welcome reissue of what now seems 1977’s darkest musical vision.** The Belgian instrumental ensemble mixed rock’s standard set up with violins, bassoon and harmonium, and created **audible Rorschach blots of horror – in particular, the vulnerability of exposed innocence just before horror strikes...**By today’s standards a remarkably subtle weaving of rock, classical and avant garde tactics, it’s a starkly beautiful portrait of “innocence destroyed”.”  
– Mark Rhodes, *Alternative Press*, #27

“Thirteen years after its initial release **it still sounds as crisply smart and outta-time as ever...**The stance is sophisticated and darkly sonorous. Using the same sorta jagged rhythmic construction that blew minds in concert halls in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, UZ provide an excellent and logical brand of ear fodder designed for people who were weaned on the early works of the Mothers of Invention, but became incapable of dealing w/ Zappa’s stunted sense of humor...UZ are part of a tradition that includes Bartok’s string quartets, Barre Philips’ solo bass work and Glenn Branca’s gtr-heroics – **music that’s so overwhelmingly crafted that you can almost forget it’s actually as warm as blood and twice as tasty.**”  
– Byron Coley, *Forced Exposure*

“Univers Zero’s classically inspired strings and rock-based percussion and guitar succeed because the band...pulled together common elements – angular melodies, intricate interplay, close attention to texture, flexible rhythms – to make something unique and cohesive. **It’s fusion in the truest sense and doesn’t condescend to either tradition...** worth the effort.”  
– Lang Thompson, *Goldmine*, 2/23/90

“The closest comparison might be **Henry Cow crossed with Stravinsky (with a bit of Zappa and Magma thrown in.)...**The sound...is superb. Everything is picked up, from the low rumblings of the bass drum to the quiet scrapings of the bow across the violin.”  
– R. Iannapolo, *Option*, May-June 1990

“...an unusual, fascinating blend of rock sensibilities and early 20<sup>th</sup> century musical techniques...**this group has been listening to Stravinsky and Bartok...The music is startlingly brutal, especially for an ensemble that is mostly acoustic.** The melodies are angular, the rhythms kinetic and thunderous, the harmonies searingly dissonant, and the overall sound bracing and very dramatic... challenging and absolutely compelling listening.”  
– Dean Suzuki, *Ear*, March 1990

## UNIVERS ZERO

## HERESIE

## ATEM 1979 / CUNEIFORM reissue 1991

“UNIVERS ZERO’s music is sometimes defined as “gothic Chamber rock”, and indeed its ominously dark atmospheres with growling voices and creeping drones will hurl you way back in the dark ages when the inquisition reached its most terrifying status. Intense fear licks from loud speakers, you hear kneecaps splinter, you feel pain screaming...absolutely not fit for children, young adults and musical lightweights...”  
– Ernst van Dinter, *Background*, 8/92

“...as exemplified by Side One’s “La Faulx,” this is “Gothic Chamber music” at its best. Amidst growling voices and creeping drones, the piece slowly takes on a more structured approach that... Edgar Allan Poe would have loved...”Jack the Ripper” is a tense and uneasy walk through England’s dark and dank back alleys....by any standard, I hold this band in the highest esteem...”  
– Glenn Hammett, *Sounds Like*, #8

“Chamber music for the Apocalypse. This talented quintet finds the right balance between post-Schoenberg and postmodernism. ...the group’s trademark gloomy sound...Their compositional resources ... and idiosyncratic ensemble work mark Univers Zero as a group of admirable, though dark, vision.”  
– *Keyboard*, 5/92

“...a dark and menacing listening experience... the closest comparison I could come up with is “The Devil’s Triangle’ on King Crimson’s second album. Univers Zero are unsettling and uncompromising in their approach...the Gothic Governors. The instrumentation is used effectively in a sort of Armageddon chamber-music style, all topped off with some strange growled vocal effects. An intriguing and absorbing band, though more for people who can enjoy classical music structures than out and out rock leanings.”  
– Mike Dillingham, *Ptolemaic Terrascope*, v. 3, #1

“Widely regarded as the darkest, most sinister album ever recorded, “Heresie” has earned a reputation which is somewhat exaggerated and misunderstood ...Not really as dark as it is usually perceived, “Heresie” is a passionate, expressive, purposeful, and important album.”  
– Dan Casey, *Gibraltar*, v.4, #17

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**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO READ REVIEWS OF OTHER RELEASES BY UNIVERS ZERO, THOSE PRESS EXCERPTS ARE AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD ON WWW.CUNEIFORMRECORDS.COM IN THE “PRESS” SECTION.**