

CIRCUS RONALDO



Danny & Pepijn Ronaldo, father and son, together on stage

An evening performance (**from 8 pm**) for adults and children aged 12 and above

Own tent with 250 seats - minimum 3 performance days

Also possible in a theatre auditorium

“Watching Ronaldo is a wonderful experience”

De Standaard

“My father would so often tell me about my great grandfather, who was forced to close his travelling wooden theatre after the stock market crash of 1930. The war that followed caused the imposing theatre caravan to disappear for good. My goodness, my father would so often speak of our family history. And yet I’d forgotten that this could really happen. On 13 March 2020, just before the planned première van Sono Io?, the doors were suddenly closed everywhere. Literally and figuratively. Not for a second had I ever considered that the day would come when no performance anywhere in the world would be allowed to go ahead.

When a performance is created, inspiration is sometimes drawn from everyday reality. You can look at today’s reality in a number of different ways. At one moment it’s a source of inspiration, at another moment you wish the doors were allowed to open again. At a moment like that, you feel the dark emptiness. But there’s something beautiful about sitting so deep in the darkness that you can no longer see the light: when you start lighting up again, it’s very clearly visible. And in the end, a human being always starts lighting up again. The inspiration that flows from this is infinitely stronger. And it’s amidst these oceans of time and this wandering around in childish dreams that the biggest dream rises to the surface. That a voice suddenly calls out: ‘The audience is coming in!’

The circus has always charted a course through wars, famines and pandemics. This time too, we tried to make ourselves resilient by interrupting the creation process of Sono Io? for a pandemic intermezzo, the performance ‘Applaus’. The lockdown demanded we dig deeper within ourselves, in order to somehow shift our inner boundaries without external input, and without succumbing to the desire to escape into our dreams. And the deeper we searched within ourselves, the more we encountered one another.

If you are no longer able to go outside, then turn inwards, because the world of the subconscious is boundless.”

~ Danny Ronaldo ~



'Sono io?', the performance

'Sono io?' is an attempt by a father and son to meet (again). United by a shared passion for music and tricks, they build a bridge between their similarities and differences. The father seems entrenched in his past, desperately searching for an age-old but faded feeling of ecstasy which he was only able to create with an audience. An audience that has already been absent for so long that he no longer needs to leave the stage, whereby its mystique increasingly acts as a common thread running through his daily life, adding colour. The son seeks to reconcile his two much-loved worlds: the old circus created by his father, and the world beyond it. Is a son still a son when he can no longer identify with an identity that has been preserved for so long? 'Sono io?' ('Is that me?') is a quest for reunification, between father and son, between performer and audience, between former glory and fresh opportunities.



Danny Ronaldo

A celebrated clown who has been on stage or crawling searchingly through the sawdust of the arena for more than forty years. A living legacy of heritage and circus history. Trained up within the age-old circus and theatre traditions in a circus family that dates back six generations. "When my son Pepijn was born, the busiest period of my life with international travel began. We've had to miss one another so much. And all that absence has now created an intense connection in everything we do. But that connection still also carries within it untold mysteries that are nowhere near being solved... I'm really looking forward to us uncovering this together on stage."

Pepijn Ronaldo

Danny's second son. As a young boy of eight, he already took part in the performance *Circenses*. A playful debut that immediately left behind indelible traces in the memories of Ronaldo's audience.

In the meantime, he has recently graduated from L' école internationale de théâtre Lassaad. During his training, Pepijn was able to focus on various authentic theatre styles such as Commedia dell'arte, pantomime, melodrama and expressive masks. Pepijn would like to merge this scholastic background with his love for the circus and for the clown.

"I have always had a sensitive connection with my father. A way of being, a way of doing things which, frighteningly enough, I sometimes recognise in the smallest movement that I make. And I would like to put this similarity on stage like a mirror. The similarities that we share, but also our differences."



*They're stepping onto the stage together now
father and son.*

Two clowns in search of their similarities.

In search of each other's individuality.

What separates them and what connects them.

It will be an intense quest for an accurate reflection.

Because both are wearing their own masks.

The mask of a father who conceals all doubts, sadness and even the smallest weakness.

The mask of a son who is still so malleable, yet in whom all the vulnerability of a child is already obscured.

And this will be an amusingly familiar quest.

But also gripping and poignant.

Because it is written in the history of mankind;

"Between a father and a son lies the deep ravine of their similarity."

Characters: the father and the son

The characters of 'Sono Io?' are a symbiosis of Danny and Pepijn, a father and a son, and two clowns. This partly acted, and partly autobiographical stratification creates a new kind of depth in which the characters are able to seek out themselves and one another.

The despondency and the end of the father's career as he has always known it, have been imbued with fresh meaning due to coronavirus. Suddenly, an artist without work who desperately wants to cling to the way life was before has become recognisable to everyone. In addition, you see a son who is managing to hold his own with a fresh youthfulness, searching for ways to navigate the life that awaits him.

The characters of the two clowns were explored in and as a result of the Coronavirus crisis, in the days that had something of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* about them: in this case it is a father and a son who, isolated, without outside help, try something in which tomorrow there may no longer be any point.

The son



“He was still my father, but different. He still had a glint of passion in his eyes, a fire that in someone else would already have gone out. His face lit up as he repeatedly ruminated on his past, but it was now covered with deep lines and dark bags. If you still saw a whisper of his swift merriment, it was without the spry alertness with which he had previously practised his precise movements. He had been a great, inspiring man. For many. He created huge volleys of laughter and

tears of emotion as if this were nothing. But that wasn't true. It meant everything to him. He chiselled out an idiosyncratic path for himself, and for us. In my eyes, he has always looked this old and important. For me he was always a great man. And still I already saw it slumbering within him then.”

“There comes a time when a son realises that his father is also just a man. Almost simultaneously, I discovered the world outside the circus. Suddenly I was no longer the small son of a great man who was following in his footsteps. I chiselled out my own path for myself, and was soon confronted with the choice between circus or the outside world. The circus has an untameable individuality. Circus families live between the meshes of the net. The further away I travelled, the more I felt inextricably linked with what my father, and his father before him, had created. It was coursing through my veins. I was learning countless new things and continued to inadvertently rebel against our similarities. Then I returned, and without looking back took on the role of the son again when I stepped through the tent opening. Even though this role had now become foreign to me.”

The father



“It’s a case of waiting for the arrival of someone with good news that will give everything colour and purpose again. Until then there is time... And time also awakes chaos, simply because it can. Yet loneliness has its advantages. It helps you to relativise. It’s good to see that culture and nature must remain in balance. That a tree carries within it as much beauty as the most beautiful actor or the best dancer. Now it’s time for nature, after that it’s about me

again.”

“Loneliness means time. And time which begets time. Time to grind to a halt. Time to give up. Time to die for a while... and it is allowed. As long I wake up on time, just in case someone still buys a ticket to see me. Would I still be the same virtuoso in their eyes? Is my longing for beauty still reconcilable with the longings of the audience? My childhood dreams now undermine the whole point of my existence. Because I am nothing but a clown, and without an audience I have no meaning.”

“My son... I recognise myself in your gaze. Your smallest gesture feels like it’s mine. I see myself when I look at you. But you are lighter. You point out my own heaviness to me without doing anything. You force me not to sink away into a sea of escapism. I want to be there for you. I want to be great. Not only as an artist, but also as a father...”



Circus Ronaldo

Since 1996 Circus Ronaldo has been performing all over the world for prestigious theatre houses and major circus and arts festivals. With European tours from Reykjavik to Lisbon and big world trips to Australia and New Zealand. In Flanders, Circus Ronaldo is most commonly featured in the programmes of the larger Cultural Centres. The tours are still put together by Frans Brood Productions in Ghent.

Circus Ronaldo is something unique in the hearts of many spectators. It creates an innovative form of circus, which is inextricably linked to the roots from the past. Based on old performance traditions, still-authentic caravans and the reuse of material from many generations back, Circus Ronaldo presents a tribute to the old circus theatre. It draws its inspiration from the commedia dell'arte and a predilection for the power that de "Tsukomogami" (the use of the spirit of worn-out materials) exerts over the unconscious. At the same time, the audience, when it enters into Ronaldo's world, discovers a familiarity, a self-evidence, a mirror for their own fragile identity. A world of magical realism is created, in which the spectator is in doubt as to what is real and what is not. In a virtuoso manner, the company digs down into the deeper layers of their own emotions and thereby holds up a mischievous mirror to them. Circus Ronaldo plays with an intense experience of the 'now', which is highly familiar to many spectators. It links a nostalgia to a reality that will unsettle you, in an intimate, passionate, everlasting dance.

A piece of history...

The Ronaldo family's journey began in **1842** when a fifteen-year-old boy from Ghent, Adolf Peter Van den Berghe, left his parental home to travel with the circus.

With the second and third generation, the acts on horseback and the name "circus" disappeared, and it became a purely nomadic theatre with virtuoso pieces in which the commedia dell'arte was never far away. The fourth generation sought its path in post-war variety theatre, musicals, and of course... the circus again.

As the fifth generation, in **1971** Johnny Ronaldo, together with his brother and uncle, created a new company that presented spectacles in the glamour of the nineteen seventies, first as Circus Ricardo, then later continuing their journey as Circus Ronaldo.

David and Danny Ronaldo (the sixth generation) restored the equilibrium between theatre and circus. Step by step in the early nineties, they created a trendsetting mix of young performers with naive, innovative interplay and old spirits from the tradition. Circus Ronaldo increasingly conquered the hearts of a growing and astounded audience, and it came to set the trend for the new generation of European circuses. The small family circus was transformed into an innovative company whose performances link together clowning, acrobatics, puppetry and commedia dell'arte.

With creations including 'Commediantentheater', 'Lazzi', 'Brick a Barak', 'Fili', 'La Cucina dell'Arte', 'Circenses', 'Amortale' and 'Fidelis Fortibus', Circus Ronaldo has toured and continues to tour at national and international circus and theatre festivals.

With Pepijn and Nanosh, the seventh generation is entering the circus arena, strengthened and embraced by a group of exceptional people. Pepijn opted for circus training in Leuven, followed by theatre school in Brussels. In summer 2020, together with his father he premiered the new performance 'Sono lo?'. With the performance 'Swing', Nanosh Ronaldo ushered in a new guard of circus artists.

The authenticity and purity of Circus Ronaldo has also attracted various theatre makers for a range of collaborations. Ensemble Leporello / Opera Nantes engaged Danny Ronaldo for their successful performance

'Minnevozen / Galantes scènes'. For Het Paleis & De Nieuwe tijd / Freek Vielen, Danny Ronaldo played Death in 'Doe de groeten aan de ganzen'. He received a best actor nomination for this. In co-production with Circus Ronaldo, Compagnie Cecilia created the performance 'Ensor', directed by Arne Sierens.

After more than 100 years of family history, Circus Ronaldo serves as a Cultural Ambassador for the City of Mechelen and Flanders, and Danny Ronaldo has been awarded the Ultima for Circus, the highest Flemish honour. The company has gained worldwide recognition (including 'Fidelis Fortibus', Culture Prize from the City of Barcelona 2017, and a nomination at Theaterfestival BE/NL for Best Production 2016) and the Ronaldos are invited to national and international fora as representatives of and experts in circus arts.

Their home base is Mechelen. In Duffel and Koningshooikt they have their fixed workplace, where all touring equipment, tents and the arsenal of circus props are stored, and where they create new performances. Today, in a never-ending quest for the magic of the circus and the theatre, and in a natural symbiosis between performance and life, fresh dynamism and lived experience and wisdom merge; the wonderful world of Circus Ronaldo.

Awards, press and quotes

Awards

Ultima voor Circus - Flemish Culture Prize 2018 (BE)

Fidelis Fortibus Best Circus Production in Spain - Premis Ciutat de Barcelona 2017 (ES)

Fidelis Fortibus Best Production 2016 - Het Theaterfestival 2016 (BE/NL)

Press

"A surprising, witty, touching and exquisite portrait of a father-son relationship." - Knack

"Sono io? is also a playful satire on the ambitious circus artist – and in it the Ronaldos once again demonstrate their theatrical charm. Their expressive interaction recalls the silent mime of Chaplin and co." -

De Standaard

"You watch the whole performance with a childlike wonder. Totally mesmerised by the sublime interplay and sparkling discoveries. Their empathy is as pure as a child's smile. As rich as the swelling belly of a pregnant woman. It is all so well-judged in terms of dosing, expression, sensitivity ...[...]. Sono io? is a performance that enfolds you like a warm coat." - Klassiek Centraal

*"The theatrical mastery of Circus Ronaldo lies in their subtle characterisation, but also in the way in which they explore the drama of transience." **** - De Morgen*

"Circus Ronaldo again demonstrates the wide array of styles and shocks of which it is master. And no, there's no hint of decline. - De Standaard

"Danny and Pepijn are perfectly on the same wavelength, in terms of both timing and interaction. They provoke generous laughter in the midst of a quiet tear, as only true clowns can." - De Theaterkrant

"Even more haunting, even funnier, and even more moving than the previous Ronaldo productions, not least because of the powerful autobiographical undercurrent. Ronaldo's interweaving of art and live is still unique."

Circusmagazine

Quotes

"As an artistic creator, Danny is a great circus architect. He manages to reinvent himself time and time again, gets better and better, and is always himself." – Ultima Circus 2018

"Danny Ronaldo is without question one of the great theatre makers and circus performers, and the world that is created by the extended Ronaldo family has been transformational for the art form and for the world's appreciation of Flemish culture. As a result, Circus Ronaldo are one of the best circus companies in the world, and continue to do inestimable credit to Flemish culture. The world needs work with the quality and charming brilliance of Circus Ronaldo now, more than ever." - Jonathan Holloway, Melbourne International Arts Festival

“Today, most circus is rather predictable and bland. Much of it is highly skilful, of course, one thinks of the glitz and polish of Cirque du Soleil, the acrobatic flair of Australian circus and the originality of the French nouveau cirque. But Circus Ronaldo is different - it seems to carry the life-enhancing traditions of historic and popular entertainment, it is clever without being conceited or condescending, and it touches everyone’s heart. For this much credit must go to Danny Ronaldo, a hugely talented performer, creator, and thinker about circus.” - **Joseph Seelig & Helen Lannaghan, London International Mime Festival**

“We want to stress that circus has a unique place in the performing arts field and artists with such a long an international career deserve our support. Danny Ronaldo has developed a unique voice in the international landscape of the mixture between theatre and circus and we need to continue laughing with them.” - **Cesc Casadesús, Grec Festival Barcelona**

“Danny Ronaldo and his company are artists of exceptional talent, imagination and character. I have been following the company for years, hoping that one day I would have the opportunity to present them to the US. BAM is America’s oldest continually operating performing arts center and has built a loyal and engaged audience, creating an ideal venue to present this artistic achievement. I look forward to hopefully welcoming the company to BAM in December.” - **David Binder, BAM Festival New York**

“Through the most artistic visual poetry, I see a rucksack stuffed with responsibility to safeguard the identity of the Ronaldo family. Whereby Danny fights like a lion, because should the heritage ever die: no e comico. My respect is boundless. The biotope is as stunning as ever. I sincerely hope that the international esteem that Danny and his companions so deservedly enjoy also translates into appreciation here in Belgium, in the form of a structural subsidy to a unique ambassador of our Great Arts.” – **Frank Van Laecke**

“There is, I believe, only one circus in the whole world that can transport me back to the open-mouthed wonder that I experienced as a small child, and that is Circus Ronaldo. When people asked me as a child what I wanted to be when I grew up, I still know exactly what I said: trapeze artist! At Ronaldo there is the same excitement and curiosity about what they’re going to pull out of their hat next, but this goes way beyond some banal rabbit: its poignancy is overwhelming and deeply human.” - **Alain Platel, les ballets C de la B**



You can view the **trailer** for 'Sono io?' on YouTube via this link: <https://youtu.be/cRsVEoVk-Ko>

SHORT CREDITS

CONCEPT, DIRECTION AND PERFORMANCE

Danny Ronaldo and Pepijn Ronaldo

TECHNICIAN

Dominique

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Lesley Verbeeck

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CO-PRODUCTION

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