

## **Director Inge-Vera Lipsius: “*Paranoia* plays with the senses of the audience”**

In her staging of *Paranoia*, director Inge-Vera Lipsius keeps her audience close to the action. “I feel it’s important that the audience can play a leading role.”

### **What kind of theater do you make?**

“*Paranoia* is the first adaptation of Willem Frederik Hermans’s novella. It’s also my first production as a director; we performed it to a sold-out audience last year and are very happy that it could be revived this fall.”

“I read the story in high school and immediately thought that it would be perfect for the theater. It’s about a young man, Arnold, who has a guilt complex because he feels he made no contribution during the Second World War. After the liberation, he casts himself in the role of a war criminal. In staging the play, I try to walk the line between reality and delusion and want to show that this novella from 1948 still has a lot to tell us. Is doing nothing just as horrible as doing something bad?”

### **What would your ideal audience look like?**

“I feel it’s important that the audience can play a leading role. I don’t so much mean in the sense of direct audience participation, but that there’s always a reason for why the audience is there, physically in the space. In *Paranoia*, the audience is seated in Arnold’s bedroom, and we play with their senses using sounds and darkness—as is also the case for Arnold. He constantly has the feeling that he’s being watched. That’s something that can be conveyed very strongly in the theater. So I would say that the audience shouldn’t be afraid to be in the middle of it all.”

### **What has touched or inspired you recently?**

“The US Open Women’s Final between the 19-year-old Coco Gauff and the world number one Aryna Sabalenka. I was captivated. It was as if Gauff improved all aspects of her game as the match went on. It was like a play in three acts, in three sets, a character arc in one match. I found it incredibly moving to see her commitment to her dream.”

### **Which living or non-living artist would you like to work with?**

“I would love it if my clown teacher Philippe Gaulier were to come to one of my shows and give feedback as only he can do. I spent a year at his school, École Philippe Gaulier in France—the same school that Sacha Baron Cohen (Borat) and Emma Thompson attended.”

“It would also be nerve wracking... Philippe is a dark clown who can really terrify his students. His theory is that, afterwards, you can handle any kind of criticism. But his critique is invaluable. So is his theory that absurdity and lightness underlie everything you do. He says that the heroes of Greek tragedies are happy to sacrifice themselves. I don’t think I could have created this production without having studied with him. Hermans has the same combination of irony and darkness; his writing is about the absurdity of life.”

### **Where do you see yourself in five years?**

“If I think of London...at the beautiful Almeida Theatre, founded by Pierre Audi, or somewhere on the West End—that would be the dream. It would be a lot of fun to do something unexpected in a big theater, where, more often than not, the audience is sitting too comfortably. I’d like to shake them up a bit, to suggest a different perspective on the world. Precisely what I want to achieve with *Paranoia*.”

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***Paranoia*** is on at The Merchant House from 6 to 8 October.

**Attend if you like:** psychological thrillers, shadow play, hallucinations, Willem Frederik Hermans, *The Darkroom of Damocles*

### **Young Makers Series**

In Young Makers we introduce budding theatermakers. Inge-Vera Lipsius (1996) graduated from the University of Cambridge in 2019, where she worked on more than thirty productions as an actor, director and producer. Earlier this year, she directed her second show *Quad Loop* about the doping scandal surrounding Kamila Valieva, the fifteen-year-old Russian figure skater. The revival of *Paranoia* will take place at The Merchant House, the gallery for contemporary art on the Herengracht.