

# This is the year **Crossing Border Festival - No Regrets** You will go!

It's another article about another festival coming to another venue in the Netherlands. You think you know what you're going to do: read the article, maybe skim it for famous names, bands you recognise, authors you've read. Then you're going to move on to the next feature in the magazine, completely forgetting to mark your agenda, or book tickets, or entice your friends out for a cultural adventure. Then, in December, you're going to kick yourself when someone says: 'Did you see Wesley Stace/Cassandra Wilson/Jhelisa Anderson/Will Self/John Langford/Stuart A. Staples/The Holmes Brothers at Crossing Border last month? He/she/they were fantastic!'

PHOTO: TERISNA VELAZA

Jhelisa



## CROSSING BORDER

### Performing this year at Crossing Border

|   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| Admiral Freebee                             | Mohammed 'Jimmy' Moh  |
| American Music Club & the film Street Angel | Niccolo Ammaniti      |
| Andrew O'Hagan                              | Niels 't Hooft        |
| Annelies Verbeke                            | Nosfell               |
| Arjen Duinker                               | Panjabi Hit Squad     |
| Arjen Lubach                                | Parne Gadje           |
| Aukelen Weverling                           | Pim te Bokkel         |
| Bart Chabot                                 | Prima Donkey          |
| Bas Belleman                                | Richmond Fontaine     |
| Benjamin Kunkel                             | Rick Moody & the      |
| Bernard Wesseling                           | Wingdale Community    |
| Bettye Lavette                              | Singers               |
| Cassandra Wilson                            | Robert McLiam Wilson  |
| Catherine Feeny                             | Rosbeef               |
| Chad Harbach ( <i>n+1</i> )                 | Said El Haji          |
| David Danish                                | Samira Atari          |
| DBC Pierre                                  | Sarah Hall            |
| De Kift                                     | Stace England         |
| Die Surfpoeten                              | Stuart A. Staples     |
| DJ Mike Conaghan                            | Supersilent           |
| Gautam Malkani                              | Susanna & The Magical |
| Gjundler Abdullah                           | Orchestra             |
| Hassan Bahara                               | The Brian Jonestown   |
| Hélène Gelès                                | Massacre              |
| In the Country                              | The Drams             |
| Jeffrey Lewis                               | The Holmes Brothers   |
| Jhelisa                                     | The McCarricks        |
| Johan Harstad                               | Thomas van Aalten     |
| John Power & his band                       | Tod Wodicka           |
| Jon Langford                                | Tom Naegels           |
| Joshua Ferris                               | Tony O'Neill          |
| Julia Franck                                | Trachtenburg Family   |
| Karine Martel                               | Slideshow Players     |
| Keith Gessen ( <i>n+1</i> )                 | Vikram Chandra        |
| Laura Hird                                  | Wesley Stace          |
| M.J. Hyland                                 | Will Self             |
| Marc Roth ( <i>n+1</i> )                    | William Boyd          |
| Marcel Möring                               | Xavier Roelens        |
| Mark Greif ( <i>n+1</i> )                   | zZz                   |
| Midlake                                     |                       |



Don't do it. Don't make the same mistake you've made before, when you missed David Byrne jamming on stage with a mentally handicapped actor; or a nervous Lou Reed reading his version of *The Raven* and discussing its influence with his wife, Laurie Anderson; or a barefooted Michael Franti collaborating with Marie Daulne (Zap Mama) and Luka Bloom. Or how about the year you missed DBC Pierre, two weeks after he'd won the Booker Prize, even before he had a Dutch publisher?

Read this article. Then book your tickets. Today.

Crossing Border, a festival that these days completely takes over The Hague's cultural centre for almost a week in November, started out with a squat and a typo 13 years ago.

Back then, the usual venues for literary performances were always about the same: small and quiet, with people listening and nodding approval. Festival director Louis Behre, a big fan of the Beat Generation, wanted to do something unique. He'd seen poets

was dropped. Since there was no money to reprint, the festival became 'Crossing Border.' Today, to those people paying attention, the name signals that something's going to be just a little bit different about this festival.

That first festival played to a sold-out squat. So the next year it moved onto stages. Today there are nine stages, 120 performers and four nights of events where literature, music, film and the visual arts mix in unique combinations. It is the largest spoken word event in Europe.

Cees Debets, managing director of the festival, remembers some of the previous performances. 'When Henry Rollins was here in 1996, we had 700 people listening to him. Monica Ali introduced her book, *Brick Lane*, at Crossing Border. And with DBC Pierre, we'd heard rumours about his book and invited him here before he won the Booker Prize in 2003.

In 2001, Crossing Border presented a similar platform with *McSweeney's* literary magazine with author Dave Eggers, along with a film by author Arthur Bradford. 'The film had musical performances with mentally-handicapped people. Several of them were in the audience. David Byrne (Talking Heads) was also here and ended up performing with one of them.'

### You WILL see/hear these people

So who are you going to see at Crossing Border this year – since you are going straight to the computer or phone to order your tickets, as soon as you finish reading this?

Crossing Border always features excellent music. Sinéad O'Connor, Coldplay and 16 Horsepower have all headlined at the festival.



DBC Pierre



This year's programme will open with Grammy Award-winner **Cassandra Wilson**, who released her *Thunderbird* CD in April, a collaboration with T Bone Burnett.

On Saturday night there will be concerts by **Jhelisa Anderson**, who got her start as a youngster singing gospel on the road in America's South, and soul singer **Bettye Lavette**, who's finishing up her first promo tour in 40 years. (The opening concert and Saturday's concerts usually sell out – another reason to book now!)

**Stuart A. Staples**, former front man from the *Tindersticks* performed solo at the Roots of Heaven Festival in Haarlem last May. He'll return to Holland at Crossing Border, as will **Mark Eitzel** and **The American Music Club**, the indie band out of San Francisco, who reunited after a decade's break in 2004.

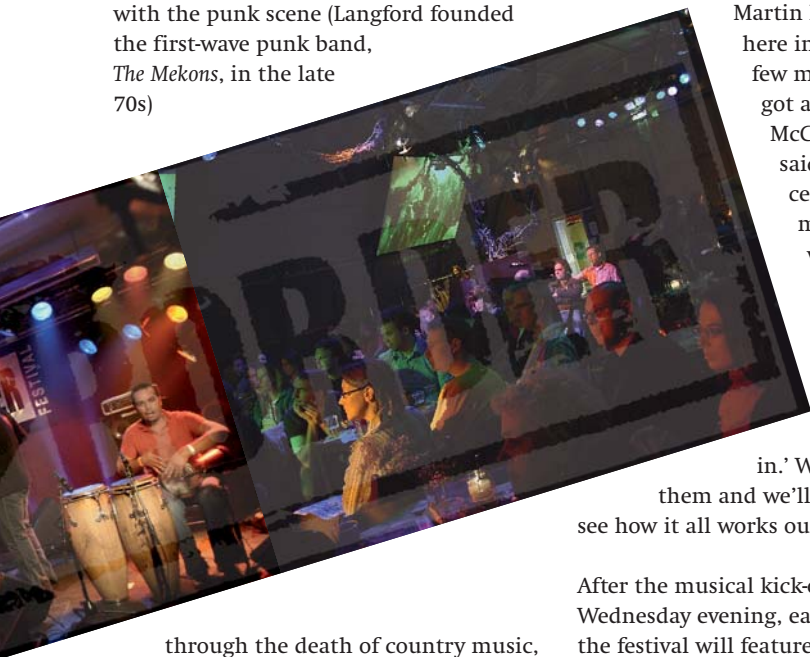
Two weeks before [his appearance at Crossing Border] he won the award and a BBC crew followed him to the festival.'

DBC Pierre will return this year to present the literary magazine *To Hell*. 'From 7.30 to midnight we'll have a bunch of musicians and writers working together. They inspire each other: Andrew O'Hagan, DBC Pierre, Sarah Hall, Richmond Fontaine, Brian Jonestown Massacre,' says Debets. 'We did the same thing with the *n+1* literary magazine with Benjamin Kunkel who talked about writing and the world with his friends. It's a bit like *The Kitchen* literary salon in New York.'

perform in a different way. So he gathered artists such as painter/poet/author/musician Billy Childish with folk duo The Singing Loins and poet/photographer/filmmaker Gerard Malanga and musician/writer/visual artist Lee Ranaldo of Sonic Youth in a squat in The Hague for the first Crossing the Border festival.

But it never became the 'Crossing the Border' festival. That's where the typo comes in. When Behre had the first posters printed, somehow the word 'the'

But, as mentioned before, it's what the musicians do when they're not making music that tends to steal the show. **Jon Langford** will not only perform at the festival in November, but he created the 2006 festival poster. 'Langford is a real Crossing Border artist: a musician, writer, poet and painter,' says Debets. The Welsh artist, who currently lives in Chicago, will present *The Executioner's Last Songs*, a journey through time in music, starting with the punk scene (Langford founded the first-wave punk band, *The Mekons*, in the late 70s)



through the death of country music, to society's 'loss of ideals'. The show features songs from Langford's albums by the same name, which helped raise money and consciousness against the death penalty in the US, as well as from his own decades-spanning songbook.

In a timely collaboration, *Financial Times* journalist and author of *Londonstani*, **Gautam Malkani**, delves into the subculture of 'desi beat' with **Punjabi Hit Squad**, the group credited with creating the urban Asian fusion musical genre. Elsewhere at the festival, **Stace England** will take the audience on a multimedia journey to exotic Cairo – a town in the American state of Illinois – based on music from his *Greetings from Cairo, Illinois* album (noted as one of the top ten albums of 2005 by a *Village Voice* critics poll). England's show will feature films and photos collected during his five years of research, hundreds of hours of conversations and 'countless hours of general hanging around in the most fascinating town in America, bar none,' according to the artist.

Crossing Border is different, not just for the audience, but for the performers. They sense that remarkable things go on at the festival and they want to help make them happen.

'Once people have performed here, they ask to come back,' says Debets. 'Andy Cairns of rock band *Therapy?* played acoustic guitar with the band's cello player, Martin McCarrick, here in 1999. So, a few months ago, we got an email from McCarrick. He said, 'I was that cello player and my wife is a violin player. We do a live soundtrack with old films. I think it would fit in.' We've invited them and we'll see how it all works out.'

After the musical kick-off on Wednesday evening, each night of the festival will feature several stages with 45-minute interviews, performances and readings by the different artists. 'We are a festival about literature and music and that's what we try to show,' says Debets. He tells about art rocker Lou Reed's visit in 2004.

'He came to read *The Raven*. He was nervous because this is not his core business. But he'd been inspired by the story.' Indeed, in 2003 Reed had released a two-CD set called *The Raven*. 'Then his partner, [experimental and performance artist] Laurie Anderson, came up on stage and had a dialogue with him.'

These are the moments that make up Crossing Border. 'We try to make a mix. If it works, it's magic,' says Debets.

And these are the moments you just don't want to miss. So you know what you have to do. Mark your agenda. Ring your friends. And book your tickets now for Crossing Border 2006. <

## What the members say:

The Crossing Border website includes complete bios of all the performing artists. So if you have any doubt whether you will enjoy the wide range of performances, head online where you can listen to many of the musicians, decide if you want to read any of the writers' works beforehand, or just get pumped for the upcoming events.

## Getting tickets

Ticket sales began in early September, so get the lead out! Some events will sell out, like the opening concert with Cassandra Wilson and the Holmes Brothers and Saturday's concerts with Bettye Lavette and Jhelisa Anderson. About two weeks before the festival, a complete schedule of performances will be available online. Don't be daunted by the complicated mix. A festival wristband (€25 – 33 plus service charges) will let you in to enjoy everything, from 7pm – 1am.

Tickets are available via Ticketservice (in major post offices, GWK Travel branches and local VVV tourist offices), at the Theatre aan het Spui box office, as well as from your usual ticket outlets. Telephone bookings can be made at Ticketlijn 0900-300 12 50 and internet sales are available through [www.ticketservice.nl](http://www.ticketservice.nl).

## Getting There

The best bet is to take public transportation. The festival locations are just a ten-minute walk from The Hague's Centraal Station, and night trains run to most major cities until after 2am. (Check [www.ns.nl](http://www.ns.nl), [www.ov9292.nl](http://www.ov9292.nl) or phone 0900-92 92 for details.). Parking is limited around the festival, but if you do choose to drive, Theatre aan het Spui can sell discounted **uitrijkaarten** (drive away tickets) for three underground car parks close to the Spuiplein. You can exchange your **inrijkaart** (car park ticket) for an **uitrijkaart** (€5- 6.50), providing your original parking ticket was purchased after 7pm. (This is only available in the Parking Spui, Centrum and Turfmarkt/Schedeldoekshaven car parks.)

## Crossing Border Festival

15 to 18 November 2006

Crossing Border takes place in The Hague's cultural centre, on four stages at the Theatre aan het Spui and in surrounding festival tents on the Spuiplein.

Festival information line: 070-346 23 55  
[www.crossingborder.nl](http://www.crossingborder.nl)

## Theater aan het Spui

Spui 187  
The Hague  
Tel: 070-346 52 72  
[www.theateraanhetspui.nl](http://www.theateraanhetspui.nl)

Crossing Border also sponsors **Border Kitchens**, literary salons held throughout the year where small audiences (fewer than 70 people) converse with writers in an informal setting. Past Border Kitchens have included Jonathan Safran Foer, Paul Auster and Ruth Rendell, among others. Watch the website for dates and writers.