

LOCKETT'S BIG BANG

We spend ten days in the life of Pete Lockett at Holland's Big Bang festival 2008

words & images: Pete Lockett

Wednesday 19th
November
Travel/Meeting Day

It always sounds glamorous to non-musicians when you tell them you are going on tour. But there is little glamour in the deafening tone of the alarm clock at 4am and the travel-sick trip to the airport that commences so many offshore excursions. I am off to Holland to be part of the annual Big Bang festival which this year features Simon Phillips, me, Baba Sissoko, Carlo Rizzo and Arto Tunçboyacıyan. We will tour five cities in Holland over a ten-day period as a quintet known as 'The World Drummers Ensemble'. 60 kilos in tow, I cross the frustrating frontiers of excess luggage payments, security checks and an in-flight service which only got to row ten before the plane reached Amsterdam. I alas was in row 25! Whisked off with Dutch efficiency to the hotel, I showered and readied myself to meet my fellow collaborators over a fine meal.

Previous participants in this Festival have included Keith Carlock, Zakir Hussain, Bill Bruford, Chad Wackerman and Glen Velez to name a few, so that is a hard act to follow. It is an unusual but exciting feeling before the journey into the unknown begins. How will the personalities mix, what musical ideas will surface? One thing is for sure, it will be a great drum hang for ten days with all these amazing talents.

8.30pm

All five drummers plus the main organiser, Erk Willemsen and his team meet in the hotel bar. Spirits are high and all seem genuinely excited by the forthcoming tour. We head to a civilised little local restaurant. The hospitality in Europe is always so much better than you get in the UK and they do not shirk away from looking after their artists. Three hours later, after a slap-up Italian meal, all head to the hotel. My night is not over though until an encounter with a very thick and all encompassing mattress leads to a flurry of 3am activity to relocate said mattress to the



corridor... One thing about touring is the bizarre and alarming array of inappropriate pillows and beds you have to deal with!

Thursday 20th
November
Rehearsal in
Amsterdam @
Pustjens Percussion

Surprised to see four of the five make it to breakfast at 8.30am. Simon has the worst of it time-wise, adjusting from the LA time difference. Soon we're in the van heading the 20km to the rehearsal space. Discussions begin as to what we are going to create together musically over the two days we have allocated for rehearsal.



This festival is truly unique in that it creates an environment for a group of players of unique character to unite in a new and challenging environment to brainstorm and create a show over a brief rehearsal period. Quite a responsibility to be handed and it seems a bit of an uphill task as the day begins. Soon the music and grooves start to flow. Part of the whole process is the resolution of different ideas and different approaches, but once the lines of communication are established then the shape of the music for the gig starts to come together. One thing we want to avoid is a night of individual solos followed by a group piece to conclude. This makes the overall writing process much more complex and time consuming but if we can create an integrated 60-minute show then it will all have been worth it. Before we can possibly imagine, the first day is rounded up and we are back in a restaurant popping another bottle of red.

Friday 21st November Rehearsal in Amsterdam @ Pustjens Percussion

It's the second rehearsal and a slightly later start for the group. Difficult to kick start the day, but after an intense debate to try and bring together a common vision of the overall picture, we begin to dissect the structure of the seven pieces we have so far mapped out, and incorporate them into a set along with a short solo for each of the five musicians. Things do not always flow perfectly in rehearsals and conflicting opinions sometimes need to be resolved maturely with the final goal of the concert in mind. This we all navigate successfully. Time flies and before we know it, the giant flight cases have arrived, Simon is changing all the heads on his kit with his Bosch drill and we have beer in hand, expectant of another night's great hospitality as the guests of Erk and the Dutch team. We are not disappointed.

Saturday 22nd November Concert in Rotterdam - De Doelen

It's the first gig day - Rotterdam. A slightly lazier morning as we board the bus at 11.45am. Holland is a very small country which means we can stay at the same hotel for the whole trip. This is great news. The trip to Rotterdam whizzes by instantly and soon we are on stage terrifying the sound techs by switching all our stage positions. It is the first of five gigs of a very elaborate programme featuring a number of diverse supporting acts. The sound checks are lengthy and exhausting and because many of us came on the same bus, we are prisoners of sound check pain. Our check comes up around 5.15pm after a hideously salty meal in the restaurant downstairs. When it comes to show time, it is really interesting to see how everyone's personality expands positively into performers. Rehearsals are always so dry in comparison and here we are in a packed 3,000-seater auditorium which is desperate for drums. The show is a great success and we have 'broken bread'. My voice is coming back after a real bad cold. However, I decide to hit the bed when the bus gets back at 2am and not venture on the wild goose chase around Amsterdam looking for a restaurant that's still open. Fat chance! Holland and Belgium are famous for their early-closing restaurants and there is nothing worse than wandering aimlessly around a city centre - often filled with drunks - looking for something that's open. They all got back to the hotel after 4am having had a less than satisfying culinary experience!



TOUR DIARY

Pete Lockett



Sunday 23rd November Day Off

Thank goodness, a break for a day! I attempt to go out but it is snowing really heavily. My cold is still a big problem so I go back to bed until the evening when we all brave the heavy snow to go out for an evening meal. I have to get fit for the rest of the tour.

Monday 24th November Concert in Amsterdam - Heineken Music Hall

Thank god for the late 10.30am breakfast curfew after a sleepless night with the dodgy hotel pillows again. After a bit of shopping I head back to the hotel and then to the soundcheck. It is the same crew and a lot of teething problems with the sound have been ironed out. My wife has come over for this show from London and somehow manages to flush her cellphone down the toilet. How? The mysteries of the feminine! The gig is rocking and the quintet is really starting to take shape now. The technicians have got all the changeovers between the acts flowing nicely and it is a lot more relaxed. The hall is a bit out of town, next to the Ajax stadium. Gary Mann from Remo has also popped over for these two gigs and it becomes a nice social hang after the gig.



Tuesday 25th November Utrecht - Music Centre Vredenburg Leidsche Rijn

This venue is famous for its 'lorry lift' which hoists the lorry up the side of the building to offload. It always makes me laugh but is ultra efficient like a lot of the new built venues in Holland. The performance and technicalities are hotting up efficiently. Slick and quick soundchecks. Everybody knows the routine and all the performers have got the material down to be able to add a lot of flexibility and extra dynamics to the show. Simon is really starting to rock out on his solos. We stay on stage for each others solos and I have found the ideal place to sit, right next to the giant mounted bass drum he has on his right - that moves some air, (and hair) believe me! These last two gigs have been out of town in 'new city' modern arena-type venues. Big, but cold auditoriums in some aspects. Today's venue is a giant red box which is temporary whilst the venue in the town is refurbished. The final two gigs will be in more 'old style' auditoria in the centre of their respective towns, so hopefully we will stop feeling like we are on the moon.



Wednesday 26th November Day off

Day Off. Chill in Amsterdam (literally!). Nice! Desperately sad to hear the Mumbai news when I get back to the hotel - I had been in both those hotels just before this trip. Simon and I head to a floating Chinese restaurant with Xi Zhang & Lauren Warnier of Nagoya Marimbas. They are an impressively talented duo. Simon spent the afternoon with them in the Music college brushing up on his Marimba licks!



Thursday 27th
November
Concert in
Eindhoven - Music
Hall Frits Philips

Suffering with a cold still and even more totally down about the violence in Mumbai. Hard to focus on the gig day, but in spite of all this, we do a great sold-out show. I think this is the best show of the tour. We have all really got inside each others playing and are really getting to compliment each other and play off each other. The spirits are high after the gig. Beers on the bus and back at the hotel by 2am.


Friday 28th
November
Concert in
Eindhoven - Grolsch
zaal Muziekwartier

The longest trip of the tour out to the border with Germany. Luckily the soundchecks are like clockwork now so the stress level is reduced pre-gig.

The final venue is a little more rock'n'roll with a standing audience and a club atmosphere, although it is probably the most poorly-designed backstage area I have ever experienced. It is sold out, packed and sweaty. The venue is tight, especially for the 50-strong Pasveerkorps group with their co-ordinated drum choreography. I must say, they are a really stunning group with incredible precision. It is another great gig. We have all really grown together over the last five gigs. Lots of new things come out and it is a really high energy show. Spirits are high and after a wine-fuelled aftershow and three-hour trip to Amsterdam, we get back at 4am. Early flight to follow the next day and time to reflect on what has been a truly memorable ten days. Hats off to Erk and his team who make this innovative festival possible.



Saturday 29th
November
Fly back to
London

Two and a half hours sleep and then it is back on the road to the airport. I have been on the road pretty much solid for five weeks now having just got back from a five city India tour just before this project. I need to sleep. Fat chance! We all love it though, tough schedules or not! 

The World Drummers Ensemble featured:

Simon Phillips (Drum set/Taiko)
Pete Lockett (Tabla/Taiko/Bongos/Darabouka/
Kanjira/Req/Djembe/Konnakol/Electronics)
Baba Sissoko (Tama/Balafon/Stringed
instruments/Voice)
Carlo Rizzo (South Italian percussion/Voice)
Arto Tunçboyacıyan (Percussion/Voice)

With supporting acts:

Nagoya Marimbas: Xi Zhang & Lauren Warnier
Capoeira: Alexandre Santos Silva, Ederson
Rodrigues Xavier
Sjahn During Afro Anatolian Tales &
Pasveerkorps
Plus Kim Weemhoff as host

