

Caro Emerald Gladdens Our Hearts A Diva Without the Whims

Her name is Caroline Esmeralda van der Leeuw, and she was born in Amsterdam in 1981. She started singing at a very early age and has made a career of it. In 2005 she left the Jazz Department at the Amsterdam Conservatoire. Two years later - in the meantime she had been working as a backing singer and a singing teacher - she recorded a demo for some producer friends: *Back It up*. It was put on a shelf somewhere, but people started asking for it after Caroline sang the song live on Amsterdam's ATV television channel in 2008. The creative team behind the song kept everything under their own management from the beginning. Grandmono is the name of the company, the label and the orchestra for which the singer became responsible in her twin roles as employer and employee. The concept of retro glamour pop with a dance beat, fronted by a voluptuous fifties-look vamp, really took off.

In 2009 *Back It up* became an instant hit. The CD *Deleted Scenes from the Cutting Room Floor* (2010) was a sensation and *A Night Like This* brought the international breakthrough. We had heard things like this before, as a pastiche and with only short-term success, but 'La Emerald' is something quite different. The melodious swing style is in her blood. When she sang *Mad about the Boy* on Jools Holland's New Year show on the BBC in 2010, he told her 'You make me happy'. In her black satin dress she had the look of a Rita Hayworth, an Ava Gardner or a Hedy Lamarr.

It was from a glamour photo of Lamarr that Emerald's stylist took the pose and oversized hat for the cover of *The Shocking Miss Emerald* (2013). The title is taken from the film *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* (1947) with Betty Grable in an uncharacteristic part as a nineteenth-century advocate of female emancipation. The same idea lies behind Caro Emerald's act, which projects the notion of an intelligent modern woman who acts out the story that she was able to command success on her own terms at some time in the past.



The secret of the success is the music itself, which is at times a brilliant cocktail of happy ingredients from the lucky dip of musical history, an original synthesis of a thousand and one parts of a great puzzle. When you recognise the ingredients, the pleasure is even greater. The Caribbean element of Emerald's background (her mother is Aruban) finds its way into such Latin elements as the sound of the marimba, a mambo rhythm or the bandoneon, the instrument that provides the backdrop to the tango (e.g. *Tangled up* with Carel Kraaijenhof). David Scheurs and Jan van Wieringen cut and pasted and played around brilliantly with loops of Duke Ellington piano, surf sounds, oompah music, Phil Spector's 'Wall of Sound', disco, Prince, ballad clichés and film music effects. Emerald turns it all into a flowing whole with her timbre and timing. The lyrics are not so deep, but sometimes they produce a smile, for example when, in *Liquid Lunch*, she sings about the Martini brand, which used *A Night Like This* in an online advertising campaign, as the cause of her hangover.

In 1955 the American Julie London set the standard for ageless crooning in the rock 'n roll era, in 1982 the British ex-punk Vic Godard and his band Subway Sect, with their *Songs for Sale*, made the perfect retro album in the midst of MTV 'synthpop', and Caro Emerald came along at just the right moment to liven up a fatally fatigued pop world with a well-tried recipe: making a new thing out of something old that has proven its worth, using the most advanced means.

In the Netherlands the Caro Emerald circus is invariably a sell-out. On 5 September 2013 she started on her first major European tour. In autumn 2014 she will do a wide-ranging tour of Great Britain, her second base. She thinks nothing of a cover of Amy Winehouse or Adele, and these remakes show just how subtle her imitations are.

Having been showered with prizes, and performing at venues that others can only dream of, it will be hard for Caro Emerald to continue surpassing herself. Once the first shine has gone off it, what awaits next is usually the circuit of musicals, casinos and dinner shows. Which is why the Emerald firm is making sure it milks the success now, with acoustic versions, remixes, dance versions, merchandise and apps. It may be that the lapse into dull routine is just around the corner, but Caroline van der Leeuw is now already legendary as a diva without the whims. With that mentality you can always start all over again.

LUTGARD MUTSAERS

Translated by Gregory Ball

The Power of the 'Intermediate Sphere'

The Passage to Europe

The history of the European Union has been written many times. Books have been published in every language describing how in the years after the Second World War, six European countries signed a treaty to set up institutions which would henceforth manage the coal and steel industries in these six founding member states. More than half a century later, the radius of action of the European Union has expanded spectacularly, and the number of EU citizens has increased almost fivefold. The intervening period has been one of breakthroughs and new treaties, but also of arguments and conflicts.

Rarely has that history been written in such a penetrating, idiosyncratic and compelling way as in Luuk van Middelaar's *The Passage to Europe*, which was first published in Dutch-language edition (*De passage naar Europa*) in 2009. Van Middelaar has not been idle since then: he became a speechwriter for the first President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy. Time has not stood still within the European Union either, with the difficulties surrounding the euro plunging Europe into an existential crisis. That crisis forms a good test case for the book: in 2009, Van Middelaar described how the Union succeeds time and again in adapting to unforeseen situations. Every time a crisis arises, there are analysts who predict the break-up of the Union, but every time Europe manages to come out stronger and with a deeper level of unity.

The common theme running through Van Middelaar's book is the observation that the ultimate stimulus in European politics has always come from the collective of member states. It is not so much the institutions of Europe (what he calls the 'inner sphere') that are the driving force, nor is it the case that each individual member state (the 'outer sphere') has control. Rather, it is an 'intermediate sphere', in which member