

BRF1 (Belgium) <https://1.brf.be/sendungen/chansons/1162526/>

The border area between pop, cabaret and theater music requires a lot of talent: a sharp mind, knowledge of literature, sophisticated humor and a sense of melodies. The Scot Dan Barbenel cuts a fine figure in everything.

He calls himself Mr Diagonal, subtitled "Prime Minister of Pop". With simple tools - piano, traveling guitar, elementary school percussion, outdated loops and playroom synths - he creates clever entertainment in which we hear all kinds of quirky things, political ("Sleepwalkers Brexit", "Passports") as well as personal ("Orange", "Into the Rustic Meadows of my Mind"). He does this with a dazzling level of craftsmanship and is therefore in the British tradition of music halls, in which Joe Jackson produced a masterpiece last year (see Chanson, Lieder and Folk from November 27, 2023).

Apparently playful, he moves on a spectrum from Brecht to Bowie to Broadway. Other comparisons place him between a mushroom-intoxicated Noël Coward (British actor, satirist and playwright, 1899-1973), Kurt Weill and the Divine Comedy. He has a loyal following in Japan's notoriously bizarre pop culture (six national tours and two feature-length rock documentaries on Japanese television). And in "The Guardian" series "Sound of Europe" he represented Belgium, of all places, because Mr Diagonal chose the European political theater stage of Brussels as his home. In general, the 54-year-old artist finds acceptance and a home in the Belgian freethinker scene, as recently at La Fête, the "Biggest Show of Freaks", organized by the "Institutfuersichentwickeldepraxisreykjavik" in Lontzen, "East Belgium".

After two albums under a different name and two albums as Mr Diagonal - "Late Victorian" (2011) about late Victorian year-end fantasies and "North Pacific" (2021) (a subtropical mutation of English chansons) - he now has a retrospective of particularly imaginative impromptus from the years 2018 to 2024: "Join the Dots" combines twelve bedroom recordings into a scrapbook of dream fragments and brainwave dispatches that were recorded as close as possible to the moment of their creation. The album is the accompaniment to his one-man show at the upcoming Edinburgh Festival Fringe, where he will perform 24 nights from August 1st to 25th, and is an ideal introduction to the world of a pop novelist outside all trends and fashions, creating an imaginative funfair of sounds and thoughts.