

The Dutch Ensemble Culture: It's heterogeneity, engagement and social embeddedness

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What has been typical about Dutch musical life in the past 25 years? In what does the Dutch musical practice distinguish itself from other (European) countries? Are there, as a matter of fact, any national differences to be pointed out in an era of far-reaching homogenization and mondialization? Perhaps submitting the question about the specificity of the Dutch musical scene to someone who does not live in the Netherlands would be better. For this I want to raise two arguments. At first, someone who finds himself at a greater distance to the object of inquiry, is perhaps less percipitous in distinguishing all kinds of nuances but might possibly have a better view on rough developments and specificities. The second argument concerns the Dutch mentality. Although, in general, the Dutch are quite satisfied with their country, usually they have difficulty in uttering this pride (except during football matches). A contemporary Dutchman will not associate his homeland with the traditional image of tulips, windmills and wooden shoes anymore. What precisely replaces this historical identification is not evident. Hasn't the Dutch music scene always shadowed the movement of countries with a much greater musical tradition. Countries such as Great Britain and the USA in popmusic, the USA in jazzmusic and Germany, France and the USA in classical music? Can the Netherlands be more than a trendfollower? I think, nevertheless, that something in which the Dutch musical life has distinguished itself from other countries during the past decades can be pointed out. In doing so, I have to operate slightly bashful for I am not entirely familiar with the situation in other countries. To my opinion, however, there is a prosperous, influential and heterogeneous ensemble culture in the Netherlands, more so than in other countries. During the past decades a number of initiatives in the 'twilight zone' between improvised music, jazz and contemporary composed music has been displayed. This has led to an enormous enrichment of the already existing Dutch musical culture. Between the big (symphonic) orchestra's and the small, traditional chambermusic-ensembles a series of medium-sized music groups, have assured themselves a position by attracting attention with their alternative line-ups and music. This contribution in raising the veil of this Dutch phenomenon will do justice to it by being as fragmented as what is treated.

The Notenkrakersactie (The Nutcrackersaction)

November 16th 1969, we find ourselves in the sacral, redplush main concert hall of the Concertgebouw (Royal Concert Hall) in Amsterdam. Director Bernard Haitink raises his arms to mark the upbeat of Quantz' concerto for flute. Suddenly the sound of several clicking toy frogs make his movement freeze. Somebody unrolls a banner and circulates pamphlets. With the aid of a megaphone composer Peter Schat tries to challenge the public and the musicians to a debate about the selection and programming policy of the Concertgebouworkest (Royal Concert Hall Orchestra). Schat is one of approximately 40 people who participate in what would later come to be known as the *Notenkrakersactie*, the Nutcrackersaction (in Dutch 'noten' means both nuts and notes). Other famous Nutcrackers were the composers and musicians Louis Andriessen, Reinbert de Leeuw,

Misha Mengelberg and Willem Breuker and the writer Harry Mulisch. The campaign, that evening, leads to vehement disapproval by the audience, comparing it to sacrilege. A fight breaks out and the police is required to intervene, after which Quantz' flute concert is performed.

The 'Notenkrakersaction' addressed the issue of 'the repeated supply of cultural consumer goods' (the classics or the so-called 'iron repertoire'). It fulminated against the obscure decision-making of the Concertgebouworchestra and against the social function of the orchestra as 'the defender of the interests of the ruling class'. It was not a stand alone action, but was embedded in a rebellion of a generation against social conservatism. Like in many other (Western) countries several groups expressed their social discomfort at the end of the sixties. Hence, the 'Notenkrakersaction' didn't stand for an 'emancipation of the dissonant', but rather for a change in the labour relations and the traditional musical culture. The 'Notenkrakers' argued in favour of a democratization of the musical life, attention for a less elitist musical culture and a perspicacious public debate regarding the policies of subsidization. What, at first, seemed inviolable became the subject of a debate.

The 'Notenkrakeraction' in itself wasn't very successful; many colleague composers and musicians condemned the upto here unprecedented provocation. However, with hindsight, one can say that this action was the prelude to what appears to be the prefiguration of a flourishing ensemble culture 25 years onward. The action resulted in searching for alternatives to the established musical practice. This led the activists to many and far-reaching initiatives such as: the establishment of ensembles, the origination of alternative concert halls and compositions for divergent (non standard) line-ups. Key words were 'small scale', 'flexible ensembles' - who, by their greater mobility, had to cater for a broader public-, and reaching 'new audiences' by bringing them different kinds of music.

Retrospectively, the 'Notenkrakersaction' can be regarded as the 'start of an ensemble culture which is unique in the Dutch and international musical life' (a note for the Dutch ministry of culture, may 1991).

Orchestra De Volharding (The Perseverance)

Autumn 1971, Louis Andriessen is working on a composition which he calls 'de volharding' (the perseverance). It is a composition in which he himself wants to play the pianopart. Besides this, Andriessen is looking for co-musicians who are willing to contribute and influence the compositorial process and (by doing so) influence the final musical result. He, in other words, is looking for classically trained musicians with a creative attitude and jazz musicians who want to be more than imitations of their American colleagues. With the aid of Willem Breuker, Andriessen searches for suitable musicians (and eventually finds them). On April 30th, 1972 the first concert of the orchestra takes place. The composition performed and orchestra bear the same name: 'De Volharding'.

From the outset 'De Volharding' can be reckoned among the most engaged ensembles in the Netherlands. 'De Volharding' can only be understood if the Vietnam war, the coup against Salvador Allende in Chile and several political actions in the Netherlands are taken into account. The ensemble often provides for a musical intermezzo during demonstrations or meetings of left winged political groupings. This

even led to a debate within the ensemble on whether the political services were not surpassing its musical task.

'De Volharding' does not believe in explicit left or right winged music (communist notes do not exist), but does claim that music within a certain context and with the use of texts and titles is indeed susceptible to politics. Since 'De Volharding' kept thinking that both the musical and the political dimension of its performances were important, the idea arose to perform contemporary Dutch music at political meetings. They would then also perform socialist battle songs during 'normal' concerts.

A combination of contemporary composed music and politically engaged music came into existence in Andriessen's *Volkslied* (folksong or national anthem), in which the *Wilhelmus*, the Dutch national anthem, gradually transforms into the *International*.

Besides the more explicit connection with left winged politics, the anti-authoritarian stance of 'De Volharding' found expression in other ways. The ensemble tried to make their music accessible for different people by performing in other than the usual concert halls, places like community centers, schools, universities and the open air. Famous became their so-called *Inklusief Concerten* (inclusive concerts); free concerts where the boundaries between traditionally different musical styles were torn down and transgressed, so that musicians and composers were able to reach different audiences.

'De Volharding' focusses mainly on performing contemporary Dutch compositions. They go about this by inviting composers to deliver works for the ensemble. These invitations are specifically directed at composers who cross the borders of jazz music, popular music and composed music (a fusion of styles). The borderline between composer and performer is also blurred in this way. Cooperation is preferred with composers who have a schematic set-up or a basic beginning which can then be used by the entire orchestra to work on. A finished composition, even if custom-made, is not the manner in which the ensemble wants to approach music. Therefore the rehearsals are not rehearsals in the traditional sense. Instead the composer and the musicians jointly work at the structure of the composition. Sometimes the composer avoids the prescription of the instrumentation or the fixing of the musical form in order to enhance the freedom in the final version. 'De Volharding', more or less demands the composer to adhere to the ideals of the orchestra in order to achieve real cooperation. This can turn out to be rather a bottleneck for many composers but it does not entail that only a few individuals are willing to compose for 'De Volharding'. Precisely the existence of such an ensemble lead to the fact that composers can come forward when appreciating this style of work. In so doing, this approach gives the ensemble a great productiveness, enabling them to draw from many qualitatively outstanding compositions for their performances.

Het Nederlands Blazers Ensemble (The Dutch Wind Orchestra)

The *Nederlands Blazers Ensemble* (Dutch Wind Orchestra) is an ensemble which was founded in 1959. At first the octet played classical pieces exclusively. Since 1966 it has, by and by, concentrated on a 20th-century repertoire, which emphatically also entails the (better) popmusic. The *Nederlands Blazers Ensemble* was the first orchestra to perform on the streets, in zoo's, circus tents, galleries and in centers for popmusic. Their informal attire (the last performance in dress suits was at the imminent closure of the zoo *Artis*, where they gave a concert in the penguin cage) contributed to what a lot of people regarded as 'the desacrilization of the concert practice'.

A fixed line-up has not been witnessed for a considerable time now. Instead the ensemble prefers a line-up pending the repertoire. Their main trademark is the combination of old and new music within one program. Each year the repertoire is enriched and broadened by 4 or 5 compositorial orders or by adding new findings from old masters, which were delved out of dusty old libraries.

The Ensemble culture

What, in fact, constitutes an ensemble culture? That the ensemble culture in the Netherlands covers a much broader field than could appear from this contribution is something I would like to state beforehand. It originates at the end of the sixties from both the dissatisfaction concerning the lack of performing possibilities for new music and from the dissatisfaction regarding the use of old fashioned performing practices of the 18th and 19th century (prior to this there was, of course, an existing ensemble culture in the Netherlands, albeit not as well organised and this did not encounter any form of an institutionalized ensemble culture. The existence of ensembles was dependent upon private initiatives and, hence, was located at the margins of the conservative Dutch musical life).

In general, I would like to define the ensemble culture as a whole of cooperating ensembles, which together form a substantial part of the musical establishment, concentrating on a repertoire beyond the classical-romantic tradition. The fact that this contribution gives exclusive attention to ensembles engaged in 20th century music, has to do with the music content innovations determined partly by these ensembles.

Of course it is important that there be ensembles in the first place. In 1996 the composer Louis Andriessen remarked: 'I like the present day ensemble culture very much. *Essential for the Netherlands is the fact that one could list 20 completely different ensembles right away.* Furthermore they take care of an ongoing repertoire renewal. What fascinates me most in the ensemble culture, being a composer, is the possibility to create a completely new musical language'. To mention but a few of the more well-known ensembles: The Nederlands Blazers Ensemble (Dutch Wind Orchestra), the ASKO Ensemble, LOOS, the Maarten Altena Ensemble, the Ebony Band, the Ives Ensemble, the Schönberg Ensemble, the Willem Breuker Kollektief, the Instant Composers Pool (ICP), De Volharding, Hoketus.

Remarkable about this enumeration is the enormous heterogeneity of the ensembles, confirming Andriessen's remark. There is certainly not one type of ensemble that could be called determinate for the Dutch ensemble culture.

It should be clear that when one wishes to speak of an ensemble *culture* more is required than just a number of ensembles. To become an essential part of the (Dutch) musical life, it is necessary for there to exist an infrastructure which can support these various ensembles.

What typifies a real ensemble culture (at least in the Netherlands) is the cooperation between the various ensembles. Amongst others this is revealed by the fact that a lot of musicians belong to several ensembles. An extended cross-over takes place between classically trained musicians and musicians whose roots are in the jazz- and improvised music. Also, Dutch composers have been influenced by jazz and improvised music and jazz musicians have switched to composing, seldom occurring elsewhere in Europe.

For the origination and continuation of a vibrant ensemble culture a proper performing infrastructure is needed, on a national level. In the sixties and seventies many ensembles avoided the traditional performing locusts. Due to ideological reasons they preferred to performing their music in community centers, schools, festivals or street stages. However, an alternative circuit of smaller concert platforms came into being simultaneously. These platforms were scattered all over the country,

increasing performance possibilities considerably. The growth in the podia for listening to music corresponds with a subsequent increase in the amount of new ensembles. In other words, a close cooperation between the ensembles and the network of concert halls exists.

Of course the role of the central government is important as well. It provides the ensembles with subsidies either directly or through intermediary foundations. Ongoing institutionalization has led to the fact that the ensemble culture is now officially encompassed in the traditional concert culture. Ensembles, originating from a protest culture, now play trouble-free in traditional concert halls. In doing so, they adhere to the demands of contemporary audiences which wish a (traditional) concert ambiance. It is true that the programming of contemporary music by the ensembles is unconventional due to its experimental nature. But as far as the concert entourage is concerned a protocol for correct behaviour exists, derived from the conventional classical concert world, e.g. conventions such as being on time, being quiet, not applauding before the last note has sounded and no smoking, eating or drinking during the concert, etc.

This brings me to the last (and perhaps most difficult) part concerning the ensemble culture: the audience. Together with the production and distribution, the receptiveness of ensemble music forms a whole, which enables one to speak of an ensemble *culture*. Is there an audience for this contemporary ensemble music in the Netherlands? Facts published in 1990 show that 1% of the Dutch population is principally interested in contemporary music (this percentage is 8% when regarding the total supply of classical music). Although statistics show that concert visits are increasing, it remains evident that the average classical concert audience is an elite and that the 1% can be regarded as the pick of the bunch. Although it is obvious, in a time dominated by economic values, to regard only the size of the audience, I choose, rather, to relate the importance of the audience's role in contemporary music to something else, namely the more generalistic attitude in relation to music. This attitude is characteristic for the audience of contemporary music, adapting itself to traditional concert habits whilst at the same time bringing about a new repertoire. The audience likes the contrasts which stem from the so-called modular programming, a combination of different musical styles within one program. An overlap between the audience's taste and that of the composer is created, where the composers effortlessly identify themselves with very diverse musical styles and traditions. This almost educational contribution of contemporary music listeners contributes to a prosperous ensemble culture (albeit on modest scale).

A report from the early nineties, presented to the minister of culture, writes with appropriate pride: 'Nowhere in the world has the ensemble culture succeeded in attaining so tight a grip on musical life as in the Netherlands. Without exaggerating one can assert that all innovations, arisen in the field of music in the Netherlands over the last 20 years, can be regarded in great part as the work of the ensembles. Proof for the success of the ensemble culture is found in the increase of the number of performances (from 187 in 1980 to 417 in 1990) and the percentage of hall-occupancy (from 54,4% to 72,9%. It should be remarked that the ensembles have been performing in ever bigger concert halls).

The Willem Breuker Kollektief

Around 1974 saxophone-player and composer Willem Breuker leaves the 'Instant Composers Pool', which he founded with Misha Mengelberg and Han Bennink, and Louis Andriessen's orchestra 'De Volharding' to establish his own *Willem Breuker Kollektief* (WBK). The interconnectedness between several Dutch ensembles – of key importance for the origination of a real ensemble culture – is moulded with this move. Part of the WBK is also a member of 'De Volharding'. Similar to the 'De Volharding', the WBK consists of musicians with very different backgrounds: some originate from jazz,

Improvised music or post-free jazz, others descend from the classical or contemporary composed music.

On the edge of the second and third millennium the WBK is world famous (from the eighties onward the WBK has attracted ever increasing crowds, also from outside the Netherlands and far removed from the centers of new European music. The WBK performs over a 100 concerts a year).

The Kollektief is renowned for its mixture of Weill, Gershwin, Morricone, Dolphy, Ellington and Prokofiev. A review in a French music magazine mentions a free jazz saxophone solo with a paso doble chorus, an invasion of a mens choir and, against a background of minimal music a la Bob Wilson, the advancing of the great classics: *Eino Kalevo Nachtmusik* and *Götterdämmerung*. The WBK music finds oneself betwixt the serious, elitist music and commercial mass music (f.l. *In Memory of John Coltrane for barrel organ*). All kinds of musical styles, musical jokes, acts, improvisations, ballads and battle songs follow one another in one big show. Breuker himself doesn't call his music jazz but 'human music'. His first concern is keeping the audience alert. This requires a great deal of variation at high speed (genres, tempi, rhythms) filled with absurdistic jokes and sketches. All the time Breuker holds on to his own musical tradition, the Dutch, which he presents in its most grotesque form.

Like 'De Volharding' the WBK plays just about anywhere, places like festivals, on the steets, during happenings, demonstrations or union actions as well as in theaters and concert halls. And just like the ICP and De Volharding the WBK is politically committed. When they turn up at the Berlin Philharmonic with a vacuum cleaner, this is considered a blatant statement demanding the disposing of the contaminated and rusted culture in the concert hall and making room for the new art.

The founding of his own record company in the seventies - the *B/Waast* - not only reveals Breuker's distrust in the existing musical distribution channels, but also his wide and diverse musical interests. Works from Louis Andriessen to Hans Dulfer and from Xenakis to the electronic music of Berio and Ligeti have been recorded and released.

Ensemble culture and/in the Netherlands

How is it possible that such a diversified, by now firmly embedded, ensemble culture arises in the Netherlands? I realise that answering this question effectively and unambiguously is a perilous undertaking. Any reasons put forward for this development will always have to take into account that, to a certain extent, coincidence plays a big part. In attempting an explanation, I do not wish to focus your attention on optional and partial explanations; I would, however, like to draw a parallel between the ensemble culture and another typically Dutch phenomenon called *verzuiling* (pillorization)¹.

Not only is the ensemble culture a musical phenomenon, but also a social one. Several extra-musical, social and political factors can be pointed out which have contributed to an excellent ensemble culture, for instance the financial support and cultural decentralization policy in the seventies, instituted by the central government. Nonetheless, I want to emphasize a specific Dutch social condition, usually conceptually described as *verzuiling* or pillorization. A difficult concept to translate and to explain, due to its specific 'Dutchness'. *Verzuiling* - an incomplete, extended definition would entail least the following elements the existence of socially separated organisations by denomination filled with organisations which do not rest on religious ideals - still is a well-known phenomenon in Dutch society, e.g. Dutch broadcasting time is divided among a catholic, several protestant, a socialist and several non-religious broadcasting corporations. This pillorization has led to a small-scaledness and a differentiation of the social structure. The effect of this, in general, is that coalitions always need to be formed in all kinds of fields.

¹ I have to thank the journalist Pay-Uun Hiu for this suggestion.

What is the benefit of pillarization? It leads to a permanent distribution of power, more (and indispensable) tolerance towards other opinions - one has to cooperate after all - and pressure groups become self-organised. Such a social constellation, which has existed in the Netherlands for such a long time, seems to be firmly embedded in the Dutch culture, and probably has contributed in one way or another to a flourishing ensemble culture.

The pillarized society, mentioned above, has consequences which are translatable at several levels to the Dutch ensemble culture. Firstly - and this is applicable to the entire ensemble culture - the culture has both a musical and a political dimension. On the one hand it adheres to musical ideals which were not fitting in the traditional (post-war) musical practice; on the other hand the ensemble culture was forced to develop their ideals rigorously, this due to the dismissive attitude by the public at first. This entailed a severance of the existing formulae such as the symphonic orchestra, the piano trio and the string quartet and the development of new, non-standardized instrumental combinations and sounds which had never been heard before. The Dutch being used to different pressure groups, could easily support these initiatives in the musical practice. Not only did this lead to the founding of several ensembles with their specific political preferences, but also to a union for improvising musicians (BIM). The development of a network of (small-scaled) concert halls, tailored to the specific needs of the ensemble music performances also came into existence. The economic context, or rather the willingness of the central government to provide subsidies, is also important for the development and continuation of an ensemble (culture). The characteristically small-scaledness of the ensemble culture enabled the movements of musicians between different groups and different historical periods (in other words between several specialisations). With this ensembles were able to cater with relative ease to the wishes of composers who, consequently, could exchange ideas in a flexible manner with smaller ensembles. This made that audiences were surprised by thematic, instrumental, historical relations or unpredictable turns in a concert program, such as was their wish. The concept of cooperation can also be considered on a smaller scale, from within an ensemble. The German musical expert Oehlschlägel thinks that compared to the solo repertoire for any instrument, ensemble music demands an extra communicative and social competence. Compared to the orchestral repertoire for traditional line-ups with tutti-strings and wind sections, ensemble music respects every musician as an equal individual. According to Oehlschlägel ensemble music is the most emancipated form of music.

Nowhere do ensembles constitute such a cooperative unity, and nowhere have they penetrated so deeply in the cultural life as they have in the Netherlands. Why is it that such an ensemble culture, so far, has not arisen in the surrounding countries? A possible obstacle in Germany is the so-called cultural federalism, which impedes the development of a flourishing ensemble culture. The relative autonomy of each federal state towards their art policy, cannot accommodate a good nationwide infrastructure for medium-sized ensembles with a contemporary repertoire. In France, on the contrary, it is precisely the centralistic approach which stands in the way of an ensemble culture. Nearly all the available money for music goes to projects in and around Paris, leaving hardly any money for ensembles outside Paris, necessary for a continuous quality. In Great Britain petty government aid, heavy competition and a generally conservative audience prohibit a substantial renewal of the musical life. Due to this British ensembles have had little influence on the present musical order. Finally, Belgium lacks a political infrastructure (in the form of structural long-range plans). Moreover, not enough Belgian composers stimulate an ensemble culture. It may also be that the linguistic conflict stands in the way of a prosperous ensemble culture.

The Instant Composers Pool

1967, the musicians and composers Misha Mengelberg, Willem Breuker and Han Bennink found the Instant Composers Pool (ICP). Because the music world doesn't take to the work of these three and because government support, at that time, goes primarily to representatives of the traditional bourgeois culture, Mengelberg, Breuker and Bennink start an organization for the production and distribution of records. They also wish to develop alternatives as regards the organization of concerts; in brief, the ICP is founded to improve their own living and working conditions. They search for the recognition of an 'other' way of making music. The ICP, by that time, is described as an association of musicians who are working on contemporary developments in instrumental improvisation.

Along with these three gentlemen of the ICP, an ever changing guest performers list is associated (Derek Bailey, Fred van Hove and Peter Brötzmann are perhaps the most well known).

In the name ICP two important statements are expressed. Firstly, the founders define improvisation as instantaneous composing. This implies (also) that improvisation no longer is bound by the traditional USA jazz material. Secondly, the idea of a group (a pool) reigns, i.e. the ICP approaches music, the control over and the administration of their own productions collectively.

Mengelberg calls the ICP and their way of making improvised music a completely new phenomenon in Europe. Like many other European jazz from the sixties and early seventies, the ICP has its background in the American New Thing. West-European musicians add their own parameters to this free jazz. In particular the Afro-American melos (the base structure of melody making) is left out.

In the beginning of the seventies, however, the improvised Dutch music develops a (relatively) individual character. It is improvised music with heterogeneous elements from other musical disciplines (Mengelberg had an authoritative jazz quartet, whilst studying classical composition at the conservatory at the same time). A fascinating interaction between on the one hand ways of making music from the world of the improvised music and on the other hand from the world of the complex horizontal and vertical structure techniques of the modern notated music came about.

The works of Mengelberg and Breuker, particularly, encountered a mixture of composed and popular music. The influence of Fluxus, musical drama and theater, becomes explicit. Typically Dutch is the displayed interwovenness of political action and playful artisticness.

Alongside the ICP there was the development of the musical theater with its specific Dutch character and humor. The Dutch musical theater is no opera, operette, musical or optical art but, quite naturally, seems to add theatrical elements to the music. The musicians acted with set plots, leaving plenty of room for improvisation. One could suddenly change to a dialogue in the middle of a saxophone solo, questioning for instance, whether this (solo) was approximately what was supposed to happen (the solo was thus 'played' twice: as a musical utterance and as a part of the play). Willem Breuker had a famous act in which he reacted against the New Thing and against 'champion-hornblowers who clench their muscles and go on'. At the highlight of his solo, gargling in the best New Thing tradition, Breuker - short of breath - appears to

become entangled in the little cord of his sax and nearly suffocates. *Kain and Abel* from 1972 exemplifies the political character typified in a lot of Dutch musical theater. Under the guise of the biblical story this musical play parodies the difficulties encountered by improvising musicians when trying to attain a position in the 'official' music world. The leading part is for Maarten Altena who plays God and 'the Big Culture Pope' concurrently, 'the Big culture Pope' being the minister who takes the decisions and distributes the money in the cultural sphere.

The importance of the ICP should not be underestimated. For but a few of their achievements, I mention (a) A total reorganization of Dutch improvised music was accomplished thanks to the ICP. (b) Out of the ICP core, other cores could arise: the Willem Breuker Kollektief with the record company BV Haast and the Maarten Altena Ensemble are only the most famous ones. (c) Initiatives of the ICP lead to the founding of the *Beroepsvereniging Improviserende Musici*, BIM (the professional association of improvising musicians) in november 1971, the first and only musicians union to control all their own business. Dutch jazz musicians can be merited for their succes in uniting themselves. They put aside their rivalry and differences of opinion and cooperated according to a well defined plan till results could be reaped.

A Dutch culture

Does something like a typical Dutch mentality exist? It isn't my purpose to formulate a conclusive answer to this question. A few years ago, quite a simple popsong called '15 miljoen mensen' (15 million persons) became a big hit in the Netherlands. I suspect that many compatriots, like me, recognized themselves in many parts of the text. Below a few lyrics are cited. Perhaps they can contribute to the thesis that the Netherlands has a fairly unique ensemble culture in which the democratization and tolerance of the individual plays an ever important role.

15 miljoen mensen; die schrijf je niet the wetten voor, die laat je in hun waarde
15 million people; you don't tell them what to do, you accept them as they are

Land van 1000 meningen, geen uniform is heilig
Country of a 1000 opinions, no uniform is sacrosanct
Een zoon die noemt zijn vader Piet, een fiets staat nergens veilig
A son calls his father Pete, a bicycle is safe nowhere

Een land wars van betutteling, geen chef die echt de baas is
A country averse to patronizing, no one chief who really is the boss

Not a conclusion

In the year 1999 the Netherlands has a rich and extremely differentiated musical life from which the ensembles cannot be set aside any longer. Contemporary music is flourishing all over the Netherlands, generating well attended performances given by dozens of ensembles specializing in a modern repertoire of interesting composers. Today's contemporary Dutch music has its roots in the sixties, the turbulent decade which disposed of many outdated convictions and values (in the Netherlands the first attack was launched on what was felt to be the serial composers' lack of social awareness). This rejuvenating start was not unique to the Netherlands, nor to the world of music; but the way in which the up-and-coming generation of composers have changed the Dutch musical scene is unparalleled in Europe. Besides a fierce debate as to the significance of contemporary music in society and concert programming, organisations and ensembles were created to promote and play new music, in order to bring about a change of mentality in existing music. The music, of

course, changed too. The mixture of improvised music and contemporary composed music, which (still) characterizes the repertoire of many Dutch ensembles, led to a musical heterogeneity which is unprecedented.

The younger composers and musicians are now reaping the benefits of what was achieved in the sixties. Not only as regards the increased freedom of musical content - because they were raised with popmusic, one can hear a mixture of pop, jazz and contemporary composed music more often - but also because of a comprehensive infrastructure, on which the Dutch musical world has been founded since the sixties. Music and musical life changed in the sixties and so far there are no indications that the turn of the millenium will bring many changes.

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