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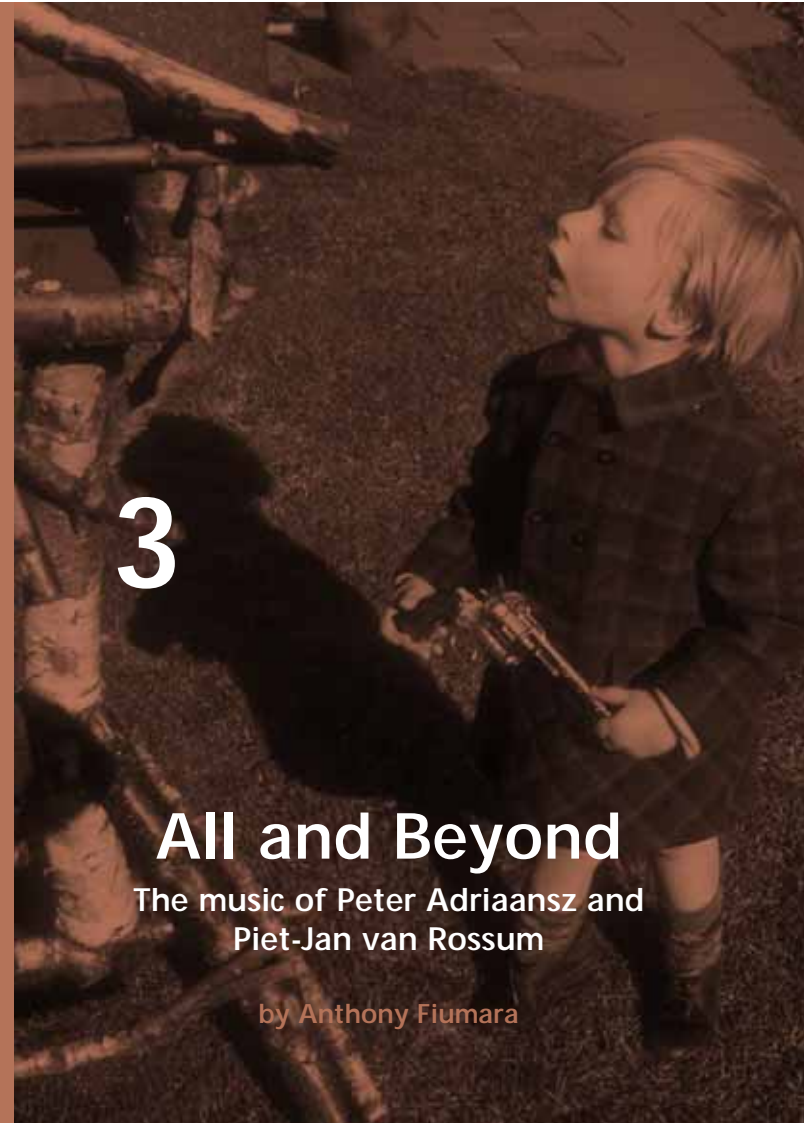


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All and Beyond

The music of Peter Adriaansz and Piet-Jan van Rossum

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## All and Beyond

### The music of Peter Adriaansz and Piet-Jan van Rossum

It seems an almost impossible task to cram two composers with such distinct profiles (idiosyncratic is the word I believe) into a single booklet. It's all the fault of November Music, which is spotlighting Peter Adriaansz and Piet-Jan van Rossum as its festival composers. Not one but two central composers, like two artists mounting a joint exhibition in a museum. A catchy title, an interesting marketing ploy, and for one brief moment it appears as if everything has been planned to the nines. 'Boy, if only life were like this!' (*Annie Hall*, Woody Allen) At first glance it seems that Adriaansz' and Van Rossum's biographies have a lot in common: they started to study music at the same conservatory in The Hague, then simultaneously moved to the one in Rotterdam; since that time, they have become valued colleagues and friends; both write music in which electronics merge with acoustics; neither one is easy to pigeonhole into a common genre (you could try the 'Hague School' but rather not); each in his own inimitable way produces scores that are immediately recognizable and require dedicated musicians to convincingly play those delicate notes (another point of similarity). Favourite performers: the Ives Ensemble. So far the platitudes. Yet everyone who is familiar with Adriaansz and Van Rossum knows they're from different planets. The former is a composer who prefers to regard himself as a scientist, while emulating and focusing on nature in its *modus operandi*, with experimental sounds as the outcome. The latter spins his stories like cocoons before looking through a magnifying glass at the decay and the irregularities in the lives of his protagonists. Forget what I wrote about platitudes.

It made sense to get the two composers to talk about themselves as well as with each other. Which we did during a lengthy conversation, just after the elections, in an office in the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ in Amsterdam. The minutes of that meeting show how the paths of Adriaansz and Van Rossum have crossed as if they were comets from different parts of the galaxy. And how they subsequently went their own ways. But always in an atmosphere of mutual respect, that's for sure.

Piet-Jan van Rossum says he doesn't like talking. He prefers to write his own story, in peace and quiet. Well here it is: following our three-way conversation, over a couple of months he sent lengthy e-mails that almost read like a diary, pertaining to subjects that he thought had not been highlighted (enough). All of this formulated in the musing, poetic style that characterizes his writing, including numerous references to other art forms. The idiosyncratic line breaks and extra spaces have all been prescribed. Just as meticulously as when he designs his own sound poetics in his scores – and just like he can become almost furious with impatience if, during rehearsals, he does not get exactly what he wants to hear.

However, once his music sounds as it should do, it really bowls you over. It contains cobwebs, creaking floors, crackling gramophone records, corrosion, and memories that appear frozen in time. Against a backdrop of transitoriness, the composer maps out his routes to an imaginary past. Gestures in sound that give expression to the frayed ends of human existence. "I can only breathe properly in a world that I have reshaped myself based on my own dreams," Van Rossum once explained. One could say that the significance of Béla Bartók and Robert Schumann to György Kurtág equals the importance of Maurice Ravel and Erik Satie to Van Rossum. But that is another story. As is Van Rossum's fondness for titles starting with the letter 'a'. Very mysterious.

Peter Adriaansz habitually writes about his work, like any scientist (for that is how he sees himself). In recent years, during his self-imposed search for musical truth, Adriaansz has increasingly divested his work of secondary issues and drama, insofar as these were ever present in his pieces. From the start, he was preoccupied with the essence of tone and structure. In 2001 *Comfort*, his ecstatically pounding composition for orchestra, led to a riot in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. Not an experience he cares to repeat: "*Comfort* was my last explicitly 'rowdy' work. In subsequent pieces I have always tried to attain a balance." Until a few years ago, he made 'truth' audible in numbers, systems, and patterns such as Pascal's triangle and Cantor Sets. Hermetic numerical systems that he applied in pieces such as *6 Parts for 7 (or more) Players* and *9 through 99*.

Such works are but one step removed from his current compositions, which are based on pure sound. 'What you hear is what you hear' could be Peter Adriaansz' motto, after Frank Stella. Since he embarked on the series *Structures*, time and sound seem to have solidified into slowly rotating crystals that are presented without bias. Likewise, Stella would say that "a picture was a flat surface with paint on it – nothing more", Adriaansz aims to strip sound of its cultural ballast, then show its true mystery. When working on *Structures*, the composer still took his cue from James Tenney to some degree whereas in the recent series *Waves* he has completely mastered his own – almost poetical – form. Listening to Adriaansz you sometimes end up in post-industrial Wagnerian landscapes. Wie ein Naturlaut.

This publication comprises excerpts from the microtonal credo that he wrote a few years ago, under the surprisingly unscientific heading *How I became a Convert*. In addition, at his request I asked him six titulating questions to spur him to write. I was interested in his opinions on truth, sound, nature, the role of the artist, and daily reality.

Finally, the title of this booklet: the umbrella that brought these dzygotic solitaries together. In the case of Van Rossum, it could read as a nostalgic lament uttered by one of the (hidden) personages in his works, 'Nostalgic, but never sentimental'. As it starts with an 'a', the heading would easily fit into Van Rossum's oeuvre. Yet it could equally apply to Adriaansz and his music from above the tree line. Beyond all, so to speak.

**Anthony Fiumara**

Amsterdam, 18 October 2010

# IV

Guid. 1 + 2: Set for MAXIMUM resonance, add reverb and some flange for a gritty, raw, sound!

Not too clear and not too loud, with a bit of vibration. Observe a linear minimum of 8 sec. in bar. Pizzicato - notes or less regularly - from chord to chord, but only after the sound of guitar 1 & 2 has disappeared and subsequent prevalence of F. How to Cook. 2. Flute - guitar should add space-filling depth.

15

\* Flute 1 probably has a maximum of 8 sec. in bar. Pizzicato - notes or less regularly - from guitar 1 & 2 has disappeared and subsequent prevalence of F. How to Cook. 2. Flute - guitar should add space-filling depth.

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## How I became a convert

### on the use of microtonality, tuning & overtone systems in my recent work

Peter Adriaansz

### Introduction

Before I set out on a discussion of some of the ways microtonality features in my work, a brief, or maybe not so brief, introduction to my training seems to be called for. After all: being trained in the West, one never *automatically* veers in this direction. I would venture to say that it always implies a choice at some point. In my own case, this choice is a relatively recent one – no more than five years at the most. But as is frequently the case with choices of a fundamental nature, it turned out to be one from which there was little turning back once I had decided to cross that particular threshold. There is definitely a ‘before’ and an ‘after’. The choice, moreover, turned out to have implications, which eventually touched on all domains of musical matter. The world of ‘micro’-tonality, with its associations of a small, specialized professional field, in reality turned out to be a world of ‘macro’-tonality. In this article, I intend not only to discuss some of my working methods in varying degrees of detail, but to also touch on some of these broader implications, which both sparked it off and came as a result.

### A brief History

As with most composers trained in the West, my initial education was exclusively slanted towards composition with the twelve available pitches neatly formatted between one octave of the piano. For a relatively long time, this was my universe. Although I was aware of the existence of other systems, with two ethnomusicologists for parents and a fairly extensive knowledge of and love for non-western music, the area of further subdivisions however seemed excessively remote to me and essentially alien to the construction of most of the instruments I was asked to write for. Furthermore, I simply couldn’t ‘hear’ it. It seemed to me at the time that there were basically three approaches towards microtonality that one could choose from:

- 1) Microtonality in the form of imported oriental modes or scales;
- 2) Microtonality as a form of *inflection*;
- 3) Microtonality as a form of ‘serial pitch-expansion’.

Though definitely sympathetic to the first of these directions, none of these possible approaches succeeded in convincing me entirely though, due to the fact that they were either a) entirely out of sync with the nature of the instruments they were mostly transported onto – resulting in a form of musical tourism to my ears; b) no more than a form of embellishment, or gesture – something which was already *non grata* to my compositional concerns; or c) when pasted onto highly expressionistic scores – as most of them were – too reminiscent of a teeth-grindingly out-of-tune Schönberg, seemingly devised for no other reason than expansion for expansion's sake, but without any form of true audibility or inner necessity. All three angles, in my mind, basically constituted *horizontal* attitudes towards pitch – something that definitely piqued my interest, but never succeeded in interesting me sufficiently to pursue in my own work.

So, how *did* I become a convert?

### Development 1 / Renunciation 1 **The Hierarchic Principle**

After finishing my studies in the early '90s, I initially embarked on a more-or-less conventional life as a freelance composer: writing on commission for ensembles and orchestras. The pieces from this period, though often deviant in their own particular way, I would still collectively classify as 'Eurocentric' in nature: implying, in this case, a certain emphasis on 'meaning', with pitch as the main vehicle of conveyance. A key element already present in these early works however was a total absence of 'development' in the conventional sense – something, which I had already discovered, was essentially alien to my nature.

Having never wholeheartedly embraced the linear, historical and basically humanist nature of European culture as the sine-qua-non for 'profound' art that it often made itself out to be, the first major crack in this edifice occurred in the mid to late '90s. Two factors were instrumental to this change in perception, of which one can be attributed to the influence of John Cage and the other to my accepting a job as artistic director of Percussion Group The Hague. Where the poetic severity and constant freshness of Cage's music and thought confronted me with certain philosophical choices, the in-depth introduction to the world of alternate sound sources of the latter – combined with a growing ability to analyze and name the many hundreds

of different ways of producing sound – sharpened my ears to a world of possibilities outside of conventional instrumental practice. Listening to and working with the many instruments from all parts of the world – new as well as freshly invented – the innate differences among especially the pitched instruments clearly revealed to me how intimately connected sound, tuning and culture actually were. The simple existence of these instruments revealed to me, at the very least, the presence of cultures in which 'the interval' seemed to have a very different meaning than in the West. Unlike Western intervals, these intervals seemed to be authentically 'alive'.

Having been trained as an organist as well, I was naturally aware of the many battles in tuning systems that had occurred in the renaissance and at the time of the North German organ school. Putting the two together at least brought home to me that there were some highly problematic issues involved with the so-called 'progress' of tuning in the West.

Although my compositional concerns at this point mainly pertained to matters of form, several pieces written during this period clearly betray some of these exotic influences in their instrumentation as well (such as the inclusion of detuned porcelain bowls in the second part of *Music of Mercy pt. 3* (1996) and the fake gamelan in *3-pt. (untampered) Product* (1998), just to name two examples).

In essence, the 'development' in this phase – or 'renunciation' as I'd prefer to call it (assuming that each development in fact consists of a rejection of something else which has become redundant) could be defined as an overall renunciation of *hierarchy*, be it cultural (the domination of any particular culture over another – although in practice this eventually meant the demise of any Eurocentric allegiances in my own work) or intra-musical (the domination of any particular musical 'form' over another – in practice: the acceptance of any material entity as able to constitute 'music').

Still, none of this really applied to the area of pitch – supposedly, the entire point of microtonality after all.

### Development 2 / Renunciation 2 **Culture**

A decidedly more fundamental change of perception gradually suggested itself somewhere between 2003 and 2005. This particular change of mind was fueled to a large extent by circumstantial factors, the

main of which was a growing awareness of the degree to which an overall culture actually dictates its own products – in fact, long before they have even been conceived in the makers' mind.

Although ostensibly remote from the present topic of *microtonality*, it became – nearly depressingly – obvious to me that much of our culture not only seemed to generate *itself* (thus enslaving music, as well as musicians, in my opinion) but also suffered from a form of *listening* – and this is where microtonality eventually comes into play – which on the one hand seemed nearly entirely 'event'-based ('value' seemed to a large extent determined by 'activity') and on the other hand, essentially didn't seem to concern itself with much more than relatively banal style-issues.

There seemed to be a great deal of impatience in this music culture, and what it seemed to say about its overall 'function' (the demand to be entertained through unremitting activity change and 'memory games'). I began to find both infantile – in its primary emphasis on narrative and dialectics – as well as not conducive to real concentration. Although this may sound like a roundabout way of getting to microtonality, it nonetheless directly leads to it, since it clearly demonstrated to me the extent to which our hearing was intended to be guided by forms of *comparative*, *referential*, *listening* – a form of listening which in my view amounted to little more than an act of collective memory, rooted in history, but which essentially had very little to do with actually using one's ears.

Not only did this bring home to me some of the many surreptitious dangers of pragmatism (the various accepted conventions involved with catering to an existing system), but along with that, the need to redefine for myself what exactly I felt the 'function' of music to be and what exactly it was that I really wanted to hear and felt needed saying at this time.

Though all interconnected to greater or lesser degrees, this development eventually resulted in three areas of research:

- 1) The areas of open, variable, forms; notated in real-time
- 2) The relationships between 'sound' and 'time', and
- 3) The areas of resonance and vibration

In practice, it constituted the renunciation of 'events' in favor of the unadorned, straight line as governing musical principle (though this

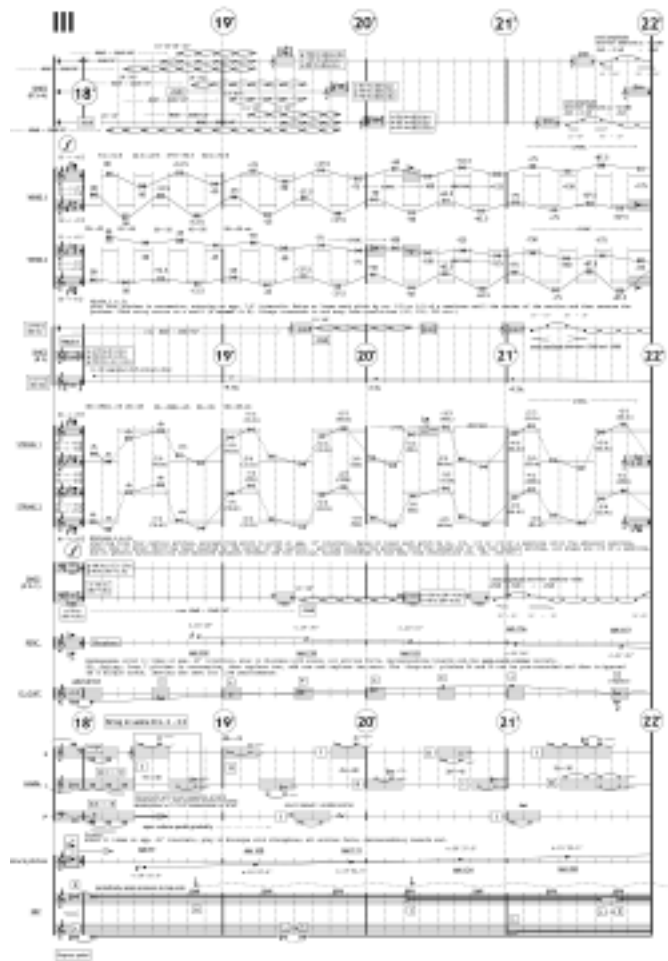
could also be construed as a natural by-product) and the acceptance of music as a physical part of nature, more closely allied to the sciences than to culture. My ideal in this became the image of a tree, a tree of which one could neither say 'this is a bad tree' nor 'this is a good tree', since it simply was 'a tree'; not much happening from the 'event point of view' (and comparing its virtues to any other tree would seem slightly ridiculous), but nonetheless definitely alive and a thing of beauty on its own terms. Akin to this somewhat simplistic image of a tree simply 'being', music, in my opinion, needed also to simply 'be' and to occupy itself more with acts of revealing than of creating.

Although I had always held the belief that music should strive to reflect itself as much as possible, this resulted in a view of music which became more research-bound than pragmatism-bound and also resulted in working in extended series rather than in individual products. As a composer, I also found myself moving away from purely acoustic composition to the area of electroacoustic composition; using amplification, live-electronics, psychoacoustics and spatial acoustics as vital parameters of my work.

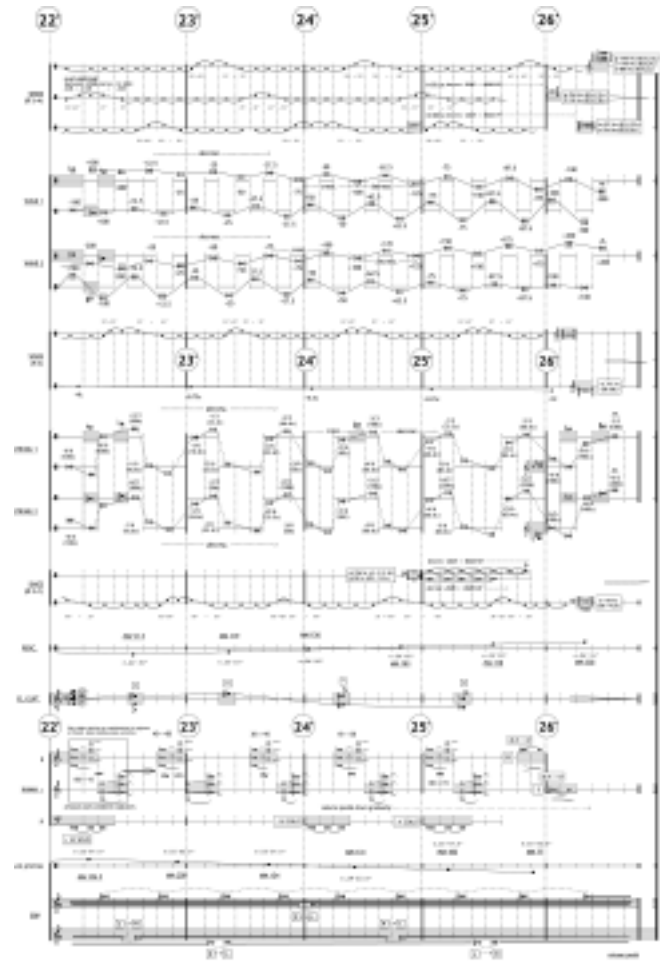
Eventually all of this led to a decision to 'specialize' and a true plethora of resulting works. But it was mostly within the context of investigating relationships between sound and time that microtonality eventually imposed itself naturally.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A key occurrence, in retrospect, was a meeting in 2004 with the renowned Korean *Kayageum* player Byung-Ki Hwang. Having had the opportunity to immerse myself much more in Far Eastern thought and music in the meantime, Hwang was however the first to draw my attention to an essential difference in approach to sound, between Eastern ears and Western ears. This difference he described in the concept of 'the after-tone': a significantly different approach to the concept of music, where 'the music' doesn't essentially lie in 'the attack' (as is the case in most Western music), but mostly in what happens *after* the attack. The attack itself is viewed as no more than a 'medium' with which to trigger a much more important, often infinitely subtle world of inflections. Considered within a larger context, this concept revealed an immense difference in the respective perceptions between not only sound and time, but also in what seemed to be 'an essence' and what seemed to be merely 'a trigger'.





Three Vertical Swells III





## Parallels

Peter Adriaens

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Parallels' by Peter Adriaens. The score is written for multiple instruments, likely strings and woodwinds, as indicated by the various staves. The notation is highly detailed, featuring numerous microtonal markings, including circles with numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and other symbols, which likely represent specific microtonal intervals or techniques. The score is organized into several systems, with some measures containing complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings. The overall appearance is that of a professional musical manuscript, with clear notation and a structured layout.

Parallels I

## Practice, Performance & Listening

Concerning the performance practicality of all these, often minute microtonal increments, I ought to point out that the musicians are never expected to intonate perfectly, for the simple reason that it is virtually impossible.

They are however expected to approximate 'as well as possible'. Designing the scores in such a way that the role of the musician can in fact only exist by virtue of concentration (and, due to their variability, can actually only be accomplished in close collaboration), a far more important issue in this respect is the element of active listening. Listening, not only to one's own sound, but also to the sound of the others as well as that of the total environment – and then responding to this. This, in fact is the most important parameter of anything discussed up to this point.

It is also in this area, the area of 'listening', that I encounter some of the most common errors associated with the topic of microtonality, and especially the area of microtonal reflection; the main one of which can only be described as mistaking medium for matter. This error (and it can really only be typified as such) occurs all too easily if one only listens to microtonality as a form of either 'pitch' or 'pitch development', or as a form of 'extended pitch technique', instead of focusing on the impact it tends to have on its environment: a form of listening which ultimately takes place on a secondary, transcendent, level. Unfortunately, this kind of listening, with ears trained to be on the constant lookout for meaning and often highly suspicious of what are sometimes derogatorily termed mere 'vibrations in the ether', is still quite paramount.

All it takes though, is a simple twist of the head...

The key to this music, in performance practice as well as in the concert hall, in my opinion, lies essentially in the ability to perceive its function as a 'medium'.

Akin, for example, to light refracting off mist: viewed from certain angles one sees nothing, but by turning the head slightly (an exact parallel to turning one's head when listening to small, interfering, increments through loudspeakers) a rainbow will often appear – seemingly out of nowhere.

In my own case, working with microtones does not occur out of a sense of purist tuning, or out of a desire to extend our tonal systems,



but stems foremost from a fascination with their acoustic properties, both in thin as well as in thicker textures. Where the thinner textures tend to lead to the production of exquisite ripples in sound – like light briefly reflecting off a diamond – the thicker textures can lead to the summoning of harmony; and it is mostly from these pre-occupations that I use microtones.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, the key issue to all of this, my so-called ‘conversion’, is that a particular essence of microtonality was only revealed to me through the medium of ‘sound’. Not through its horizontal properties, not through modes, scales or tunings, but mainly through its vertical properties. For me it ended up having everything to do with pulsation, resonance, vibration and speed, each of which was already imbedded in the DNA of any small interval. Coupled to my belief (see ‘the tree’) that everything is already embedded in everything – and that ‘music’ simply is – this was like discovering the atom: the kernel which caused all to grow and seemed to epitomize a way of listening, which eventually could lead to a real – and, in my opinion – necessary form of concentration.

Oberlin / The Hague, December 2008

This article is an edited and much abbreviated version of *How I became a Convert* (2008) published on [www.huygens-fokker.org/thirty-one/documents/HowIBecameaConvert-PeterAdriaansz.pdf](http://www.huygens-fokker.org/thirty-one/documents/HowIBecameaConvert-PeterAdriaansz.pdf)



Pascal's Triangle, Modulo 9

The mystery of sound is mysticism; the harmony of life is religion.  
The knowledge of vibrations is metaphysics, and the analysis of atoms  
science; and their harmonious grouping is art.

Hazrat Inayat Khan The Mysticism of Sound Ch. Vii p.58

## Music as objective truth – 1

Peter Adriaansz

Re: *Objective truth* ('How do you feel music and objectivity/truth are connected? Is music about metaphysical concepts such as truth, beauty, goodness?')

In the end, Art – and I take the liberty of writing 'Art' with a capital A once again – cannot ever offer 100% pure 'truth' and nothing but the truth because it always hinges on a personal interpretation. There are thousands and thousands of ways to present one and the same truth. Let's say you hand 10 composers the model of a helix and ask them to translate this into music as truthfully as possible. In all likelihood, you will end up with 10 completely different versions.

Yet it is still worthwhile to strive for the truth...

In that sense music, like all Art, has a symbolic value. It also represents a *particular way of thinking*.

I certainly do not mean to say that music is subordinate to anything else. Like all other Art forms, music is a pure and entirely autonomous phenomenon, and can essentially capture the whole world. Just like philosophy or science it can be used to gain insights into certain phenomena, or even into the universe itself. The only problem is that the universe, as the sum of all spirituality and all thinking, is an endlessly larger phenomenon than Art. Viewed from that perspective Art is definitely subject to something far larger and is merely a *medium*. To my mind every form of Art is thus essentially the expression of a thought, then of an ideal, and ultimately of a belief. The choices you subsequently make are in the first instance ethical, then aesthetical. I view such choices as the only way for an individual to rise above their own intrinsic shortcomings. And in that way Man and his product can often diverge phenomenally! (Witness the many, many sublime creations by people far from magnificent themselves...)

Many cultures, from ancient China to India, have known about this purpose of Art for numerous centuries - just read up on Daniélou. Certainly long before Western Europe put 'Art' – and the artists them-

selves – on a pedestal, and thereby at the epicentre of a potential answer.

Unfortunately, I should add. For by now, this view more or less determines the ideal of the entire world, with the romantic idea as a supreme and almost ineradicable phenomenon. Only a fool could ever believe that Romanticism is a bygone era.

This focus on the individual – instead of on the universe as a whole, with its inevitable implications of ‘questioning’ – means that a lot of speculation and research within the sphere of composed music has been lost, or banished to ‘safe havens’ such as electronic music or sonology. In that sense, Music largely appears to have abandoned its mediating role in our consciousness. At least, definitely in the sense of a *collective* ambition. The biggest risk being that composed music (as a real form of Art) will eventually stagnate at the level of nothing more than high-quality entertainment.

And I don’t think that really was the original idea.

Based on this cryptic reply you could conclude that to me music has a metaphysical purpose. ‘Truth’ is an important component because it says something about the credibility of what one does. In addition, I believe that credibility – towards either yourself or the wider world – continues to be a fairly essential issue.

Within this context of ‘shifting the focus away from the individual’, the pursuit of ‘truth’ implies that *searching* is more relevant than *creating*. The emphasis is less on expression than on revealing.

The message is that mysteries may be found all around us, if only you look hard enough. The advantage of this approach is that elements of personal compulsion or manipulation – feelings that we as listeners immediately pick up on as they enter our system – are reduced to virtually zero. Once that happens, things become ‘what they are’. As far as I am concerned, from that moment onwards we can truly start to concentrate – and detach ourselves from unfulfilled desires.

If, as an artist, you have the incredible audacity to subject your products to the scrutiny of others, you should probably also have something to say, I think.

There is way too much hot air as it is!

## Music as objective truth – 2

Re: *Sound* (‘Why do you think music is mainly about sound? Instead of, for example, about construction or about other music?’)

Of course, music is about *all sorts of* things, from purely technical aspects to the unification of human feelings, from provocation to solace and from misuse for therapeutic purposes to the building of multicultural bridges because this is convenient for politicians.

As far as I am concerned music is about Sound; or rather, about ‘listening’.

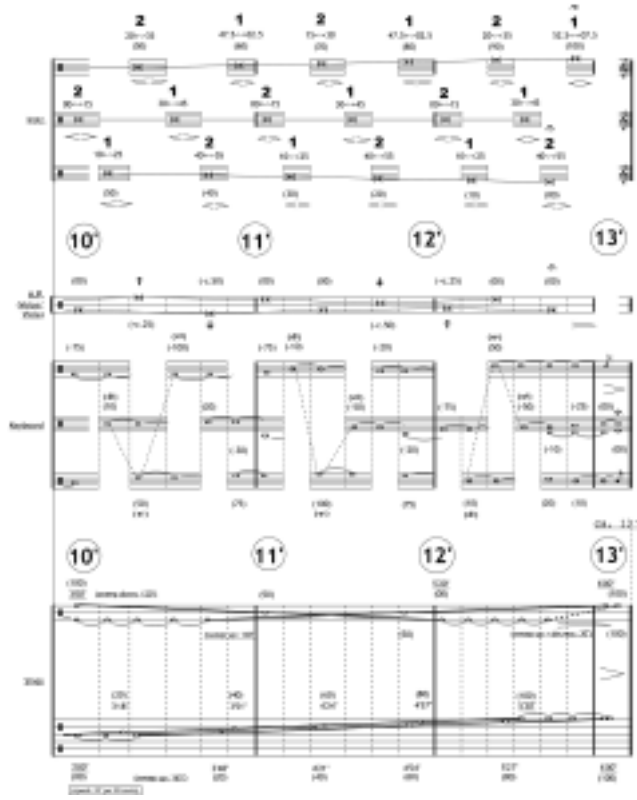
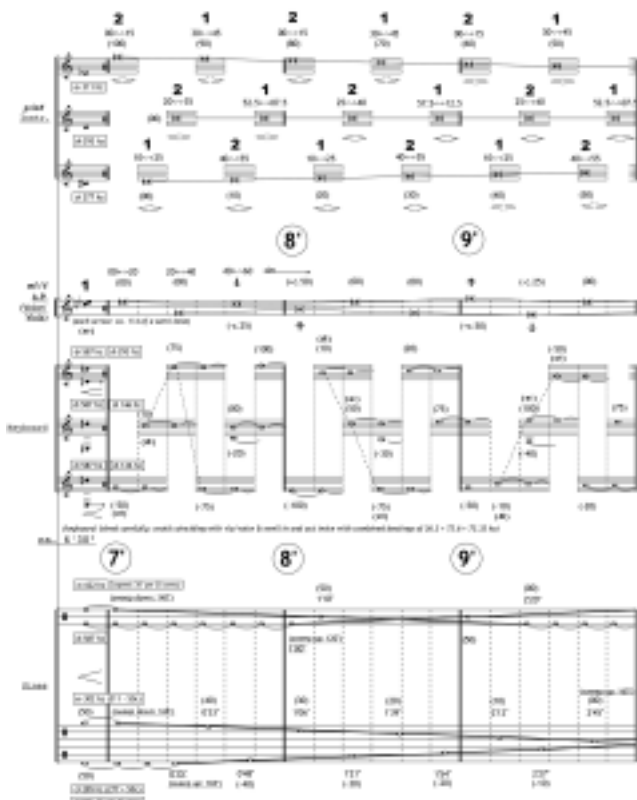
I should say straight away that I believe ‘construction’ and sound are identical (in my case, sound is literally an outcome of formal construction). Together with ‘notation’ and ‘research’ this more or less amounts to my Holy Trinity...

All my life I have been a constructivist but sound has only started to play an essential part in the last six years, largely alongside my development from a purely instrumental composer to a mostly electro-acoustic composer. From that moment onwards, my development became entirely evolutionary. Until then, I was more of a Fox.

But the real issue here is ‘listening’. I use the word in a literal sense; using your ears and not some kind of inbuilt gramophone record (which has more to do with *referencing*, i.e. to derive meaning based on a shared linguistic model; ‘if ‘A’ is this and ‘B’ refers to ‘A’ the meaning will likely be ‘C’... and then guess whether the intention is ironic, sardonic or cynical, and so on. Strangely enough, the word ‘sincere’ does not feature in this list. In the Netherlands, a counterpart to this form of listening has emerged in the concept of *Het Grote Luisteren* (The Big Listening). When hearing that term I always find myself thinking, ‘what do you mean, listen ‘big’, if the ears are already completely filled?’ But that aside).

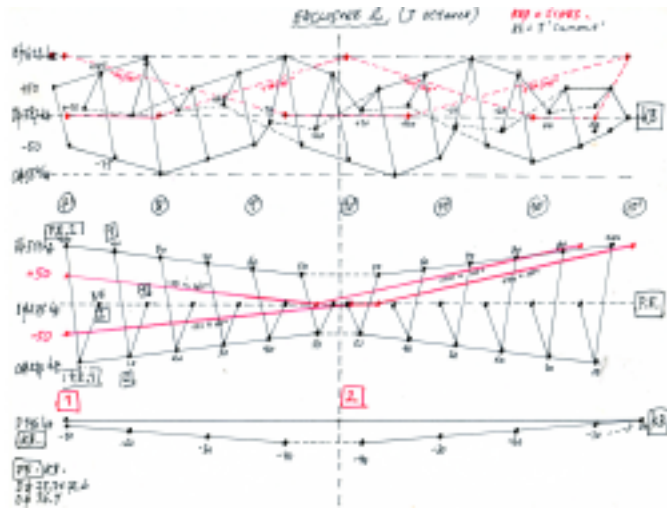
I think that everything can eventually be explained from a quest that has occupied me for as long as I can remember. Namely, an exploration into the functioning and meaning of music. In this pursuit my own

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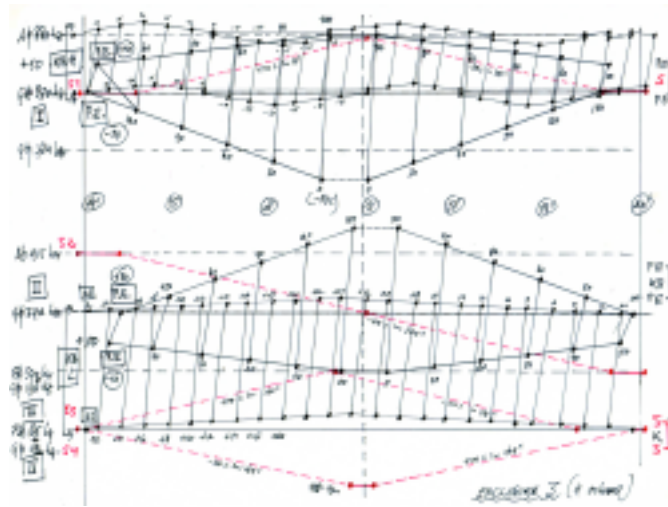


1. The following provisions of all codes or standards for a building shall apply unless otherwise specified in these code amendments to these codes.





Enclosure 2 and Enclosure 3 form diagram



ignorance is my most important guiding principle. I want to understand what it is all about. In a *fundamental* way. What is music? How does it work? What are the *universal* characteristics of music? And when I say 'fundamental', I mean 'that from which all superfluity and inherited culture has been stripped' (but more about this in the next section).

Not much remains at that 'fundamental level', I can assure you. But that which you are left with, is indescribably crucial. On top of this, a strange logic comes into play. As the scope appears to narrow, the potential increases exponentially. Suddenly, new and substantial riches open up. No sobriety or meagreness. At the basis, you find an infinite universe that is infinitely abundant.

Of course, one of those fundamental elements is *Sound*. The fact that music exists by the grace of vibration.<sup>1</sup> I am strongly convinced that at a certain level such vibrations affect people more deeply than all inherited 'language'. Not least because they automatically and without any constraints evoke a natural kind of beauty. It is one of the first things that speaks to us. Once I finally found a way to turn 'sound' into a truly composable element (through the use of micro-tonality) there was no stopping the floodgates from opening. From that moment on sound was no longer 'orchestration', 'tone colour' or 'timbre' but the simple outcome of a very large number of infinitely small intervals.

Although in reality, these processes are not really that 'simple'.

Therefore it is at this level that the compositional argument really takes place. A level where only 'free' ears really work...

<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, the world of classical music is still full of misconceptions regarding the definition of Sound, and what it actually means 'to compose with sound'. Misconceptions, which often lead to people being accredited as 'sound specialists' when they are in fact occupying themselves with forms of refined instrumentation. There is however a huge difference between 'composing with sound' – and the tradition it arises from – and the act of devising sophisticated instrumental combinations. Just as there is a fundamental difference between 'instrumentation' and 'orchestration' in purely instrumental music.

On a scale of increasing abstraction, the correct order in my opinion is as follows. *Instrumentation* (the distribution of notes over instruments, be it idiomatic or non-idiomatic) → *orchestration* (the translation of *timbre* on to instruments; essentially non-idiomatic) → *composing with sound* (composing with the *intrinsic characteristics* of sound, be they acoustics, micro-acoustics, or psycho-acoustics etc; almost by definition non-idiomatic, while not by definition instrumental; equally tied up with other parameters, such as *duration*). For me, this is also the correct hierarchy.

Obviously, I am not under the illusion that the above will solve everything once and for all, but there is no harm in trying...

## Music as objective truth – 3

Re: *Nature* ('What is the connection between sound and nature? Do you think nature is an absolute phenomenon? Or are you trying to be in accord with nature, in 'her manner of operation'?')

Considering that I am someone who rarely if ever ventures into nature but prefers to work undisturbed in his study all day – albeit with a spacious garden on the other side of the ocean, something that is far harder to obtain in the Netherlands – it may come as a surprise that nature plays such a pivotal part in my work. Of course, that quote about being in accord with nature, 'in her manner of operation' is from John Cage who very frequently proved himself capable not just of coming up with outright original music but also of making very meaningful statements.

If he says something, people should take heed.

In itself, the word 'nature' does not say much... unless it is juxtaposed with 'culture'. Only in that context does 'nature' acquire significance. One phenomenon is produced by humans, whereas the other is a product of, well, who exactly?

In essence, I think it all boils down to conviction. As the term itself implies, 'culture' has a lot to do with cultivation. Although culture often appears to evolve organically, much also depends on agreements and understanding, plus – if you like – a whole list of bad habits. It is therefore not surprising that 'Culture' is closely associated with 'tradition'. A lot of the political turmoil taking place in the Netherlands these days basically revolves around the preservation of

## Wave 6



Wave 6

tradition, or 'culture'. Nothing wrong with that if the latter is really under threat. But what if this culture – or tradition – has been as good as dead for years?

Keep it alive artificially? Or changes?

These types of questions never occur when talking about 'nature'. Nature is what it is – there is no other option. Once you believe that sound and the act of 'listening' are central to 'music' – and that music does not just revolve around some sort of comparative consumer report based on a whole range of cultural agreements which over the decades, or even centuries have acquired the status of an unchallenged canon – 'nature' starts to make far more sense as a source of inspiration.

Culture is finite, yet nature is infinite – unless mankind in its rapaciousness decides to destroy even more than it already has. And in nature, you can find some of the profoundest mysteries imaginable.

Also for Music.

Merely in my own field, the research of vibrations large and small, of the characteristics of sound waves or how different materials reflect upon each other the parallels are *literal*. Not just in a manner of speaking or as some kind of absolute symbol. 'Vibrations' are after all not a cultural event but a natural phenomenon. Sound itself – and I am not talking about orchestration, tone colour, or timbre – is also a natural phenomenon. Every truly organic form that exists, is: a natural phenomenon. I could go on and on and on.

In the end though, the real point is that nature is devoid of 'culture', that its character is universal and therefore fully trustworthy. Nature will run its own course; it is the fountainhead, infinite in all respects. The mysteries of its 'operation' – its *literal* operation – are so intriguing and astonishing that for the time being nothing remains but to continue studying it.

## Music as objective truth – 4

Re: *Disappearance* ('Why not just depart for the North Pole armed with a microphone? Is a human being (artist) a 'medium' and should he subject his own imperfect ego as much as possible to that truth?')

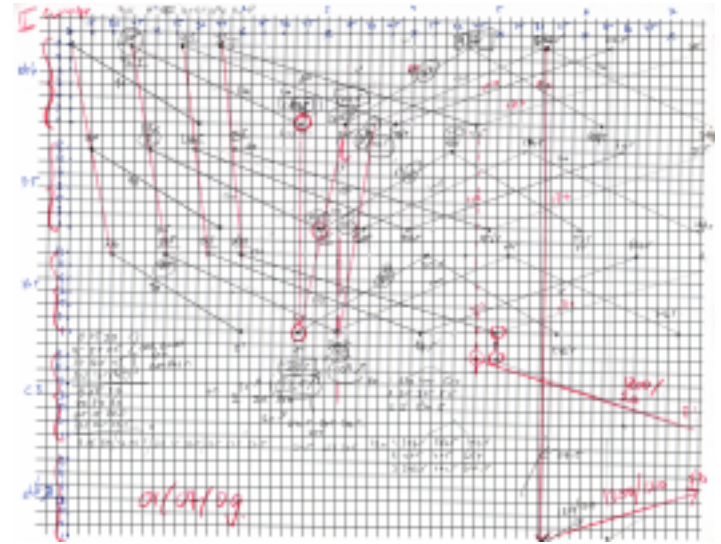
Well, I am not *that* conceptual, Anthony. To cite the philosopher John Rawls' summary of the 'Aristotelian principle' as quoted in Chapter 18 of Charles Murray's *Human Accomplishment*, a book we both admire greatly:

*Other things being equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities), and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity.*

I absolutely agree with this, however little sympathy I may have for Aristotle in general.

I am certainly possessed of a similar urge to master complex matters (ideologically as well as technically). In this respect 'the challenge' itself also plays an important part. To randomly head for the North Pole and plant a microphone would not satisfy my internal necessity for the making of a product. Even though – and I want to emphasize this – from an ethical perspective I rate the utterly egoless positioning of that microphone more highly than my own propensity to want to define everything in writing and on paper. I still see that as a child-like predilection but *noblesse oblige*. My own specific talent linked to what is left of my professional sense of responsibility towards performing musicians requires that I capture these things on paper. Only then will I maybe start to believe that I am beginning to understand some things.

As an artist, you in fact face just one fundamental choice. Either the music is about yourself, or it is a reflection of something else – from which you subsequently eliminate yourself. I think it is possible to achieve this both by way of that aforementioned microphone as well as in a codified manner. Only to arrive eventually at a single brush stroke – prepared many thousands of hours in advance: the brush stroke that contains everything else.



*Verdichtungen formal sketch*

Finally, that's all that really matters to me: music as is part of something bigger. Individual preferences, emotions, or the need to express should play no part in this. You get all of that for free anyway. No need to even think about it.

## Music as objective truth – 5

Re: *Responsibility* ("What is the artist's role nowadays?")

Now that we may have concluded that simply planting a microphone on the North Pole will not satisfy me sufficiently – and perhaps the above may also have shown that most of what I do is of the pretty thorough variety – I hope the perception of my 'role' as an artist will not be that negative either.

But what *the* role of the artist is, is far less easy to say.

Not that I don't have certain ideas about it. Yet in the end, 'the role' is probably just as varied as there are different types of artists. And this probably applies equally to their sense of responsibility.

One need only cast a glance in my scores to see that all is A-Ok with regard to my own sense of responsibility, but defining 'the role' is a good deal trickier.

Without drowning in grandiose theories on this subject – and *trust me*, these can be found in abundance, even though nowadays an Artist in the Netherlands may not imagine himself to be much more than an exponent of a left-wing hobby – I could also simply refer to a letter I wrote to the editor of the Dutch national newspaper *de Volkskrant* that was published in the spring of 2010.

'Challenged' to this by a pretty cogent article by a certain Mr. Fernhout under the heading *Why should art be subsidised?* I pursued to shine my well-meaning and clear light on this issue. Mr. Fernhout stated it was high time that artists took the trouble to explain the 'value' of their activities. Which was indeed an apt appeal; witness the quality of most 'art justifications'. They always seem concerned with matters of secondary importance.

A complex musical score titled "Wave 3" is displayed. It features multiple staves, including a vocal line at the top and several instrumental lines below. The score is heavily annotated with various markings, including dynamic markings like "mf" and "f", and performance instructions such as "play the notes with the left hand" and "play the notes with the right hand". The notation includes notes, rests, and other musical symbols. The overall appearance is that of a detailed and intricate musical composition.

Wave 3

My response was one of the most integer and high-principled sort. I did not shrink from playing for the highest possible stakes.<sup>2</sup>

Once sent, the letter, was eventually published. Abundant compliments poured in from various colleagues. Subsequently, *de Volkskrant* put it on the Internet.

Well, then I had it coming...

Straight away, approximately 40 reactions came up. Including all told, one single expression of support, by 'a colleague' naturally ('lots of sympathy for the endeavour but it's *'pearls before swine'* – something along those lines) and a very interesting e-mail from an economist. As for the rest, I am ashamed for the Dutch People.

So I will spare you my vision of the 'role of the artist'.

<sup>2</sup> Dear editor,

Hereby a brief response to the article by Mr. Fernhout, Why should art be subsidised?[0] published in the Volkskrant on Friday, 17 April 2010. As requested: written by an artist.

**Re: Why should art be subsidised?**

Mr. Fernhout rightly states that the art world should be able to explain why art needs to be subsidised. Especially as this is often totally incomprehensible to a large number of people. Why support something that has little significance in the eyes of many? Equally, I subscribe to his statement that the art world is remiss in this respect and that politicians do not have any fundamental and substantive arguments at their fingertips. Hereby some remarks in reaction to his article:

In essence, art is an immaterial, useless product. Yet it is still in demand. Therefore many art products (and I am emphatically referring to so-called forms of high art, from poetry and composing to the visual arts) do not fall under normal market criteria, because it is mostly hard or impossible to quantify their tangible value. In a nutshell, this is the reason why it has been necessary to support certain forms of art since time immemorial. Often, such art forms do not serve a directly perceivable useful 'purpose' and are not geared to 'the product' or its marketability. Real art is about entirely different issues. Regardless of its perceived 'worthlessness', it meets other, existent needs.

That art is subsidised is not at the command of the artists themselves. It is the result of a real demand that is manifest in society. This demand is grounded in the human thirst for immaterial meaning as well as for a mirror of reality that often cannot be quenched by everyday life. This thirst is not exclusive to a specific stratum of the population. It is present in all sections of society, wherever people search for value. Attributing value and meaning is therefore the gist of the essence of art; the quest to achieve this is why people need to make it.

That there are people who do not feel the need to use art as a means to arrive at value or meaning (of course there are also other ways) is nothing new. Neither is the fact that some people, or even a complete sector (I specifically refer to the visual arts market) violate this need. Nevertheless, the need for art forms that do not aim for immediate satisfaction, recognition, or entertainment will continue to exist as long as humanity wishes to explore deeper layers. Excesses, symptoms of the age, or political games should not cause us to lose sight of this.

Art is the natural outcome of every self-respecting society and, like religion, it is a human need. For society as a whole, art is therefore no less than a barometer of its mental health and profundity. It is neither possible nor desirable to deny that elitist aspects are ineluctably connected to the appreciation of art. Obtaining value requires effort, it doesn't come naturally. And that is how it should be.

In the end the immaterial value of art is priceless. Society should cherish the minimal investments made by the Dutch government. Eventually, the economic pros will outweigh the costs by far (you must lose a fly to catch a trout) even though this may not be immediately obvious to everyone.

Peter Adriaansz, composer

## Music as objective truth – 6

Re: *Art and Culture Politics* ('Your pursuit of objective truth bears testimony to intense idealism. Imaginably, everyday life (society, politics, culture policy, policies pursued by grant-giving bodies) may well often be an albatross around your neck. To quote the Flemish poet Willem Elsschot ('The Marriage'): "Between dream and deed, laws get in the way and practical obstructions". (To what extent) is it possible for you as an artist to withdraw from quotidian reality?')

Hmm, I fear that I will have to broach this subject with a certain caution...

It is true that a yawning chasm exists between idealism and pragmatism, and that it is often very hard to bridge this gap. Yet I feel that an artist can ill afford to stop playing a part in wider society. Everything you do is not just aimed at meeting your own needs but also at responding to what you feel society – or culture in general – is actually in need of.

This is of course an extremely arrogant tendency that is hard to explain, but even harder to resist. You think you discern something. Consequently, you feel are obliged to play a part in promoting this. It is therefore not for nothing that I repeatedly say that what I do is subject to a mission. My initial impulse to compose barely seems geared anymore to satisfying some inner need. Rather, it *has to be done*, as far as I am concerned, in order to arrive at a cultural landscape I can truly identify with.

As a composer and in various other capacities (as a programmer and as someone who is active in cultural politics and several organisations) I have therefore always tried to give meaning to this purpose: to advance a specific culture.

Of course, in practice this can often clash with existing or prevailing views on culture; sometimes it is hard to imagine a more knife-edge issue than the relationship between artists and prevailing culture politics.

Especially when it comes down to matters of content. And all the more so once you start to realize how far-reaching the impact of cul-

'What has happened is – now you all have to turn your brains around – the greatest work of art there has ever been. That minds could achieve something in one act, which we in music cannot even dream of, that people rehearse like crazy for ten years, totally fanatically for one concert, and then die. This is the greatest possible work of art in the entire cosmos. Imagine what happened there. There are people who are so concentrated on one performance, and then 5000 people are chased into the Afterlife, in one moment. This I could not do. Compared to this, we are nothing as composers... Imagine this, that I could create a work of art now and you all were not only surprised, but you would fall down immediately, you would be dead and you would be reborn, because it is simply too insane. Some artists also try to cross the boundaries of what could ever be possible or imagined, to wake us up, to open another world for us.'

Karlheinz Stockhausen, Hamburg, September 2001

tural politics is on the essential content and freedom of the product itself (i.e. the actual music). In the end, it is less the practical than the ideological obstacles that can sometimes make life difficult.

But... that's is the way it *should* be in a healthy, thriving culture.

A 'Healthy culture', if I may say so, largely flourishes on the basis of two phenomena: diversity and rivalry (between ideas, I should add, not so much among 'styles' or in the context of empty vessels such as 'pluriformity' – and with minimal centralisation as far as I'm concerned, which is an exceptionally tricky issue in the Netherlands just now).

The moment that one of the above factors threatens to come under constraint is the time when we need to get seriously worried. To those in doubt of this proposition I recommend careful reading of the article *Why they hate the Jews* by Albert Einstein, written in 1938. Although the title is a bit of a shocker – and it may almost seem perverse to refer to this as an analogy – I have rarely read a more lucid description of the preconditions for a liveable culture. But truth tends to manifest itself in the extremes after all...

In this respect, we seem to have arrived at a crisis period in Holland as far as art is concerned. (Reading what Peter Schat wrote in the 1980° however one gets the impression that such crises are simply permanent but never mind). Fortunately, in times like this enlightened figures sometimes help to remind us of what is really important. Such as our very own Rob Riemen of the *Nexus Institute* in Tilburg for example. In his wonderful book *Nobility of Spirit. A forgotten ideal* he lucidly explains how dangerous culture relativism can be.

It is however impossible to escape these issues unless you totally pull back from the fray. I've noticed that the tendency is becoming stronger in me but I do not believe I have reached that point yet. Perhaps in musical terms, yes, but not in relation to society as a whole.

Finally, for anyone who really wishes to uphold truthfulness in Art, hereby *my top five of all-too-obvious tips for a healthy culture*:

- 1) Fewer managers, more responsibility for the artists themselves.
- 2) Far, far less centralisation.
- 3) More Art education in primary schools.
- 4) Far more attention to serious culture critique.
- 5) No politics or marketing in areas where depth and quality of music itself should prevail.

Of course, these are antiquated truths. However, if I have learned one thing it is that some things are worth repeating. Over and over again, if need be!



10/12

THIS INCREASES SCORE LAYOUT

9/100 +7 9/1 +3

A handwritten musical score for 'Three Vertical Swells'. The score is written on multiple staves, including vocal lines and piano accompaniment. It features extensive annotations in green and purple, including circled notes, arrows, and text boxes. The title 'THIS INCREASES SCORE LAYOUT' is written in purple at the top. There are also some numerical notations like '9/100 +7 9/1 +3' at the top. The score is densely packed with notes and markings, indicating a complex piece.

20/12

10

A handwritten musical score with a large section highlighted in pink and green. The score is written on multiple staves. The highlighted section contains several staves of music with notes and markings. There are also some text annotations in green and purple. The number '10' is written in a circle at the top right. The score appears to be a draft or a working manuscript.

Three Vertical Swells, draft score

VERSLAG VOORBEREIDING STANDAARDCONCERTEN, CONCERTEN, CONCERTEN, CONCERTEN,  
d.d. maandag 3 december 1985.

1. Opening

2. Data mei-concerten 1985:  
dinsdag 5 mei  
maandag 12 mei  
woensdag 21 mei  
dinsdag 27 mei

Concert op maandag 3 maart 1986 (12.30-13.30 uur):

Ideën:

- Joost van Balkom stuk voor vioolsolo (5')  
Goraïles-krispo electr. stuk "2 Angels Gouche" (16')  
of tweede electr.stuk (12')  
Korold Philippel stuk voor 14 strijkers en pf. 4-a (1'),  
eventueel voor mei-concert  
Piet-Jan van Rossum stuk voor 2 pf. en cello (11')  
Arthur Bauer pianostuk (5')  
Huba de Graaf computerstuk (2')

3. Ideën voor mei-concerten 1986

- Complot Jeff Hamburg-concert met "The Gift", "Fractis", "Elegie",  
"Connection", "Sweet", "Vasacaglia".  
John Sijnders Holografie B.A.Zimmermann voor 2 pf.,  
werken Elliott Carter  
Joost van Balkom stuk voor saxifoon en videotape (8')  
Peter Adriaansz stuk voor fluit en piano (11')  
Piet-Jan van Rossum electr. stuk (11')  
Barbara Woor stuk voor 2 gitaren (14')  
en/of stuk voor sax. (17')  
Bert Eckhardt pianostukken (3a) van Karel Geoyssarts  
Huba de Graaf stuk voor div. instrumenten en 2  
computers  
Jan Boerman drie stukken voor 2 pl.(40')  
Goraïles-krispo electr.stuk (12')  
H.Lacheyman stuk voor 2 gitaren (30')  
J.Pickard "Vortex" voor koper-ensemble  
Collin Mac Fee Concert voor piano en blaaas-dictet  
G.Pittici Flume (3')  
G.Pittici Stuk voor bas-klarinet en pf (8')

4. Kunst Harry Brant in sept. 1986 afgeleid.  
Eventueel zelf collectief stuk maken.

5. In mei-concerten ook plaats invullen voor 80e-annus werken, gespeeld door  
80-studenten. Uitwisseling met andere conservatoria overwegen.  
Uitvoering(en) is verkend door (H.J.v. de, Jacobsdors De Haag).  
Gillis van Bergedijk komt nog met ideën over mei-concerten.

6. Volgende vergadering: maandag 3 maart 1986, 13.30-14.45 uur (Studio III)

Rick Reijnders  
's-Gravenhage, maandag 16 december 1985.

## 'Not that damn it, but this!'

Anthony Fiumara in conversation with Peter Adriaansz and  
Piet-Jan van Rossum

### AF When did you first begin composing music?

PA I started when I was eight...

PJ I bet you were forced to do it...

PA No, not at all Piet-Jan...

PJ I always got that impression. I have never said it out loud, but...

PA No, it really was my own choice. I heard music all around me, it was the most natural thing to want to do. At times when it was taken away from me, it made me deeply unhappy. It was a somewhat Spartan upbringing, I will admit, discipline was a major issue. I had to study at regular times for example, take daily lessons and so on. This was the time that I was studying with my father. And he paid close attention to my progress. If I was caught reading comic books instead of practising, he'd know immediately! Of course, eventually this early preparation did me a world of good for my later professional life. Both of my parents realized full well what was required.

PJ What comic books did you read?

PA Oh, I don't remember.

PJ Now that's something I'd like to know!

PA Both my parents taught at the conservatory. My father was a lecturer in music history and theory, my mother in singing and music theory. Students would often visit; they would play through my compositions from time to time.

PJ My childhood was definitely the reverse of yours. The similarity is that we were both eager and passionate. But nobody pushed me in any direction. Except, my father wanted me to become a star organ player. He was a talented man who could have achieved much, but he was born in the Westland region in Holland, a market-gardening district, into a very strict Dutch Reformed family. Artists were believed to be scum - there was no chance of him going to Music College. Instead, he was pressured into carrying on his father's fruit and vegetable import business. He more or less taught himself organ and played at the Reformed Alliance...

AF Where they sing semibreves...

PJ Yes. Psalms notated in semibreves. That was the kind of music I heard when I was young. There was a big disparity in age between me and my brothers and sister. None of them was interested in music but I was. This made my father very happy. He thought, 'it is finally happening, he will be an organist, I am going to project onto him what I never managed to do.' Fairly quickly, I moved in an offbeat direction. He was not so happy about that.

AF You said that he even put his fingers in his ears when your music was performed.

PJ My first major tape piece in the Concert Hall of the Royal Conservatory. Quite a furious piece... He really didn't understand what I was doing. He was sitting like this [doubles up and covers his ears with his hands].

AF What did he say afterwards?

PJ Nothing. Very little was said at home. Things were always fine, 'we are healthy Dutch lads', my father used to say. Work hard, stay on target. He didn't have a lot of musical baggage and we hardly had any records with classical music. The good thing was, I could explore music on my own terms. They really let me do what I wanted. At the time, Radio 4 was still a useful classical station. Whenever I switched on the radio, I heard the weirdest experiments. One surprise after another. And I bought records, which helped me find out what I liked. It was a great journey of discovery.

PA I've read the same thing about Ton de Leeuw. He also used his radio to haul in music from the far corners of the world. These days you would use the Internet.

AF Piet-Jan, did you study as an organist at the conservatory because your father pushed you?

PJ No, although as a child I learned to play the organ and I was fairly good at it. But I disliked practising other people's work. I quickly started to improvise and write my own notes – which I would subsequently play. For my entrance exam for composition I handed in an organ piece. Peter too, probably.

PA I have no idea actually.

AF Do you still recall what kind of music you were writing at the time?

PA I really cannot remember.

PJ I do, *Paradiso terrestre* for flute and piano. One day, Peter's briefcase was stolen with a manuscript inside. Then he rewrote the

entire piece from memory! It was played by a Spanish musician with ugly teeth.

PA Christ! That's true... wholly unimaginable that I would still be able to do that nowadays...

AF Do you think the seeds of what you're doing now had already been sown?

PA If pushed, from 1993 I could perhaps find a number of pieces that have 'it'. However, 'it' has only really been present in the past six or seven years I'd say.

AF What pieces are you referring to?

PA I think *Chant Négatif* perhaps, an old work. And also the *Triple Concerto*. Subsequently, it increases exponentially. Aged 18 I was just a very impulsive young guy.

AF Who were your heroes at that time?

PJ Frank Zappa was Peter's hero.

PA [Surprised] Zappa? Well, yeah, I was very much into pop music at the time. My strict upbringing had made me somewhat rebellious. In a sense I still am. From age 14, rock music was one of the things I was fascinated by. My heroes ranged from Messiaen and Ives to the Scorpions.

AF Are they still your heroes?

PA Well no, not really. I still buy pop CDs occasionally, if I find something interesting, but I no longer listen to Motörhead if that's what you mean. I'm someone who can resolutely turn a corner and say goodbye. That applies to people as well as music I'm afraid. Likewise, I stopped playing organ from one day to the next. Without any regrets, I guess I am not particularly sentimental.

PJ Ah, you are quite sentimental. Peter and I did our entrance exams at the same time. We hung out together for years, so I know him quite well by now – and he knows me.

AF Piet-Jan, what type of music were you writing when you were admitted to the conservatory?

PJ A weird amalgam; everything mixed together. My heroes were Stravinsky, Ives, I discovered the Beatles who fascinated me. Once I started college, I discovered Stockhausen. This immediately became a bone of contention between Peter and myself. You didn't like Stockhausen at all whereas I ensconced myself in the electronic studio almost straight away. What a find, all those tape

recorders. I was there night and day. Together with Justin Billinger and Ronald Philippi I kept an eye on the notice board. Is the studio free? Then we would spend all day there, working until the school closed. I was completely absorbed by it. However, you headed in an entirely different direction. To you, I was this strange person engrossed in tape music. I probably thought of you as this old fashioned guy who was into instrumental music.

PA Well, we have certainly made up for lost ground by now! [laughs]. I guess I had enough on my plate. I was only allowed to do two majors, composition and organ; unfortunately I couldn't add electronics. After four years, I temporarily gave up studying composition, as you know. I was 18 when I started. Having gone through five different teachers in the course of three years, I eventually lost my footing. It was the most tragic decision of my young life. I didn't do anything for a year then moved to Rotterdam to study. During my years in The Hague I found it quite disruptive to skip from Jan van Vlijmen to Brian Ferneyhough to Diderik Wagenaar to Frederic Rzewski to Louis Andriessen. Not surprisingly, in the end I didn't have the faintest idea what I wanted. That I changed teachers so often, was entirely due to circumstances. Van Vlijmen left after a year, so did Ferneyhough – and switching from Ferneyhough to Andriessen is a pretty big step for a young mind!

AF Why Rotterdam?

PJ I should add that we made the move together. At that time, we were great friends. Both of us were going through a crisis. I had it up to here with The Hague. I was studying under Louis Andriessen and Jan Boerman. They started to grumble because I had so many doubts – and suddenly I was sick of it. What could be more normal than searching for answers when you're at college? I will never forget how I went to Frans de Ruiter (the principal) and said, 'I'm leaving'. He was furious; he tried to force me to stay. And so we finally ended up with Klaas de Vries in Rotterdam. Klaas was an extraordinary teacher. He was very encouraging and could really make me feel that I was on the right track, 'with perhaps a shift a bit further to the right or to the left'.

PA Yes, Klaas was very encouraging, an extremely good teacher, I agree. I can't say I really subscribe to the ideology from my

present point of view, but I have to say that together, Peter-Jan Wagemans and Klaas de Vries were very good. Those two years in Rotterdam were incredibly constructive. With hindsight, I think that to some extent I was encouraged to go in a certain direction. Yet it was also important to me at the time to connect a little with tradition.

AF Are there any pieces from that period that you still think worth while?

PA Well... Even now the final part of *Lines, Dots and Crosses* from 1993, for violin and piano – my 'official' first work – still agrees with me to some degree.

PJ The finale of *Lines, Dots and Crosses* is stunning. I still remember it. To me it's very strange that you renounce it so rigorously.

PA As I said earlier, I'm really not sentimental. I review all those pieces and then give them private marks. A, B or C...

PJ It has nothing to do with sentimentality. You are human...

PA [Shakes his head]

PJ You're not a human?

PA [Laughs] Well, I am frequently reproached for becoming more and more inhuman!

PJ Yes, but you are developing in a certain way...

PA [Shakes his head]

AF I think you like cultivating that image.

PA No, my work simply contains few 'humane' or retrospective aspects. You might find poetic elements, but it feels more as if I am creating some sort of truth, or a form of liberation. But you will never find intentional acts of human 'consolation'. Do you understand what I mean? Some music really focuses on the human condition: on an exchange of feelings. This is not so in my case, I think.

AF Yet isn't your music about being human? In your work, you always take position as a human being facing a natural phenomenon.

PA But as a person, I disappear completely. That is my feeling at least. Although I do think you can say about my music 'that's Adriaansz'.

PJ So what does define your music? Ultimately, the Adriaansz factor validates your work. Your musicality - tied up with you as a person, as a human – as well as your constructive abilities.

PA Yes, fortunately that is something I can rely on. The ability is almost mechanical. If I decide to do something specific I must

accomplish it. Oddly enough, at the end of the day, it will have become itself – and nothing else. I suppose you could call that ‘musicality’.

AF If I say that at heart you are a romantic, does that scare you?

PA It does a bit, actually! I understand what you mean if you are implying that romantics are idealists. Such definitions are complex however. Romanticism does have its good elements. It can lend autonomy to music; one person obtains the exclusive right to some sort of truth. I do believe in the autonomy of music, but the artist should stay out of the picture. I am definitely no stranger to idealism, to the idea that music can act as a portal for truth and beauty. Not sure though if that really counts as romanticism, a term that I finally associate more with a suffering subject.

AF I think Peter is looking for the sublime in his work, Kant’s Erhabene. In that sense, he is indeed a romantic.

While Piet-Jan is a romantic inside the world that he painstakingly creates around himself. As if he single-handedly wraps all his notes in a thin layer of grit.

PJ Perhaps, but I subsequently withdraw from my work as well. I dislike artists who are too prominently present in their own work.

AF Indeed? You live in a lonely cottage on an embankment; you write explanatory notes for your work that resemble poems, haikus contingent to the work.

PA It is a very personal approach.

AF But not romantic?

PJ Interestingly, Petra van der Schoot [visual artist, theatre maker] once said something about this that I have always remembered, ‘You cannot see clearly with a tear in your eye.’ At the same time, what you say is true. But I want to be able to keep my distance and I am wary of being pigeon-holed. I do not know if I am a romantic or a classicist.

AF You want to be a classicist.

PJ It takes years to even find out that one is engaged in this struggle. A strict adherence to form was not something that I carried inside me. I really needed to teach myself to practise this. Unlike Peter, I regard the music that I make as a human product. Initially with all the associated failures. Some works are OK, others failed. That’s all part of the human condition. If you examine my oeuvre,

you will not find huge zigzags. Rather, you see continuity.

PA Fascinating question by the way, why some people engage in substantial style changes whereas others do not ...

PJ I am genuinely a self-made man. Until I was 18, I could (and had to) decide for myself what I wanted to do. Since there never were any jamming-stations I set foot on the right path almost immediately. The only moment of confusion was my composition studies but afterwards I continued my own path with perseverance (but also with new attainments). As long as there is silence and I can concentrate, I know where to go.

PA Did you never for a moment question your own tradition?

PJ My own tradition?

PA Everything you are rooted in. Did that never enter your head?

PJ What is there to question? Things are as they are. I follow my own path. And I take with me what I find and can use along the way; it determines the route I take. The process unfolds in a particular direction, like a tree.

PA Amazing. I’ve always been searching for ‘something’, but I never found it within ‘my own’ so-called tradition. It took me a long time to find out why I was so dissatisfied with the culture that I was deemed to be a part of...

PJ If I may say so, for you the sting is that you have been given too much baggage to carry. For instance, to me Bach is a thing of beauty that I’ve personally discovered whereas for you his music has numerous connotations.

PA You may be right; it comes with connotations, as well as certain value judgments...

AF In other words, Piet-Jan has slowly been able to fill his rucksack while Peter started with an overflowing rucksack and was forced to throw out all the ballast.

PJ You were far more knowledgeable than I when you started at the conservatory.

PA Maybe, but there was a lot of deadwood. My mission was to break loose. Fortunately!

PJ Something similar is true of Louis Andriessen. He really spent a long time searching. He even stopped composing for a year. Only at the end of the 1970s did he find the road he was meant to take.

PA His was a political path, you see. Which is something I under-

stand. A trajectory not based so much on culture, but on ideas. You know, I grew up with value judgments - and to this day, there is nothing I detest more. Because we all know such pronouncements are superficial as hell. If it were in any way possible to abolish all value judgments and judge disparate values on an even keel, on their own intrinsic merits, without comparison, the world would be a better place. For instance, why not attach the same value to the expertise of a Japanese Zen painter, such as Sesshu, as to a Vermeer? Thousands of hours spent in preparation before abruptly applying the perfect brushstroke in one go... Observing Vermeer's works we think 'how incredibly clever' - the emphasis being very much on the 'how' - yet on seeing a Zen artist we wonder 'is this really clever'? As a composer, I put my mission before my self. But that mission can only be successful if both of those trajectories are able to exist side by side, with equal conceptual value.

AF **How is this expressed in your music?**

PA By fostering a specific direction. By contributing to a particular way of thinking.

AF **You could also decide to juxtapose different approaches to music in your own music.**

PA Yes, but I'm not a multiculti, neither do I believe in that kind of 'contrast'. The essence of this way of thinking has more to do with Nature than with making judgments on the basis of cultural baggage. Some composers for example believe that music obtains 'value' through recomposing Alban Berg.

AF **In your case, you could say the same of Alvin Lucier, La Monte Young or James Tenney.**

PA Yes, but that is far less tangible...

AF **Not to me.**

PA It's really not the same type of tradition. To me, one tradition is based on servitude, the other on liberation... and the sounding results are totally different.

AF **Talk about value judgments!**

PA Yes, such blasted irony: I'm full of them! Ha ha ha!

PJ I find it interesting that you feel more admiration for the Japanese calligrapher than for Vermeer. You are making things incredibly difficult for yourself. You'll be 92 before you understand even a quarter of that Japanese tradition. I've been in Japan

for some time and was really enchanted. The concentration was almost tangible - in the streets, the No-theatre, the Kabuki. But I also intuitively felt that I should stay far from it all, because it would never be possible for me to get to the very core of the matter. Maybe I could say the same to you. It's not your culture. Vermeer is your culture...

PA No, it isn't.

PJ Because you don't want it to be.

PA No, really, it isn't. I will explain. I was not entirely raised in the Netherlands. For the first eight years of my life, my formative years, I lived in various locations around the world. That has forever undermined my attachment to one particular location, I believe. I don't feel a natural affinity for Vermeer. The first music I consciously remember hearing was Indian music. I have more affinity with that. Next in line is the old music my father played on his harpsichord. I imagine that when a Dutch person looks at Vermeer from a Dutch perspective, something 'happens' inside.

AF **But the same applies to Americans and Japanese.**

PA Funny that...

PJ Conversely, they will be 92 before they understand even a quarter of Vermeer.

AF **Don't you think it is merely cultural tourism?**

PA Perhaps... Yet an idea can be very persuasive - and let's not forget that degrees of abstraction still determine great differences in depth. Artists often search for things they can identify with in some way, something that is important to them because they recognize something. And sometimes you have to look towards far away places. It could be nothing more than a concept. Seemingly mundane issues may play a part. For instance, why are the strings on Japanese and Korean zithers not as tightly strung as those on European instruments? Such questions can lead to answers that seemingly explain 'everything'. I have to think about those aspects because to me sound is pivotal.

AF **Do you hope to create music that does not require decoding on the basis of its references to a particular tradition?**

PA What I really want is for music to become autonomous, to be itself, without inherited language. In the western world, truly autonomous music has become exceedingly rare. That worries me.



PJ What a strange thing to say.

PA In these parts, applied art, pragmatism, has become far too important.

AF **But what is art? Everything refers to something else.**

PJ Maybe I'm not that interested in the question whether music is art. I want to constantly renew myself as best I can. To extract information from the deepest layers inside myself. Everything I know and am capable of is relevant to that process.

PA But do you not feel any responsibility?

PJ Isn't that what I'm saying? It is my job to look around and inside myself. In any case, the term 'art' has become polluted. I'm a bit ashamed to say I'm an artist. These days I just say, 'I write music'.

PA I would own up if I were you. If only to show you strive to create autonomous art. It sounds as if you are ashamed.

PJ No no no, I am merely ashamed of the word.

AF **Why is that such a big issue?**

PJ The background is political. There is also the fact that we live in a culture where artists are increasingly seen as profiteers. People who receive a bag full of money, then lie in a hammock to pick their noses and put the discharge on paper. And the result is ugly to boot, 'the bastards'. That is why I avoid the term artist for at least I don't have to explain myself. In any case, the term is losing its meaning. I just see all those people around me, and I want to use my music to get through to them.

PA You will not succeed... not with what you're doing!

PJ Maybe not, but that is what I want. To me, that is the essence of making music. I'm not a talker, I'm fairly close-lipped but music I can do. It is my first language. A way to express myself.

AF **How do you set about that? You want your listeners to like your music. Is that something you consider when composing?**

PJ No, not really. I just have faith that if someone is open to it, they will understand my music. At the first public concert in the new Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ in Amsterdam – when all and sundry were in the audience as entry was free and everyone came to see what their tax money was being spent on – I was in a cold sweat. I had written a half-hour piece for the Ives Ensemble, *Annette dans l'atelier*. High flageolets, very quiet with a couple of violinists at the back who are producing a rustling noise. So I thought,

Lord, a lay audience, they will be fidgeting on their chairs. But nothing of the sort. They were dead silent and afterwards it got a good hand. I'm not saying they understood what was going on but they seemed to feel that the piece had substance. I found that a remarkable experience.

AF **Can we return for a moment to those references Peter mentioned?**

PA Well, you can come up with a chord that very clearly refers to something else and 'comments' on this. Over the past 20 years, our culture has been defined by this attitude I think.

PJ Every chord you write points to something else. Even if you use sine tones. And the moment you put a flutist and a violoncellist together on stage 'in the traditional way', you're also making references. For instance, to Brahms.

PA Yet I still think that notes are more 'polluted' than sound.

PJ Polluted? I don't think either are polluted.

PA Perhaps this is the best attitude to have, but I clearly don't have it.

PJ I agree that the twelve tones of the octave are very limited...

PA That's definitely one of the things I find pretty faulty! To my mind, those twelve tones are purely arbitrary. They're not even tuned well and on top of that they sound pretty bland. I have always considered this a step in the wrong direction. Which is why I simply can't accept that system. If the basic principle is wrong in its very foundations, it should be discarded. That should have been thought out better. It resembles an unproven scientific formula that subsequently collapses. A process which starts on a compromised basis does not exactly inspire confidence, don't you think?

PJ I think you have to accept some things are the way they are. Otherwise, why not complain that your hearing stops at 12,000 kHz. I would like to hear frequencies between 14,000 and 23,000 kHz.

PA Yes, but such wishes are personal.

PJ When I make electronic music, I am constantly trying to give tones a different temperature. I listen to the result until I think 'this is OK'. All of my music is 'off-key'; it doesn't comply with tempered tuning. That is my 'freedom of hearing'.

PA I really don't feel I have that liberty. As a result composing is often a trial. Everything has to be just right. Thankfully, musicality takes over, if I understand you rightly. But as far as I'm concerned, everything falls to pieces if the systematics or foundations are

not correct. Regardless of whether I find the sound agreeable. I throw out a lot I find quite beautiful.

- AF Don't you ever feel that you have to distance yourself even more from your music? For example, put a microphone on the North Pole to record the wind?
- PA No, I'm way too much of a composer. I am still fascinated by design. I find it very satisfying if everything falls into place, inside as well as out. But I do think this ambition is childish! Ha ha ha.
- PJ Yet regardless of all these barriers you have been writing really good music from the start. Which would have been impossible if you did not strike a balance between rationality and sensuality. This connects to what I said before: Peter is quite emotional. I remember paying you a compliment, a few years ago, to which you replied, 'Piet-Jan, don't say such things, this will make me very emotional!'
- PA (Laughs) I can imagine. I may not be sentimental but I definitely am emotional! But don't you feel a certain embarrassment, deep down? I know for example that certain aspects of my thinking go further than other people's thinking. This then gives me the so-called 'right' to say something, but I often feel extremely embarrassed with this function.
- PJ Yes, I know that feeling very well. Especially because my compositions are very personal. That bothers me greatly whenever a premiere takes place, but not while I am working on a composition. Perhaps also because I live a fairly isolated existence. I am holed up in my little house in Fijnaart (Brabant) with my cats where everything has its own logic. I do what I do without second thoughts. Anthony once asked me why you could suddenly hear my speaking voice on tape at the end of *Attendre longtemps, je suis sans identité...* It just seemed the right thing to do when I was making the piece: 'Yes, it should be like this!' When it was performed for the first time, I felt strange; a combination of pride and fever. But I tend to work on a piece for so long – what I end up with is ... how shall I put it...
- PA You are creating something that you can distance yourself from at a later stage, I think.
- PJ When I'm in the middle of a working process, at a certain moment

*everything* turns into potential source material. Including my own voice. Any sound – from a violin to a passing subway train or gull – may be used and could fit together, when necessary. As if everything is one giant vibrating string.

- PA I am mortified when I receive positive reactions. If someone says, 'I thought it was great', I immediately change the subject!
- PJ I always say 'Thank you!' (Laughs). These days I can even handle disapproval.
- PA Ha ha, you definitely couldn't before. He could get so incredibly angry!
- PJ Criticism – particularly when you ventilated it, back when – did keep me on my toes. For a while, you were my evil genius.
- PA Ha ha ha!
- AF Like a conscience?
- PJ No, not exactly. There was a time that Peter represented something that I absolutely did not want to be. When you said something, I thought 'No, not *that* damn it, but *this*!' At the same time, it was a great motivation to set to work again. 'Sod off!' I would think. At the end of the 1990s, no one performed my pieces. When you listen to work from that period, you hear a certain doggedness to continue. Which helped me to hone my convictions until I knew exactly what I wanted, and to throw out the rest.
- AF What do the references in your music mean? The use of scratchy gramophone records and badly tuned pianos seems to refer to a world that is broken down or something that is worn out.
- PJ It is difficult to explain. It is about the human factor. I am fascinated by fallibility. We are all just people. We rise, we peak, then we start to decline... It's very complicated...
- PA But what is it that you want to offer people? What is the feeling you want to convey when you write about Paris at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [*à la Cour des Lilas*, 2008/9]? Listening to that piece, I am aware of that time period all the way through. I feel a kind of melancholy. What is your message when evoking that lost world?
- PJ I primarily want people to experience beauty. That longing feeling is probably me. When I read Sebald's books, I found someone who does with words what I try to do with sound. Sebald is a melancholy writer who posits truths to which my reaction is 'the facts are horrible, but they are written down so beautifully'.



Owing to his mastery of style, he does not go under as a hopelessly wistful person. What I'm trying to say is, if my work is good, it has nothing to do with wistfulness.

PA You do use fiction. Your music is always accompanied by, or based on words.

AF Narrative?

PA It frequently refers to stories from a different epoch. You write music that belongs to the present while calling to mind an ideal world, rooted in the past.

AF Nostalgia.

PJ Often, the texts are a world in themselves. *À la Cour des Lilas* is about Maurice Ravel, who is one of the icons of my youth and my first real hero. For this piece, I resolved to immerse myself totally in Ravel's music. I trawled through all of his scores from the first notes to the last, listening to every work. I went to Paris and walked through areas that were important to him. Then I started to write a story about an old man at the end of his life who gradually loses his physical powers. In the beginning of that story the old man walks from the Hôpital Saint-Louis down into the subway until he arrives at the station Porte des Lilas. He imagines he has made a huge journey to get there. He dreams up links between the memories he has lost based on fragments that he has retained and the names of metro stations. He starts from Goncourt and passes the ugly Belleville station, which used to be a smart suburb of Paris where he went with his parents for a picnic. Memories of his youth and his friend Ricardo Viñes rise to the surface. Then he arrives at the station Pyrénées. To me this is a symbol for the ascent that is part of human life, across mountain peaks that he never dared scale.

PA Yes, this is truly human. I always think your music is very human. An ode to mankind.

PJ Eventually he arrives at the Porte des Lilas. When I was there, I discovered that underneath the station is a vast Roman water supply system. It used to contain sources that were connected to the Paris water system. You can enter through a regard (manhole). Walking down an enormous stairway you enter the underground network. Wonderful. In the story, the old man descends into the catacombs. Of course, these are all metaphors. He ends up surrounded by this maze of corridors... The narrative is quite complex.

Concretely, he goes on this journey past decrepit metro stations, gets out at an ugly square, then walks towards the manhole and descends into dark passageways. There he stops, and dies. That is the reality, but his real story is a fantastically ornate tale of things he experiences. Having passed through the manhole he walks into a field of lilies and looks out over this sea of flowers. Those are his last lines... I'm not sure that I should mention Ravel here for I never indicated anywhere that this piece was about him. It doesn't even sound a lot like him...

PA But it is entirely impregnated by the period.

PJ Yes, that is true. It is actually my favourite period.

AF Why?

PJ Everything that I care about happened then. Satie, Cocteau, Stravinsky, Ravel, Giacometti.

AF So that period is a source of inspiration. You've not just made a piece about Ravel but also about Giacometti [*Annette dans l'atelier*]. Would you have liked to have lived back then, or is it enough to muse about that time?

PJ No, I wouldn't have wanted to actually be there. Although I wouldn't mind meeting Ravel or Satie. They were both cat lovers, so that's okay. What is interesting though is that many of these artists were both sinners and saints. Giacometti was married to Annette all his life but spend his money on his favourite model Caroline, a prostitute. Stravinsky also had many mistresses.

AF Is there a sinner in you as well?

PJ We both used to be terrible little sinners. When I was a teenager, I experimented with petrol and paraffin oil.

PA Really? I once got arrested for arson!

PJ You too? So was I. Ha ha. That's really funny!

PA As well as shoplifting and stealing...

PJ Me too. When I met you, you were living in digs. I went to your parties; I'd just met Carmen, whom I later married. Carmen and I would sleep in Peter's bed. If he wanted to go to bed and found us there, I would hear him mutter, 'guess I'll just have to go lie down somewhere else'.

AF So you slept in the bed of your evil genius.

PJ That came later. However, he was already a friend. We go through long periods when we do not meet up, but I really like him a lot.

And I greatly respect him as a composer. Always have done. He is an evil genius only in the sense that his opinions are sometimes directly opposed to mine. It tended to piss me off, but that is no longer the case. When I attended the first of Peter's parties, I was shocked. He only had hard rock music and records by the Stranglers. To my mind hard rock was horrible and the Stranglers were dreadful. But thankfully, you also owned a record by Kate Bush. Back then I was so cocky that I would remove the Stranglers from the turntable and put on the Kate Bush record. And at the end of the evening he would be pissing out of the window. But I bet I am not supposed to tell that either! I thought it abhorrent. Actually, I was quite a well-mannered lad.

PA Yes, those were interesting times. Ha ha ha.

AF Well, to return to the references in your music, you don't mind if it reminds people of Paris in the 1920's?

PJ Provided it is not felt to be a vague expression of the music of that time. Like Richard Rijnvos nowadays writes music that very clearly reflects another place or time but is still 'totally Richard'. I am quite proud if I manage to evoke that atmosphere. It gives me enormous pleasure to insert minuscule references to Ravel in my music when nobody knows it is about him. One of Ravel's bass parts, or a motif accompanying an obscure song. Funnily enough, nobody has picked up on this yet.

AF Your new work *and somewhere inbetween* will premiere at November Music. Has it been written in the same vein?

PJ Strikingly, a brochure says: 'Piet-Jan van Rossum has created a work that resembles an eastern pen and ink drawing. Long drawn-out lines, a lot of room. He regards it as a very individual piece and he has broken new musical ground.' That is true. I was in a car crash in December 2009. Afterwards, some things disappeared from my memory. I was confined to bed for months. In any case, I was experiencing some kind of midlife crisis (like many of us): Who am I, why am I doing this, do I want to continue doing this, what have I achieved, if anything? Awkward, when you have to stay in bed all the time. Subsequently, there have been some changes. From the above piece, I eliminated a number of characteristics of western music that Peter dislikes as well. Leading people on, using a beat to grab listeners by the short hairs and

drag them through the room, and other coercive methods that were common under Romanticism and up to the present day. *and somewhere inbetween* turned out to be a quiet, gentle, and intimate work. Everything happens consecutively, just one thing at the time. The only thing that matters is aural beauty.

AF So you have started to grow towards each other?

PA Well, as far as the beauty of sound is concerned...

PJ Of course, we are both striving for beauty... I have to admit I am a bit flustered about this new work. It is so different. Perhaps I am still on the same road as before, but each time I go further. And this time I really crossed a border. Once I have done something, I'm through with it. In that sense, I am impatient.

PA So how do you attain depth if you do everything only once? Shouldn't ideas continue to develop, if it is a step in an evolution?

PJ That is a superficial question. As if I produced a plastic cup [he takes a plastic coffee cup from the table] and subsequently I say I am totally fed up with cups and in general with objects sitting on a table...

PA And now, I am going to build a zeppelin! Ha ha ha!

PJ So maybe I will make another cup, but it will be very different. Three steps down the road it won't even be a cup any longer.

AF Is *and somewhere inbetween* also a reference to that period in Paris?

PJ No no no.

AF It is your most abstract title.

PJ Do you think so?

AF Yes, most of your titles are more descriptive: *Achtjes rennend rood hondje* (Little red dog runs figure eights) or *Annette dans l'atelier* (Annette in the studio) ...

PJ *Annette dans l'atelier* is part of the Giacometti cycle. It is the title of a painting by Giacometti while another work in the cycle, *Annette* (1954) is a pen drawing; I still have to create *Annette IV* (a bust). I do think that Little red dog runs figure eights is quite an abstract title. The dog is a vivid red colour and it is circling a man who has been planted in a garden at an angle of 45 degrees.

AF But it refers to a world outside music. Whereas *and somewhere inbetween*...

PJ ...refers to a situation. I was really 'in between' when I made it. First, I was ill and needed an operation. That took about four

months. When I had only just recovered, I crashed off the road at a speed of 120 km per hour - and lost another four months. In the meantime, I had to write. It is something I cannot do without. After the accident I was severely concussed. Which means you can't do a thing. Awful. Your head just refuses to work. So when I was lying in bed I would spend two hours thinking about my material and sorting things out in my head, then I would steal to my computer and move two sounds to a different location (in Protools). Subsequently, I felt sick and had to crawl into bed again. This piece really was written one millimetre at a time.

It was a huge shock that I had almost died. The police officers that found me after the crash said it was a miracle that I had survived and emerged relatively intact from the wreckage. It makes you wonder. Why am I still here? Why me?

AF *Has and somewhere inbetween* become your *Heiliger Dankgesang* [Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the Divinity, part of Beethoven's 15<sup>th</sup> string quartet, opus 132, in which he thanks the gods that he is healed]?

PJ I wanted to write music about the fact that I was no longer sure why I should write music, like Fellini with his film *81/2*. The world had turned grey; I was not in the mood for doing anything and had ended up in a vacuum. That was the first theme. Then I wrote a story about a woman waking up in her own house, where she starts to do very ordinary things. She makes a cup of coffee, squeezes an orange, and watches television - she really doesn't experience anything. That was the text I started with originally. Then all those things happened to me and I added another layer to the text. The mediocrity that I sensed entered the house through the backdoor but left via the skylight.

AF *Mediocrity?*

PJ Life as a continual repetition of moves. Yet at the same time I was overjoyed that I had lived to see it. That duality was quite strange. I remember staring out of the window following the accident, and thinking, 'I am still able to observe all of this'. I was happy as a sand boy to watch mundane things. Such as a car in the distance on the motorway, a little sparrow, the budlelea. At the end of the story, there is a brief moment... The woman is sitting at home, and decides to change direction... She opens the door. It

emerges that behind her house is a red path, leading through the polders. She follows it to the end. Then she hears the ringing of a bell. The sound opens a little door inside her head and she remembers the ideals she once held - before losing them. The sky opens momentarily and she is overwhelmed with joy that she is still alive. This is how the piece ends. It consists of three parts. In the first section she comes home and has a strange dream in which she murders Orpheus. In the second part, she wakes up and finds herself surrounded by total mediocrity. And in the final part she steps outside and the heavens open briefly. Summed up: she comes home, lies down, sits, stands, and back again. The music is very sober, just one thing at the time... Harmony and melody are only accentuated slightly. Quiet. I am very pleased with the result.

AF *Is it about you and your ideals?*

PJ A difficult question. My work is personal but at the same time, it is not. If a piece focuses excessively on the ego, instead of communicating, it merely informs, saying: The master isn't feeling that well today but tomorrow things will improve. Nothing is as boring as a work built around a dull life and a super size ego. The audience can take note but that is all. I want to present something on which other people can project their own lives and circumstance. When I played *and somewhere inbetween* to an Argentinian colleague it was an emotional experience for her because it made her think of what she had left behind in her native country. This means I have succeeded. To me, the work has an entirely different meaning but she could sense the core. So it has to start with me, for I can only create a narrative that deals with what I have experienced and learned. But ultimately, it is up to the listener to tune in to this and write their own stories.

PA Do you always see a way forward?

PJ Yes, I make sure that I can continue. I have plenty of ideas. The piano is covered with drafts. Some are 15 years old.

AF *Interesting, that you allow this old material to grow - like branches on a tree - whereas Peter stops radically as soon as his material starts to obtain reference.*

PA Not in the last six years I haven't! That's been one big evolution...

AF *Probably your longest to date.*

- PA Yes, although certain entirely new problems are revealing themselves gradually. After all, I do have to keep on evolving in my area, so I come up with one technique after another. So far, it keeps on coming and every time is still different in more or less subtle ways, but you have to keep an eye out as to how far you can go. As well as on the areas you haven't explored yet.
- PJ That is something I recognize too. When I am deep into composing, sound is all that matters. It is an abstract activity. There is no narrative.
- AF **And yet you write stories about old people to accompany your pieces. Why? For you, such stories do act as triggers.**
- PJ These are different layers. Don't forget that *à la Cour des Lilas* refers to a particular time and a specific way of telling stories.
- PA I do think that your approach allows you more freedom. I believe it is a more enjoyable way of working.
- PJ In what way?
- PA Well, to involve the whole world like that. I could do the same to some extent, but I think I am much more locked inside a cage than you are.
- PJ You have to explain that. Why are you doing something that in the end puts restrictions on your happiness? For I do not think you are referring to Goethe's saying, 'in der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister' (a true master chooses to do more with less).
- PA ... No, I'm not, indeed. I am referring more to my tendency to 'go on a mission', which is quite strong. I do not have a lot of faith in people's intrinsic abilities unless they are dedicated to a particular purpose. The intensive production process that I apply to my work – which I do find quite enjoyable – is in some ways a prison of course. Not just because I constantly feel the need to produce, but also because of the task that I have set myself. So many things are 'forbidden', yet I do not have any intention to slacken the reins. Even though things can sometimes get very heavy, especially in view of the numerous additional responsibilities that come along with it, I would not wish to take a freer attitude. Regardless of how comfortable that might be or whether it could lead to short-term contentment. In the end, that cage does force me to go deeper – perhaps I have just cut myself loose more rigorously.
- PJ But why call this a cage? Why don't you say: I created my own

gardens of Versailles and I am the only one who knows the plan? Isn't this all about the meaning of the words cage and freedom? To me, freedom is something I experience within borders. Of course composing is especially about what NOT to do. Isn't that the choice between, 'I dwell in possibilities' and 'I am drowning in possibilities'?

Do you really need all those systems to satisfy yourself? It was like that from the start. I remember you writing pieces based on far-reaching systematics that I didn't understand at all. You tried to explain it to me three times but I really didn't get it. However, at a certain moment those systems were fine by me: it's a nice work anyway, I thought...

PA I just want perfection... he says blithely! Ha ha ha!

PJ That is your intelligence, the rational part of your personality, the part that you need to keep happy. You build a cage around yourself so that you can feel entitled to make music.

PA True. I can only create if I understand how it works. I think that writing a narrative serves the same purpose for you as research does for me. Except that my examples are not part of the real world but are based on abstractions. Or derived from concrete sounds. Take for instance the model of the Leslie Loudspeaker in *Three Vertical Swells*. First I analyze it and then I try to translate it as perfectly as possible over all the relevant parameters of the piece.

AF **Peter, even though you aim for objective truth your latest works, such as *Parallels* for the Ives Ensemble, are genuinely sad.**

PA Depressing, I know...

AF **No, not depressing. Sad. Do you mind if that is how it strikes people?**

PA No, of course not. I frequently get those kind of comments. People either feel my work is ecstatic or they tell me, 'I don't want to know what is going on in your head'. Some thought *Three Vertical Swells*, which I wrote for the Royal Conservatory, was quite scary.

PJ I think they are very beautiful pieces. I have no connotations whatsoever with fear.

PA But you have progressed way too far by now, of course. Other people are simply terrified by music that takes place in extremely low registers, or associate sadness with descending lines (which is what happens in *Parallels*). A very understandable feeling though.

- AF The piece that took you closest to the inhabited world was *Prana* – wasn't it?
- PA Yes, that's certainly one – esoteric that it is though – but this applies possibly even more to *Verdichtingen* for orchestra and sine waves, which I wrote in collaboration with poet Astrid Lampe. That is my most recent 'humane' piece. That's one I was also quite proud of: being able to capture an abstract phenomenon in words and communicate it on the same level as the music.
- AF How did you experience working with text in *Verdichtingen*?
- PA It was great, I must say. Mainly because I was able to realize what I had imagined. Total freedom, and being able to treat words exactly in the same way as the musicians create their sounds. An equal relationship in every sense of the word. First we had to decide on a format but from then on, it was purely about content. Once the penny had dropped, it was a terrific collaboration. I had to entirely revise my doubts about collaborating with others. I tend to know pretty exactly what I'm aiming for and that I had no intention of illustrating somebody else's texts. So we had to find the perfect fit – how to say the same things in different ways and build it up from scratch. And it worked. After that, I thought, 'well, who knows, maybe one day I could even write a kind of opera!'. Whereas I've always said that you can shoot me if I ever do that! (Laughs).
- AF What are you like when you work with musicians?
- PA Essentially, I would say I try to stimulate. My contribution to the execution of the music has increased so much in recent years that by now I am the de facto conductor. I have to do everything, so the effect should be to encourage people. I explain to them what I want and help them on their way.
- AF And you? I get the idea that you are a perfectionist. That you know very clearly what you want.
- PJ The problem is that traditional music notation never coincides fully with what I have in mind. I devise new sounds that require an explanation. I know exactly what I want but it is difficult to capture that on paper. During rehearsals, I need a lot of time to get musicians to understand what my intention is. Yes, sometimes this causes friction.
- AF And what if you're not there to explain?

- PJ That is awkward. To me, a score is an unwieldy vehicle. I much prefer a proper recording of all my pieces to a correct score. It would be far more informative; musicians could hear how the work is supposed to sound. Subsequently, the score could help them find out how to play the music.
- AF Funnily enough, you're stricter than Peter in this respect. Far stricter. You want just one single performance but music is a living, breathing entity. Look at Beethoven. All his symphonies have been played in a thousand different ways but it's still Beethoven.
- PJ Of course I think it's great if musicians work on my pieces and create their own music on the basis of what I have made. That really makes me very happy. If you ask me to choose between a score and a recording, I'll choose the recording. But if you ask me to choose between a recording and a live performance by good players, I'll choose the latter. I always try to be as precise as possible in my notation so that people know what should happen where, when, and what it should sound like. Once that is clear, players can throw their soul into the music. There will be plenty of room for them. Doesn't the same apply to you?
- PA Well, of course I hope the musicians will put some of their soul into it, but my scores are so different that circumstances are also quite different. In the long run I really am aiming at a different performance practice of course.
- AF What would that be like?
- PA Listen, listen, and listen again. No hierarchy. One beautiful, ideologically equal world.
- AF Where you are the boss.
- PA No, that's not what it's about, Anthony... I try to motivate. That's why I enjoy working with musicians. During rehearsals, I am always on stage and walk up to people as the piece progresses. I then proceed to mould the piece as they play and this is how it grows. It doesn't take that very long to achieve. My only real fear is whether or not this is possible without me. In your case, you can still notate 99% of your intentions but my works come with a pretty extensive manual and an often indecipherable score. If I were to say, 'Well, see you at the final rehearsal!' I can be 100% sure that things will go wrong. Unless the ensembles are already

familiar with my work. Which is somewhat worrying for the future I have to admit.

- PJ I have another fear. At first glance, my pieces appear very simple. Often, conductors look at the scores and think they will be ready to perform after just two rehearsals. When the concert takes place, everybody panics because the score is so empty. Everyone is exposed and isolated; the musicians no longer know when they have to start playing. Chaos! I have often experienced this.
- PA Yes, I can imagine that perfectly, that's the problem of scarcity. It almost forces you to over-notate. Cultural habits exercise so much more influence than we often suspect, don't you think? Which is why we really have to adopt a critical attitude towards such conventions.
- PJ One thing that really needs to change in the Netherlands is the tradition of underrehearsal. Sometimes works are only played once, and even then, the actual performance is merely a kind of public dress-rehearsal. That is not just disastrous for us, but also for the musicians who never get the chance to rise above the 'raw material'. And in the end it is bad news for the audience as well, which doesn't pay to see a semi-finished article. I always argue for more rehearsals but I am rarely successful. I have the same feeling about sound equipment. I cannot understand why it is so hard to convince venues and ensembles that they need proper equipment and a skilled technician. I have to move heaven and earth to get ensembles to rent certain equipment and employ a technician that I can work with. Nowadays, I stipulate a number of conditions before I start writing, but there often isn't enough money. I wish I had my own equipment but that is prohibitively expensive. The Ives Ensemble is a positive exception. They always schedule plenty of rehearsals and really go all out. One of very few ensembles that are constantly helpful and prepared to do everything within their power to achieve the result that the composer has in mind. When I know that I am going to work with them, I can relax. Nice people, good musicians, dedicated: what more do you want.
- AF You recently started working with notation software Sibelius. Did this play a part in the fact that your compositions began to incorporate faster note sequences?

PJ To some extent. More importantly, between 2002 and 2007 I made one major tape/ensemble piece after another. I was determined that 2008 would be the year when I would leave off the computer and write purely acoustic works. Subsequently, I wrote for a vocal renaissance quartet, for the Asko|Schönberg, and for the Ives Ensemble.

AF But then you got back in front of your computer because of Sibelius.

PJ Indeed. Did you really think that what I wrote for the Asko|Schönberg was fast?

AF Perhaps some passages outpaced what you wrote earlier?

PJ Possibly. Could be true, but is it a problem?

AF No, it was just something I noticed.

PJ I am pragmatic. If I have a playback function at my disposal, I tend to use it. Naturally. The moment I hear the result it has a certain effect on me, which steers my writing in a different direction. When I am making tape music, the process is equally associative. I have my materials, which I process in a variety of ways. Sometimes I extrapolate – as if growing a plant. Sibelius allows me to work in exactly the same way.

AF Has working with the computer influenced your music?

PA It did earlier. Now there's really no purpose in using the playback function, with all those generated sine tones. It makes no sense at all for the kind of music I am currently making. I have worked out a system for the things that I need. It fits on a single sheet of paper and I can infer all the data from that. I still calculate manually though, or with the aid of a calculator. However, it is impossible to get a computer to play those vibrations and frequencies. You'd just get 'dee-deu-deeuh-duh-déh-da' and so on. If the software were actually able to play it... In the preceding period, I did use the playback function a lot. I have to say though that using a computer has sped up the process enormously. My production has gone way up.

PJ But you always wrote rapid pieces. Chant Ascendant for example, for the Nieuw Ensemble, that was quite something.

PA An infernal din!

PJ Well I thought it was a good piece.



still from *alle terre assenti* film by Petra van der Schoot

## On pedal technique and Studebakers

Piet-Jan van Rossum

My parents were from the Westland, both were born into families of market gardeners.

Their parents were very strict Dutch Reformed people with a considerable piece of land, growing vegetables, fruit, and flowers.

My father was ambitious: he wanted to paint and play music, he read books.

Those books were torn up and his ambitions were torpedoed. Artists were considered amoral and lazy people. Above all, they weren't able to earn any money.

He became a broker in vegetables and fruit and started his own business. He left the Westland and moved to Delft.

In his spare time he played the organ, accompanying services at the Reformed Alliance. The psalms were all in semibreves.

He still managed to become an accomplished organist who put his heart and soul into improvisations over psalms (or sometimes hymns, but then he got a telling-off).

Because he had never taken lessons his pedal technique left much to be desired; his feet often lagged his hands to some extent (this started off my fascination with small imperfections).

He disliked Bach and only played the romantic repertory in the tradition of Jan Zwart.

At home he painted landscapes and townscapes.

He was an enterprising character: one of the first to own a car, a Rover, later a Studebaker, later still a Chevrolet; making holiday trips as early as the fifties, with a photo and film camera.

At home, there was a Hammond B3 and a tape recorder.

In the 1960s he even took pictures in 3D; I still have the View-Master projector in the attic.

One of those old films, a journey in 1954 to Venice, has been used by Petra van der Schoot for the visuals in *alle terre assenti* (2002). You see my mother as a young woman as she looks at Lake Garda and walks across the Piazza San Marco.

When I was born my parents were getting on in years, mother 45 and father 52.



Brothers and sisters had already left home and the house was quiet. Not much was said.

Neither father nor mother used a lot of words or entered into discussions. At home, there was a strange combination of reticence and freedom. God was always present in the background and He was rigorous and just, which mostly meant that I could expect a lot of trouble, but at the same time we were a fairly enlightened family with all those modern media and those beautiful cars outside.

I spent my youth in front of the old Garrard record player playing at 16, 33, 45, and 78 rpm. My father let me 'play' with a stack of 78 records and a stack of singles. So until I was 10, I did not hear much else. Theatre organs, old show bands, virtuoso whistlers, Johnny and Jones, Rosemary Clooney, Charlie Kunz. Eventually, I started to listen more to the side effects than to the music itself: scratches, noise, acoustics. The information on some 78 records had become so faint that the music could only be heard in the distance, through a sea of noise.

I didn't have a clue about classical music until I started to listen to the radio and used my pocket money to buy LPs. That is when I took a path that wasn't rated very positively at home.

PS: Have found documents in my archives from 1985, when Peter and I had just started at the conservatory - for example, a programme proposal to accompany our first pieces, drawn up by Dick Raaijmakers. Plus a lot of angry letters on frequent non-attendance of choir and counterpoint lessons; very funny. In one letter there is mention of an intolerable situation and disciplinary measures, ha ha ha. That's it for now, to be continued...

## On Tintin and Pisa

Dear Friend,

I'll continue.

In connection with this year's performance at November Music I was reading through the old notes for *alle terre assenti* from 2002.

They explain how I work and why I do what I do. At the time I thought this necessary. I'm attaching it, it's quite interesting. It ends as follows:

*For far too long, the means have been confused with the end. Writing is communication and not just virtuosity.*

*I take my audience seriously and want to bring the music as close to the listener as possible.*

*One way to do this is through the subtle interaction between conditioning and alienation; playing with the expectations created by conditioning.*

*Few listeners will be prepared to empathize with a world that does not refer to what they already know and which is not reassuring in any way.*

*This is why playing with deformation (as discussed above) is a dangerous game; you need to find out how far you can go as a writer and guess when your audience will tune out because they are no longer able or willing to keep pace. That is the moment when the tower of Pisa comes crashing down. I believe that a writer should regularly look over his shoulder to see if his audience is still following along.*

This need for communication is strong.

When I am composing, I retreat so that I can look deep inside myself while attempting to depict humanity and the world as honestly as possible.

When my work is performed I am tense as I wonder if the penny will drop for the audience. Extraordinarily, I have never had to make concessions when I was sitting at my writing desk.

I am my own audience and not easily satisfied.

So the game I refer to above is primarily a game I play with my first listener, myself.



I want to add something to the *alle terre assenti* notes. The essence of composing is not workmanship or a thorough theoretical basis but the talent to bring dead matter into being. Matter has a natural penchant for chaos, which applies to music as well.

To create order from chaos requires that you work like a beast; you need to get to know your material inside out, rise above it, so that eventually you can mould the material to your will.

I would like to go one step further: I see myself as an oven that needs to be heated up to very high temperatures. Subsequently, I let the materials react on my humanity: what I experience, what I am feeling, etcetera.

In this way, you can breathe life into matter, alchemy takes place. Dead matter is imbued with a soul and can start to communicate with other souls.

As a level-headed guy I feel slightly embarrassed when I write this down, perhaps it sounds woolly and esoteric; but it is a difficult process to explain.

This is the only way in which I can create something that I feel is worth making.

The oven is a symbol for deep concentration. Something which I only manage for a limited period of time, for it soaks up huge amounts of energy.

Also, such a period of concentration relies on thorough preparation. It requires: silence, a good condition, no-one around, being able to work undisturbed for a couple of days, without telephone or Internet. I mentally prepare myself by reading and watching films, for instance Sebald, and Tarkovski. These days Béla Tarr as well. Such a period is very important to charge the batteries: the waiting, the growing vexation, the uncertainty.

Nowadays I go in for less and less (traditional) analysis. I am not interested in dissecting a work with a scalpel. If only because you cannot find the core (or soul) of a work in this way. Having analysed, I'm usually left with a cut open work that all life has seeped out of. Why is Ravel still alive, whereas Caplet is long dead? Why Poulenc and Milhaud but not Durey or Auric?

All of them are sterling composers, so what exactly is that spark? One could say I am engaging in analysis but I skip that whole verbalization phase; I'm just listening carefully for as long as I need in order to understand the forms and until I can feel them somewhere in my body.

So something inside my head is analyzing, or scanning, but I could not tell you how exactly it works; only that it does. Somewhere inside my head some unusually direct links must have been made at one point or another, there is no other way to explain it. I know that during childhood it is decided which centres in the brain are connected through a three-lane road and which use a dirt road.

The musical language centre uses a broad pathway to connect to the imagination, to memories and feelings; the bifurcations to the semantic language centre are narrow. All this probably has to do with the fact that little was said when I was a child; to me, language was and is an awkwardly slow vehicle.

(although I really love it; there is always a book in my backpack and I have even written three small books albeit at a sluggish pace, sometimes just one sentence a week.)

A slow vehicle...

That makes it hard to explain exactly what I do when I compose. I have never really felt the need to find out. When something is functioning well, you leave it alone, don't you think?

Why go to a psychologist to unravel yourself if nothing is wrong? Or take a car to the garage that is driving smoothly?

I am superstitiously afraid that to analyse your own work is to kill its originality. There are plenty of examples.

For instance, Hergé created the best Tintin comics in the 1930' and '40', when he had no time to think because he had to produce at an enormous rate for *Le petit vingtième*, a weekly supplement. At the end of his career, Tintin's success had come under close scrutiny and he tended to suffer from eczema the very moment he touched a pencil. The final Tintin adventures, however accomplished, are slightly laboured.

(I am a connoisseur of Tintin, show me a picture and I'll tell you the album.)  
Many Tintin adepts see *The Calculus Affair* as the apogee of Hergé's abilities; I prefer *The Secret of the Unicorn*. Far more atmospheric and organic.  
It is a tricky subject; verbal analysis is a stage that needs to be seen through.  
If only because the subject is taught at the conservatory. Fortunately, what I learned at that time has since been absorbed by my intuition.  
It is important to know how to mix paint yet the art of painting is quite a different story.

Paradoxically, if you were to analyse my work you would notice forms that fit together tightly; you'll also notice there's very little material.  
*Angel Alley* for example, is based exclusively on two pieces of material lasting about three seconds.  
*à la Cour des Lilas*, which lasts 45 minutes, revolves around a melodic cell that is sung as a solo by the soprano right from the start.  
*alle afstand herleid* is an endless variation on a series of chords.  
As I have explained in the notes accompanying *alle terre assenti*, it is all about thorough preparation.  
When I start to write, I make sure that the material and its derivatives are embedded in my bloodstream so that I don't have to think about them any more.  
As if digging a channel before opening up the water gates; before everything starts to flow the bed needs to be in order - but in the end it is about the flow, not the bed.  
Byebye,

pj

A handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Angel Alley". The score is written on ten staves. The top two staves are labeled "(soprano)" and contain a melodic line with many notes and some lyrics written below the notes. The middle two staves are labeled "piano" and contain a piano accompaniment with chords and some rhythmic markings. The bottom four staves are labeled "(soprano)", "piano", and "bass" and contain further musical notation, including some lyrics. The handwriting is dense and detailed, with many notes and markings.

*Angel Alley*

## I'll continue ...

Hey there,

Let's return to the period before I went to college. As so little was said at home I quickly learned to express myself in other ways. When I was 10, I started taking organ lessons with Gerard Bal at the Music school in Delft. My father secretly hoped I would realize his dream of becoming a brilliant concert organist. But I was stubborn and started to improvise more and more; eventually I did nothing but improvise. We had a 1950<sup>s</sup> promotional record on the Philips label with fragments by Rachmaninov and Dukas. I decided to go to the record shop to look for works by these two. For years afterwards I spent all my pocket money on LPs and tapes; I used the tapes to record radio programmes. I was inquisitive and totally enthralled by everything I discovered. Nobody in the family knew a thing about classical music and this was the first time that orchestral and chamber music could be heard in Soendastraat 15 in Delft. Ravel, Stravinsky, and Ives made the deepest impression. One summer, I spent the entire holiday (1979) playing Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* on a cassette tape in the back of the car, interspersed with *Le tombeau de Couperin*. This memory is precious because I was completely happy with those two works, and because there was a very direct contact between me and Ravel. If I would have met Ravel during that holiday I would have addressed him as a family member, totally unaware of the cult that surrounded him, an eerie and clammy hero worship that I only became acquainted with later, at the conservatory. I merely imagined meeting someone who spoke the same language. My father and mother didn't really understand but thankfully did not intervene either. I sat in the back of the car engrossed in a completely different world as my parents silently drove to the next castle or the next ruin, where my father would get out briefly to take slides.

In 1981, the Dutch national radio station NCRV broadcast all of Stravinsky's works. I took down the details in the radio guide and recorded everything.

When I heard *l'Histoire du soldat* for the first time, I was totally taken aback. And thus I continued to explore. In 1981, another important event occurred: a live broadcast on TV of *De Tijd* by Louis Andriessen. I listened breathlessly for 45 minutes, watched all the interviews. Afterwards I knew that I wanted to become a composer. I remember going to school the next day, totally enthusiastic about all I had seen and heard, and that even the teachers looked at me with amazement. I started to write for my own instrument, the organ, but had no idea how I should set about this and sort of taught myself what to do. It didn't really come easy, and I picked up some bad habits. (When, in 1985, I finally sat for an entrance exam at the conservatory, Jan van Vlijmen almost turned me down because of my weird manuscripts. Thankfully I had also played and recorded several works, which won him over. In any case, Louis Andriessen thought I was an interesting oddball as he revealed during my first lesson.)

In the early 1980<sup>s</sup>, I was a restless figure who tried to express himself any way he could. I jumped at anything that I could lay my hands on and used it, painting self-portraits on canvas with spit and blood, writing stories about men who lived under water with birds for eyes, made little stop motion movies with mosaic stones on a table in the garden and my father's super 8 camera. At a certain moment I began to record short- and long wave signals on the radio and splice them together in a very primitive way, influenced by the Beatles whom I discovered in 1982. Until then, I had never listened to pop music. At the same time, I was a little rogue who started a gang with friends and was into everything that was naughty: we often roamed through the old gin factory in Delft and experimented with methylated spirits, paraffin oil, etc. This is where I discovered, for example, that you can paint a room superfast by putting an aerosol can with propellant in a

tin of paint before igniting the paint. Don't try this at home.  
At school, we used fireworks to blow up toilet bowls  
(light the port fire, put it in the water and flush quickly),  
we flooded the corridors with a fire-hose or  
emptied the heating pipes so we had a day off in winter.  
And perhaps a hundred more actions like this.  
I was editor of the school paper but after a totally disorderly edition  
(with slapdash DIY comics and furious argumentations) I was  
put under supervision and subsequently quit.  
At home I tried to figure out composing.  
I did not talk about this with my friends for they didn't understand.  
At that time everyone was into *Grease*, which left me utterly cold.  
I borrowed the few orchestral scores that were kept in the  
archives of the Delft library and studied them.  
I wrote my first works, mostly large pieces for organ, and  
played them myself during concerts my organ teacher organized.  
*The Symphony of 3 world wars* (what a horrible title) from 1982  
lasted 45 minutes: clusters, sound fields, the organ motor switched  
off and on - I'm still surprised I did all of this with such a  
lack of convention.  
Imagine that such a concert took place in the large church in  
Naaldwijk, in the Westland, which was filled to capacity with  
market gardeners, farmers and members of the Dutch Reformed Church.  
Afterwards people looked at me as if I was mentally deranged.  
That got to me. I was 16 and far from sure of myself.  
In spite of everything my father was proud - even if  
I did not play César Franck.  
Later, when I started to study composition in The Hague I  
stopped playing the organ and he was deeply disappointed.  
During the last performance of my work that he attended,  
*Absinth* (1987), a 4-track tape piece,  
he was sitting in the auditorium with his hands over his ears,  
a sad farewell.  
He really didn't get what I was doing.

In the years since then  
the internal split between monk and rascal has become  
steadily more apparent. Those two seem to balance each other out.

I can get quite lost in an extreme state: the strict ascetic, the  
obsessed artist, the man-child who's afraid of his own mortality.  
Then the wild boy inside me wakes up and gives me a kick in the pants.  
When all is said and done, the serious man greatly needs the  
rake to be able to enjoy life.  
This makes me think of Liszt, who composed his later works in a  
monastery in peace and quiet until he couldn't stand it any more and  
went back to the city, his girlfriends, and a worldly life.  
Then he would return to the monastery to do penance.  
The same goes for Claude Vivier. And for  
Ravel probably as well, but little is known about that.  
Such patterns are intrinsic to composing. It is an  
extremely abstract activity that requires you to stay  
deep inside your head, in complete concentration until you  
have to come down to earth; sometimes as rigorously as possible.

I am, like my father in his day, an obsessive collector.  
Facts, books, LPs, CDs, films.  
I do research, always one subject at the time, and try to find out  
as much as possible; watching, listening.  
I keep track of people who inspire me with their  
attitude and through their work,  
and who incite me to take the same path.  
The focus is not purely on the work.  
I'm interested to know how someone develops throughout his or her life.  
Growing, peaking, fading, the entire cycle.  
So I want to acquaint myself with their entire oeuvre.  
I think the human factor is important; that fallibility, the  
struggle to find one's feet.  
Perfection doesn't exist.  
Only people that try to grasp it.  
A family of inspired ones.  
Important inspirations are: Marguerite Duras, Andrei Tarkovski,  
W.G. Sebald, Orson Welles, Alberto Giacometti.  
And in music: Ravel, Stravinsky, Ives, the Beatles, Syd Barrett,  
Nick Drake, Morton Feldman.  
Recently, in preparation for *à la Cour des Lilas*, I listened and  
read everything by Ravel one more time.

I looked for recordings of all his works, even the tiniest splinter, sought out scores, tried to find manuscripts of unfinished works, and listened to everything until I knew it inside out. Also, I read his letters; a visit to his house in Montfort-l'Amaury with Richard Rijnvos had to be postponed because of six months of health trouble. For *Lilas* I spent some time in Paris as well, focusing on the metro and the neighbourhood near the Porte des Lilas. For days I wandered around metro stations, looking at travellers, soaking up the surroundings, meandering through the neighbourhood above ground. I spent entire afternoons in outdoor cafés with a packet of unfiltered Gauloises, watching and listening, searching for details that I could use for the texts I wanted to write. At moments like that it is important that something 'clicks', that I am able to make contact with the area, the stations, the people, that I remember the smells, the cold wind as I was sitting in the pavement café, the indifferent waiter. I take all of this in and then I retreat to write the piece.

pj



one of the catacombs underneath Porte des Lilas

From the notes on *alle terre assenti* (2002)

#### Why this material?

I argue for an unconditioned approach to listening; this partly determines my choice of material.

Sound is far too complex a medium to warrant capturing it in 12 units on paper.

I want to take the character of an instrument into account, the history of a sound recording, the acoustics of a concert hall (or living room).

The electrical themes are like old photographs. Gazing at a picture I try to discover its provenance, the story behind it. As a result, to a certain extent the composition is the product of becoming acquainted with – and breathing new life into – the presumed reality behind these sound images.

Using such themes is like returning to the origin and inspiration of all music.

I totally submerge myself into this process, while making use of every nuance and each little tick. I view these as guidelines leading me to the core and essence of the reality behind the sound document, and thus to the core of my own perception of music, and that of my audience...

#### Work process: reduction to & fixation of the theme

I reduce the material. Chopping away until I find the core, which I preserve.

This core is like a seed that contains the entire work.

Once I have found the core of the work I fixate it. From that moment onwards, the core becomes the 'theme'.

I keep focusing on it as I spin the theme round, polishing it.

This sharpens the knowledge of the theme's identity. Dimensions are added, and colour is added – until it becomes a small icon; forceful, alive, and independent.

Eventually, I will use these themes to create moments in which the themes are simultaneously spinning and utterly frozen. Then the development of form appears to stagnate as time continues to tick obsessively.

These are the moments I am waiting for.

#### Work process: transparency & overview of the structure

A work primarily consists of form, whereas content comes second.

To me, creating a razor-sharp form is the most important ingredient of the work.

Call it the construction of a skeleton: an attempt to maximally articulate the elements of structure and time.

This does not undermine the importance of 'content'; what I'm saying is that the world benefits more from a properly told bad story than from a badly told good story.

I believe that by nature, matter is subject to chaos. As far as I'm concerned, there is but one way to master form, namely through concentration; struggling with matter time and again.

Through a combination of concentration and willpower, an entirely original and organic form concept may evolve after a period of disciplined working; something which the ratio could never achieve.

This is precisely what defines the difference between dead matter and living, breathing music.

Gradually, I am acquiring a strong and true form.

Concentration leads to a state of mind whereby you are simultaneously able to oversee the whole and observe everything in detail; not just on paper, but in reciprocity with all non-verbally operating extra-rational areas of our being that are equally involved in thinking and feeling.

The presence of different layers makes it worthwhile to listen to a work time and again.

#### Why transparency?

I could have been a classicist, someone who opts for a form that has proven to be effective, without circumlocution, unambiguous.

Within a particular narrative, darkness may have a place but in the last resort the structure ends up being clear and crystallized.

This is how I feel and write.

That typically Dutch Lutheran upbringing, founded on self-control, modesty, and frugality, in combination with my education (in The Hague) which was founded on conceptual and monolithic thinking, have produced an uncompromising and sharp composer.

However, life has occasionally led to corrosion and erosion; gradually I started to see the widening gap between ideals and reality...

I cannot escape the fragmentation and noise that surround me and I am looking for ways to incorporate these data into my sound universe, which brings me to the

#### treatment of material

I choose to show the world as it is, in a mild manner by means of 'minor imperfections'. 'Minor imperfections' are: a scratched film, a wandering eye, a broken voice, an old gramophone record.

This is connected to my view on life as a splintered piece of wood, chunks of beauty that may fracture or disappear, unanswered questions, waiting and silences.

I'm looking for new beauty in the corrosion of an old (sound) world.

Minor imperfections imbue this work once the skeleton has been erected. I explore how much I can make the structure reel without causing it to really collapse as I attempt to turn the proud tower into a Leaning Tower of Pisa...

In concreto: I stack balanced layers on top of each other and subsequently shift & edit in such a way that the structure remains intact. At the same time, the details sometimes make weird jumps (a kind of assonance) and I introduce material seemingly too soon or too late, before or after instead of on the beat, hiccupping, tottering, briefly marking time.

#### Communication

Far too long, the means have been confused with the end. Writing is communication and not just virtuosity.

I take my audience seriously and want to bring the music as close to the listener as possible.

One way to do this is through the subtle interaction between conditioning and alienation; playing with the expectations created by conditioning.

Few listeners will be prepared to empathize with a world that does not refer to what they already know and which is not reassuring in any way.

This is why playing with deformation (as discussed above) is a dangerous game; you need to sound out how far you can go as a writer and guess when your audience will tune out because they are no longer able or willing to keep up. That is the moment when the tower of Pisa comes crashing down.

I believe that a writer should regularly look over his shoulder to see if his audience is still following along.

PJ

## ...and on

You could say that I have made a study of minor imperfections. All of the stories I have told you up till now served to shed some light on my roots, on the origin of this fascination for fallibility.

My fascination for Orson Welles is connected to this.

I recently saw the remnants of *Merchant of Venice*, one of the films he wanted to make but couldn't finish due to all kind of (mostly financial) problems.

Welles was working on that film over a lengthy period; whenever he had some money he would shoot a couple of scenes; he would take these with him in film cans as he travelled. In this way, the film fragments were scratched and damaged; sometimes the celluloid was full of cracks even before he had finished editing.

Welles edited a lot; his films, particularly the later ones, are staggeringly edited. It was often lack of money (but with beautiful results). He was envious of Tarkovski who could film scenes in one prolonged shot.

Welles didn't have the wherewithal to do that.

Only a single fragment has remained of *Merchant of Venice*.

Each splice is visible and every bit has a different colour and sharpness. One shot even ends in dark yellow overexposure, possibly the last bit of a reel of film. There are a lot of scratches, splices, as well as noise and ticks on the soundtracks.

Shylock's big monologue has been lost; the negatives probably having been stolen. And in the end Welles decided to redo the monologue without costumes or scenery, in a desert somewhere in the US, dressed in a raincoat and with watery eyes, a bright red sky in the background. This scene ends with a moped that unexpectedly drives past in the background and Welles' irritated growl: 'cut'.

Such fragments make me want to set to work straight away. I love Charles Ives for the same reason.

For his unsteady constructions that can barely stay upright and are deeply human. Think of the *The 'St.-Gaudens' in*

*Boston Common (Col. Shaw and his Colored Regiment)*  
[from *Three Places in New England*]. Precisely notated wobble that is performed differently every time. I love that man, with his apt notes and weird stylistic changes. Another example is Syd Barrett (the founder of Pink Floyd) who at some point clearly no longer knew what he was doing. His 'oeuvre' is limited and surveyable (three albums) and he was surrounded by clever producers like Roger Waters and David Gilmour, who very subtly framed and streamlined his messiness. Especially *The Madcap Laughs* is a very strange record: entries are often too early or too late, unexpected changes of pace, wrong notes, slurred vocals sung by someone who is not really present, sometimes forgetting his lyrics. Small icons of the evaporating mind.

You can recognize this fascination in my tape pieces as well; the tape recorder plays an important role in this. As a child, I spent hours in front of the record player but also behind the tape recorder. My father used a board and some nails to make a 'tape recorder' for me and I wound the tapes with my hand, front to back. Later I sometimes experimented on his simple Sony. When I was at the conservatory and had access to professional recorders running at 38 cm/sec, wild horses couldn't drag me away. My love for the tape recorder is still intact. The physical violence of overmodulated recordings, the infinite possibilities of transposition and the resulting surprises, tape noise, slipping tapes. A tape recorder is a monster that needs taming. In Studio 1 in The Hague I regularly blew up my ears with feedback, it's like driving a car at high speed; you have to know what you're doing - but what a result if you go all the way! I still use two Revoxes when composing. My early tape pieces, from around 1985, were made with a limited range of analogue instruments: six tape recorders, two VCF filters, a vocoder, a ring modulator, an octave filter (which Stockhausen used for *Kontakte*), and the enormous reverb plate in the silent room. In addition, I would sometimes obliterate partial fragments with the

Bulk Eraser, a machine for erasing tapes. There was also a small box, forgot the name, which contained a spring that sounded fantastic if you dropped it from a height of 30 centimetres. Then you could transpose that sound so that it was eight octaves lower, always with a totally surprising outcome.

I had a strange relationship with Jan Boerman. I admired him, still do: I think he is one of the major tape composers of the last century. But I often got the book thrown at me during his composition lessons. Sometimes the way I treated my material made him furious, he found it 'unaesthetic', which meant nothing to me. And I mean, he was genuinely angry! To put the knife in a sound that was only 'halfway' developed, for him that was really not done. I have learnt a lot from his 'Golden Ratio' way of thinking. He and Louis Andriessen taught me how important it is that your form is well-constructed. A listener benefits more from a properly told bad story than from a badly told good story. That is something you learn when listening to the later Stockhausen. For example *Donnerstag aus Licht*: his forms are very strong whereas his stories are wafer-thin. Or *The Big Sleep* by Howard Hanks, a film that I recently saw for the third time. The plot escaped me yet again but that makes no difference, for the narrative is so solid that you end up watching breathlessly and you think you understand. It's really an abstract Detective Movie, with all the associated characteristics but without a layer of meaning. At the time it was a huge box-office hit but nobody is going to make me believe that many people understood the plot. A very interesting phenomenon.

Yet you can exaggerate this effect, as I think David Lynch does: he makes you feel he is playing a game with you without taking you seriously; you really work hard to follow all the twists and turns but at a certain moment you sense that there never really was a solution to all of those riddles in the first place, while Lynch appears to be laughing at you from the sidelines;

he stopped being actively involved a long time ago. Even a master of form and style can go over the top and break with sincerity. That's unacceptable. Lars von Trier does the same, at a demonic level. He plays a gruesome game with his audience and subsequently jeers at them because they leave the cinema in tears. I think that is out of line. Anyway, my proposition remains intact: I still prefer a work by Lynch to a horrible film by a very sincere filmmaker. And now it's time for a break. Please don't hesitate to be critical. Is there anything else you want to know? See you Thursday...

pj

A P.S. about Barrett: I just listened again to *The Madcap Laughs*. The best songs are those that the Floyd boys didn't touch, such as *Terrapin*. I know that song by heart, note for note, all the irregularities as well. Funny that other people's mistakes can get under your skin to the extent that they become part of your own system. An annoying vicar used to say: a bad example sets a bad precept. Well yeah, what's all the fuss with the good examples? Why not the bad ones? What am I supposed to listen to? *Wish you were here?* An overly smooth overproduced album? Yuck. Good mistakes are much more exciting than properness. And yes, I am contrary, that's true; when everyone turns left I look to the right to see what's going on there. Byebye,

pj

## CONCERT ELEKTRISCH ENSEMBLE

In de traditie van Stockhausen, Boris van Rossum opvoert het ELEKTRISCH ENSEMBLE. Dit trio, bestaande uit Ronald Philipp, Piet van Rossum en Jacin Billinger, heeft zich op een unieke en radicale manier bezig met het schrijven van nieuw geluid. Het ELEKTRISCH ENSEMBLE componeert met bandrecorders in combinatie met oscillatoren, rignedulators, meetapparatuur en filters. Het alles wat daar bij hoort, speakers, omroep en natuurlijk tapes, is de bandrecorder hier als instrument het uitgangspunt voor de creatie van klankkleur. De klankcompositie die eindeloze gestalte krijgen is een langdurig en arbeidsintensief proces, zijn nog niet eerder voortgebracht in de geschiedenis van de elektronische muziek. In deze tijden van gemakkelijker automatiseren, speel-moederen en andere computers, is het ELEKTRISCH ENSEMBLE een achteloos toegewijde groep geluidsvontiersen. De drie bandrecordercomponisten studeren momenteel nog aan het Koninklijk Conservatorium in Den Haag en gaan verder met de principes waar Karl Heinz Stockhausen in 1959 met

## VLIDAG 27 & ZATERDAG 28 FEBRUARI

zijn stuk 'Contacte' mee begon. In het Eindhoven zijn drie composities van de afzonderlijke leden van het ELEKTRISCH ENSEMBLE te horen, alsmede een gezamenlijk gecomponeerd stuk. Om ook te laten zien hoe het ELEKTRISCH ENSEMBLE met bandrecorders componeert, zal de uitvoering van het gezamenlijke stuk met video in beeld gebracht worden. Hiervoor zullen vijf camera's vijf bandrecorders in beeld brengen, die op even zoveel monitoren te zien zullen zijn. Opstelling aan deze visualisering is het de bandcompositie zijn samengesteld uit verschillende stukjes tape. De knip- en plaktechniek vormt de basis voor de klankcompositie.

### De composities:

1. "Adam E" (Philipp, 1985)
2. "Vormloos w' silent fall" (Van Rossum, 1985/1986)
3. "Eenop de draag en quartiers" (Billinger, 1986/1987)
4. "Object" (Philipp, Van Rossum, Billinger, 1987)

Aanvang: 21.00 uur Entree: 5,-

Billinger, van Rossum, en Philipp



1987, ode to the tape recorder



## And on towards winter

Hey Anthony,

Comment ça va?

Finally the weather is somewhat cooler.

I have always preferred the winter and don't mind the rain either.

Wintertime, skating with cold air around my head in temperatures just below zero.

It would be nice to live in the extreme North for a year.

Rather than in a warm country.

Anyhow, it is as it is.

In July and August I was holed up at home to write the first scene of *achterna gedragen*, a music theatre production in collaboration with Petra van der Schoot that will open in April 2011.

I quickly need to sort out the form.

The first few weeks my head was full of cotton wool because of the heat. Pity, such a waste of time.

In order to work well I stick to rigid daily rituals.

After I get up, I cycle for half an hour through the polders at a fair pace. On returning home I do some gymnastics, various warming-ups and stretching exercises for the back and shoulders. I need that to chase away the spectres of the night and to get my system going. Also, when I have to write a complete scene (30 minutes) in two months I need to be in good condition. In that respect I am Spartan, I no longer smoke, I have always been a non-drinker, and I want to remain as sharp and clearheaded as possible, physically as well as mentally. I don't need stimulants; even without all that stuff my head goes into overdrive.

In the past weeks I have been eating 'in moderation', no sugar, hardly any fat. This diet is linked to the tension that builds up as I write. It affects my stomach in such a way that certain foods don't agree with me. Very unpleasant but that's the way it is and I have become used to it in the past 20 years. Cycling is very important; the physical experience of air resistance and painful muscles and the silence of the polders allow me to

crawl out of myself and to create distance. Once I'm home I switch on all the computers and work for approximately five hours, including a short break.

Around six in the evening I stop and fiddle about:

sometimes I spend an hour gardening, sometimes I read.

I eat at 7:30 and watch the news.

Then I turn off the TV and work until around 11.

So generally the days here look pretty much the same:

me, the felines Foon, Fiets, and Zeepje,

my piano, computers, loudspeakers, garden, bicycle.

I keep a diary and write about major issues such as 'being stung by a horsefly', and for the rest only about films, books, and music.

And of course there is my job in the classical CD shop in Rotterdam, which I have been doing for 15 years, two days a week. In all its simplicity it nicely counterbalances all that frantic brain activity. I help people to find music they like; those happy faces give me great satisfaction.

I'm also involved in the purchase of CDs for the shop.

This too has been an element in my cast-iron routine for 15 years.

I have sent you some old documents, school ID cards and non-attendance letters, but I wish I hadn't, I don't really feel like playing the buffoon. Hereby a number of pages from a score, I would much prefer to include these in the booklet.

The orchestral pages may be too large.

I now have a website, almost finished, look up [www.pietjanvanrossum.nl](http://www.pietjanvanrossum.nl) or [www.buromono.nl](http://www.buromono.nl)

for a list of works and information about these pieces.

Those notes are far more interesting than all of this claptrap.

Bye for now,

pj

3 Variation  $\frac{3}{4}$  2

Handwritten musical score for Variation 3, measures 1-2. The score is written on 12 staves. The top staff is the vocal line, followed by piano accompaniment. The music is in 3/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines. There are some handwritten annotations and markings throughout the score.

Andere route, hetzelfde zicht

3

Handwritten musical score for Variation 3, measures 3-4. The score is written on 12 staves. The top staff is the vocal line, followed by piano accompaniment. The music continues with complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines. There are some handwritten annotations and markings throughout the score.

## Tail end

I also want to say something about the people I like to work with.

I like collaborating with Petra van der Schoot. One of the wonderful things about her is that I never need to explain anything.

Our communication is through music and images.

I make something that she responds to and the other way round.

As she is grounded in the visual arts as well as music she understands exactly how I work, what a score is, what time means, what a tension curve is, and how it feels to be a musician on stage.

Petra studied sculpture with Robert O'Brien, and for a while she was Dick Raaijmakers' pupil and majored in cello at the conservatory in The Hague.

She is one of the most extraordinary visual artists I know, and unfortunately also one of the most reticent. Whoever gets the chance should try to see her work, her torsos made of wire netting, her photographs.

We are presently working on our second full-length music theatre performance, *achterna gedragen*.

The first performance, *Aantekeningen van een zoogdier*, was successful, which was unexpected for it contained no narrative, no text, just music, two actors, and bits of film.

What she does in those performances is special and I am glad that I have the chance to work with her.

During November Music 2010 we are presenting our first collaborative project, *alle terre assenti* for violin, piano, four loudspeakers, and film where she deemed that necessary, with Monica Germino on violin and Reinier van Houdt on piano.

In addition I am gradually assembling a small group of collaborators, people who are committed to quality and adventure, who I know well by now and have often worked with: Reinier van Houdt (pianist), Arnold Marinissen (the percussionist, well-known to you), Jennifer van der Hart (soprano).

The same applies to groups such as the Ives ensemble and the MAE.

A few good friends are worth a room full of acquaintances. The flyer seems a nice addition to the booklet if it is not too full by now.

Your equally shunned less blest rediminished Friar Minor,  
alex jacto flest



## <no subject>

O look, a final outpouring, pj is obstinately refusing to give up the ghost...

I was irritated by a remark made by Boulez.

If you want to reduce a composer, any artist, to a canon, yes, that's possible. And that is what Pierre Boulez does. He categorically refuses to perform certain of Stravinsky's works, I suspect because he doesn't consider them sufficiently interesting. Well, when I am interested in a particular artist, I want to hear every note, read every letter, and see every stroke they've ever put to paper.

I cannot see the work as separate from the human being.

I believe that every proper artist searches for an absolute truth and meaning and in my experience you won't find out much about this search through works, which are hermetically sealed in perfection. I am much more interested in vulnerability. That is why unfinished pieces are so interesting; skeletons in the cupboard. Take for instance the piece about Franciscus of Assisi by Ravel, or his strange ode to industry and factories.

I constructed a music theatre production around

one of these skeletons: Satie's unfinished *Le fils des étoiles*.

My favourite works of, for example, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Stockhausen are pieces that have remained in the shadows.

*Perséphone* by Stravinsky, *L'enfant et les sortilèges* by Ravel, *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* by Debussy (the complete version with narrator, orchestrated by Caplet), *Trans* by Stockhausen.

As I ponder this list, I realize that all these pieces are theatrical while the first three are discontinuous: small forms that fit together like a puzzle.

Precisely what I never do. Remarkable.

Two works have a narrator, three works a choir and soloists.

Clearly, what I would like to do in the future is: opera, oratorio, theatre. *À la Cour des Lilas* for example is a springboard to opera.

I also want to compose a work structured as a full religious service including the sermon and background noises from all over the church. The church as theatre.

Everything, the sermon as well, should be through-composed and timed, with prolonged silences, the suggestion of an ambulance driving past, someone dropping money on the floor, birds flying in through a broken window.

The mother of all religious services!

And of course, the organ.

For some reason I always imagine this in the Sacré-Coeur in Paris.

The Vatican will have to reach deep into its pockets, but it will be worth it!

I am going on holiday now, back 15 September.

See you,

pj



*acteren, even niet acteren*

## Last letter from Mürren

Hello my friend,

Last letter from Mürren (Switzerland), near Lauterbrunnen.

I come here regularly. I wrote part of

*à la Cour des Lilas* in this place in November/December 2008,

it is doublebassist Cristin Wildbolz's little house,

Sometimes she is away for prolonged periods and I mind her cat Pizzu.

The house has a masonry heater;

in the winter you have to feed the fire for two hours each day,

and even now, in September, it is already quite chilly.

Yesterday I walked from the Schilthorn (2900 m)

to Stechelberg (900 m). Took me 10 hours and it was

extraordinarily beautiful. I saw the transformation of the Lutschinen,

from snow to torrent to brook to stream to rivulet.

It was gruelling. Leg muscles totally worn out today.

Yet nothing beats travelling on foot (or cycling).

There is something about the way I travel.

Walked from Trier to Aachen.

Walked from Hoek van Holland to Le Havre.

Cycled from Basel across the Alps.

I'm only interested if the journey entails relentless cycling or

walking in one direction, preferably far, far away. All and Beyond.

There is a link with composing, embarking on megaprojects and

aiming to get as far as possible.

Earlier, I told you that language feels like an awkward vehicle.

These letters I've sent were expressly meant to be informative.

Now you are proposing to use these letters in sequence

as the text for the booklet.

When I read them consecutively it feels as if I've been dining heavily.

I'm finding it hard to understand why you

think the text is beautiful and poetic.

I merely see the utterings of a man who

tries to explain something in cuneiform script.

And I'm not saying that as a quack or out of false modesty.

Describing my motives is like walking with diving shoes, like the

ones worn by Haddock and Tintin when they explore the wreck in *Red Rackham's Treasure*. I shift and measure and weigh my words until eventually they obtain a certain clarity. Composing lacks that heaviness; it enables me to say something with a single gesture.

Okay, use the text as it was written, it is what it is, this is what pours out of me. Don't forget to include this mail, so the readers will know where I go on holiday and the name of Cristin's cat.

It is shocking to see how far the glaciers and the perennial snow have withdrawn by now. I'm in a position to compare for I have been coming here, intermittently, for 35 years. And when I return in 30 years time (pfffff ... I'll be 74) perhaps only the Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau will still have snow. Probably Mother Nature's not amused by us. Going home tomorrow, back to Foon, Zeep, and Fiets,

grüezi mitenand,

pj

somewhere between Schilthorn and Stechelberg







Peter Adriaansz was born in Seattle in 1966 and studied composition at the conservatories of The Hague and Rotterdam, where his teachers included Louis Andriessen, Brian Ferneyhough, and Peter-Jan Wagemans.

From 1993, Adriaansz has worked as a free-lance composer receiving numerous commissions worldwide as well as writing for ensembles with more unusual instrumentations in the context of specific projects. His pieces are performed by ensembles, festivals, and individual musicians all over the world.

Adriaansz' work is characterized by a systematic, research-oriented approach towards music. Sound, structure, and audible mathematics constitute the main ingredients. In recent years, a growing interest in flexibility, variable forms and – especially – microtonal reflection can also be observed in his work. Among others, the latter has led to several large-scale compositions, such as *Prana* (2007), *Music for Sines, Percussion, eBows & variable Ensemble* (2008), and *Three Vertical Swells* (2010) for amplified ensemble, *Anekabahudaravaktranetram*, 2007 and *Verdichtingen*, 2009 for orchestra and voices plus two extended series, on spatial harmony (*Structures I-XVI*, 2005) and micro-acoustics (*Waves 1-13*, 2008). In addition, he has created many (electro-) acoustic works in response to incidental commissions.

#### Works Peter Adriaansz (selected)

- No.5 *Chant Negatif* (1995) (40')  
for soprano, string orchestra and 6 percussion
- No.11 *3-pt. Product* (1998) (25')  
for harmonium, fl/picc trb. & 2 perc
- No.13 *Comfort*, for Orchestra (2001) (7')  
for large Orchestra
- No.18 *Triple Concerto* (2003) (18')  
for ensemble (rec, cl/bs cl, trb, el.gt, mar, pf, vl, cb)
- No.19 *6 Parts for 7 (or more) Players* (2003) (17'-30')  
for ensemble (hpschd, fl + hrp, cl, trb, vc + pc, pc solo, harm. instr)
- No.20 *9 through 99* (2003) (12')  
for ensemble (pf 4-hands, vib, mar, 2 fl, bs cl, bsn, vl, vla, vc, cb & ch cymb)
- No.24 *7 Dances for Percussion 4-tet* (2004) (26').  
for percussion quartet
- No.27 *Structures I -XVI* (2005) (ca. 400')  
for any kind of mixed ensembles and orchestras, with or without live electronic delay
- No.35 *Prana* (2007) (63')  
For amplified ensemble of electric guitars, eBow piano, percussion & female voices
- No. 37 *Waves 5 - 7* (2007/2008) (ca. 28')  
For 2 winds, trombone, percussion, el. Guitar & eBow piano)
- No.39 *Waves 11 - 13* (2008) (ca. 18')  
For variable ensemble of treble instruments, sinetones & subsonic waves
- No. 41 *Enclosures* (2008) (20')  
For voice, viola, microtonal MIDI keyboard & sinewaves
- No. 44 *Verdichtingen* (2009) (ca. 27')  
For Orchestra, Narrator & Sinewaves
- No. 45 *Three Vertical Swells* (2010) (ca. 30')  
For amplified ensemble, Hammond Organ & Sinewaves



**Piet-Jan van Rossum** (1966, Delft, The Netherlands) 1985-1990 – composition studies with Louis Andriessen, Jan Boerman and Dick Raaymakers. 1990-1993 – composition studies with Klaas de Vries and Peter-Jan Wagemans. 1985-1990 – organ studies with Rienk Jiskoot

Van Rossum mainly focuses on composing and writing. In his own words: 'I look upon myself as a storyteller, a member of an ancient tribe of shy, wild people who, through stories, sometimes succeeds in creating another way to experience time. My work comprises life as I live it; a splintered piece of wood, chunks of beauty that may fracture or disappear; lots of waiting, silences. This explains my fascination with scratched movies, lazy eyes, a broken voice, old gramophone records, growing old. It's all about looking for pristine beauty inside the corrosion of an old (sound) world.'

With some artists he has built a special relationship, people who are dedicated to quality and adventure: Visual artist Petra van der Schoot, pianist Reinier van Houdt, percussionist Arnold Marinissen, soprano Jennifer van der Hart and the Ives ensemble.

### Works Piet-Jan van Rossum (selected)

*and somewhere inbetween* for soprano, 4 instruments and 4 loudspeakers

*à la Cour des Lilas* for soprano and ensemble

*Aantekeningen van een zoogdier*, visual musical theatre for piano, 7 loudspeakers, and 2 actors\*

*achttien proeven met kleine tertsen* for singing percussionist, ad lib choir, and 2 loudspeakers

*attendre longtemps, je suis sans identité* for 2 pianos, ensemble, and 2 loudspeakers

*Angel Alley* for 4 loudspeakers and film\*

*alle terre assenti* for violin, piano, 4 loudspeakers, and film\*

*andere route*, hetzelfde zicht for 2 pianos and full-size orchestra

*Alberto Giacometti*, cycle in 3 parts ("Annette dans l'atelier", "Annette [1954]", "Annette IV") for string quartet, 2 pianos, tuba, and 2 loudspeakers

*acteren, even niet acteren* for viola and piano

\* director film/theatre: [Petra van der Schoot](#)



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## Links

[www.mcn.nl](http://www.mcn.nl)

[www.novembermusic.net](http://www.novembermusic.net)

[www.anthonyfiumara.com](http://www.anthonyfiumara.com)

[www.pietjanvanrossum.nl](http://www.pietjanvanrossum.nl)

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<sup>1</sup> Except for 'How I became a convert', which was written by Peter Adriaansz in English and translated into Dutch as 'Hoe ik een bekeerling werd' by Moze Jacobs (Alles Voorbij, ISBN 978-90-76937-30-4)

