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The Music of Louis Andriessen: Dialectical Double-Dutch?

A visit to the opening of this year's Holland Festival allowed me to see and hear the first two performances of Andriessen's De tijd *(Time) on June 1 and 2 and to interview the composer. Andriessen was billed as the festival's first 'pivotal composer and commentator' in a new scheme designed to allow contemporary music to 'become accepted as a normal phenomenon as opposed to the exclusive preserve of specialists: just a part of daily life to be listened to from time to time'; it is planned to have one featured composer-commentator at each festival in future. The first beneficiary under the scheme received considerable attention this year, including a major retrospective concert presenting several of the works mentioned below as well as a new piece,* Anfang/Ende *for recorder and piano, played by Frans Brüggen and the composer; there was also a performance of his major music-theatre piece* Mattheus Passie *(Matthew Passion).*

A commentary on Andriessen's work is particularly timely for English readers, since his group Hoketus will be touring this country on the Arts Council's Contemporary Music Network this winter. In addition to Andriessen's own Hoketus *(the piece after which the group is named), the programme will include Frederic Rzewski's* Coming Together *and Michael Nyman's* Think slow, Act fast. *Starting at the Round House, London, on November 15, the group goes to Southampton (17th), Cambridge (18th), Bradford (19th), Birmingham (20th), Llantwit Major (21st), Huddersfield (23rd), Liverpool (26th), Nottingham (28th), and Manchester (29th).*

Like every good European composer, Louis Andriessen has seemingly read his Adorno. When he dies the word 'dialectics' may, conceivably, be found engraved on his heart.

The desire – the need, indeed – to look at everything from both the positive and negative points of view is something that the more empirical Englishman finds hard to understand. Too often this Hegelian double-think ends up either as the negation of *everything* positive ('too positive in its negativism') or looking suspiciously like having your cake and eating it. When this approach is applied to the complicated range of techniques and aesthetics that emerged in continental Europe after 1945 as the New Music, it becomes even more inscrutable.

Take, for example, Andriessen's *Séries* for two pianos of 1958. When he wrote it the composer was just 19 (he was born in Utrecht on June 6, 1939). While at school he had studied composition at home with his father Henrik, a highly respected composer and, for many years, an elder statesman of Dutch music (he was born in 1892 and died early this year). In 1957 he had gone to the Royal Conservatory of Music in The Hague, where he studied with Kees van Baaren (1906-70), the first Dutch twelve-note composer.

So far so provincial-looking. But the young Andriessen must already have been touched by the ebb and flow of new ideas coming at him from both east and west: from Stockhausen in Cologne and Boulez in Paris. Indeed, on the face of it the title and instrumentation of *Séries* tell all: this must be a *Structures,* Book I sound-alike, surely? There were, after all, plenty of other imitations of total-serial Boulez going the rounds in the middle and late fifties, even after the Darmstadt fashion parade had moved on to open forms, graphic scores, and John Cage (1958 was the year of the latter's triumphal re-entry into Europe). *Séries* is even proudly presented in the recent Donemus brochure for Andriessen as 'one of the first Dutch serial compositions':[1] that is, presumably, one of the first Dutch *total*-serial compositions. A small step for a single composer, but a large leap for Dutch musical history, duly to be recorded in the annals thereof.

If the composer's own word is to be taken for it, however (and I confess that I've had no opportunity either to hear the piece or to study the score), *Séries* is both more and less than the sum of its number systems: '*Séries* is less than my musical expression; it is my music about serial music. I cannot judge finally: that's not my task. But I have the feeling for myself that my approach ... is a kind of objectivism.'[2] An 'objective' (or, as Andriessen himself also likes to call it, a 'Classical') approach to musical materials can, of course, be interpreted as being identical with that of Boulez when he was composing *Structures,* Book I (1951-52). Andriessen has said that 'music is always about other music' and that too can be seen as indicating a direct response to a received musical technique and musical aesthetic, on the level of what we normally call imitation.

But what Andriessen is here suggesting is that his two-piano piece, composed at the age of 19 in a country that had not so far evinced much involvement with the New Music of France, West Germany, and Italy, is actually a reinterpretation of total serialism in total-serial terms. Boulez had taken musical material from Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* and manipulated it as an 'exercise' (his own word for it) in extending the technical principles of Messiaen's experiment. Andriessen's *Séries* does not, so far as I know, draw on Boulez' *Structures,* Book I, for its actual musical materials. But it uses the technical sophistry of *Structures* as the starting-point for a commentary on the value of that technical sophistry and the aesthetic on which it is based. If this is so – and, as I said earlier, I don't as yet have the means of judging it – then *Séries* may be an achievement every bit as remarkable as Kagel's *Anagrama,* written two years later, which presents 'serialism deliberately taken to absurd extremes'.[3] And every bit as inscrutable. (If it seems so now, how much more must it have been then?)

If the suggestion that *Séries* achieves a dialectical critique of *Structures,* Book I, in particular and post-Webernian total serialism in general seems a little far-fetched, it is at least instructive to pursue aspects of Andriessen's subsequent output and career with it in mind. On leaving van Baaren in 1962, the composer went to study with Berio in Milan and Berlin (1962-65). The works of his from the mid-sixties that I have heard follow the lines of European avantgarde development that one would expect from a Berio pupil; and they do so with more than a hint of Berio's technical flair and his ability to make avantgarde ideas more 'accessible'.

There are graphic scores (*Registers* for piano, 1963; *A Flower Song II* for oboe, 1964), pieces with Italian

1 *Louis Andriessen* (Amsterdam: Donemus, 1978); Universal Edition is now the British agent for Donemus.

2 This and all following quotations not individually acknowledged are taken from my conversation with the composer.

3 Glyn Perrin, 'Mauricio Kagel', *Contact 15* (Winter 1976-77), p. 16.

titles, Berioesque instrumentations and a suggestion of Berioesque incest in onion-shaped unions (*Ittrospezione III (Concept I)* for two pianos and three instrumental groups, 1964; *Ittrospezione III (Concept II)* for mixed ensemble, 1965), and, later, electronics (*Hoe het is* (The way it is) for strings and live electronics, 1969). Perhaps most interesting of all, there are at least three cases of severe multiple quotation: the aptly entitled *Anachronie I* for orchestra (1966-67), the ambiguously and sinisterly entitled *Contra tempus* for mixed ensemble (1967-68) – mysteriously not in the Donemus catalogue – and the predictably entitled *Anachronie II* for oboe and an orchestra devoid of woodwind and heavy brass (1969).

Here we are on Berio's happiest hunting ground, with a myriad of opportunities to be all things to all men and as dialectical as you choose at the same time. *Anachronie I* is described in the Donemus catalogue as 'a doll-like collage of style quotations' (a definite candidate for double-Dutch). It is dedicated to the memory of Ives who was, I think, the subject of revivalist hysteria in Holland at the time (when he was also becoming known over here). Brahms, pop music ... the mixture is very Ivesian and also a bit like Berio.

Contra tempus and *Anachronie II* both reveal, even more clearly than *Anachronie I,* that love–hate dialectical relationship with the past that started to become a disease in the late sixties and was eventually to be metamorphosed into neo-romanticism in the seventies. The former is strewn with bits of medieval debris (Andriessen was very much into Machaut at this time),[4] while the latter is an 'oboe concerto that describes three centuries of oboe music'.[5] We can work it out, the composer seems to be saying, if only we can work out where it's at (and possibly where it came from).

Putting aside for a moment the precise nature of the composer's relationship with his material, the story of Andriessen's development so far follows a path fairly typical for a European composer, perhaps even for a British or American composer, of his age. Early involvement with the ideas of total serialism shortly gave way to an immersion in the much cloudier waters of the new trends of the sixties. The clear-sighted confidence now usually attributed to composers of the New Music in the fifties soon proved unfounded. The seeds of doubt were really, I think, sown in the very inflexibility of total serialism itself as well as some of the modifications that quickly followed it. Whether these modifications are represented by the changes Boulez underwent between *Structures,* Book I, and *Le marteau sans maître* or by the supposed pieces-as-critiques of Andriessen and Kagel, it soon became apparent that serialism had undermined itself anyway and that its nature could not long withstand the construction of dialectical critiques purporting to be based upon it. By opening up the past once more, composers raised again the question of style.

Or did they? If composers such as Berio and Andriessen posed a question about style in the music they wrote in the sixties, perhaps it was not 'What style should I compose in?' but rather 'How important is style anyway?' Or to put it another way 'Isn't the approach you have towards your chosen musical material more important than the actual musical material you choose?' Having moved in the mysterious ways of the sixties which suggested overtly dialectical answers to these questions, which would undoubtedly have appealed very immediately to him, Andriessen grew more and more fascinated as the decade drew to a close by the music and ideas of a much older composer who had provided his own solutions long before: Stravinsky. In addition he also now points to the pre-19th-century composer's approach to these problems, aligning himself with the 'Classicists' and not with the 'Romanticists' whose principal concern was expression:

> The musical material which I use changes over the years, because I have other musical interests. But my approach will not change, it will always be the same.
>
> The best example is the approach of someone like Igor Stravinsky, who doesn't really care about something like style or personality, but who cares about *music*. I think that's more or less the ideal approach towards the profession: that you care more about what you think you have to tell about music than how to express yourself. In that sense I'm a Classicist and not a Romantic.
>
> Or – an English example. In a letter, I think it was, from Purcell about his trio sonatas he writes: 'Faithfully endeavoured in the Italian style'; that is, as well done as possible in a style which was alien to him. And I feel very much at ease with such an expression, I like that approach ... And of course now we say that Purcell's trio sonatas are much more interesting than the Corelli ones ... But he did not care about that: he just tried to write as well as possible in that style. It was the same with Mozart.

Before I discuss the changes in Andriessen's musical material of the last ten years or so, it is necessary to mention one other aspect of his activities, which had already begun in the sixties. Andriessen's fellow students at the Hague Conservatory included four other Dutch composers who were also pupils of van Baaren: Misha Mengelberg, Peter Schat, and Jan van Vlijmen (all b. 1935), and Reinbert de Leeuw (b. 1938). They became known as 'The Five' and their attempts to change Dutch musical life since the mid-sixties have been notable if not always very influential.

In 1966 they attempted to get Bruno Maderna appointed chief conductor of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra. The aim was 'to reinvigorate that fossilized institution and transform it into a major centre of living music'.[6] It didn't succeed; Bernard Haitink was appointed and the orchestra's commitment to new music has remained minimal.

Their other principal campaign had potentially much wider implications. Acting in the wake of the 'revolutionary' climate that existed in much of Western Europe after the events in Paris of 1968, the group organised the 'Nutcracker Campaign' the following year. It involved public demonstrations against the bourgeois stranglehold on Dutch musical life in general and the policies of the Concertgebouw Orchestra in particular. In 1969 the five composers also collaborated on an 'anti-imperialist opera and morality' called *Reconstructie* (Reconstruction), the hero of which was Che Guevara.[7] Its anti-US nature led to the group's being blamed for the fact that President Nixon bypassed Holland on his European tour that year. In 1970 a sit-in staged in the Concertgebouw resulted in the arrest and prosecution of a large number of musicians and others.

Political activity has been a motivating force behind Andriessen's work since that time. It is undoubtedly part

4 Dutch-speaking readers may wish to investigate this in Andriessen's article 'G. de Machaut en de Messe de Nostre Dame', *De gids* (January 1968), pp. 53-58. This appears to form part of a series of articles on Stravinsky's relationship with various composers (Gesualdo and Webern are others) which was published in *De gids* before planned publication in book form. For further on Andriessen's concern with Stravinsky see later in this article. For more information on his published writings see the entry on Andriessen in John Vinton, ed., *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Music* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), p. 12.

5 From the Donemus catalogue.

6 Rudy Koopmans, trans. Gary Schwartz, 'On Music and Politics – Activism of Five Dutch Composers', *Key Notes,* no. 4 (1976/2), p. 22. This article is a valuable introduction to the activities of these composers in the 1960s and early 1970s; it includes documentation and interviews with all five.

7 The work is available on STEIM Recording Opus 001.

of the reason for the development of his views on musical material and style as outlined above. It has also caused him to look for alternatives to conventional kinds of music-making in general and to the symphony orchestra in particular. He has not written for anything resembling the standard symphony orchestra since 1970; and even then the conventional line-up, for a Beethoven bi-centennial piece called *The Nine Symphonies of Beethoven,* was suggestively augmented by an 'ice-cream vendor bell (with four pop musicians)'.[8]

These alternatives have so far taken three concrete forms. The first was the group called De Volharding, which gave its first concert in 1972. Its name means 'perseverance' and it arose out of the so-called 'Inclusive Concerts' begun by Andriessen and others in 1970. These were free concerts designed to break through 'the traditional barriers between music genres, between types of the audiences [sic], between performers and composers'.[9] A notable feature of De Volharding is its mixture of 'straight' players (some of them ex-Concertgebouw members disillusioned with the dreary round of classical bourgeois concert life) and jazz musicians.

This mixture in itself reflects one of the more refreshing aspects of Dutch musical life: the extent to which the music that most people call 'free jazz' is accepted in Holland, despite the repressive tendencies mentioned earlier; also the extent to which composers and improvisers – and thus composition and improvisation – mix in ways they rarely do in Britain – or even, I think, in the States. De Volharding was, indeed, set up 'with the aim of doing away with the ludicrous discrepancy between the two forms of music, jazz and classical',[10] to perform Milhaud's *La création du monde.*

Andriessen's works for De Volharding (which include a piece of the same name written in 1972) derive in part from further investigation of the fruitful *lack* of discrepancy between jazz and classical styles already explored by Stravinsky, Milhaud, and others in the early 20th century. It is here, too, that American minimalism first features as an influence on the composer's style. This becomes of greater significance in the works composed for Andriessen's second group (of which more below). But already in pieces such as *De Volharding, On Jimmy Yancey* (1973), and *Hymn to the Memory of Darius Milhaud* (1974)[11] we find a vigorous, even abrasive, use of repetitive techniques in music that the composer describes as 'much more earthy; it has not the cosmic sound of those pieces which Reich and Glass wrote at the same time'. His works for De Volharding include not only compositions suitable for concerts, but political songs and pieces for public demonstrations. A number of other Dutch composers such as Mengelberg (better known nowadays as an improvising pianist) and Klaas de Vries have also written for the ensemble; the prevailing manner is loud and punchy, using some dozen musicians on wind instruments and piano in an exhilarating and often relentless tutti. Andriessen used to be the group's pianist but no longer plays with them.[12]

But it was with the founding of his second group, Hoketus, for the performance in 1977 of a piece bearing the same name that many of Andriessen's preoccupations came together in a way that seems especially exciting. The piece *Hoketus* had its origins in a project on minimal music that the composer started when teaching at the Hague Conservatory in 1976; it was finished the following year. The choice of instrumentation itself might suggest an interest in the repetitive music of La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass: the work is scored for two groups, each consisting of pan-pipes, Fender piano, piano, bass guitar, and congas. It reflects Andriessen's concern both to work with forces not associated with 'serious' music and to build the act of performance into the composition of the piece in ways that could never be done with a symphony orchestra. In the sleeve notes to the recording of the work he writes:

> *Hoketus* is proof of the fact that the quality of the performance is essential when judging a composition. Some of the musicians in the group have considerable experience in folk and pop music. This is one of the essential qualities of the work and it influenced the composing of the final version which emerged after 18 months of rehearsals. With different musicians it would have been a different composition. And that is how it ought to be. One aspect of thinking about music in 'political' terms is that the composer asks himself who he is actually composing for, and who will listen to the result. The musicians performing his work are his first listeners, and are at least as important as the audience. I hope I'll never write another work that musicians in paid employment will be forced to play against their will.[13]

These politically influenced ideas seemed to fit particularly well with the minimalist techniques on which *Hoketus,* in common with much of the composer's output since about 1973, is based. One of the best things about Andriessen's minimal music is that it doesn't sound anything like that of the American minimalists, though of course it is influenced by them to varying extents and would not have been possible without them. The composer himself thinks that his approach to minimalism in *Hoketus,* and also perhaps particularly in *De staat* (1973-76), may be compared to his approach to total serialism in *Séries.*

The dialectical critique of minimalism offered in *Hoketus* takes a number of different forms. Andriessen reacts positively to the ways in which minimalism allows an 'objective' approach, enabling the composer to go beyond personal expression and explore a small amount of musical material in a non-narrative, non-linear, non-developmental way. It is significant that Terry Riley's *In C* is the American minimalist piece that he considers to have influenced him most. It's not simply that the piece was one of the first repetitive compositions and has long since taken on the quality of a contemporary classic. *In C's* 'people process'[14] allows an interaction between composer and performer through the freedom for improvisation that is built into the structure of the piece; this must, in the light of the above quotation, be particularly attractive to Andriessen, though the precise nature of the 'people process' is not something he has chosen to emulate very closely. Freedom of repetition on the part of the ensemble as a whole is, however, a strong feature of *Hoketus,* in which a bar or a group of bars may be repeated as often as the players wish. (Example 1 shows

8 From the Donemus catalogue.

9 Koopmans, trans. Schwartz, 'On Music and Politics', p. 22.

10 From the De Volharding brochure as quoted in Gijs Tra, trans. Ruth Koenig, 'De Volharding, "an offbeat jazz group or a crazy band of wind players" ', *Key Notes,* no. 7 (1978/1), p. 10.

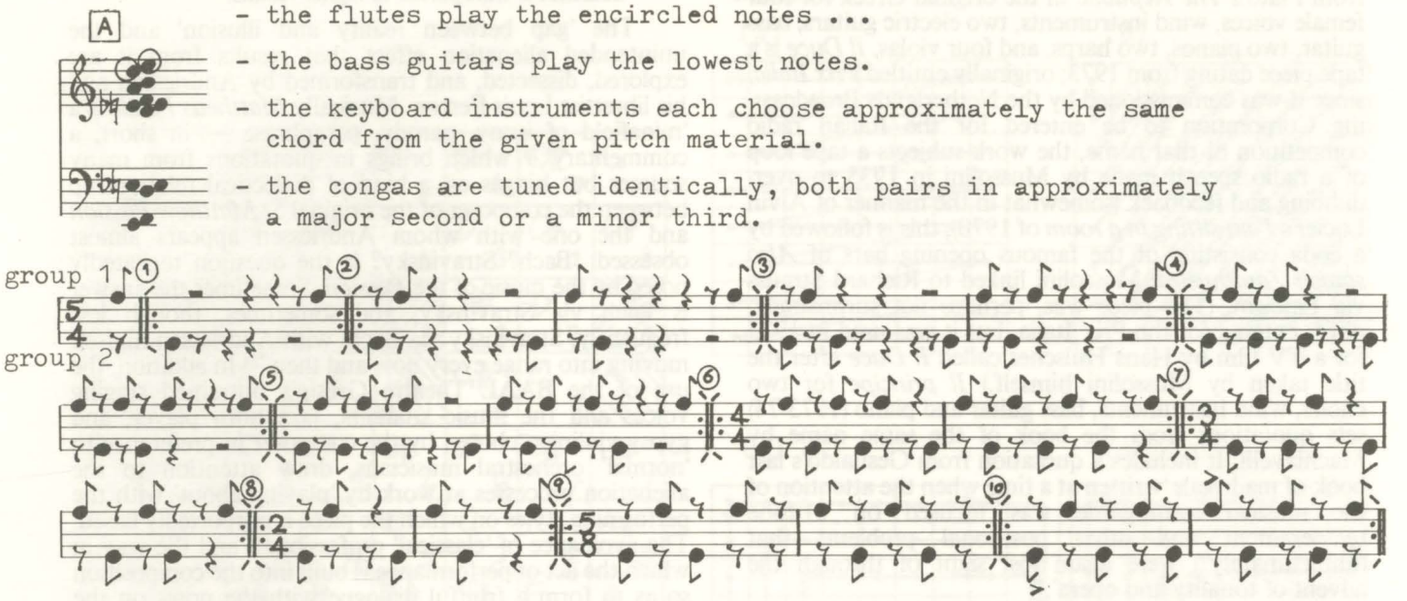
11 These three works are included on an LP, De Volharding 002. There is also an EP of arrangements (including Eisler's *Solidaritätslied*) and Andriessen's composition *Dat gebeurt in Vietnam* (That happens in Vietnam) of 1973.

12 De Volharding visited England in May 1978, immediately after a trip to Chile during which seven members of the group were arrested while playing at a May Day protest march. An account of this is given in Tra, trans. Koenig, 'De Volharding'.

13 Donemus, Composers' Voice CV 7702. *De staat, Il principe, Il Duce,* and *Hoketus* are all on this two-record set.

14 The term used by Michael Nyman in *Experimental Music: Cage and beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), pp. 5-6. Nyman actually discusses *In C* under the heading 'Repetition processes' as well as elsewhere, but his definition of 'people processes' as those that 'allow the performers to move through given or suggested material, each at his own speed' seems to apply to Riley's piece.

Example 1



the opening of the work.) The recording of the piece lasts some 25 minutes while live performances usually last about three-quarters of an hour.

The extent to which Andriessen's repetitive music is a positive rather than a negative reaction to American minimalism will of course be determined in part by the listener's interpretation of the American repetitive repertory itself. It is clear to me that if Andriessen's latest scores are in any sense objective, then so is Riley's *In C*. (The situation undoubtedly becomes more complicated with the recent music of Reich and Glass, for example, the increasingly opulent nature of which has been influenced by materials and structures that could be interpreted as much more subjective.) Andriessen's minimal music certainly has a rawness about its dissonance very different from the soft curves of the dissonance arising from most performances of *In C* (the latter inhabits the world of 'drug-culture' according to Cornelius Cardew). Elmer Schönberger considers that 'In *De Staat* Andriessen has tried his strength against minimal music and has succeeded in subordinating those techniques to new expressive objectives which are almost the exact opposite of the ethereal minimal style of Terry Riley for example.'[15] In that case the dialectics of the composer's minimalism are much easier to understand, especially bearing in mind the 'earthy' rather than 'cosmic' approach mentioned above: a point that can apply to the music for Hoketus as well as that for De Volharding.

In 'testing his strength against minimal music' Andriessen has enlisted the help of the aesthetic/political critique that aided his search in the sixties (if not the fifties) for the composer's role in society; he has also turned to another previous involvement: medieval music. Association with the music of an age in which the expression of a composer's personality was even less a stylistic factor than in Purcell's day is clearly of significance in terms of the above deliberations on musical objectivity. But here I want to investigate its more purely technical role in Andriessen's dialectical critique of minimalism.

It is, I suppose, obvious that a piece with the title *Hoketus* is going to be based on the medieval technique of hocket. Andriessen's study of Machaut in the mid-sixties later led him to assert that 'Though [hocketing] went out of use in Western music round 1400, it reached an advanced stage of development in many different forms of folk music, with equal groups of instruments each playing one note of the melody in turn.'[16] Here he has attempted to reclaim the technique for contemporary concert music. Though it should be said that he is not the first 20th-century composer to have used it, few if any have done so with more consistency and rigour over such a long time-span.

Hoketus requires its two identical groups of instruments to play practically identical chords in quick alternation. These chords bounce between the groups, the number of their repetitions determined by the players, until a powerful climax is reached; the hocketing continues right to the end. On record, particularly with headphones, this is mesmerising. The composer says: 'The recorded performance approaches such perfection that the listener will have to keep reminding himself that the two groups never play two consecutive chords but continually play one chord in turn.'[17] A live performance should have all the drama and the feeling of incipient mayhem held in check by cruel discipline that are characteristic of, say, a performance of Reich's *Drumming*.

Andriessen here uses the principle of hocketing as a kind of filter through which many of the techniques familiar from American repetitive music may be passed. The rhythmic 'filling-in' technique used at the beginning of *Drumming*, the additive processes of Glass, and, in the coda, the abrupt transformation of the harmonic vocabulary of the main part of the piece into a jazzy chord sequence finally reduced to its origins: all these are fed into the 'hocket machine' that the composer has devised. The resulting minimal mince clearly comes from the body of music that we call repetitive, but it has been crucially, critically, transformed. A distancing relationship has been achieved which allows minimal techniques to be used as the basis for a dialectical discourse on the genre itself.

The groups De Volharding and Hoketus, each with its eponymous piece representing a repertoire of considerable substance and variety, are two of Andriessen's three alternatives to conventional music making; the other is the collection of works not written for either. Among these is a triptych of compositions dealing with politics of which *De staat* is the first. 'They are all', says the composer, 'settings of texts which are politically controversial, to say the least, if not downright negative.'[18] *De staat* (The Republic) is a setting of words

15 From the Donemus catalogue.

16 From the sleeve notes by Andriessen (trans. Elizabeth Haig) to CV 7702.

17 Ibid. 18 Ibid.

from Plato's *The Republic* in the original Greek for four female voices, wind instruments, two electric guitars, bass guitar, two pianos, two harps, and four violas. *Il Duce* is a tape piece dating from 1973; originally entitled *Prix Italia,* since it was commissioned by the Netherlands Broadcasting Corporation to be entered for the Italian radio competition of that name, the work subjects a tape loop of a radio speech made by Mussolini in 1935 to overdubbing and feedback (somewhat in the manner of Alvin Lucier's *I am sitting in a room* of 1970); this is followed by a coda consisting of the famous opening bars of *Also sprach Zarathustra*: Mussolini linked to Richard Strauss via Fascism. (The piece was, perhaps not surprisingly, never entered for the Prix Italia, but it was used in 1975 for a TV film by Hans Hulscher called *Il Duce* after the title taken by Mussolini himself.) *Il principe* for two choirs, wind instruments, bass guitar and piano (1973-74) sets quotations from the book of the same name by Machiavelli. It includes a quotation from Gesualdo's last book of madrigals 'written at a time when the attention of the musical avant-garde was focused on 31-tone temperament and other post-tonal problems that (unfortunately?) were again lost sight of through the advent of tonality and opera'.[19]

Andriessen's examination of conception, production, and consumption (his 'three aspects of the social phenomenon called music')[20] via Plato in *De staat* is expanded in three later music-theatre works: *Mattheus Passie* (1976), *Orpheus* (1977), and *George Sand* (1979-80). All were written for and first performed by the BAAL Theatre Group, an important Dutch company whose post-Brechtian work should be known over here. A kind of Brecht-inspired alienation lies at the root of Andriessen's music-theatre pieces, an element that clearly adds a further dimension to the dialectical nature of his output.

Mattheus Passie sets up a critical relationship with Bach's work in order 'to alienate the Passion culture by replacing the story of Picander with one entirely new'.[21] Willem Jan Otten and Elmer Schönberger explain that

> While Germany has its Bayreuth Festival, Austria its Salzburg Festival and Poland its Krakow Theatre Festival, the Netherlands is afflicted by the Sufferings of Christ in the week between Palm Sunday and Easter. Up and down the country, in the tiniest of hamlets – even in Naarden near Lake Yssel – the Passion is sung. This prodigious number of performances is perhaps the most authentic expression of our theatrical consciousness, without so much as a single actor appearing on the scene. To get the true picture, just imagine the following: a village church packed with the Sunday faithful; a massed choir, pressganged soloists from the surrounding region who look anything but Divine; an organ pealing forth from above; and a splenetic orchestra conducted by the local solicitor. Attendance implies a certain measure of mortification. So edified is the congregation-cum-audience at the end that there isn't even any applause. (The Passion culture may be regarded as the northern Protestant counterpart to the southern Catholic carnival.)
>
> The Passion culture naturally has nothing to do with alienation, still less with irony, and that is why it is such a dramatic event by Dutch standards: one simply forgets that there is a gap between reality and illusion, between the back of the shop and the display window, between the position and the person. The solicitor wielding the baton *is* a solicitor wielding the baton; the members of the choir *are* members of the choir; and the audience is transported to higher realms.[22]

The 'gap between reality and illusion' and the unintended alienation effect that results from it are explored, dissected, and transformed by Andriessen and his librettist Louis Ferron. Musically *Mattheus Passie* is a 'minefield of irony, parody, paraphrase – in short, a commentary',[23] which brings in quotations from many sources but hinges on a kind of dialectical relationship between the composer of the original *St Matthew Passion* and the one with whom Andriessen appears almost obsessed: 'Bach? Stravinsky? is the question repeatedly posed by the music of the *Passion.* Sometimes the answer is Bach via Stravinsky, and sometimes, though less frequently, Stravinsky via Bach, with Andriessen himself moving into range every now and then.'[24] In addition, the use of the BAAL Theatre Group's untrained singing voices and the music students, jazz horn player, and gypsy violinist, chosen by the composer in preference to 'normal' orchestral musicians, draw attention to the alienation processes at work by 'playing about' with the performing styles on which the piece is purportedly based. The avoidance of 'classical' professionals and the way in which the act of performance is built into the composition so as to form a fruitful dialogue with the notes on the page are by now familiar aspects of Andriessen's work.

Orpheus also reconstructs, reconstitutes, and at the same time both accepts and denies the past in a dialectical relationship the more complex and perhaps also the more incisive for the comparisons that may be made with musical history's previous attempts to catch the essence of this myth of musical creation before it vanishes, Eurydice-like, for ever. The piece, which has a libretto by Lodewijk de Boer, is described as 'another step up from the Hades of the opera tradition, with as the point at issue its ever more hermetic and electrified music'.[25] In appropriately narcissistic fashion, it sets itself up as a 'polemic against official opera practice',[26] not only by being an operatic look at the failure of operatic realities but through the ambiguity of its hero's resemblance to Mick Jagger and an exploration of the 20th-century set of myths that this suggests. Jazz-rock, Shirley Bassey, and the theme tune of *Kojak* are among the musical starting-points; there is also a 'Grand ballet en mi-bémol majeur avec choeur with respectful greetings to Steve Reich, Phil Glass and the others', described as 'minimal titling [sic] typical of American art galleries'.[27] 'Nevertheless,' say Otten and Schönberger, 'in the opera as a whole the alluder has come out on top of the allusion.'[28]

About *George Sand* I know far less. Its librettist, Mia Meijer, has apparently compiled a series of snapshots of the author's life based on the available documentation. Strangely, Chopin is not mentioned in the only review of the piece I have seen, but the 'orchestra' seems to consist of 'four grand pianos, numbered on the back, played by four reincarnations of Liszt who collectively produce a sound which could hitherto only have existed in the common dreams of Pleyel, Steinway, Yamaha and Bechstein: the roar of the Eight-Handed Manual, the Sound of Eight Feet Pedalling, the Octopus in Sound'.[29]

De tijd (1980-81), which I saw at this year's Holland Festival, is also part of a trilogy. In this case there is some overlapping, however, for *De staat,* the first of another set of three works, is also the first of this one; the second is *Mausoleum* for large ensemble (1979); *De tijd* is the third. All three are concert works for voices and instruments; all three draw on repetitive techniques without, I think, any quotations from the past; and all three set complex texts

19 Ibid.

20 For an explanation of these see the sleeve notes to CV 7702.

21 Willem Jan Otten and Elmer Schönberger, trans. David Smith, 'Louis Andriessen's Matthew Passion and Orpheus', *Key Notes,* no. 7 (1978/1), p. 24.

22 Ibid., p. 24.

23 Ibid., p. 25.

24 Ibid., p. 25.

25 Ibid., p. 31.

26 Ibid., p. 32.

27 Ibid., p. 32.

28 Ibid., p. 32.

29 Wilhelm Schön, trans. Sonja Jokel, 'Music Drama at the Holland Festival: The Venice of the North Incarnate', *Key Notes,* no. 12 (1980/2), p. 6.

in 'difficult' foreign languages. Each work is in a very definite sense 'about' its text (that for *De tijd* in particular seems to have involved its composer in a fantastic amount of research), but the words themselves are made largely inaudible by the nature of the musical presentation: you simply have to do your homework if you want to appreciate these pieces at anything deeper than the surface level of what they sound like.

De staat is a lengthy setting of some of Plato's words from *The Republic* which suggest that musical innovation represents a danger to the state. Andriessen's rejection of Plato's argument ('There is no such thing as a fascist dominant seventh')[30] is countered, in the composer's mind at least, by his regret that musical innovation is not in fact a danger to the state and his realisation that what Plato really wished to ban was the *effect* of musical material once it is ordered, 'becomes culture and, as such, a given social fact'.[31] The musical material of *De staat* is based on tetrachords (probably the work's only connection with Ancient Greek music as such) and this concern with the number 4 is also reflected in the scoring, in which homogeneous groups of instruments are treated as individual units: four oboes (the third and fourth doubling cor anglais), four trumpets, four horns, four trombones, four violas, four women's voices, etc. Repetitive techniques are much in evidence, though the higher level of dissonance that Andriessen achieves compared with most earlier, American minimal music, and the fact that he writes out the score in full, contrast with previous repetitive norms. The latter allows much subtle variation from repetition to repetition: 'always the same, but always never the same', as the composer says. Even the look of the score suggests, to its composer at least, that a crucial modification of the original minimalism has taken place: one that might well also produce a different psychological effect on the player.

Mausoleum, the second piece of this trilogy, sets words by the Russian revolutionary anarchist Mikhail M. Bakunin. Just to confuse matters, it appears that some of the material of this work also finds its way into *George Sand.*[32] But it is with *De tijd* itself, the final composition of the trilogy, that I wish to conclude, particularly since it seems to sum up so many of its composer's current preoccupations.

First, the text of *De tijd.* In an interview about the piece recently published in English, Andriessen says: 'What stimulated my writing the piece was a unique experience which gave me the feeling time had ceased to exist; the sensation of an eternal moment. It was more than perfect inner peace. A euphoria which was so potent that I later decided to write a piece about it.'[33] No doubt wisely, the composer leaves us to guess at the precise nature of this experience. What we do know, however, is that it resulted in an enormous amount of reading, in order both to find out more about what had been written on the subject of time and to choose a suitable text. Two years elapsed before he began writing the music:

> What I did do during those two years can scarcely be reconstructed at this point. It started with Dijksterhuis' *The Mechanization of the World Image* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* and ended with Dante's *Divine Comedy* and St. Augustine's *Confessions.* In between lie stacks of books on seven centuries of ideas on time and a trip to Florence where, apart from peace and quiet, I was after a philosopher contemporary of Dante's.[34]

30 From the sleeve notes to CV 7702. 31 Ibid.

32 See Schön, trans. Jokel, 'Music Drama at the Holland Festival', p. 6.

33 With Elmer Schönberger, 'Louis Andriessen: On the Conceiving of Time', *Key Notes,* no. 13 (1981/1), p. 6. This interview was originally published in Dutch as 'Over het onstaan van "De tijd" ', in *De revisor* (1981/2), pp. 24-32.

34 Ibid., p. 6.

Andriessen became not only a 'composer of the post-Einsteinian era looking back to the late Middle Ages'[35] and thus taking up again his involvement with the medieval period, which began in the 1960s; he also tried to read more recent scientific work on what many consider to be the central question of philosophy, realising eventually that he 'was after a philosophical unknown – which it actually *is* again since Einstein and Gauss'.[36] He finally surfaced with an extract from the eleventh chapter of the eleventh book of St Augustine's *Confessions,* which he set in the original Latin; he prefaced his piece with two lines from Dante's 'Paradiso' which seemed to sum up his experience of time standing still:

> . . . mirando il punto
> a cui tutti li tempi son presenti
> (. . . gazing on the point beyond
> To which all times are present.)[37]

Second, the staging. Unlike *De staat* and *Mausoleum, De tijd* is conceived as theatre as well as music, though there is no one on the stage. The entire 'action' of *De tijd* is provided by mechanical representations of time: a slowly expanding colour projection, a huge pendulum that swings the whole width of the stage from a fulcrum high in the flies, an hour-glass spewing sand, a large clock. These images of time passing (the work of Paul Gallis, Theo Jeuken, and Paul Vermeulen) powerfully complement the great surges of sound issuing from the orchestra in the pit.

Third, the music itself, which is performed by a choir of eight female voices and an orchestra of 44, consisting of Andriessen's by now familiar non-symphonic line-up (here including six trumpets, two pianos, two harps, and seven percussionists). It seems to me that Andriessen has quite brilliantly solved the problems of dealing with such a subject and setting an apparently unsettable chunk from a philosophical tract by seizing on the ambiguities of tonal motion and resolution that already exist in the so-called 'new tonality' with which he has been working for some years. A good Schenkerian would refuse to allow most repetitive music the status of 'tonality' at all because it frequently lacks the directed motion and the techniques of preparation, suspension, and resolution that are the fundamental characteristics of 'common practice period' tonality. Not only, however, is the minimalist composer, working with the building-blocks familiar from common practice tonality, able to rely to some extent on the ways in which his audience's lifetime habits of listening will bend essentially static material in tonally directed ways; he can also modify his approach to consonance and dissonance, preparation, suspension, and resolution, to produce a new balance between ways of hearing, between the 'old' tonality and the 'new':

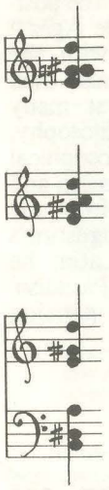
> The task I had set myself was to create a situation characterized by a combination of tensions and non-tensions difficult to describe. In principle, it is possible to accomplish two things at the same time in music. If you have harmony in mind, it is natural to be thinking about the dominant seventh chord because the dominant seventh is a chord that asks for resolution. When you build the resolution in by adding a fourth – i.e. the tonic – you have at your disposal, in theory at least, a consonance which has to be resolved and yet is already resolved. It then depends on the context whether the thesis-like character of the chord – the resolved chord – or its arsis-like character – the chord asking for resolution – predominates. Technically speaking, one could call *Time* a chain of

35 Schönberger's words, ibid., p. 6.

36 Ibid., pp. 6-7

37 As quoted by Schönberger, ibid., p. 8. (The translation is by Laurence Binyon.)

Example 2



initial idea for the chord

dominant seventh with both major and minor third but no fifth

final basic chord

dominant seventh plus tonic but no fifth

extension of this harmonic idea

two dominant sevenths (without fifths) a fifth apart

dominants; an eternally postponed resolution which is nevertheless there all along.[38]

The material presented in Example 2 gives some idea of what this means in practice; the *Key Notes* interview provides much more detail and further discussion of the composer's approach. It does not seem to me too far-fetched to suggest that Andriessen has here achieved something like a new and dialectical approach to the 'new tonality' and therefore to the notion of tonality itself. His concern to use more dissonant material for his repetitive processes has resulted in the beginnings, at least, of systems that take the visual symmetries of the avantgarde and the aural realities both of the old tonality and the new into account.

It is certainly true that processes of a similar nature have been the recent concern of the original American minimalists. The huge, improvised canvases drawn in simple, 'tonal' material and crucially coloured by the use of just intonation in Young's *The Well-Tuned Piano;* the increasingly sophisticated approach to harmonic resource that characterises Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* and *Another Look at Harmony* and Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians:* all these and others indicate that Andriessen is not alone in this new harmonic field. But a European cannot help reflecting on the possible significance of the continuing influence of Stravinsky on Andriessen's music: a reflection here animated by the composer's description of *De tijd* at any early stage as 'an image of a *Threni*-type piece; reserved, without expression, precisely notated and governed from beginning to end by strict numerical relationships.'[39]

It was with *Threni* that a European living in the United States finally achieved a new fusion of tonal hierarchies and twelve-note methodology: a synthesis that perhaps *is* theoretically impossible. 25 years later it may require a European, influenced by American models but with a European's highly developed sense of history as well as his sense of tonal practice, to provide the almost century-old question 'Tonal or atonal?' with the next answer – simple-sounding, neat, but most certainly dialectical – *'Both'.*

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Scores and records of Louis Andriessen's music may be obtained from the Donemus Foundation, Paulus Potterstraat 14, 1071 CZ Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Readers in Britain may obtain them through Universal Edition, 2-3 Fareham Street, London W1V 4DU, who are now the British agent for Donemus. In addition, brochures etc. and copies of the magazine Key Notes *(in English) may be obtained free of charge by all readers outside Holland on application to either Donemus or Universal Edition.*

38 Ibid., p. 8.

39 Ibid., p. 8.