MUSIC ON THE COMPOSERS' VOICE SERIES

HILARY BRACEFIELD

OTTO KETTING
Symphony No 1 (1959), Symphony for Saxophones and Orchestra (1978)
CV 8001

THE NETHERLANDS SAXOPHONE QUARTET
Music by Heppener, Keuris, Petersma, Straesser, de Vries, Wagemans
CV 8002

ELECTRO-INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC BY TON BRUYNÈL CV 8003

KLAAS DE VRIES and PETER-JAN WAGEMANS
Follia, Bewegingen (de Vries); Muziek II (Wagemans)
CV 8004

HOKETUS
Tam Tam (Wagenaar); Bint (de Bondt)
CV 8101

MUSIC FOR SOLO FLUTE AND FOR FLUTE AND PIANO
Music by Bon, Escher, Ketting, Loevendie, de Ruiter
CV 8102

ELECTRONIC COMPOSITIONS BY DICK RAAIJMAKERS
Ballad 'Erlkonig' for loudspeakers, Five Canons
CV 8103

THEO LOEVENDIE
De Nachtegaal (1974/9)
CVS 1981/1

JAN VAN VLIJMEN
Quaterni (1979), Wind Quintet II (1972)
CVS 1981/3

Well might British composers turn green with envy when they contemplate the avenues available in the Netherlands for the dissemination of modern Dutch music. Particularly valuable are the Donemus publishing activities: catalogues, scores for sale or hire, the periodical *Key Notes,* and the Composers' Voice recording series are all incomparable opportunities for the music of Dutch composers to become known in their own country and outside.[1]

The nine records reviewed here cover the Composers' Voice issues of 1980 and 1981 except for the final 1981 record of music by the veteran Rudolf Escher who died in 1980, and a third 'Special' record of music played by the bass clarinettist Harry Spaarnay. As far as I can tell, without first-hand experience of music in Holland, the series really does seem to cover nearly all composers writing today, except for those in the jazz and improvisatory scene. Obviously most of those represented were born in the 1930s and 1940s, but two younger composers are included here (Wagemans and de Bondt); others are perhaps having to wait for suitable works or opportunities for recording — Wim Laman is one not selected yet. The records are meticulously produced, with attractive artist-designed covers and useful sleeve notes. While most tracks are studio recorded, occasional live performances are used. The van Vlijmen *Quaterni* and Wagemans's *Muziek II* are both pressings of the première performances: one must assume that the composers were happy enough with the interpretations to allow the publication of their works in this form, despite the occasional audience noise to be heard on the recordings.

Dutch composers share with British a proximity to countries with an enduring great musical tradition, and it is a pity that more Dutch music is not heard here, for the sixties and seventies have been a busy and vital period of music making. Although composers were rather swamped by the total serialism of the fifties, and its aftermath, their reactions to European trends in the end took various quite individual forms, this diversity permeated by a sinewy formalism and a wry jazzy humour obvious in many of the works on these records.[2]

Otto Ketting (b. 1935) stands a little apart from the majority of composers born in the 1930s. Though trained at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, he was not part of the group known as 'The Five',[3] but worked both as a jazz and a classical trumpeter, and then earned a living as a writer of film music. Recently he has been concerned to give more time to his own personal music, and the early and late symphonies coupled on CV 8001 make an interesting pair.

The Symphony no.1 written between 1957 and 1959 is a work quite assured in its use of the orchestra, with a discernible jazz element, overshadowed by violin solos in the style of Berg. In two perceptive articles in *Key Notes,*[4] Ketting acknowledges the sudden impact on him of the Second Viennese School, but despite his admiration for Webern, it is the influence of Schoenberg and Berg that comes through.

I heard the *Symphony for Saxophones and Orchestra* at the Warsaw Autumn in 1980 and found it an exhilarating experience. The repetitive element it contains (though nothing like American minimalism) was not liked by the Eastern European audiences; when I told Ketting I had enjoyed the work he immediately assumed I was British or American! It is a triumphantly brassy piece — the orchestra consists of two groups, one of brass (six horns, five trumpets, four trombones, tuba), and one of strings (without double basses) with tuned percussion. The saxophones are both pitted against and merged with the brass, and are only joined by the strings after eleven minutes' playing in the first of two short Adagio sections which separate the core of the musical development contained in the two long fast sections. Ketting, as a brass player, must have felt some glee in subjecting the string section to such a long silence, but its use as a holding body of sound in the second half of the piece works particularly well. The saxophone and brass music exploits both the agility of the instruments in running triplet and semiquaver passages and the tone colour in nicely spaced chords; the working-out of these elements is both exciting and completely at ease. It is a work that would surely suit a Proms audience: I'd love to hear it done. The recording offers brilliant playing by the Netherlands Saxophone Quartet with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, conducted by Bernard Haitink.

Another of Ketting's works, *A Set of Pieces* (1967) for flute and piano, is on the flute music record. In this very static and spare music, which avoids the usual flute clichés, one again hears his individual voice, and for me this makes Ketting, together with Peter-Jan Wagemans, the most interesting composer represented in this collection.

The Ketting orchestral disc stands in sharp contrast to the thoughtful, intellectual music of Jan van Vlijmen, born the

same year as Ketting, but part of the group of van Baaren's pupils of the 1950s, and now himself principal of the Royal Conservatory in succession to van Baaren. This Composers' Voice Special record seems to have been rushed out after *Quaterni* won the important Matthijs Vermeulen Prize in 1980 (awarded, incidentally, to Ketting's *Symphony for Saxophones and Orchestra* in 1979).

Of all composers represented here van Vlijmen stands nearest to the total serialists from whom the young post-war generation learned—the shades of both Berio and Stockhausen are evoked more than once in the course of *Quaterni,* a large, 27-minute piece for orchestra, written as the first part of a projected three-part work. The intellectual working-out concerns fours—four twelve-note series, fourths as an important interval, four sections to the work, and so on. Rather as Stockhausen is doing at present, van Vlijmen makes use of a melodic element to bind the work together: if this is meant to soften the intellectual approach, it becomes almost embarrassingly trite at times, and I found the lack of rhythmic drive, despite some aggressive passages, soporific. The Wind Quintet on the other side of the disc was written in 1972, and features good playing by the Danzi Quintet. Again, however, its static formalisations become sterile rather than stately, part of a tradition from which music has really moved on.

Peter-Jan Wagemans was born in 1952 and has had the most notice of the younger generation. He gives the impression of being absolutely certain of himself and the music he writes.[5] While rebelling against strict serialism, he yet is prepared to use elements *from* serialism; while recoiling from neoromanticism he is yet prepared to learn from the orchestration, form, and musical language of 19th-century composers. All is, however, subsumed into an evolving but personal musical style. *Muziek II* for orchestra is recorded here from the première by the Südwestfunk Orchestra conducted by Ernest Bour at the Donaueschingen Festival in 1979. The work, begun in 1975, was revised in 1979: previous attempts to perform it by Dutch orchestras had ended in fiasco. On the face of it, it doesn't sound a difficult work to perform, but the parts present many problems, especially for the greatly divided strings. It consists of seven sections, held together by a cantus firmus running through the trombones. (Wagemans delights in using formal devices from the past and seeing what he can do with them.) Despite some lyrical sections, it is the music's aggressive nature that impresses—especially in the last sections. They are not pretty, but they are compelling; Wagemans is not afraid of silence, and uses it in startling manner. There is no English composer working in any way quite like him at present. Unlike Nigel Osborne, for instance, Wagemans's irony and social comment is there in the music, and does not need words for its communication. The Netherlands Saxophone Quartet include on their record his Saxophone Quartet of 1975. It, too, is an individual piece. A motto theme is played in outrageous counterpoint between widely spaced instruments and commented upon by others. Witty, uncompromising and gritty music, it deliberately belies the harmonious nature of the instruments for which it is written.

Wagemans is a composer worth looking out for. *Muziek II* is coupled with two pieces by Klaas de Vries, which show a composer less sure at present of his musical path. De Vries (b. 1944) is a product of the Rotterdam Conservatory, studying under Otto Ketting who conducts the performances here of *Follia* (1973) for brass, five solo strings, electric instruments, and percussion with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, and *Bewegingen* (Movements) for 15 instruments (1979) with the Residentie Orchestra. The brass writing comes out rather like Ketting's in both works, and de Vries seems trapped by various other influences on him that he has explored—organum, Renaissance music, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Stockhausen, minimalism. He writes in *Key Notes,* no.13,[6] of his dilemma, and it seems a pity that, unlike Wagemans, he has not been able to blast his way out to a form of expression which suits him. Despite my strictures on his conflation techniques, *Bewegingen* is the more successful of these two questing works, with its interesting assortment of instrumental groupings. (In between the two he had written a work for the group De Volharding.) On the Netherlands Saxophone Quartet record de Vries is represented by his short *Two Chorales* (1974), which show a feeling for the sonority of the instruments in all ranges. These slow pieces with a jazz sound to them are satisfying short essays which do seem to be written out of his own personality.

Louis Andriessen's importance in the movement of Dutch music away from serialism into other paths has been chronicled by Keith Potter in *Contact 23.*[7] The groups De Volharding and Hoketus both developed from the existence of works written for a group of performers which, having come together, continued together as other works germinated. Hoketus, of course, toured Britain in 1981, and if you heard them you will already have an idea of the sound of the two pieces offered on CV 8101. Diderik Wagenaar (b. 1946) calls himself a self-taught composer. From Utrecht, he was nevertheless trained at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, but he seems always to have had a special interest in rhythm and, in particular, jazz rhythms. He had already written *Liederen* for De Volharding when he evolved *Tam Tam* for twelve instruments in 1978-9 for Hoketus, and it has a particularly jazzy sound. Wagenaar has aimed to avoid the predictability of a lot of minimal music, and one must admire the way the group here manages not to make any obvious mistakes in the movement and silences of the 23-minute piece. I enjoyed it, in a nagged-at way. Cornelis de Bondt (b. 1953) is the youngest composer represented on the whole set of records and is still a student at the Royal Conservatory, studying with both Andriessen and van Vlijmen. *Bint* (1979-80) is a half-hour piece which proceeds by rhythmic acceleration. It has little harmonic interest, and seems to me to be the kind of repetition piece which is no more than an exercise. It might work if you *see* the players, but it is the sort of thing Ravel has already done in *Bolero.*

Theo Loevendie (b. 1930) began life as a jazz musician, but since about 1968 has turned more and more to composition. The fresh approach this background has created leans in the direction of lyricism and a Romantic tonal and instrumental colouring—witness the very successful *Six Turkish Folk Poems* of 1977. *De Nachtegaal,* a Composers' Voice Special for 1981, was included unexpectedly in this batch of records, and the sleeve notes and all the information I have on it are in Dutch. Loevendie had written a previous version of the work in 1974; this version (1979) is completely revised. Hans Christian Andersen's tale *The Nightingale* is spoken (in Dutch of course), accompanied by a group of seven instrumentalists—the same grouping as in Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale.* The work was written, in fact, for a music-theatre tour with the Stravinsky work, and accompanying photographs show the tale being mimed by actors in masks. This 1979 version is for concert use and is performed by Lieuwe Visser (speaker) and Ensemble M conducted by David Porcelijn. Obviously there is some affinity with the Stravinsky; Loevendie uses a dominant instrument, as does Stravinsky, but here it is the clarinet, standing for the nightingale. Loevendie is apparently working on an orchestral version; I wouldn't advise English-speaking listeners to buy the present version, although the music is descriptive and instantly appealing, and is not weighed down by its Stravinskyan overtones. *Music for Flute and Piano* (1979) on CV 8102 is, according to the sleeve note, jazzy and bright, but the piano part is over portentous, and the work is not particularly memorable.

The two records of electronic music in the set are completely different from each other. One wouldn't expect the most Romantic sounding music of all these records to come on one of the electronic discs, but the selection of recent work by Ton Bruynèl (b. 1934) provides just that. The record includes pieces from 1973 to 1979 and gives a very good idea of the composer's preoccupations in this period: namely the combination of instruments with tape. *Phases* (1973-4) and *Translucent II* (1977-8) combine the Utrecht Symphony Orchestra with sound-tracks, while *Soft Song* (1974), *Serène* (1978), and *Toccare* (1979) combine oboe, flute, and piano (Bruynèl himself) respectively with tape. The electronic tracks in all the works are virtually long, constant, thick sounds. Both the orchestral works make a rather impressive effect and with the speakers placed round the audience could be quite an overwhelming experience in a live performance.[8] It is hard, though, to see how Bruynèl can go any further in this direction without repeating the rather similar effects. The solo tracks on side 2 are embarrassingly Romantic, with owl, water, and night sounds too close to the real thing. They could be popular listening, and Bruynèl, presumably, hopes that they are, but they are poised disconcertingly between musical thought and pictorial suggestion.

Dick Raaijmakers (b. 1930) appears to follow his own idiosyncratic electronic line and hang anyone who doesn't like it. Dutch wit is evident in the sleeve note to his record (CV 8103), the *Key Notes* article about it,[9] and the music of his

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CV 7901 PETER SCHAT	**Symphony No. 1 Op. 27 (1978)** Concertgebouw Orchestra cond. by Colin Davis **Septet, Op. 3 (1957)** Radio Wind Ensemble cond. by Huub Kerstens
CV 8001 OTTO KETTING	**Symphony No. 1 (1959)** Concertgebouw Orchestra cond. by Hans Rosbaud **Symphony for Saxophones and Orchestra (1978)** The Netherlands Saxophone Quartet and the Concertgebouw Orchestra cond. by Bernard Haitink

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Five Canons, fascinating explorations of one electronic pulse. It is hard not to be influenced by the sleeve note, which refers to the *Canons* (which were evolved between 1964 and 1967) as 'mouse music', as one listens to these little squeakings and nibbles of sound gradually multiply. The *Ballad 'Erlkonig'* is half an hour of sound from shortwave radio, with a Pseuds' Corner sleeve note (or a parody of one?); a private world or a private joke that I did not share.

The compilation discs of flute and saxophone music are an introduction to the work of a number of Dutch composers, but one must remember that in writing for small combinations there is an element of self-indulgence.

The flute record includes a work by the oldest composer represented — Rudolf Escher (1912-1980). His Sonata for flute and piano (1976-9) was his last completed work. A deceptively Debussyan beginning leads to a strong three-movement work of uncompromising standards, but from a world rather remote from the rest of the seventies music in the collection. The two solos by Wim de Ruiter (b. 1943) and Maarten Bon (b. 1933) demonstrate the fact that if one writes melodically for flute solo, even using complicated virtuoso techniques, pieces can end up sounding interchangeable. The Ketting set of pieces on this record stand rather impressively apart from all the other works recorded, which could all really have been set by Ton Bruynèl to his electronic tracks.

The excellent work of the Netherlands Saxophone Quartet is celebrated on the record of works written for them. The *Canzona* (1969) by Robert Heppener (b. 1925) with its pleasant textures is both the earliest work and the nearest to the typical harmonious sound of much French saxophone music. The other works, however, all manage to exploit the differences rather than the similarities in the sound of four saxophones playing together, though it is significant that they are all kept short and pithy. The Saxophone Quartet (1970) by Tristan Keuris (b. 1946) is considered something of a breakthrough work. It's rebarbative, and if the quartets by Wagemans and by Wim Petersma (b. 1942) have learned from Keuris, then I appreciated what they learned. Joep Straesser (b. 1934) contributes a work called *Intersections V* (1974), and its title suggests its provenance. The record shows how much a vital playing group can generate from composers, and the experience of both the composers and the performers illustrated here must have led to the composition of the work that still echoes in my mind after listening to all this music: the *Symphony for Saxophones and Orchestra* by Otto Ketting. Nothing seems to get onto the Donemus list unless it is well composed and competent, and all this music is more than that, but the Ketting work has an exuberance that deserves to go further.

NOTES:

[1] *Key Notes*, published twice a year, is available in English free to readers outside Holland by writing to Donemus, Paulus Potterstraat 14, 1071 CZ Amsterdam, or by writing to Donemus's UK agents, who are now also distributors for the Composers' Voice record series: Universal Edition (London) Ltd., 2-3 Fareham Street, Dean Street, London W1V 4DU. For distributors in other countries apply to Donemus for details. Many articles in *Key Notes* are related to recent issues on Composers' Voice, and sleeve notes on the records are often summaries of the related articles by the same author.

[2] For a discussion of the trends in Dutch music after 1945, see Keith Potter, 'The Music of Louis Andriessen: Dialectical Double-Dutch?', *Contact 23* (Winter 1981), pp.16-22.

[3] Andriessen, Mengelberg, Schat, van Vlijmen, and de Leeuw, all pupils of Kees van Baaren. See Potter, 'The Music of Louis Andriessen'.

[4] Otto Ketting, 'Film Music: "Finished one day, recorded the next and usually forgotten the day after" ', *Key Notes*, no.10 (1979/2), pp.20-27; and 'Schoenberg in Holland', *Key Notes*, no.13 (1981/1), pp.25-7.

[5] Roland de Beer, 'Peter-Jan Wagemans: "We should turn music towards the people without falling into the neo-romantic trap" ', *Key Notes,* no.10 (1979/2), pp.4-9.

[6] Klaas de Vries, 'The point of composing is to find out, again and again, exactly what you are after', *Key Notes*, no.13 (1981/1), pp.39-45.

[7] Potter, 'The Music of Louis Andriessen'.

[8] *Phases* was reviewed by both John Casken and Richard Orton in two 1975 performances in *Contact 13* (Spring 1976), pp.34, 36.

[9] See Gene Carl, 'Five Canons by Dick Raaijmakers: A Method of Repetition', *Key Notes*, no.14 (1981/2), pp.1-10.

THE TYRONE GUTHRIE CENTRE, ANNAGHMAKERRIG, IRELAND

HILARY BRACEFIELD

In *Contact 23* Stephen Montague wrote about the MacDowell Colony for Creative Artists in New Hampshire, USA, and bemoaned the fact that there was no such centre in Britain. I can report, however, that exactly such an establishment opened its doors in Ireland in October 1981. I was one of those invited to visit it during the summer of 1981 to try out the facilities, and I give here some details that *Contact* readers may find of interest.

When Sir Tyrone Guthrie the theatre and opera director died in 1971, he left his family home in Ireland for use as an artists' community. The bequest was so complicated that it is only ten years later that the project has come to fruition. Administered jointly by the Arts Councils of Southern and Northern Ireland through a board of directors, the comfortable 19th-century house has been renovated to provide eleven study-bedrooms, most with bathrooms *en suite.* There is also a fully fitted-out artist's studio and a large music room with adjoining composer's bedroom. Downstairs Guthrie's pleasant library and drawing-room have been left much as they were, and there is a large modern kitchen and dining room. All the residents' rooms have a work-table, a generous selection of Guthrie's books, double doors for privacy, and a spectacular view of the lake in front of the house and the pine forests that surround the estate.

As I found during my residency, one can work in peace all day long. Breakfast and a simple lunch may be concocted by the artists themselves at any time they like, but at Guthrie's wish everyone gathers for the evening meal, and may choose to continue to talk after it. If the creative urge flags during the day there are all those books, while outside there are boating and swimming in the lake and plenty of walks in the forests. Newbliss, the nearest little village, is three miles away. (Dublin and Belfast are each about 80 miles from the area, and Monaghan itself is quite easily reached by public transport.)

Guthrie wanted a mix of creative artists, and when I was there writers, artists, and a composer were in residence. Performing artists are also welcome and at least one theatre group has been to the Centre. While residents are mainly drawn from Ireland, places may be given to creative artists and performers from further afield if the board of directors likes the project put forward, and indeed a leavening of local talent with that from elsewhere is something Guthrie would have relished. Residences of between about three weeks and three months are envisaged, and residents are expected, if they are able, to contribute to the day-by-day costs of living at the Centre.

Further details are available from the resident director, Bernard Loughlin, The Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig, Newbliss, County Monaghan, Ireland.