

## Music

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**From Louis Andriessen, Ton Koopman, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Within Temptation and DJ Tiësto to Frans Brüggen or Han Bennink and Wouter Hamel: Dutch music of every conceivable genre is well represented beyond the country's borders.**

The current music culture in the Netherlands is a result of a long history coupled with the recent past in which the differences between conventional ideas and contemporary styles fight it out in an exciting battle. From the very beginning the fighters for the old and new music have joined forces to resist the mainstream. Both camps challenged the nineteenth-century-style structure of musical society, with its insatiable appetite for the symphonies of Beethoven and Mahler. The end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s saw the emergence of Reinbert de Leeuw's Schönberg Ensemble, the New Ensemble under Ed Spanjaard, Frans Brüggen's Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, and the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra under Ton Koopman. Together with countless other ensembles, they have enriched the musical life of the Netherlands.

In the New YorkTimes the Instant Composers Pool, often called the ICP Orchestra, was recently hailed as the continuing flagship of the Dutch avant-garde. In the meantime, numerous current or former ICP musicians have achieved international success on their own merits. Saxophonist Ab Baars and trombonist Wolter Wierbos tour outside the Netherlands on a regular basis. And the young Wouter Hamel and British-Dutch Benjamin Herman have also achieved considerable success abroad.

Dutch pop music is just too good to be confined to its home in the Netherlands. Tiësto, Armin van Buuren and Within Temptation are success stories that form the tip of an iceberg of talent. DJ Tiësto has twice been chosen as the world's best DJ, a title also awarded to Armin van Buuren.

And outside, or maybe even within, all these categories is André Rieu; without doubt the best-selling Dutch performer of all time.

### Contemporary music

Louis Andriessen (1939) was the key figure in the modernisation of the contemporary classical genre. In 1969 he not only stormed the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, but he worked together with a number of leading writers and composers on the 'collective opera' *Reconstructie (Reconstruction)*. Andriessen founded several ensembles so he could play his compositions on his own terms. For example, in 1972 the De Volharding Orchestra was established to perform *De volharding (Perseverance)*, playing music not just as entertainment but also as a means towards social action. Louis Andriessen's magnum opus is *De Staat (the State)* in which two identically matched orchestras incessantly pelt each other with rock-hard chunks of musical granite.

The sharpest of the typically Dutch edges are gradually becoming dulled in the younger generation. They are internationally oriented and regularly give their pieces English titles. Take Michel van der Aa (1970) for example. This pupil of Andriessen studied film direction at the New York Film Academy as well as taking a course in drama direction at the Lincoln Center Theater Director's Lab. Like Andriessen, Van der Aa has worked with film directors such as Hal Hartley and Peter Greenaway. His broad musical-theatrical approach has already tempted the *Financial Times* to make the following Wagnerian prophecy: 'This is the Gesamtkunstwerk of the future.' Micha Hamel (1970) studied in The Hague but did not encounter Louis Andriessen until much later, in the composition class at Tanglewood (USA). He has conducted many performances of contemporary music. Composer and theatre-maker Merlijn Twaalfhoven (1976) – who originally trained as a violist – is an equally versatile talent. Twaalfhoven has a receptive ear to non-Western music and the sounds of nature. With his foundation, La Vie sur Terre, he undertakes large-scale projects on location, for example in the dunes,

on an old Soviet submarine, or in Paradiso, the Amsterdam temple of pop music. Jacob ter Veldhuis (1951) is considered a maverick, but is nonetheless one of the most frequently performed living Dutch composers. 'Ultra-tonal and sweetly flowing' is how he describes his music, which derives from his background as a pop music composer, and which he employs as a gesture of revolt against the 'hackneyed avant-garde'. Ter Veldhuis explores the furthest boundaries of kitsch and is not afraid to cross them: 'My music is liberally sprinkled with sugar.' The high point of his success so far is the three-day festival devoted to his work at the Whitney Museum in New York in 2007.

### **Old music**

Performing 'classical' musicians such as Ton Koopman and Frans Brüggen are of great significance for music in the Netherlands and abroad. Each has, in his own way, performed a great deal of musical archaeology in their research into the performance of old music on authentic instruments. Koopman is a great authority on Bach. Brüggen stretched the definition of old music by playing not only Bach and Purcell with his orchestra, but also Beethoven and Schubert, which led the Italian composer Luciano Berio to call Brüggen "not an archaeologist but a great artist."

### **Spectacle**

André Rieu is a phenomenon of an entirely different order. He travels the world with his spectacular performances, playing classical music, salon music, operetta, soundtracks and pop music for an audience that is largely new to live orchestral performances. According to Billboard Magazine, Andre Rieu was the best selling male performer during the past year, only surpassed by pop stars Madonna, Tina Turner and Britney Spears.

### **Jazz pioneers**

Dutch jazz is characterised by a varied mix of style icons and opinions, but is primarily renowned for the strong self-willed nature of its musicians. The avant-garde of the ICP Orchestra and its entourage has proved to be highly influential, although it is not only the disciples of the ICP who account for the jazz being made in the Netherlands. Take for example alto saxophonist Benjamin Herman, who was born in England but brought up in the Netherlands. In the early 1990s he was one of the acid-jazz pioneers in the Netherlands with his group the New Cool Collective. This group spawned the New Cool Collective Big Band, which has since built up an international reputation. In the meantime Herman is making the most of his opportunities alongside 'New Cool': playing with the British pop star Paul Weller and making records with his jazz idols. Another talent with great international potential is the young singer Wouter Hamel, sometimes irreverently called the Dutch Jamie Cullum. Less than a year after the release of his very successful debut CD *Hamel*, he was performing to packed houses in Japan. The full extent of the ICP's influence can perhaps best be seen in the career of pianist Michiel Borstlap. This spring the flamboyant playboy of Dutch jazz musicians is flying from Chicago via Amsterdam to Jakarta, and from the capital of Angola, Luanda, via Hawaii to Estonia. He composed an opera in Qatar and wrote the 'almost standard' *Memory of Enchantment*, which was recorded by Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, among others.

### **Pop music exports: 36 million**

There are far more success stories than only Tiësto, Armin van Buuren and Within Temptation. Treading in their footsteps, Sander Kleinenberg, Fedde LeGrand and Ferry Corsten are also doing well. Junkie XL (Tom Holkenborg) had a global hit with his remix of Elvis Presley's *A Little Less Conversation*, and for years has been a successful supplier of music for films and computer games, working from his base in Los Angeles.

Dutch pop music is a valuable export product. The Buma Cultuur foundation researched the export value of this cultural heritage and arrived at the very respectable sum of EUR 35.9 million for the year 2006. More recent figures are not yet available.

Years ago father and daughter Hans and Candy Dulfer were successful in the Japanese market and this is now also proving very receptive to the light, jazzy pop of Room Eleven. 'Gothic' groups such as

After Forever, Epica and The Gathering are also proving successful, treading in the footsteps of Within Temptation; while alternative rock groups such as Voicst and Peter Pan Speedrock are also hard at work. The Nits and The Ex have been active in countries such as France, Finland and even Ethiopia for many years. And then there are the groups that concentrate on playing abroad rather than in the Netherlands, which means they are less famous or even unheard of in the Netherlands itself. Examples of groups in this category are Kasba, a Moroccan-Dutch band, and Zuco 103, reasonably well-known in the Netherlands, but far more active abroad.

### **Music theatre**

The Netherlands Opera maintains a constant high standard with innovative stagings of familiar works as well as contemporary opera. The artistic director Pierre Audi is in demand all around the World. The young opera composer Michel van der Aa received great international acclaim following his opera *After Life* which was based on the film with the same name by Japanese director Kore-Eda. Orkater, a contraction of the Dutch words for orchestra and theatre, is a musical theatre company that has been performing for thirty years and regularly tours abroad, most recently with *The Prefab Four* and *Novecento*. Additionally, the Netherlands distinguishes itself with its stimulating small-scale musical theatre scene, with companies such as M-Lab, Yo! Opera, De Veenfabriek and Caecilia Thunnissen's TIS.

### **Festivals**

It is impossible to give a comprehensive list of all the important music festivals in such a limited space; there are simply too many to mention. On the pop scene Lowlands, Pinkpop, Eurosonic and Noorderslag remain good markers. The Oerol festival on Terschelling combines nature with theatre, music, visual arts, installations and street theatre. Musicians in New York sometimes comment that the city is empty during the North Sea Jazz festival, which after a long history in The Hague has recently moved to Rotterdam. For classical music, the Holland Festival and the Gaudeamus Music Week, both in Amsterdam, and the Festival Oude Muziek in Utrecht remain important, although smaller towns and cities such as Delft and Kerkrade are also home to internationally renowned festivals of chamber music.

### **Sector institute**

Music Center The Netherlands (MCN) is the knowledge and promotion centre for the professional Dutch music world. MCN works for every musical genre: from pop, dance, jazz, classic and contemporary to world music.

More information:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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