

2015 International Rostrum of Composers

Willem Jeths (1959)

Recorder Concerto (2015)



NLNPO entry

production: NTR

Composer: Willem Jeths
Title: Recorder Concerto,
for soprano recorder solo and orchestra
Commissioned by: NTR Zaterdag Matinee
Written with financial support of:
the Performing Arts Fund NL,
and the
Borletti Buitoni Trust
Dedicated to: Erik Bosgraaf

Performers: Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra
Conductor: Markus Stenz
Soloist: Erik Bosgraaf, recorder

Instruments: rec-solo 2fl/picc 2ob/eh 2cl 2fg/fg-c 2h 2trp 2trb
cel perc str
Duration: 20'
Recording première: December 20th, 2015, NPO Radio4
Venue: Royal Concertgebouw Amsterdam
Published by: Donemus, Amsterdam

Willem Jeths

"What can I say about my music? For me, intuition and associations are the keywords while composing, together with striving towards a clarity and economy of musical material. Nature is one of the main sources of my inspiration."

About the Recorder Concerto

“The more I immersed myself in the instrument, the clearer it became to me what the theme for my Recorder Concerto had to be – the vulnerable purity of a child’s spirit. This is probably why my own childhood ended up being an important source of inspiration for the Concerto. My recollections of childhood aren’t all particularly happy ones. I had to overcome a lot of adversities.”

Although Jeths emphasises that his Concerto should not have any literal programmatic content ascribed to it, it’s beyond dispute that the score contains echoes of this youthful conflict, for instance in the dramatic tutti timbres of the opening measures, tinged with the ghostly reverberations of a water gong.

Or else in the tempestuous central passage, where the soloist wrings screaming top Cs from the instrument above nervous scale passages in the orchestra and a chromaticism that becomes increasingly tortured. There are also some contrasting moments of calm recollection, such as the delicate solo cadenza, accompanied ‘*molto fragile*’ by gently vibrating crystal glasses. Or the purified resignation of the slowly evanescent closing measures.

Jeths says “For me, the ending of the Concerto is about transformation. About personal transcendence but also about bidding farewell to youth and the demise of the inner child.” Listening closely, one can hear this theme being announced with great subtlety at the start of the work. A keen ear can actually discern a reference to “*Wenn dein Mutterlein*” from Gustav Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder* within the orchestral accompaniment (a transparent web of plaintive sighs). “That song really was a flash of inspiration,” says Jeths, “all the more so since it bears such a telling resemblance to the theme of my Concerto. The child, the wasting away, but also the baroque gesticulation, which is so well suited to the recorder – it deals with them all.” And then, pensively “All things considered, it’s become one of my most cherished and personal works.”

WILLEM JETHS:

Biography

- 1959 born in Amersfoort piano and music theory lessons
- 1980-1982 Sweelinck Conservatory Amsterdam, music education
- 1982-1984 Utrecht Conservatory, composition study with Hans Kox
- 1984-1988 Utrecht Conservatory, composition study with Tristan Keuris
- 1988 Tristan Keuris Prize for composition, Utrecht Conservatory
- 1983-1991 University of Amsterdam, musicology Doctoral dissertation on the composer Elisabeth Kuyper (1877-1953) 'Zes vrouwelijke componisten' (Six women composers) (Walburg Press Zutphen 1991)

Highlights

- 1996 Wiener Internationaler Kompositionswettbewerb: second and third prize for violin concerto Glenz and first Piano Concerto
- 2000 three-day 'Willem Jeths Festival' in Rotterdam De Doelen
- 2002 commission Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra: Flügelhorn Concerto
- 2003 professor in composition Fontys Conservatory, Tilburg

2004	composer-in-residence, Gelders Orkest, Arnhem
2004-2005	composer-in-residence, Brabants Orkest, Eindhoven
2005	commission opening restored Philharmonie in Haarlem: Ombre Cinesi
2005-2006	composer-in-residence, De Doelen, Rotterdam
2007	professor in composition Conservatory of Amsterdam
2008	premiere opera Hôtel de Pékin, opening new opera theatre Enschede
2010	commission Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra to commemorate Mahler: Scale 'Le tombeau de Mahler'
2012	semi-concertante performance and cd recording opera Hôtel de Pékin
2015	'Honorary title 'Componist des Vaderlands'

About his work

Willem Jeths' compositions present a highly individual reaction to music tradition. Jeths has composed chamber and orchestral music (including solo concertos), songs and an opera, initially in an atonal idiom, but later flirting with traditional tonality. He draws on the past and attempts to enrich it through experimentation: "It is precisely by taking tradition as a starting point that it becomes possible to explore new paths." Of the musical parameters, he devotes the greatest attention to tone colour – "Colour is the theme of all my works." He meticulously works out timbral effects, often calling for playing techniques unused in the West – or even elsewhere – and creatively incorporating uncommon sound sources: toy instruments, breaking glass, dripping water. That seems more subtle than it sometimes sounds, for subtlety and beauty are not always his goal – showing the extremes is more important. "My music is about extremes: strict purity versus distortion, loud against soft." For example, he lets a beautiful violin tone fade into scratching, and in his Bandoneon Concerto, the solo instrument instead of being tango-like, sounds at times like "a worn-out dog". While his music is rich in tone colour, Jeths is frugal with his musical material. He limits himself to a few motifs and presents them from varying perspectives until they are (as his composition teacher Tristan Keuris would say) "run down".

Willem Jeths: <http://www.willemjeths.com/>

Erik Bosgraaf: <http://www.erikbosgraaf.com/>