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M is for Men, Music, Mozart, but I is for Illusion

In 1982, Louis Andriessen composed a score for *Golven*, a Dutch movie based on *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf. I liked the music immediately, in all its simplicity and charm and with its undeniable personal touch – every one of its notes referring to both existing styles and models, and equally to Andriessen's own musical DNA.

Soon after the music was released on LP, Louis, his wife Jeanette and I sat down and listened to it. After the final chord, Jeanette broke the silence and said, 'If Louis dies, we play this music'. And not – as the implication was – *De Staat* or *Mausoleum* or even *De Tijd*.

Of course, this was an impulsive, somewhat unbalanced evaluation, but it signified something important – something that Andriessen, at least in those days, heartily agreed upon. It meant that odd-jobs of this kind – writing so-called functional music without much future on the concert stage – made him do things in his music which he wouldn't do so overtly in his concert works but with which, in a very basic, even sentimental way, he could identify. This, in spite of all its casualness and even superficiality, and in spite of its, so to say, musical 'incorrectness'. The intimacy of the music of *Golven* is one that makes Andriessen's functional music a category of its own within his oeuvre.

Of its own does not mean unconnected with his other music. On the contrary, Andriessen stands pretty much alone among his contemporaries as a composer who easily switches between functional music and concert music, as he has done from the beginning of his career. The film music for *The Family*, the once famous agitprop song without words *Dat gebeurt in Vietnam* and the music he wrote for theatre group Sater may be footnotes in his catalogue by now, but listening to them is an experience which does not fundamentally differ from listening to concert pieces from the same period like *On Jimmy Yancey* and *Symfonieën der Nederlanden*.

In both disciplines, Andriessen tends to draw upon similar musical sources, thus confronting 'classical' audiences with sounds and gestures which stem from traditions which lie outside the concert-hall, and confronting 'non-classical' audiences with compositional strategies and peculiarities which are at odds with their listening habits. The demarcation line between his concert music and his functional music may be so vague and blurred that many a piece seems to be as much part of the one as of the other. In opera, or rather music theatre – a genre that tends since *De Materie* (1988) to dominate his oeuvre – he openly strives for an integration of the conceptual methods of his large concert pieces and the empirical approach of works in the tradition of *St. Matthew Passion*, *Orpheus* and *George Sand*, to mention three titles of 'operas' he wrote in the seventies for the Dutch theatre group Baal. Baal, excelling in innovative music theatre, consisted solely of actors from the spoken theatre. Of course, while this clearly imposed limitations on the vocal style of Andriessen, it also served as a compositional challenge and seems to have corroborated his bias against classical singing and his preference for jazz and non-vibrato singing associated with early music.

Underlying this compositional attitude are both social ideas on music and music practice as developed in the seventies, and – perhaps more crucially – a specific combination of temperament and taste. Although raised in a milieu of classical musicians and composers – his father Hendrik was Holland's pre-eminent composer of Roman Catholic Church music in the twentieth century – Andriessen was never to exclusively identify himself with the classical canon. He has always been a Bach devotee and he still cherishes the copy of the piano duet arrangement of Beethoven string quartets that was part of his musical upbringing. But until now, large chunks of musical history leave him indifferent. He prefers Chausson to Wagner, Ravel to Mahler, and dismisses Romanticism and Expressionism in general and the German and Austrian

brand in particular. Jazz – early bebop and cool jazz – have influenced him more than Mozart and Brahms, as he is always happy to tell.¹

A typical story in this context is that of the first non-Dutch performance of *De Staat*, the piece which may be said to mark the birth of the 'real' Andriessen and which was his first to gain international acclaim. The performance took place in Warsaw 1977 and the ensemble consisted mainly of orchestral musicians. Andriessen recalled: 'I had to sing every note for them because they articulated the piece like Bruckner and Mahler. And it should be articulated like Count Basie and Stan Kenton!'²

As to the social and political ideas which are relevant to this blurring of styles, Andriessen formulated a kind of aesthetical credo in a television documentary from 1979, titled 'Composition: A Lesson'.³ The documentary was conceived as a lecture. The composer, in his characteristic formal-informal style, summed up his conclusions from the lessons learned from both the discovery of the music of Charles Ives and from politico-musical activism in the sixties and seventies, which was connected with ideals of self-determination and self-dependency. He emphasized the historical separation of composer and performer, leading to the musicians' alienation from his work and, as a result of the composer's absolutizing the written score, his alienation of musical practice. Andriessen: 'Functioning as a composer is a social attitude. To me this attitude boils down to choosing certain musicians and thus choosing a certain audience.'

His conviction that musical renewal cannot be separated from the renewal of musical performance practice led Andriessen to establish De Volharding (Perseverance). Formed in 1972, this originally conductor-less, big band-like ensemble was made up of both jazz and classical musicians and featured, for several years, the composer himself as *maestro al pianoforte*. The group started as an ad hoc ensemble that gave the first performance of Andriessen's composition of the same name, a piece in which he experimented with both Fluxus-based and jazz-based techniques, from Terry Riley's *In C*. For a number of years, the ensemble would function as a kind of experimental garden for his musical thinking and make him discover the Andriessen as we know him since *De Staat*. Though De Volharding was primarily a musico-political experiment in the spirit of the sixties – anti-establishment, anti-symphony orchestra – and for a long time performed as an agitprop ensemble in very 'unclassical' locations, it never contented itself with playing the kind of neo-Eisler tunes that have been so popular anti-establishment folk. On the contrary, it made its objective not only to 'reach other and new audiences' but also to 'develop and criticize [their needs and tastes] at the same time.'⁴ In the first year of its existence, the orchestra played not only new pieces connected with the war in Vietnam but also music of jazzman Willem Breuker (who at the time played in the band), arrangements of Georgian songs and Andriessen pieces such as *On Jimmy Yancey* and *Volkslied*. (*Volkslied* is a unison composition in which the Dutch national anthem, the *Wilhelmus*, is gradually transformed into the *Internationale*.) In addition, Andriessen provided arrangements of Stravinsky's *Tango* and Milhaud's *La Création du Monde*, the latter of which he considered 'the best historical example of a piece of music in which musical styles, linked to different social classes, were combined.'⁵

Here I take a leap in history and land in 1991.
And here is where Mozart comes in.

Or rather, *Not Mozart*, as this was the original title of a series of six short television films that the BBC, on the occasion of the Mozart Bicentennial, commissioned from a group of composers which included Michael Nyman, HK Gruber and Louis Andriessen.

Bringing together Andriessen and Peter Greenaway to join forces in what was to become *Music for Man, Music, Mozart*, was no sheer coincidence. Greenaway's collaboration with Michael Nyman, who had written a number of scores for his films, was at its lowest ebb and Andriessen's admiration for the filmmaker was known to the official matchmakers. The foundation was laid for a collaboration which in the following years would result in two ambitious works for the music theatre, *Rosa (a Horse Drama)* in 1994 and *Writing to Vermeer* in 1999.

The decision to write the piece for De Volharding was a practical one. As Andriessen, being the orchestra's godfather, was supposed to compose a new piece to celebrate its twentieth birthday and already had planned to write some songs for jazz singer Astrid Seriese, he

combined the two ideas. This may account for the fact that – as we shall see later on - one of the spirits that haunt the score of his Mozart-piece is that of another M - Milhaud. Another explanation for Milhaud's musical presence is suggested by the fact that Andriessen and Greenaway decided to make their own *création*: their *M is for Man, Music, Mozart* is essentially a Genesis story, one that goes from the making of Man to the making of one man in particular - Mozart.⁶

Greenaway's 30' film is a work by an artist known for having said: 'I don't think we've seen any cinema yet. I think we have seen 100 years of illustrated text'. One should not conclude from this, however, that *M* is text less. On the contrary, the screen incessantly abounds with words. A typical Greenaway touch is the scraping pen that, in real time, using elegant quasi-18th century characters, produces long lists of words and long sentences that alternately clarify and obscure his flamboyant images. It is just one of the many qualities and manners which have their origins in earlier films such as *The Draughtman's Contract* (1982), *A Zed and Two Naughts* (1985) and *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989). The baroque scenery, the corporeity and the naked bodies, the combination of formalism and violence – it's all there. The original broadcast of the film on BBC television was introduced by a voice, warning that it would contain 'explicit language and nudity'. Characteristically these so-called explicit images appeared too clinical to be lustful or exciting. I would even call them prude.

Basically *M* is composed as a series of creational phases, localized in a 17th century Theatre of Anatomy with its operating tables and its many-levelled auditorium, filled with a horde of extras in the role of spectators and participants. The film is structured by the music, a series of three self-contained songs and three equally self-contained instrumental interludes.⁷ As the singer, Astrid Seriese, is shown singing her songs, it is clear that the film has not been 'scored' but rather that the music has been 'imaged'. There is, however, no orchestra to be seen.

The first scene is a pas de deux of two female dancers based on the first song, *The Alphabet Song*. As Greenaway had already written and filmed so many alphabets, lists of numbers etc., he asked the composer to make his own alphabet. Together with a physician friend, Andriessen wrote one from A to L, whose 'A is for Adam' en 'E is for Eve' leave no doubts about its creational nature and whose allusions to libertine writers like De Sade and Sacher-Masoch⁸ may be interpreted as an announcement of the licentious main character of the film. The fruitless attempts at intercourse and procreation by the two female dancers are just one example out of many in a film which abounds with signs, tokens, metaphors and metonyms⁹ that allude to as many competing interpretations; a quality which, by the way, makes *M* ironically much more literary than the average traditional movie from which Greenaway so explicitly dissociates himself.

The music in this pre-Mozart phase of the film is already aware of the great M.'s music to come, as it combines the vocal characteristics of *Sonata facile*-like melody with the kind of counting-out rhyme which is to conclude the scene preceding the final invention of Mozart.¹⁰ The melody at the words 'F is for fertility' is even a free inversion of the main theme of the *Sonata facile* (Ex.1). Mozartian is also the *Rakete*-like figure, first at 3₅ (Ex. 2).

Ex 1

(Ex.1)

Ex 2

(Ex.2)

Either the first instrumental interlude is an enlarged version of the previous *Alphabet Song* or – which is from a compositional point of view more probable – the song is a kind of extract of the interlude. Where the song alludes, the interlude is explicit: it contains the only two straightforward Mozart-quotations in the whole piece, one from the Sonata in A KV 310, the other from the *Sonata facile* KV 545 – the last one being transposed to A. The two quotations are so obvious that they are wisely left out of the recapitulation.

To say recapitulation is to say sonata form, and indeed, this interlude comes nearer to it than anything else in the Andriessen's output. The development section, however, restrains from any real development (as many an early classical work does as well, by the way) and confines itself to a suspenseful, gangster film-like tritone in the bass (A-E flat), sounding not once but a dozen times.

Apart from Mozart, one may recognize in this movement not only the composer of *De Staat*¹¹ but also Andriessen's godfather, who is not Mozart but Stravinsky, especially in the saxophone solo starting at 4₅ (Ex. 3).¹²



(Ex.3)

The Alphabet Song is the foundation for the second scene, M is for Man.¹³ This starts with a proclamation of 'Aural and Visual Variations on a Conundrum of the Apotheosis of the Spirit of Mozart'. And 'aural variations' is indeed what we hear in the aforementioned instrumental interlude. The visual variations are set in a kind of bakery where the making of man is shown through a process of trial and error, leading from a Man of Floor through A Man of Words, A Man of Meat, of Cloth, of Straw, of Clay, of Water and so on to man in the shape of a naked dancer. Man's final montage is accompanied by a second song, named after Vesalius, the 16th century anatomist,¹⁴ and basically enumerating man's ingredients - 'sins, shit, teeth, nails and various random involuntary motions.' Finally, the naked body is held upside down and beaten on its buttocks like a new-born baby – a gesture which is copied by the bystanders with an eagerness which may be pardonable with scatological geniuses like Mozart but hardly with mere extras. The song with its archaic, fauxbourdon-like parallel fifths is of great tenderness in its opening and concluding slow episodes (Ex. 4) but full of sudden excitement in the fast middle episode with its aforementioned monosyllabic ingredients of the human body.



(Ex.4)

In the next scene, 'M is for Movement', Man slowly comes to life in an extended solo dance, carried by the sounds of a second instrumental interlude. This interlude is the proper Adagio of what gradually turns out to be a classically balanced suite. Its opening chords come together with the soft and gentle crying of a baby, which is, by the way, lacking on the recording – alas, as it is certainly the most memorable meeting point of musical and non-musical sounds in the entire movie. The interlude is a fully fledged Andriessen-Adagio and indisputably the score's pinnacle, together with its offshoot *The Eisenstein Song*, which eventually found no place in the film.¹⁵ It is

in this interlude that the ghost of Milhaud is definitely raised, in a procession of slow amphibrachs, sustaining a choral-like melody in halves and quarters. The repetition of the first episode (1-2₅) a semitone higher and enriched with an extra *Stimme* (3) is an old but highly effective trick that Mozart would not have been ashamed of, whereas the far trumpets con sordino in parallel fourths and thirds in the middle-episode (6, Ex. 5), expressive *seufzer* (8₅, Ex. 6) and blue notes seem to point directly to the composer of *La création du monde*. The major-minor chord at 9₁₂ (Ex.7) may be heard as a pars pro toto of this movement.

Handwritten musical score for Example 5. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It contains a melodic line with notes and rests, some marked with 'd.' and 'hp'. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains chordal accompaniment with notes and rests, some marked with 'mf'. There are also some handwritten markings like 'H/12' and '12'.

(Ex.5)

Handwritten musical score for Example 6. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It contains a melodic line with notes and rests, some marked with 'hp' and 'mf'. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains chordal accompaniment with notes and rests, some marked with '3MA' and '7#'. There are also some handwritten markings like 'H/12' and '12'.

(Ex.6)

Handwritten musical score for Example 7. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It contains a melodic line with notes and rests, some marked with 'A', 'hp', and 'mf'. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains chordal accompaniment with notes and rests, some marked with '1.5.5.5' and '2.5.5.5'. There are also some handwritten markings like 'H/12' and '12'.

(Ex.7)

'Having made Man and taught him MOVEMENT, what was the best that could be done with him? Teach him to make MUSIC.'

In the following scene, the singer is covered with instruments, one of the female dancers pretends to play the clarinet, Man is eating from his nose and the bystanders hold each other's noses at the words 'the exposure of the bum' as sung in *The Schultz Song*, a sort of allusion which in itself may be even more childish than Mozart himself is reported to have been. (Since Milos Forman's *Amadeus* the overexposure of M.'s silliness has become a cliché in itself.)

Why Schultz? Like Vesalius in the earlier scene, the Polish writer and graphic artist signs the screen after the song which is named after him: 'Bruno Schultz 1934'.¹⁶ The reason why he does is unclear, at least not deducible from the film itself. It shouldn't worry us too much, however. Minefields of allusive duds seem to be Greenaway's favourite playground.

The words of *The Schultz Song* are, apart from some more remarks on man's physical functions, rather obscure and add to the 'conundrum' that was promised before. The key to their meaning may, or may not be found in Schultz' writings.

The song itself is a three-part, dance-like piece in a light-hearted, ironical vein – the typical scherzo of this symphony of songs and variations. As in all the other movements but one,¹⁷ the central key is D.

'Having made Man and taught him MUSIC then it was necessary to invent MOZART.'

It is only in the very last minutes of the film that the final metamorphosis of Man into Mozart takes place. It clearly provokes unlimited joy in the galleries of the Theatre of Anatomy, where jostling onlookers, dressed now in 18th century style, are greatly overacting their would-be playing of musical instruments. This naivety confirms the weak link in Greenaway's aesthetic

arsenal, which is basically those of a visual artist, not of a dramaturg. *M* is a film that combines innovative cinematography with theatrical clichés, bad acting and run-of-the-mill dancing.

All the strength here comes from the music, the third and final instrumental interlude, whose main features are Andriessen all over, from his beloved parallel seconds at the opening¹⁸, to the majestic slow melody that, in the manner of a Bach chorale prelude, spans a fast moving, rhythmical lowland of trombones, double-bass and piano¹⁹. As a final reminder of Mozart there is the *Rakete*-figure again (6), but it is the one and only reminder.

Apparently, film and music go in opposite directions: the former from Man tot Mozart, the latter from Mozart to Andriessen.

So, is *M* really for Mozart?
Does *M* say anything about Mozart?
About Mozart in the 20th century?
Or about being a 20th century colleague of Mozart?
Is *M* about an icon or an example?
Is *M* about a cultural fact or a cultural force?

Difficult questions.

There may be a lot of irony in *M*, but there is no fundamental comment or criticism.

There is no competition either.

There is no nostalgia, no holy pathos and no *ewige Kunst* sentimentality.

There is no identification but there is professional respect.

There is playfulness and there is pleasure.

It is the pleasure of people who like to make. It's real creative lust. May we say: real Mozartian creative lust?

'Hallo, this is Annette speaking, Annette Morreau from the Arts Council. What about a new piece, a kind of video-opera on the occasion of the next Mozart Bicentennial?'

And there it was.

Is Louis Andriessen a Mozart connoisseur?

I wouldn't dare to say. In his parental home he used to play the late symphonies as piano duets. In the period he studied with Luciano Berio in Milano the piano sonatas were on his music stand. We, that is, Louis and I, have a habit of playing piano duets and two pianos, and I remember that more than once, indeed, we played the Adagio and Fugue in c minor and the *Flötenuhr*-music.

And that's about it.

Might Andriessen have thought of it himself, to write a Mozart homage in 1991?

I don't think so.

In the almost thirty years I know him we hardly ever discussed Mozart. It was his idea, however, to include a short paragraph on Mozart in the book on Stravinsky we wrote in 1983²⁰. In the book *M* is put on the stage as a member of the same choir of 'know-it-alls, money-grabbers and anally-fixated hypochondriacs' to whom Stravinsky belongs as well.

The first time I saw Louis Andriessen *live* was in 1969, when in Amsterdam the collective, agitational opera *Reconstructie* was premiered, a main event in the socio-cultural history of post-war Holland. The opera was written by seven men – two writers and five composers of whom Andriessen was one – and dealt with the exploitation of South America by the United States. *Reconstructie* was loosely modelled after Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, with the famous womanizer and rapist in the role of despicable imperialist, with Bolivia and Cuba as his victims, and with Che Guevara as the Commendatore.

In the middle of the opera there is an opera within an opera, a mini-Mozart-opera, a lovely pastiche consisting of a tiny overture and some tiny arias and tiny recitatives. Andriessen, who

conducted this scene, was – as he has once confided to me - the main author of the overture's forty seconds.

Reconstructie was structured as an alphabet as well.

But M was not for Mozart, but for Moonlight.

At that time, Mozart was subsumed under 'I is for Illusion'.

Notes:

- ¹ Cf. Louis Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing of Time* (Arc Music, 2002) p.153.
- ² Andriessen, *The Art* p.149.
- ³ Louis Andriessen, 'Componeren: een les' (tekst voor een televisie-programma van Hans Hulscher over Louis Andriessen), in: *Muziek & Dans*, March 1979.
- ⁴ Andriessen, *The Art* p.136.
- ⁵ Andriessen, *The Art* p.133.
- ⁶ I owe this suggestion to Michael Steinberg's notes to the recording of *M is for Man, Music, Mozart* on Elektra Nonesuch 79432-2.
- ⁷ There is a fourth and final song, the so-called 'Eisenstein Song', which is on the cd-recording of *M is for Man, Music, Mozart*, but which was left out of the film due to lack of broadcast time. In concert-video performances of the piece, De Volharding is in the habit of playing this last (and arguably most beautiful) song at the very end of the show during the credits and titles. Why the song is named after Eisenstein is a question open for easy and uncommitted speculation.
- ⁸ 'J is for Justine or the misfortunes if virtue' and 'Venus' fur', alluding to *Venus in furs* by Sacher-Masoch. (The fur is the one worn by the novel's mistress.)
- ⁹ See William van Wert, 'Metaphor and Metonymy in Greenaway: *M is for Man, Music, Mozart*. www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/cteq/01/12/man.html
- ¹⁰ A Dutch version of 'Ah, vous dirai-je Mamam' ('Altijd is Kortjakje ziek'), in itself already a banality, let alone when rendered by this especially insipid chorus, as if sung by grown-up infants.
- ¹¹ Two measures before 3.
- ¹² Cf. e.g. the clarinet solo in the first movement of the *Ebony Concerto* (starting one measure before 10).
- ¹³ Having arrived at the letter M, the Central Letter of the Alphabet, the Gods decided to use it to make Man.'
- ¹⁴ The scene is concluded with a hand writing '1543 Vesalius'.
- ¹⁵ 'The Eisenstein Song' (movement #7) is to (the preceding) 'Instrumental II' (movement #4) what 'The Alphabet Song' is to (the following) 'Instrumental I' (movement #2) is.
- ¹⁶ In 1934 Schultz published his *Cinnamon Shops*. Zie www.echonyc.com/~goldfarb/schulz.htm
- ¹⁷ all the other but two movements, if *The Eisenstein Song* is included.
- ¹⁸ One of the first out of many examples that come to mind is the penultimate choir in *De Staat* ('to melos ek triōn').
- ¹⁹ One of the first out of many examples that come to mind is the oboe melody, mirroring the first choir in *De Staat*.
- ²⁰ *Het apollinisch uurwerk Over Stravinsky* (Amsterdam 1983), translated as *The Apollonian Clockwork. On Stravinsky* (Oxford 1989).