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**Willem Pijper: an aperçu<sup>1</sup>**

"After Sweelinck the Netherlands produced practically no composers for three hundred years. But the 20th century has seen the birth of a flourishing school which, in reacting against the strong influence of the 19th century, accepted the hegemony of French music." Thus the *Larousse Encyclopedia of Music*.<sup>2</sup> Although in its baldness this statement is correct neither about the lack of composers nor, in this radical form, about the hegemony of French music, it is nevertheless true that the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries were heavily dominated by foreign composers and performers, with the result that, without national content and without international quality, the music of this period is at best competent, often only of historical interest.<sup>3</sup>

A number of factors contributed to the revival of music in the Netherlands around 1880. There was the opening of the Concertgebouw in 1888 and the musical reforms of Willem Kes associated with the orchestra. In 1895 Willem Mengelberg took over from Kes and began to internationalize and modernize the repertoire, with the introduction of composers like Richard Strauss, Scriabin, Debussy, Rachmaninov and above

all Mahler. At the same time, Dutch compositions were being published by A. A. Noske in Middelburg. Finally, a new generation of composers began to make itself heard.

First and foremost among these was Bernard Zweers. Although trained in Leipzig, Zweers was the first to make a serious bid for an independent nationalistic style, especially in his Third Symphony, *To My Fatherland*, of 1890. He was followed closely by Alphons Diepenbrock, a composer of large choral and orchestral works. It was Diepenbrock above all who initiated the shift from Germanic to French influences mentioned above: from Wagner to Debussy, and from German Lieder on texts of the Romantics (e.g. *Hymnen an die Nacht* on texts by Novalis) to vocal works on poems by Baudelaire, Verlaine and Laforgue.

Diepenbrock's near contemporary Johan Wagenaar (1862-1941) was a very different character - a *bon vivant*, realist and humorist, the composer of satirical operas, of concert overtures two of which, *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *De Getemde Feeke*, are still in the repertoire, *Saul and David* (inspired by a painting of Rembrandt) and a *Sinfonietta*. He spent some time as a violinist in the Utrecht

Stedelijk Orkest (Utrecht Municipal Orchestra); he was also active as an organist, and directed various choirs in Utrecht. From 1919 to 1937 he was the director of the Royal Conservatory in The Hague. He was also an important conductor and introduced a number of important works into the Dutch repertoire, among them Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. As a composer he was influenced by Brahms, Berlioz, and Richard Strauss - the latter two especially in the matter of brilliant orchestral scoring. The concert overtures are clearly inspired by Richard Strauss, specifically his *Don Juan*. Wagenaar was an eminent pedagogue, and among his pupils were Peter van Anrooy and Willem Pijper.

Willem Frederick Johannes Pijper<sup>4</sup> was born in Zeist on September 8, 1894 of working-class parents with staunch Calvinist leanings, who took a little interest in music. His father, a paperhanger who sometimes played psalm accompaniments on the harmonium, taught him the names of the notes of the treble clef when he was five. Pijper subsequently discovered the use of sharps and flats on his own and began composing simple melodies. His fascination with symmetrical musical structures was evident even at this early age. The organist of a nearby church took an interest in the lad and allowed him to play on the church instrument. At ten he began formal piano lessons and made rapid progress.

Poor health (he suffered from a form of chronic asthmatic bronchitis) prevented the young Pijper from attending regular elementary school, and hence for the first 13 years of his life he was educated at home. During this time he made marked intellectual progress, becoming a voracious reader with a particular

interest in botany. He spent many happy hours in his father's garden where he began a collection of seeds, carefully labelled and categorized, which he maintained until his home was destroyed during World War II.

By 1908 his health had improved sufficiently for him to attend high school (*gymnasium*), where he studied for three years, wishing to devote himself entirely to music. In 1915 he passed an examination in theoretical subjects at the Utrecht Conservatory. Here he was taught composition by Johan Wagenaar (1862-1941), who introduced him to his own favourite composers: Berlioz, Richard Strauss, and Gustav Mahler.

The most important thing Wagenaar transmitted to Pijper, however, was his excellent theoretical knowledge, which Pijper in turn was able to pass on to others throughout his teaching career. Pijper was an eminent pedagogue. First a teacher of harmony, in 1925 he became the head instructor in composition at the Amsterdam Conservatory, and in 1930 he became the director of the Toonkunst Conservatorium in Rotterdam. Here he remained until his death in 1947.

In the 1920s and 1930s Pijper's reputation grew rapidly, and he became one of the most respected composers in Europe, drawing the attention of as prominent a musician as Pierre Monteux, who tirelessly promoted Pijper's Third Symphony (1926, see below) and other works. As an indication of his rising prominence, we may note that his compositions began to be performed at the concerts of the prestigious International Society for Contemporary Music.

The war years were difficult for Pijper.

During a massive German bombardment of Rotterdam on May 14, 1940, Pijper's home was completely destroyed. Fortunately, he had stored his manuscripts in a safe-deposit vault several months previously, thereby preserving them for posterity. Pijper spent much of his time during these trying years working on a new opera, *Merlijn*. He believed that the work would be the last great effort of his life, but he also feared that he would not live to see it completed. In this, Pijper was unfortunately correct: in late 1946 he was diagnosed with cancer. It is likely that the war years had prevented an earlier diagnosis, and by this time his condition was beyond treatment. During the closing weeks of his life he began putting his musical affairs in order; in his last days he rewrote in meticulous detail the orchestration to his *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra*, completing the task on February 3, 1947. On March 18 of that year he died at the age of 53. During his short life he had succeeded in restoring the music of his country to a place of prominence in the European musical life of the twentieth century.

Pijper's appearance must have seemed rather eccentric. He was afraid of dentists and spoke with his teeth hidden behind his hand and moustache. None the less he had a tremendous influence on his students and thus on modern Dutch music. He taught many future prominent Dutch composers of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s: Henriëtte Bosmans, Rudolf Escher, Hans Henkemans, Piet Ketting, Guillaume Landré, Bertus van Lier, Karel Mengelberg, Henk Badings, and later Kees van Baaren. Although quite convinced of the merits of his own theoretical and stylistic stance - some would argue he was arrogant - Pijper nevertheless encouraged

a significant degree of independence in his pupils, as can be gathered from the broad spectrum of styles represented by this list. Pijper was also an active performer, working in particular with the Utrechts Blaas sextet (wind sextet), and with the singer Berthe Seroen. Moreover, he occasionally gave piano recitals during the mid to late 1920s.

Of greater importance than his performances was his activity as a critic. In 1926, with Paul F. Sanders, he established the periodical *De Muziek*, which survived until 1929. He contributed many essays to his periodical, hoping thereby to give guidance to contemporary Dutch musical life. Collections of his essays were published by Querido (Amsterdam) under the title *De Quintencirkel* (1929) and *De Stenvork* (1930).

Pijper's essays are especially important for an understanding of the fundamentals of his own compositions and convictions in matters of style. At times hampered by a blind faith in his own ideas and direction, Pijper was apt to attack and criticize rather than to assess objectively. And although a remarkably cerebral musician, Pijper could also be passionate, and this passion led to a number of historical errors and misjudgments on his part about certain of his colleagues. Nevertheless, these essays have permanent value as a document of modern musical history in the Netherlands.

Pijper also contributed a crucial chapter on contemporary music, characteristically entitled "Van Debussy tot heden," to Bernard Smijers' *Algemeene Muziekgeschiedenis*, which appeared in 1957, well after Pijper's death. In this chapter he quotes with obvious approval a comment on his compositions by fellow-

composer Sem Dresden:

By the analysis of his works, piece by piece, one could form an excellent idea of the gradual shift from the tonal system via bi- and pluritonicity to the so-called atonal one. From the older melodic and polyphonic way of writing to the poly-melodic style, which necessarily involves the most surprising rhythmical developments as well.<sup>5</sup>

I would like now to trace briefly this development in Pijper's writing, with references to a few musical samples. (The numbers following the "D" in brackets refer to the Discography which follows the article).

It is not surprising that Pijper's first efforts at composition were heavily influenced by Wagenaar. Like his teacher and most of his contemporaries, Pijper himself began as an epigone of the German late Romantics, Brahms, Wagner and especially Mahler, thanks in no small degree to Mengelberg. Hendrik Andriessen has remarked that during this period Mahler's music was simply *the* music, and a Mahler cult, especially with regard to the sonorities of the large orchestra and the strong emotions expressed in the music, held sway in Holland.<sup>6</sup>

One of Pijper's earliest works is his *Theme and Five Variations for piano* (1913, D 31), dedicated to his friend the composer Alexander Voormolen. This is conventional and even epigonal music characteristic of the period; it

could have been composed by Brahms or Dvořák, especially the theme itself and the earlier variations in the tradition of late Romanticism. The *First String Quartet* in F minor (1914, D 27), dedicated to Johan Wagenaar, reveals similar influences, notably that of Brahms. The first movement especially makes us think also of Dvořák and other Czech models such as Josef Suk in its use of the parallel thirds and sixths so typical of these composers. Towards the very end of the first movement, however, there are already some interesting harmonic shifts, announcing the change in style on which Pijper was to embark soon. While the third movement is harmonically closer to César Franck, the Scherzo, the second movement, is more original, incorporating bi-tonal elements: at one point, for example, a passage for the violin is in C while the other three instruments play in the key of E flat. One main motif appears in all four movements, an early use of the germ cell technique I will discuss below.

The *First String Quartet* suggests in embryonic form the change in idiom which was to occur soon after 1915. At this time Pijper went through the first of the several major shifts one can discern during his career. He abandoned Romanticism, the musical language of Wagenaar and his models, and began a process of absorption, emulation and modification of quite different, more modern influences.

A major reason why Pijper felt that Romanticism (German or otherwise) was no longer acceptable, was that he did not share that movement's interpretation of the function of music. According to Andriessen, "he never wished to use musical elements as material to

make a sort of portrait of particular feelings.”<sup>7</sup> This thinking would inevitably lead him away from the emotionally hyper-charged music of Mahler towards a greater degree of intellectualism and abstraction. Indeed, after an initial “romantic” phase, the “constructivist” element in Pijper’s music becomes and remains unusually strong, and this fact has often been a stumbling block for a more widespread appreciation of Pijper’s music. As a number of critics have rightly pointed out, however, and as I will argue below, this does not mean that Pijper’s music can be classified as similar to the almost mathematically conceived music of, for example, Arnold Schoenberg (and perhaps Boris Blacher and even Paul Hindemith). Pijper’s intentions were never to purge his music of all emotion, as even a cursory glance at his scores will reveal. And in any case it can be said in favour of the perhaps unusual cerebral character of Pijper’s compositions that they are, as Andriessen points out, characterized by a high degree of technical competence, which has the advantage that the music is “never hindered by clumsinesses, bungling, experiments or empty effects.”<sup>8</sup>

A relatively greater emphasis on the intellectual element in music may also explain, at least partially, why very early in his career Pijper came under the sway of French music, with its traditional sense of order. Manifestations of French tendencies clearly appear in two settings of poems by Paul Verlaine, the *Fêtes galantes* (1916) and the *Romances sans paroles* (1918), though at this stage the influences are older: César Franck, Albéric Magnard, Gabriel Fauré. Very quickly, however, it was the influence of Debussy, and to some extent Ravel, that was superimposed on that of both the Germans

and the earlier French composers. It is a shift that was to have a lasting effect on Pijper’s work. Eventually his turning to French Impressionism also led him to appreciate and emulate such composers as Erik Satie, Francis Poulenc, and Darius Milhaud. It should be noted that Pijper followed a tendency that was rather general in the Netherlands in the 1910s and 1920s. A similar preference for the French tradition can be observed also in the music of Willem Landré, and indeed a Dutch/French synthesis is characteristic for the whole generation after 1915 represented by composers such as Daniel Ruyneman, Matthijs Vermeulen, Sem Dresden and Alexander Voormolen. Clear evidence of Pijper’s move towards French music can also be heard in his *Sonatina no. 1 for piano* (1917, D 21 and 22).<sup>9</sup> For a composer still early in his career, this work already gives an impression of maturity. It is in the tradition of the only sonatina by Ravel.

This is not to say, however, that Pijper became a mere epigone of the French. In his striving for a style which would break with the Germans, he could not simply move into another camp. On the contrary, after 1918 Pijper entered upon a phase of increasing experimentation, especially in tonality, that can best be understood by analyzing the chamber works of the period 1918-1922. In them, in just a few years, Pijper found a distinctively modern style and grew into one of the most advanced composers in Europe. Although he moved particularly in the proximity of avant-garde figures like Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Milhaud, Andriessen is nevertheless correct when he points out that Pijper’s “musicality strove for perfection of his own language.”<sup>10</sup> Pijper’s

study of Schoenberg's system, for example, served primarily to clarify his own ideas, and he never slavishly embraced dodecaphony. On the other hand, his output during this period was marked by polymetrics and bi-tonality.

It has been argued that in the orchestral works of the same period (notably the first two symphonies), influences of Mahler and Strauss, especially in the scoring, still predominate. Yet there is a noticeable shift between the First and the Second Symphony, and it is all in the direction of a French hegemony. Though judging from his letters of 1921 Pijper remained a convinced Mahlerian, and though certain touches in the scoring of the *Second Symphony* (1921, D 29), such as the use of a tenor horn and a mandolin, still suggest Mahler's direct influence, Harrison Ryker writes: "Yet how curiously the Mahlerisms are applied! The harmonic language is a syncretic mixture of Debussy and early Stravinsky ... with unmistakable polytonal tendencies; presumably Milhaud played a role in these."<sup>11</sup> And Ryker concludes: "It remains a puzzling work ... in terms of influences."<sup>12</sup>

The Symphony is certainly a startling and unorthodox work; so much so that Mengelberg, who was to have conducted the symphony with the Concertgebouw, was scared off. Ryker writes: "He did not understand the music; he found the instrumentation unworkable ... and he felt that the Amsterdam audience would not accept it." In the end he agreed that the work should be performed, but Pijper himself was to conduct it. The premiere took place on November 2, 1922. The episode demonstrates some of the problems Pijper would have to face once

he started on his modernistic phase. Unfamiliarity with Pijper's intentions, and specifically his leanings towards techniques of the avant-garde, caused alienation, and not only in staid Amsterdam.

For Andriessen the two main characteristics of the period 1920-1934, Pijper's most representative, are the fact that the traditional 7-tone scale is not the basis of the music - instead, all 12-tones in mutual functional context provide the material for the composition - and that there is an unusually strong and sophisticated rhythm at work. According to E. W. Schallenberg, Pijper cultivated in this period a type of "absolute" music which is characterized by the following aspects: a mixture of cerebral and emotional elements, particularly visible in the Third Symphony; polytonality, i.e. the simultaneous use of scales a triad or a diminished fifth apart; polyrhythm, i.e. the use of unusual metres such as 5/16, 9/16, 7/8 time etc.; and a rejection of "outdated" musical structures, such as simple sonata forms, with literal recapitulations, and straightforward variation forms.<sup>13</sup>

Consistent use of polytonality and polyrhythm occurs for the first time in the First Violin Sonata and the First Cello Sonata. As in many compositions of Pijper, the beginning of the *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano no. 1* (1917, D 19 and 20) is traditional, but in the working out of the material, modernistic tendencies can be heard. One may in fact note the shift from a somewhat "Brahmsian" beginning to more acid harmonies within the first minute of playing: Pijper has entered into his most productive and most innovative phase.

The search for alternative musical structures eventually led Pijper to the theory of the “germ cell” (*kiemcel*) as the prime formal element of a piece of music. Germ-cells in Pijper’s music are musical devices to create cyclical unity within a particular work - a very short basic musical unit (not the 12-tone scale) which is used as a unifying element throughout a composition. A thesis by Hans Eduard Mooij,<sup>14</sup> available on the World Wide Web, analyzes this technique in great detail in one specific composition by Pijper, the *Piano Sonata no.1*. Mooij, like other musicologists, suggests that the concept may have come from Pijper’s botanical observations as a boy.<sup>15</sup> The Dutch musical historian F. W. Schallenberg has similarly written on this topic:

Just as the behaviour of humanity in general is guided by germ cells planted in the child’s soul, so likewise the course of a composition had to evolve from a found motif, logical-illogical, like all growth in nature.<sup>16</sup>

A pupil of Pijper’s, Bertus van Lier, going even further, has given a philosophical significance to the idea: “The ‘germ cell’ became for Pijper the symbol of the everlasting principle of which the transient is the manifestation.”<sup>17</sup> Starting from the conception that every work of art arises out of a number of such “germ cells,” according to van Lier, Pijper worked with the precision of a mathematician, drawing his conclusions and then building upon them.<sup>18</sup>

Is this theory an example of the excessive use of technique at the expense of expression? Pijper believed that constructivism is

not an obstacle to inspiration. He was fond of talking about “inspiratiediscipline,” and maintained that constructions can be filled with emotion. The theory in any case never became dogma, as perhaps the 12-tone technique did in the case of Schoenberg. Nor did Pijper rigidly apply polytonality; rather, as in the case of Schoenberg’s pupils Anton Webern and Alban Berg, artistic intuition and mobility of technique remained an integral part of his method, and he was always interested in colour and expression. Although some critics have maintained that since about 1919 Pijper was an atonalist, in reality there is no question of Pijper’s consciously abandoning tonality altogether. Pijper’s bi- or polytonality always aims at harmony as a whole, and the harmonic complexity exists exclusively for the sake of the physical tensions towards which he aimed — it is the means, but not the object, of the musical expression. In spite of his severe self-discipline and the consistent application of his ideas, Pijper remained a composer of strong emotional character.

This can be seen in his *Third Symphony* (1926, D 30), arguably Pijper’s most important composition but also a most controversial one. Like all of Pijper’s symphonies, it is very short. Pijper’s symphonies are in this respect at the antipodes of Mahler’s compositions. Seen negatively, this may suggest that Pijper lacked the ability to write extensive movements in the tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> century composers who were still working when he began his own writing. On the other hand, the trend in 20<sup>th</sup> century music has in any case been toward shorter, more complex compositions. Pijper preferred to be concise and he had a dislike for exact repetition. An indication of his desire to achieve concentra-

tion in his ideas may be found in a 1926 essay published in *De Quintencirkel*, in which Pijper expresses his musical views on this matter:

Bruckner and Mahler could still project symphonies of considerable duration. This is no longer possible (indeed, it was not feasible in Mozart's time either) ... Our generation thinks more efficiently; as students we trained ourselves to survey quickly, to summarize, and this process will undoubtedly progress further. Symbols of this, our age, are the telegram and stenography. We no longer have time for ornamental letters, no more disposition for lengthy meditations ... With four or five words, a telegram induces whole complexes which begin to function at the same instant (Pijper, 1964, p.134, quoted in translation in Mooij).

Pijper's symphonies follow in general the predilection for brevity and compactness demonstrated in his chamber music. For that very reason, perhaps, they have failed to establish themselves in the hearts of concertgoers, especially beyond the Netherlands, though they have earned the respect and at times even the enthusiasm of some very prominent musicians, including - apart from Mengelberg - Eduard van Beinum, Pierre Monteux and Simon Rattle.

Writing about a performance of Pijper's Third Symphony by the Utrecht Stedelijk Orkest, Andriessen comments on some of the problems associated with this work. He had written elsewhere about Pijper: "I have al-

ways admired in Pijper the fact that *au fond* he was not concerned with the world and cared solely about the purity of his work."<sup>19</sup> It was this independence from other people's opinions, Andriessen suggests, which at times gave Pijper's critical writings an unnecessarily sharp edge. In his review of the symphony he argues that it also made acceptance of his music more difficult.

To be sure, on a practical level, the symphony's idiosyncratic scoring meant that its smooth incorporation into the repertoire was unlikely. But there are also problems of a more fundamental nature. On the positive side, Andriessen goes on, the work's most important characteristic, its clear and orderly construction, and the "elaboration of the themes," should make it a satisfactory work for the "contemplative and reflective spirit" of the Dutch. Audiences in Holland are not inclined towards Romanticism, according to Andriessen: they appreciate music in which "passionate feeling is shaped by a fixed form" and therefore tend to prefer the symphony.<sup>20</sup> But Pijper's circumspection ("bedachtzaamheid") at times limits the scope of his fantasy and freedom. The most problematic aspect of Pijper's music, however, is for Andriessen the complexity of its harmonies. If one could absorb the harmonic elements of Pijper's symphony more slowly, this difficulty would disappear; but the chords follow each other quickly, and so the harmonic lines and the melodies spawned by their sequence can get lost. The result of his analysis of Pijper's Third leads Andriessen to categorize it, somewhat paradoxically, as at the same time "klassiek, modern en aktueel." On the one hand its genuine modernity, by which he means its difficult but solid harmonic aspects, gives the



work its greatest strength, its spontaneity and power, but on the other hand the symphony's "up-to-dateness" (Andriessen is thinking of the jazz influences here) is its weakness. The work is "classical" because of the unity of content and form, which provide it with the basis for its ability to last ("duurzaamheid.") And despite his reservations Andriessen concludes: "I am proud that such a work was written by a Dutchman."<sup>21</sup>

Pijper's progression from German Romanticism through French Impressionism and, after a brief flirtation with the Second Viennese School, towards his own style (not, it could be argued, without some tendencies towards syncretism) may also be traced with profit through his chamber music of the period 1920-1934. I would like to suggest the following examples:

1. The *String Quartet no. 2* (September 1920, D 27). It provides a good example of the second important shift in Pijper's work, beyond French Impressionism. Pijper temporarily seems to have come under the influence of the Second Viennese School (Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, Anton Webern).
2. The *String Quartet no. 3* (1923, D 24 and D 27). This work is bi- and atonal, but not in the strict 12-tone system of Schoenberg (as indicated earlier, Berg and Webern also frequently deviated from this rigid pattern). Here Pijper has entered upon his most radical phase.
3. The *Cello Sonata no. 2* (1924, D 19 and D 20). Despite his openness to modernism, Pijper never became stridently modern - listen to the long melodic line of the cello in the opening movement of this sonata, which

is roughly contemporary with his third string quartet.

4. The *Concerto for Piano* (1927). This, like the Third Symphony, is an important work, and one which has been played and recorded many times. It demonstrates yet another aspect of Pijper's openness to the contemporary musical scene. Some musicologists have argued that Pijper returned to tonal music in the late 1920s, but in this piece bi-tonality is quite noticeable. The predominant influence seems to be that of Darius Milhaud; his five piano concertos may have provided the model for Pijper's, and they and his orchestral music also extensively employ bi-tonality. Notice particularly the use of the saxophone in the first movement: the whole passage is reminiscent of Milhaud's *La création du monde*, as are also the jazz elements. This is the age of much of the jazz-inspired music of Milhaud, Jacques Ibert and Francis Poulenc. Kees van Baaren, a pupil of Pijper's, wrote of the concerto:

The work consists of seven sections merging into one another without a break; sections 1, 3, 5 and 7 are for piano and orchestra, 2, 4, and 6 for piano solo. The solo part and the orchestral section each have their own thematic material, which they develop completely independently of one another. We can consequently speak of a counterpoint of autonomous groups analogous to the counterpoint of autonomous parts from earlier centuries.<sup>22</sup>

5. The *String Quartet no. 4* (1928, D 25 and D 27). In the compositions of the 1920s the

influence of the French remains an important aspect of Pijper's music, as can be heard in this composition, which is reminiscent of Maurice Ravel's only String Quartet.

6. The *Piano Sonata* (1930, D 14). This is one of Pijper's finest and most important works, fully demonstrating the possibilities of the germ-cell technique. All three movements use the musical material with which the first movement opens. Its germ-cell consists of the notes D - A - E - A flat - E flat, and an extra B flat, allowing the principle of bi-tonality. The separate movements are larger and more complex than those of the sonatinas. Several of the Sonata's idiosyncracies seem to be associated with the French composers known as *Les Six*, the group which formed around Erik Satie in 1918 and stayed together into the early 1920s.<sup>23</sup>

Not only may the nature and quality of the modernist elements in Pijper's musical ideas of the "middle period" just discussed be understood effectively by an examination of the evidence in Pijper's own works, as I have suggested in these examples. We may also come to an assessment of the precise degree of "radicalism" of these modernistic tendencies by looking at composers roughly contemporary with Pijper. To do this in a systematic fashion would be an enormous task and would probably show that there is a whole range of "modernisms" at work in this period in Dutch music. One particularly striking contrast, however, may suggest how far and how quickly Pijper had advanced beyond his own initial position as a late Romantic. Let us compare some of his compositions with those of his arch-rival Jan van Gilse (1881-1944), a man who in a sense remained faithful to this starting position.

As noted above, Pijper was for a number of years a critic for the Utrecht newspaper, and reviewed the concerts by the Utrecht Stedelijk Orkest, of which van Gilse was the conductor.<sup>24</sup> Pijper was extremely critical of van Gilse, not only of his conducting abilities but also of his compositions. Van Gilse's most famous piece is perhaps the *Prologus Brevis* for orchestra. He also wrote the *Treurmuziek bij Tijl Uilenspiegel*, clearly influenced by Richard Strauss (the music was recorded by the Concertgebouw Orchestra at one time), and five symphonies. Van Gilse suffered under Pijper's criticism, and eventually abandoned his post and left Holland for a while, only returning in 1933. He was the director of the Utrecht Conservatory, but from 1937 he decided to devote himself exclusively to composition. His heroic behaviour during the war dispelled any notions of his pro-German attitude (two sons died in the Resistance, and he himself hid in the house of the parents of Rudolf Escher). He died of cancer and was buried in Oegstgeest, but not even under his own name.<sup>25</sup>

To compare the two enemies, we may take two examples in similar genres. If we compare van Gilse's *String Quartet* of 1922 (unfinished, only the two central movements have been preserved) with the roughly contemporary *Third Quartet* by Pijper (D 24 and D 27), these works appear to be radically different. A second comparison shows, however, that in reality, and in retrospect, the two composers were perhaps not as far apart as they thought. In van Gilse's *Trio for Flute and Strings* of 1927 one can hear echoes of Max Reger's *Trio* for the same instruments; Pijper's *Woodwind Quintet* of 1929 (D 8), perhaps because of the nature of the combination, strikes us as not so very different in texture and harmony from

van Gilse's. Certainly by 1930 Pijper had largely overcome a certain aggressiveness of tone; at the same time he began to show a preference for older contrapuntal forms such as fugues, as can be seen in his *Sonata for Violin Solo* of 1931 (D 16).

In fact, in Pijper's later works the harmonic expression seems at times once again to approach monotonicity, especially in the *Six Adagios* (D 11), and in the accompaniment to the "Konijnenlied" in *Merlijn*. Pijper completed the *Six Adagios*, his last orchestral work, in 1940; it was published posthumously. Because he borrowed the music from the initiation ritual of the Order of Freemasons, an order in which he held the highest rank,<sup>26</sup> the music has an introverted, sacred character. The brevity of each of the movements is once again proof of Pijper's preference for conciseness: in less than ten minutes in total, a great variety of textures is displayed. The rhythmic variety and the subtle shadings in instrumentation make the piece into a fascinating whole, despite the simplicity of its tonality: all movements are in the key of C major! In contrast also with much of Pijper's music, these pieces can be performed by amateurs, which accounts to some extent for their continued popularity.<sup>27</sup>

Despite such examples of more accessible works in Pijper's last phase, it has nevertheless been argued that the later works show a continued prevalence of the cerebral and abstract over the emotional and, more damaging, a loss of inspiration. In *Merlijn* specifically, Pijper came up against an inherent contradiction between his ideal of absolute music and the principle of a symphonic drama where the music is in the service of a text. Pijper expended a great deal of energy

on the project of *Merlijn*, a musical drama based on the Arthurian legends, over a period of roughly six years. The case of *Merlijn* is interesting from the point of view not only of musical but also of literary history, since it involved a cooperation between Pijper and one of Holland's most prominent novelists, Simon Vestdijk.

Vestdijk himself was extremely well versed in music. He wrote on the topic on many occasions,<sup>28</sup> notably in essays entitled "Mijn relaties tot de muziek" and "Het eerste en het laatste: Grondslagen ener praktische muziekethetiek."<sup>29</sup> On this topic both Ernst Vermeulen ("Vestdijk over Muziek," in the 1968 issue of *Raster* devoted to Vestdijk) and Hella Haasse have made enlightening remarks.<sup>30</sup> Vestdijk considered musical compositions the highest forms of art, and he had a great admiration for composers. In an interview with Nol Gregoor in 1968 Vestdijk expressed regret that he had not gone into music and become a composer. But he felt that there were even fewer opportunities for composers than for writers in Holland. He would not have considered becoming a conductor, for he considered it a dog's life: "Those people are constantly sweating and scary," he said; they needed to be very much "aware" and "awfully skilful," which he was not. He was too slow, and, according to his wife, "too lazy." But he had a very large collection of gramophone records, his only real hobby.<sup>31</sup>

Pijper wrote Vestdijk a first letter on an essay on music which Vestdijk had written in *Het Algemeen Handelsblad*. The correspondence led to a solid friendship and the intense cooperation on *Merlijn*, which was proposed by Pijper - it is not known when precisely.

For Pijper a new musical drama was a logical step after his relatively succesful *Halewijn* (D 5) of 1933,<sup>32</sup> which had been performed four times in the *mise-en-scène* by Johan de Meester and Eduard Verkade. But for Vestdijk the project was anything but logical, since he was of course primarily known as a prolific novelist. He therefore needed considerable enthusiasm to be convinced. "I refused," Vestdijk wrote, "but nobody is as obstinate as Pijper!"<sup>33</sup> One domain in which the two men met was astrology, about which Vestdijk had even written a book. The twelve episodes of the drama's four acts would each be determined by the signs of the zodiac.

The cooperation between Pijper and Vestdijk turned out to be problematic, however,<sup>34</sup> because of the speed at which the two worked, with Vestdijk always being well ahead of the slow and methodical Pijper. At one point Vestdijk in fact delivered his finished libretto to his publisher while Pijper was still working on the score.

After a short period of discord, their differences were patched up and work continued. The project never reached completion, however, partly because of external circumstances: Vestdijk was interned in St. Michielsgestel, while Pijper became ill and his strength diminished dramatically. *Merlijn*, like the *Fifth String Quartet* (D 25, 26 and 27), remained unfinished at Pijper's death.

"The genius of Willem Pijper (1894-1947) dominates all modern Dutch music", thus the *Larousse Encyclopedia of Music* states unequivocally.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Pijper's unique musical talent, recognized at an early stage both nationally and internationally, coupled with his solid grasp of musical theory, his great pedagogical qualities which allowed him to influence two generations of pupils, and his keen critical powers which he expressed fearlessly in newspapers and periodicals, made him a figure who towered above his contemporaries.

DISCOGRAPHY (from the web site <http://www.chez.com/craton/musique/pijper/works.htm#dis>)

(Note: DAVS = Donemus Audiovisual Service; DCV = Donemus Composer's Voice; RNTS = Radio Netherlands Transcription Service)

1. Concerto for Piano and Orchestra  
Ronald Brautigam, piano; Residentie Orchestra The Hague; Roelof van Driesten, cond.  
Olympia  
OCD 315

Theo Bruins, piano; Philharmonic Orchestra of The Netherlands Broadcasting Foundation; Willem van Otterlo, cond.  
RNTS 6808 101

Theo Bruins, piano; Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra; Roelof van Driesten, cond. DCV 1

Hans Henkemans, piano; Concertgebouw Orchestra; Eduard van Beinum, cond.  
Philips A02242 L

Hans Henkemans, piano; Concertgebouw Orchestra; Bernard Haitink, cond.  
RNTS 109 204.1

2. Concerto for Violin and Orchestra  
Hettema, piano; Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra; Vis, cond.  
DCV 1987-3

Jacques Meyer, violin; Philharmonic Orchestra of The Netherlands Broadcasting Foundation; Ernest Bour, cond.  
RNTS 6808-099

Theo Olof, violin; Radio Philharmonic Or-

chestra; Bernard Haitink, cond.  
RNTS 109 217.1 R

3. Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra  
Heinrich Schiff, 'cello; Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra; Ed Spanjaard, cond.  
NM Classics 92040

van Staelen, cello; Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra; Vis, cond.  
DCV 1987-3 R

4. De Boufon, Het patertje langs den kant,  
Scharmoes for Piano  
Robert Moeling, piano  
Erasmus WVH205

5. Halewijn (Dressing Scene)  
Elisabeth Lugt, sop.; Sophia van Sante, mezzo; Concertgebouw Orchestra; Hans Vonk, cond.  
RNTS 6808 102

Ruud van der Meer, bar.; Jard van Nes, alto; Hein Meens, ten.; Tine Appelman, alto; Marianne Dieleman, alto; Wouter Coedhart, ten.; Omroeporkest; Edward Downs, cond.  
DCV 1987-2

6. La Maumariée  
Jard van Nes, voc.  
GLO 6018

7. Merlijn Ernst Daniel Smid, bar.; Marten Smeding, ten.; Thea van der Putten, sop.; Romain Bischoff, bar.; Frank Fritschy, ten.; Marianne Hund, alto; Geert Smits, bar.; Joep Broecheler, bass; Ioan Micu, ten.; Rob Sturkenboom, ten.; Palle Fuhr Jorgenson, bass; Mark Peterson, bar.; Netherlands Radio Philharmonic

- Orchestra; Men of the Netherlands Radio Choir; David Porcelijn, cond.  
NM Classics 92055
8. Quintet for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon and Horn  
Danzi Wind Quintet  
RNTS 6808 101
9. Septet for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, Piano and Double Bass  
Ardito Wind Quintet; Reinbert de Leeuw, piano; Anthony Woodrow, Double Bass  
RNTS 6808 102
10. Sextet for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn and Piano  
Philharmonic Sextet of The Netherlands Broadcasting Foundation  
RNTS 6808 099
11. Six Adagios  
Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra;  
Roelof van Driesten, cond.  
DCV 1
- Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra;  
Eduard Fipse, cond.  
Philips A 02242 L
12. Six Symphonic Epigrams  
Concertgebouw Orchestra; Eduard van Beinum, cond.  
RNTS 109 216.1
- Concertgebouw Orchestra; Peter Erös, cond.  
RNTS 109 511.2 Y
- Concertgebouw Orchestra;  
Bernard Haitink, cond.  
RNTS 6808 099
- Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra;  
Eduard Fipse, cond.  
Philips A 02242 L  
Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra; Simon Rattle, cond. DCV 1987-3
13. Sonata for Flute and Piano  
Hubert Barwahser, flute; Felix de Nobel, piano  
RNTS 109 568
- Koos Verheul, flute;  
Jan van der Meer, piano  
RNTS 6808 099
- Jolle de Wit, flute; Hans Henkemans, piano  
DAVS 6904
- Jacques Zoon, flute; Bernd Brackman, piano  
NM Classics 92059
14. Sonata for Piano  
Robert Moeling, piano  
Erasmus WWH205
- Oliver Majstorovic, piano  
Hochschule MHS G 8
15. Sonata for Two Pianos  
Dercksen and Hans Henkemans, piano  
Publisher and Number Not Given
16. Sonata for Violin Solo (allegro maestoso) Theo Olof, violin  
RNTS 6808 102
17. Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano  
Nap de Klijn, violin; Hans Henkemans, piano DAVS 6904
18. Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Ronald Hoogeveen, violin; Peter<br>Beijersbergen van Henegouwen, piano<br>DCV 1  | Amati String Quaret<br>DAVS 7273-3  |
| Theo Olof, violin; Janine Dacosta, piano<br>RNTS 6808 100  | Netherlands Quartet<br>DCV 1987-1   |
| Herman Salomon, violin; Maria Stroo, piano<br>RNTS 109 571   | 26. String Quartets, 1-5<br>Schoenberg Quartet<br>Olympia OCD 457                           |
| 19. Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2 for Violoncello<br>and Piano<br>Wouter Mijnders, 'cello; Peter<br>Beijersbergen van Henegouwen, piano<br>DCV 15 | 27. Symphony No. 1<br>Richard Dufallo, cond.<br>Publisher and number not given              |
| Terry King, 'cello; Robert Moeling, piano<br>Erasmus WVH205  | 28. Symphony No. 2<br>Concertgebouw Orchestra; Bernard<br>Haitink, cond.<br>RNTS 6808 100   |
| 20. Sonatinas Nos. 1 and 2 for Piano<br>Hans Henkemans, piano<br>Publisher and number not given  | Concertgebouw Orchestra; Rafael<br>Kubelik, cond.<br>RNTS 437-1, 438-1                      |
| 21. Sonatinas Nos. 1, 2, and 3 for Piano<br>Robert Moeling, piano<br>Erasmus WVH205  | Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchetra;<br>Roelof van Driesten, cond.<br>DCV 1                     |
| 22. Sonatina No. 3 for Piano<br>Gerard Hengeveld, piano<br>RNTS 6808 101   | 29. Symphony No. 3<br>Concertgebouw Orchestra; Eduard van<br>Beinum, cond.<br>London LL 851 |
| 23. String Quartet No. 3<br>Gaudeamus String Quartet<br>RNTS 6808 101  | Concertgebouw Orchestra;<br>Pierre Monteux, cond.<br>DCV 9                                  |
| 24. String Quartets Nos. 4 and 5<br>Gaudeamus String Quartet<br>DCV 1  | Concertgebouw Orchestra;<br>Willem von Otterloo, cond.<br>RNTS 6808 102                     |
| 25. String Quartet No. 5<br>Amati String Quartet<br>RNTS 6808 101  |   |

Residentie Orchestra The Hague;  
Willem von Otterloo, cond.  
DAVS 6601

Richard Dufallo, cond.  
Publisher and number not given

30. Theme & Five Variations for Piano  
Robert Moeling, piano  
Erasmus WVH205
31. Three Aphorisms for Piano  
Robert Moeling, piano  
Erasmus WVH205
32. Three Songs of Ariel from "The Tempest"  
Inge Frölich, mezzo; The Hague Philharmonic Orchestra; Diego Masson, cond.  
RNTS 6808 100
33. Trio for Flute, Clarinet and Bassoon  
Emile Biesen, flute; Sjef Douwes, clarinet; John Mostard, bassoon  
RNTS 6808 100
34. Trio for Violin, Violoncello and Piano  
Ronald Hoogeveen, violin; Wouter Mijnders, 'cello; Peter Beijersbergen van Henegouwen, piano  
DCV 1
35. Trio No. 2 for Violin, Violoncello and Piano  
The Netherlands Piano Trio  
RNTS 109 566
36. Trois vieilles chansons de France  
Elisabeth Cooymans, mezzo; Duus Hoekman, bass; Cor Backers and Geza Frid, piano  
RNTS 6808 100

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> As the subtitle suggests, this article is intended less as a scholarly discussion than as a first introduction to a composer relatively unknown on the North American continent. For this reason my sources have been restricted for the most part to easily accessible ones; for the same reason my musical examples are drawn from a discography which is still available. My text refers in places to pieces which were recorded but the recordings are not available today.

<sup>2</sup> *Larousse Encyclopedia of Music*, p.492.

<sup>3</sup> However, composers such as vanBree, Fodor, Dopfer and Hol have managed to stay or reappear in the repertoire.

<sup>4</sup> The biographical sketch that follows has been adapted - by kind permission - from the website maintained by John Craton, <http://www/chez.com/craton/musique/pijper/pijper.htm> . The material contained there is itself based on information provided by Donemus (the institute for the promotion of Dutch music) and the books by Ryker and Hoogerwerf quoted in the bibliography. To correspond with Mr.Craton, write to [craton@canoemail.com](mailto:craton@canoemail.com) .

<sup>5</sup> "Door de analyse zijner werken, stuk voor stuk, zou men zich een uitstekend denkbeeld kunnen vormen van de geleidelijken gang uit het tonale system over bi- en pluritonaliteit naar het zoogenaamde atonale. Van de oudere melodiek en polyphone schrijfwijze naar den poly-melodischen stijl, die, als noodzakelijkheid, tegelijk de meest verrassende rhythmische omwentelingen met zich mede brengt." Smijers, *Algemeene Muziekgeschiedenis*, Utrecht: W. de Haan, 1957, p.504.

<sup>6</sup> Hendrik Andriessen, *Over muziek*, Utrecht: Het Spectrum, n.d., p.91.

<sup>7</sup> "... dat hij de muzikale elementen nooit wilde gebruiken als material om een soort portret van bepaalde gevoelens te maken" (*ibid.*).

<sup>8</sup> "... nooit door onhandigheden, door gehaspel, door probeersels, door ijdele effecten gehinderd" (*ibid.* p.92).

<sup>9</sup> Pijper wrote three piano sonatinas. Hans Henkemans played all three regularly, and they have stayed in the repertoire of many Dutch pianists.

<sup>10</sup> Pijper's "muzikaliteit streed om voltooiing van zijn eigen taal" (Andriessen p.92).

<sup>11</sup> Ryker, in the brochure accompanying the CD Donemus CVS 1, p.4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Entry on Pijper in the *Winkler Prins Encyclopedie van de muziek*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1957, vol. 2 p.487.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Eduard Mooij: *The concept of organic development in the Willem Pijper Sonata for Piano*, Bachelor's thesis (1998) published on the Web at <http://www.music.utas.edu.au/Hans/hans01.htm> (no page numbers).

<sup>15</sup> "Quite a few sources claim, although without certainty, that there could be a link between these germ-cells and Pijper's botanical interests. It is not certain whether Pijper made a connection between botanical processes and methods of composition, as there seems to be no clear indication of this in his own writings. Pijper himself used the term for several years (often inconsistently) in program notes for his own works ... Pijper only used the term germ-cell in explanation of his music to the general public, and never used the term in conversations with his colleagues and students" (Ryker 1994 p. 488, 495, quoted in Mooij).

<sup>16</sup> "Evenals de handelwijze van de mens in het algemeen bestuurd wordt door kiemcellen in de kinderziel geplant, zo moest ook het verloop ener compositie evolueren uit een gevonden motief, logisch-onlogisch, gelijk alle groei in de natuur." *Winkler Prins* ... vol. 2 p.487.

<sup>17</sup> "De 'kiemcel' werd voor Pijper het symbool van het onvergankelijke beginsel, waarvan het vergankelijke de verschijningsvorm is."

Quoted in the article "Nederland," *ibid.* vol. 2 p.385.

<sup>18</sup> Mooij provides further material in his discussion preceding the analysis of Pijper's *Piano Sonata* of 1930: "In Pijper's music the germ-cell is generally presented as a single musical idea, which is further developed to create cyclic unity. Cyclic unity is not a new concept in the traditions of Western art music. Cyclic techniques may be found in music of the late sixteenth century, often in dance forms such as the pavane and galliard (Scholes 1970, p.772). Cyclical concepts may also appear in some music of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where movements of a work are connected by means of a theme (or themes) common to all or selected movements.

"Cyclic unity was regularly employed in the music of composers such as Franck, d'Indy, Ravel and Debussy, who were all influential on Pijper's thought during his formative years (Hoogerwerf 1974, p.57). Vincent d'Indy used the French term 'forme cyclique' (cyclic form, or cyclical form) and 'cellule' in his treatise *Cours de composition musicale* (1909) ... Pijper, who was familiar with d'Indy's treatise (Ryker 1971, p.214), probably saw an analogy between the biological process of growth and the musical process of growth."

<sup>19</sup> "Ik heb in Pijper altijd bewonderd, dat hij zich *au fond* van de wereld niets aantrok en zich alleen om de zuiverheid van zijn muziek bekommerde." Andriessen p.90.

<sup>20</sup> "...doorwerken van de themas ... beschouwende en overwegende geest ... de hartstochtelijkheid in een vaste vorm gestalte heeft." There is much to argue with

here. It is difficult, within these parameters, to understand the enthusiasm of Dutch concertgoers, both during the Mengelberg years and ever since, for the music of Richard Strauss, and especially for Mahler (a cycle of whose symphonies was recently completed by Ricardo Chailly!) Indeed, Andriessen seems to have overlooked Mahler's successful combination of "Romantic" and "symphonic."

<sup>21</sup> "Ik ben er trots op, dat een dergelijk werk door een Nederlander werd geschreven." Andriessen p.115.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in the brochure accompanying CD Olympia OCD 504 (1991).

<sup>23</sup> George van Renesse premiered the sonata in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw on February 4, 1931.

<sup>24</sup> Van Gilse studied at the Cologne Conservatory with F. Wüllner, and later in Berlin with Humperdinck. He conducted in Cologne, Munich and Berlin, and from 1917 to 1922 in Utrecht.

<sup>25</sup> For a full discussion of this episode in Pijper's life, see van Gilse-Hooijer.

<sup>26</sup> Pijper had been distressed by the poor quality of the music during his own initiation ceremony. There is some indication that he may have planned further Masonic music, but his death prevented him from writing it. His Masonic funeral was a ceremony of exceptional pomp and circumstance.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ryker's more detailed analysis of the six movements in the brochure accompanying the CD by Donemus CVS 1, p.7-8.

<sup>28</sup> In 1983-84 Meulenhoff published these essays in three volumes.

<sup>29</sup> In the latter essay Vestdijk speaks of the associations raised by the second intermezzo of Bizet's *Carmen*, which plays a crucial role in his *De koperen tuin*, a novel tracing a student's musical development.

<sup>30</sup> Hella H. Haasse, "Een koninkrijk voor een lied," *Maatstaf* 4/5 (1971), p.299-315.

<sup>31</sup> "Die mensen zijn voortdurend bezweet en vreselijk ... adrem ... ontzaglijk handig .. te lui." Nol Gregoor, "Mijn laatste interview met Vestdijk," *Maatstaf* 4.5 (1971), p.251-265.

<sup>32</sup> *Halewijn* is Pijper's only opera. It is based on the medieval "Liedekijn [song] van heer Halewijn." The manuscript originally contained only the libretto written by Emmy van Lokhorst, based on a poem by Martinus Nijhoff. This libretto was used for the performance of the Wagner-vereniging in 1933. Later on, the "Middle Dutch" adaptation by Erna Buning-Jergens was added and "this libretto was used during the performance at the opening of the new building of the Boymans Museum in Rotterdam on July 6, 1935, with Eduard Verkade as producer and Corrie Hartong as choreographer." The opera was performed again in 1937 and in 1952. (Information from the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, *A hundred highlights from the Koninklijke Bibliotheek*, on its website <http://www.kb.nl/kb/100hoogte/hh-en.html>). Cf. also nos. 86 and 102 in Kloppenburg's catalogue.

<sup>33</sup> "Ik weigerde, maar niemand is so koppig als Pijper!"

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of the cooperation between these two cultural giants of the Netherlands, see *Simon Vestdijk en Willem Pijper. Merlijn. Het ontstaan van een opera in brieven en documenten, verzorgd door Arthur van Dik en Mieke Vestdijk*, Amsterdam: Nijgh en van Ditmar, 1992; and also Luc de Corte: "Merlijn, de onvoltooide opera van S.

Vestdijk en W. Pijper," in *Ons Erfdeel* 36/4 (1993), 611-13.

<sup>35</sup> *Larousse* ... p.492.

<sup>36</sup> This bibliography is based on information provided on the website of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague.