

The History of The Netherlands Wind Ensemble

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The Netherlands Wind Ensemble has played an essential part in the popularization of the wind ensemble in the modern era. Joep Terwey was one of the founders and a driving force in their drive to world wide success.

The Netherlands Wind Ensemble has continuously been active in renewing the concert life and never hesitated to add some humor to their performances. Those efforts attracted an enormous publicity, which resulted in an abundant number of excellent photographs, as you can note in the article.

JOEP TERWEY

Joep started his musical career on the violin, but his violin teacher advised him to switch to a wind instrument. Joep chose the bassoon. He became a student of Thom de Klerk, principal bassoonist of the Concertgebouw Orchestra. He was Thom's only student and he received ample attention. In 1960 he did his final exam at the Amsterdam Conservatory. In 1964 he was appointed in the Concertgebouw Orchestra. He retired in 1998 from that orchestra as principal bassoonist.

THE BEGINNING OF THE NETHERLANDS WIND ENSEMBLE

As the teacher for ensemble-playing at the Amsterdam Conservatory Thom de Klerk founded a wind quintet, called the Aulos Wind Quintet, with the members Edo de Waart, George Pieterse, Jaap Verhaar, Martine Bakker and Joep. De Klerk was a perfectionist and indoctrinated the player with a very definite approach to music. The conductor Willem Mengelberg had been the dominant factor in Dutch musical life during sixty years and Thom de Klerk was one of his followers.

After a while de Klerk wanted to expand the quintet in order to perform the Mozart serenades, Dvorak and Gounod. The Concertgebouw Orchestra had performed once the Gran Partita but it was certainly not part of the normal repertoire.

De Klerk was a very ambitious man and his

aim was to found the "I Musici" for winds. "I Musici" a strong orchestra, famous for its refined sound. There were wind ensembles with a certain fame in other countries, but - in the ear of de Klerk - they produced a squeaking sound and had a primitive way of playing. He wanted musicians in his ensemble who could realize his ideals in sound. The players he selected all had teachers who guided their students to a definite style of playing and not just taught them to play a lot of notes.

The first public performance was given in a simple hall, part of a play ground, in Amsterdam. But the first concert was very successful and received a lot of positive publicity. Several concerts followed, like the one in the Wigmore Hall in London. Essential was also the immediate support of the Nederlands Impresariaat, which contributed immensely to the popularity of the ensemble.

Indeed, de Klerk had very good ideas about the ideal sound and was capable of demonstrating them. And in the beginning all members did their utmost to realize his ideals. The parts were filled with additional dynamic and other markings. De Klerk wanted the players to vary the attack of a tone. Not every attack



Joep Terwey



The beginning with (l-r): George Pieterse, Joep, Martine Bakker, Edo de Waart en Jaap Verhaar

**Thom de Klerk**

was “ta”. He wanted an attack comparable with that of the string instruments. Suddenly, in 1967, de Klerk died. The ensemble doubted if it could continue without its “father” and great stimulating force. But everybody had put so much time and energy in the ensemble and they did not want to give that up. In those days oboist Edo de Waart had already left the ensemble, in order to establish a career as a conductor. And he was quite successful. He was willing to take over the position of de Klerk. Edo de Waart was a much better conductor than de Klerk, which gave an extra stimulus. De Waart had been a student of de Klerk and could therefore continue de Klerk’s musical intentions. The group became even more fanatic than before. Thanks to de Waart there came prospects to make recordings and gradually the group acquired an international reputation. Piet Heuwekemeier, director of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, outlined a new commercial approach, which resulted in more concerts and in several compositions written for the ensemble. Peter Schat, among others, wrote a

work, called *Clockwise*, for them. A memorable concert was given in the Concertgebouw, with Dvorak and Peter Schat’s *Clockwise*. The concert was an immense success.

A foundation was set up in order to give the ensemble a legal base. Joep Terwey was its managing director, which gave him a leading role in the group. A curious incident was the beginning of a tradition the ensemble became famous for. Once it was very hot in the hall where they were playing. Joep - “as a director you must lead the way” - took off the jacket of his tuxedo and he received a warm applause. The rest of the group followed immediately. Never afterwards they dressed in “rok”. And this was the first of many innovations they established in concert live. Of course it was all part of the movement of the sixties, of which the ensemble formed an essential element in Holland.

But finding a new outfit ended in a true drama. Everything was tried out, even the use of a real fashion designer. He came up with a seemingly acceptable outfit, but it turned out to be useless in practice. The members of the ensemble also formed a close-knit group of friends. They were also fanatic bicycle-riders and even participated together in some serious races.

Gradually Edo de Waart had more success with his career as an international conductor and in 1975 he had to give up the Netherlands Wind Ensemble. And oboist Han de Vries could not combine anymore playing in the ensemble decided to continue without a conductor. The

**Ready to perform an arrangement of Mozart’s *Entführung* in period costumes.**



Preparing for the race ...

“iron repertoire” did not form a problem, since, thanks to the teaching of de Klerk and de Waart, there was enough unity in style. Some works even sounded better without a conductor. For instance Stravinsky’s *Octet*: in the slow

movement bassoons and trombones have to play some very short notes together. That was always a problem. Without conductor they agreed to follow the trombone player and it sounded perfect. They did change the position

of the players, such that they could see each other. Of course everybody dared to take more liberties without a conductor. Frequently a discussion about interpretation and tempi followed.

Joep Terwey and oboist **Werner Herbers** acted as the management, but were faced with serious problems, when clarinetist George Pieterse decided to leave the ensemble, because of many other obligations. His departure had a negative effect on the level of



On tour in England.



The break through: The Concert in the Kleine Zaal of the Concertgebouw.

performing. Many clarinetists came as replacements, but they had a completely different background. They were good musicians but it required an immense amount of time to make them “speak the same language” as the long time members did. These efforts were not very stimulating. Around 1985 Harnoncourt was active as a guest conductor with the Concertgebouw Orchestra. Impressed by his fascinating but unusual approach, Joep Terwey and Werner Herbers asked him to conduct the Netherlands Wind Ensemble. It resulted in a “public rehearsal”. His demands were completely contrary to those of de Klerk. Harnoncourt wanted them to play in the style de Klerk had detested. They had to play more aggressively, which was absolutely forbidden under de Klerk. Joep Terwey and Harnoncourt: “Harnoncourt is maybe not a really good conductor, but in general his approach is very different, original, refreshing and highly personal. He taught me more than any other conductor we ever worked with. And he is an honorable and amiable man and I cannot say that of every other conductor I worked with”.

But for the ensemble working with Harnoncourt was the beginning of the end. Some members followed the de Klerk line and others played as Harnoncourt wanted. The clarinet

problem remained unsolved and concerts were increasing difficult to plan. The truth is that the ensemble was by then no more than an ad hoc group, with a continuous change in the players.



Rehearsing with Harnoncourt.

Not only the quality of the performance suffered, but it was impossible to seriously rehearse new repertoire.

After intense discussions about continuing the ensemble or stopping altogether, a new start was made. But several members had had enough and quit the group.

The oboist **Bart Schneemann** was willing to lead a new attempt - with a completely new group of players - and his activities led to a successful revival, resulting in many excellent concerts and records. ♦