Robert Adlington, ***Composing Dissent. Avant-Garde Music in 1960s Amsterdam*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 384 pp., ISBN 978 0 19 998101 4).

The 1966 premiere of Peter Schat's *Labyrint* signalled the international breakthrough of a radical post-war generation of Dutch composers. Influenced by the Situationist International movement, the work intended to 'disorient' the public with abstract musical complexity and abstinence of a clear message in order to stimulate active listening and the audience's spontaneous and creative engagement. Schat's *Labyrint* exemplifies the experimental aesthetic and social activism in the Dutch sixties, which musicologist Robert Adlington thoroughly discusses in *Composing Dissent. Avant-Garde Music in 1960s Amsterdam*. The book follows and contextualises the musical, social and political endeavours of a handful outspoken composers, including the acclaimed Louis Andriessen, Reinbert de Leeuw, Peter Schat, Misha Mengelberg and Willem Breuker. In doing so, Adlington offers a rich study of a dynamic decade in Dutch musical life in which the avant-garde renegotiated the musical culture with radically creative and socially engaged experiments.

Adlington covers the composers' engagement in seven topics – each of them in an individual chapter labelled with a contemporary catchword: 'situatie' (situation), 'vernieuwing' (renewal), 'anarchie' (anarchy), 'participatie' (participation), 'politiek' (politics), 'zelfbeheer' (self-organisation), and 'volksmuziek' (folk music). These topics are roughly structured in chronological order, covering the years between 1961 and 1971, and explored through a selection of specific compositions and key events. Adlington analyses them in the broad context of contemporary avant-garde thinkers and activist groups, such as the Amsterdam-based Provo, effectively using the rich historiography on the Dutch sixties, including the authoritative works of James Kennedy and Hans Righart.

However, the diversity caused by each chapter's partially specific theme, raises the question whether the book is best structured this way. It does not entirely succeed in continuously tying all elements together in its overarching narrative, occasionally risking main developments to lose their clarity and other aspects to become of marginal importance. This happens for example to the analyses of anarchism in the performance practices of the Instant Composers Pool (chapter three), experiments with audience participation and 'collective creativity' (chapter four) and the relation between avant-garde and popular music (chapter seven). The book's periodization raises questions on how it relates to the historiographical debate concerning

Published by Royal Netherlands Historical Society | KNHG

DOI: 10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10350 | www.bmgn-lchr.nl | e-ISSN 2211-2898 | print ISSN 0165-0505

the Dutch sixties. The year 1973 is presented as possible endpoint for the narrative while at the same time being pushed forward even further into the 1970s regarding the composers' increasing attempts to realise an alternative music culture (309-310). However, consistent with general trends in Dutch activism, the years 1968/1969 seem the most significant *caesura* for the composers' idealist repositioning, as both their social and political activism in compositions and performances as well as their rejection of established cultural institutions became more explicit.

The two main shifts in *Composing Dissent* are especially relevant for historians working on the 1960s. First, the relation between the composers' changing social and political ideas and their musical practices. One of Adlington's main issues is to argue against the composers' claim to partake in a purely musical discourse, autonomous of any socially embedded meaning. Ultimately his argument is based on the context in which the music was composed and performed. For example, the paradox in Schat's above mentioned *Labyrint*: precisely because of the attempted abstinence of making a social statement, the composer's music embodies one. Adlington tackles this most meticulously in chapter five by analysing works influenced by the international political issues of 1968, such as the Cultural Congress in Havana and the May revolution in Paris. Especially striking is his discussion of the remarkable opera *Reconstructie* (1968) – a collaborative work on United States' 'imperialism' in Latin America and Che Guevara. Although the composers continued to rigorously deny 'extramusical' expression, Adlington describes how, 'social meaning' undeniably permeated into the compositional techniques, besides the opera's explicit political subject and libretto. Eventually, in the context of the radicalizing political culture of the 1970s these ideals fundamentally shifted, making political and social messages an active goal of the compositions and performances as such. The final chapter discusses this in-depth with Andriessen's *Volkslied* (1971) – an experiment with 'vernacular musics' for 'unlimited number and kind of instruments', starting with the Dutch national anthem and gradually transforming into the left-wing *Internationale*.

The second development concerns ideas of 'cultural renewal'. The first episode is the heated debate in 1966 concerning the demand to appoint Bruno Maderna as co-principal conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra in chapter two. The avant-garde composers campaigned to assign a conductor specialised in the performance of new music in this institute, which they perceived as resistant to perform their work. Adlington discusses how the composers' ideas about 'cultural renewal' related to the rhetoric of Provo and Jan Kassies (a prominent advocate of socialist cultural policies in Dutch post-war cultural life, who participated in the Maderna campaign). However, they conflicted in regard to the content: while Kassies promoted a wide-ranging subsidy structure aimed at 'pluralism' in cultural life and creative participation, the composers stressed the privileged position of the

avant-garde based on their artistically innovative role. Adlington describes in chapter six how the composers gave up their attempt to be integrated in the established concert structures after this failed campaign, by discussing the famous Notenkrakers activities of 1969 – when they disturbed performances of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, critiquing the hegemony of the symphonic orchestra and the elite concert institute. At the end of the decade 'self-determination' became a key issue for the composers, eventually resulting in experiments with alternative venues and new types of democratic ensembles, such as the Schönberg Ensemble and Orkest de Volharding in the 1970s, accompanied by new compositional experiments.

Underlying Adlington's analysis is a continuous tension between the composers' unwavering ideals and their actual achievements. Their utopian ideas were in a continuous state of flux, challenged by 'established' critics and by polemics with other activists, and confronted by the realities of musical life. An excellent example of this is, again, the premiere of Schat's disorienting *Labyrint*, which left the public 'confused, bored, or indifferent' and unwilling to participate (56). Another intriguing element is the composers' motivation, which, as Adlington recurrently explains, served their self-interest. For example, the Notenkrakers' opposition to established concert institutes and their demand for 'self-organization' neglected other authoritative relations, such as those between composer and performer. They received great resistance from performing musicians and unions, seeking emancipation from their presumed submissive role. Attempts to join forces resulted in a vital ensemble culture in which new democratic, musical and organisational practices became a central, albeit continuously contested, ideal.

Although several topics discussed in this work marginally return in the main arguments, *Composing Dissent* offers valuable analyses concerning the musical experiments of this lauded generation of Dutch composers embedded in social and political activism. Adlington's work is relevant for those interested in post-war avant-garde music culture, the relation between creativity and activism, and the sixties in general. The book is accompanied by a website containing a selection of scores of relevant compositions, excerpts of historical recordings and a fragment of the televised debate concerning the Maderna campaign – adding an evocative level to Adlington's analysis of this wonderfully turbulent period in Dutch musical life.

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