



A fragment of an 'Alamire' choirbook (MS 228 fol. 1v) (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Brussels).

had never before been studied, and which include *acta capitularia*, provide a rich picture of the triumphs and sorrows of the college of canons, in whose lives music played a vital part. The collection of thousands of names and of data about the choirboys, singers and composers will make it possible to place musical life in the Low Countries in a broader socio-cultural and religious context. At a later stage, research will be extended to cover the secular courts as well.

A second area of research concentrates on the music itself. Stylistic studies, publications in facsimile or in modern transcription, preferably of recently discovered, little-known or unknown compositions, are being prepared and proposed. Lectures, exhibitions, colloquia and conferences bring the results of this research to the public. One such conference was the international Orlandus Lassus Conference held in Antwerp 24-26 August 1994. By means of concerts and annual festivals concentrated on particular themes, scraps of old paper and parchment stored deep in the archives and libraries come ringing back to life.

To establish the Foundation as a truly international centre, where music and musical life are seen as part of society in general, interdisciplinary research is encouraged: musicologists work together with philologists, historians, art historians, classicists, liturgists and other specialists. The documentation centre with publications and a database is growing.

With the Alamire Foundation, musicologists in Flanders are establishing a project which reaches across frontiers, in the same way as the Flemish composers of polyphony made their music known throughout Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

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**Otto Ketting** 'The good notes in our age'

The Dutch composer Otto Ketting (1935-) searches for 'the good notes in our age'. He believes that it is now almost impossible to shock people with music, as was done in the fifties and sixties. Everything has been done and everything is allowed. Why should a composer now experiment with the audience's listening habits, as Ketting did in *Collage no. 9* (and in his other collages) in 1963, on the occasion of the Concertgebouw Orchestra's 75th anniversary? Why not write music which begins before the conductor reaches the podium, an anti-anniversary piece in which the wind and string sections are supposed to organise a whist drive on stage?

Ketting wrote *Collage no. 9* when he was twenty-eight and provocation was part of his basic attitude and that of his contemporaries. Ketting was in fact an outsider in the world of young Dutch composers. He went his own way and did not study under Kees van Baaren, as Peter Schat, Louis Andriessen and Jan van Vlijmen did. He learned a great deal from his father, the composer Piet Ketting, but was otherwise largely self-taught. He studied trumpet at the conservatory and later played the instrument with the Residentie Orchestra in The Hague.

The idea behind *Collage no. 9* worked. Bernard Haitink, principal conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra at the time, refused to perform the piece. For three years it lay on the shelf, until the French conductor Ernest Bour dared to perform it – but without the notorious card-playing scene.

These days Ketting experiments with tradition rather than listening habits. A key work of recent years is *Symphony no. 3*, whose premiere in 1990 was conducted by the composer himself. It is a large orchestral work with a traditional three-part structure, but it avoids easy resort to old forms and techniques. Ketting did not want to copy tradition shamelessly or plunder it for a fashionable, collage-like style. In his view that would be as disastrous as searching for a modern sound idiom by using vague hissing noises, clusters, tone clouds or unplayable rhythms, as many contemporary composers do.

In *Symphony no. 3* what seems at first sight to be an

easy flirtation with the past is in fact a difficult struggle with traditional tonality. This is evident from the 'title'. Anyone calling a work a symphony these days is asking for a confrontation or at least a dialogue with the past. It is dialogue, rather than confrontation, that Ketting has deliberately sought in his work. His dialogue is a reflection on musical history, a grappling with the problem that composers themselves created when about the turn of the century they crossed over the borders of tonality and when not long ago they abandoned serialism, the structural anchor in which pitch, rhythm and timbre were arranged according to mathematical principles.

In *Symphony no. 3* Ketting uses not only a traditional form but also a true symphonic orchestra. Ketting says: 'The sound of the symphonic orchestra dates from the nineteenth century. You have to be quite honest about that. Of course I could have decided to leave out various instruments. That's the solution I would have chosen fifteen years ago. Through the word 'symphony' I want to emphasise reflection on tradition.'

As a result there is at first sight a sharp contrast with Ketting's earlier 'symphonies'. In 1959 he wrote his *First Symphony*. He says: 'With this piece I felt as if I was turning the world upside down, which in a sense I was. At that time no one in the Netherlands was influenced by the sound world of Alban Berg, almost everyone was still under the spell of Willem Pijper.' The *Symphony for Saxophones and Orchestra* (1978), which Ketting himself calls 'a rowdy piece that roars on and on', is also an untraditional work. In *Seventy Years of Dutch Music* (Zeventig jaar Nederlandse muziek) Leo Samama describes it as 'one of the high points in Dutch music: insistent, uncompromising, acidly witty, but also lilting and even dreamy'.

Yet Ketting's symphonies do show similarities, and these can also be found in his other works. Whether he is writing film music to escape from the solitary existence of the composer, opera (e.g. *Ithaka* written for the opening of the Amsterdam Muziektheater in 1986), orchestral works or compositions for smaller groups, his work is consistent and clear in structure, well thought out and colourful in sound. Ketting sometimes compares composing with the work of a director recording instructions so that the notes find their place. But as a true composer he works in the first place from a broad feeling for music.

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*Translated by John Rudge.*

#### **BIMhuis** A Concert Venue for Improvised Music

During the 1960s new forms of improvised music emerged in Europe for which, according to some observers, the term 'jazz' was no longer entirely appropriate. This new music was no longer based exclusively on American material, but took its inspiration equally from the achievements of European musical history.

The Dutch branch of this music developed successfully; over time it acquired an impressive reputation, both in the Netherlands and internationally, with names such as Misha Mengelberg, Han Bennink and Willem Breuker, Maarten Altena, Guus Janssen, Theo Loevendie and Ernst Reijseger. A large number of younger musicians followed in the footsteps of these trendsetters.

The increasing international appreciation of the quality of Dutch improvised music is inseparably bound up with the continuing system of subsidies operated by the Foundation for Jazz and Improvised Music in the Netherlands (SJIN – Stichting Jazz en Geïmproviseerde Muziek in Nederland), and the concert venue owned by this Foundation in Amsterdam, the BIMhuis.

These organisational structures came into being mainly on the initiative of the musicians themselves. Around 1970, musicians claimed key positions in SJIN and in the early years of the decade they founded the Professional Association of Improvising Musicians (BIM – Beroepsvereniging van Improviserende Musici), which attracted a membership of more than 250 musicians. BIM and SJIN then worked together to draw the attention of the Dutch government to the deprived position of jazz and improvised music and the poor social status of their practitioners compared with other, more accepted forms of music, which were at that time able to rely on large government subsidies and an extensive concert circuit.

The government accepted the proposals of SJIN and BIM; within a few years this led to the structured subsidising of jazz in the Netherlands via SJIN, and in 1974 the Foundation opened its own concert venue in Amsterdam, the BIMhuis. Today, SJIN subsidises more than a thousand concerts annually throughout the Netherlands.

The BIMhuis occupies a central position in the production activities of SJIN. In spite of its originally rather spartan facilities, from the moment of its opening, the BIMhuis functioned as the 'nerve centre' of the Dutch jazz world, and within a few years its name was also firmly established on the international scene. Following rebuilding work in 1984 the BIMhuis now has an attractive, well-equipped concert hall in the style of an amphitheatre, with an adjoining modern café which, depending on the type of concert, can be separated from the auditorium or incorporated in it. There are also intensively-used rehearsal rooms and recording facilities. In addition, as well as the offices of SJIN and BIM, the BIMhuis also houses the National Jazz Archive, which was set up in 1980 on the initiative of SJIN with the aim of acquiring as much material as possible relating to jazz and improvised music in the Netherlands, including sound and picture material, magazines and sheet music. In addition to collecting historical material, which it makes available for information or study purposes, the Archive also encourages the production of educational programmes, films and sound carriers, whose small circulations and sales make them less than attractive to commercial publishers.