

There is therefore no cause for too much nostalgia. During its peak years, the journalism in *Vrij Nederland* was very self-satisfied and, according to the rumours, the magazine 'floated on alcohol'. And in case anyone has forgotten: it was not just the mental hygiene that left something to be desired at that time; the same also applied for bodily care, as is apparent from a chance sentence in a report about the alternative psychiatric institution Nieuw-Dennendal, where according to the *Vrij Nederland* reporter the chaos was really not as bad as was sometimes asserted: 'In a family, too, not all the beds are always made, [...] and there's always a teenager who manages to avoid having their weekly shower.' The good old days?

ROB HARTMANS

Translated by Julian Ross

A book has recently been published on the history of *Vrij Nederland*, and specifically its glory years (1965-1985): JOHN JANSSEN VAN GALEN, *De gouden jaren van het linkse levensgevoel. Het verhaal van Vrij Nederland* (The golden age of left-wing thought. The story of *Vrij Nederland*, Balans, Amsterdam, 2016, 494 pp). This publication, which draws mainly on interviews and internal communications, is not available in English.

Music

A Double Talent with a Double Personality

Jaap van Zweden

Jaap van Zweden has an illustriously unconventional career. His father was a pianist and, going by the television series dedicated to Jaap a year ago, it was abundantly clear he was 'a man of the people'. That folkish character trait was handed down from father to son, even when the son turned out to be an exceptionally talented violinist. Born in Amsterdam in 1960, by age ten he was already receiving pats on the back by such old maestros as Theo Olof, and at seventeen he won the Dutch Oskar Back Violin Competition before going to study at the Juilliard School of Music in New York. He hadn't even turned twenty when he became concertmaster of Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1979. Two worlds co-existed side by side – and Jaap felt it. The older, respectable orchestra members thought he was too much of a working-class lad who ought to shine his shoes more often. Not only was he soon performing the more 'received' repertoire with leading conductors, but also delving into more popular realms of classical music. He played concerts by Locatelli and Vivaldi (he did not really pay that much attention to historically informed performance), but was just as happy to perform with such musicians as Dutch flautist Beldien Sternberg (b. 1957). He was equally as fond of Gershwin arrangements as he was of Rihm and Mendelssohn. In a 1990 interview, he declared he wanted to be considered among the top fifteen living violinists in the world. And if Bernstein asks you to record his Serenade, then you are getting close.

Because of his position at the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, he was permanently able to work with the greatest conductors of the day. That experience awakened the desire to become a conductor himself, certainly when Bernstein once asked him to lead a rehearsal in his absence. Van Zweden was also extremely ambitious as a conductor. After several successful stints conducting various Dutch orchestras, in 1996 he became

principal conductor of the Orkest van het Oosten (Netherlands Symphony Orchestra). He introduced new Dutch repertoire to the eastern part of the country along with that of such masters as Mahler and Beethoven. He set the bar high and did not hesitate being tough on orchestra members. This gradually resulted in a vast improvement in the orchestra's level of playing. That aroused interest among orchestras of greater standing. From 2000 to 2005, he was principal conductor of the Residentie Orkest (The Hague Philharmonic), followed by the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra in Hilversum and deFilharmonie (Royal Flemish Philharmonic) in Antwerp. Characteristic of his performances is the love of the grand gesture, not without pathos. The downside to this could be a certain crudeness, the upside a greater grasp of form in such long and dramatic works as Mahler's symphonies and Wagner's operas.

Van Zweden's repertoire was partly selected by the orchestra programmers. That led to him presenting a relatively higher amount of unfamiliar and new repertoire to Dutch broadcasters than with other companies. His growing number of guest performances with foreign orchestras resulted in him presenting relatively less adventurous work while at the same time raising his level of performance. The grand gesture that veered perilously close to grandstanding now vied less often with his preference for achieving quality. Being able to work more and more with orchestras of the highest quality also contributed to this. He subsequently became principal conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Hong Kong Symphony Orchestra, and (as of 2018) the New York Philharmonic. His growth as a conductor can clearly be heard in his recordings. In his younger years, his preference for tweaking the repertoire in the studio often clashed with his need to pull out all the stops, which often led to variable results. In the concert hall, he was increasingly able to reconcile his 'outspoken, folkish and rugged disposition' with the complexity and subtlety of his repertoire. Recent highpoints are the CDs of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* (with the Hong Kong Symphony Orchestra), Bruckner's symphonies (with the Radio Philharmonic) and Mahler's Third Symphony (with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra). His concert schedule betrays a preference for



Jaap van Zweden

large-scale, popular classical-romantic works (since 1980 including modern Russian composers) while fortunately also allowing room for Dutch repertoire while touring abroad. Even Louis Andriessen, who avoided symphony orchestras for years, is going to compose a piece for him. He does not play the violin in public anymore.

At present, Van Zweden's double background is no longer a source of conflict, but of inspiration. As a man of this day and age he makes no bones about who he is or his biography (he is an excellent cure for the notion that classical music is solely intended for the elite). He let a television crew follow him for a year which allowed us to witness not only his occasional short-tempered outbursts during rehearsals, but also his contact with his autistic son (who now lives in a house with other autistic people set up by him and his wife). It is probably safe to say that we will never hear of any other conductor who deals not only in houses but is also cut out to make vigorous music as well as engage in the kind of intensive, direct PR that is the lifeblood of American orchestras.

EMANUEL OVERBEEKE

Translated by Scott Rollins