

a youthful candour and not get too big for their boots. Though it would appear Lucas and Arthur regularly receive fashion tips on how to dress, they still (along with their managers perhaps) succeed in giving the impression of just being themselves and not bothering with creating any image. Moreover, their musical star is rising at a time when classical music appears to be attracting a diminishing audience, most of whom would appear to be old people. (The latter was also true to a certain degree seventy years ago, but due to the ascent of youth culture and the changing relations between the older and younger generation, anything not directly geared to a young audience these days is sometimes made into a problem.)

In that context two extremely talented adolescents who excel at classical music are a godsend to the music industry. An added attraction for the business aspect is the brothers' apparently effortless willingness to go along with the current demand of presenting a smooth image in the media. Practically all their new CD releases (after Beethoven, CDs followed with Schubert, Mozart, French music, and most recently with music by Saint-Saëns, Poulenc and Fazil Say) were marked by guest performances in *The World Keeps Turning*, a very popular television programme in the Netherlands.

The Jussen brothers' repertory is partially made up of well-known works for two pianos and four hands, by such composers as Mozart, Fauré, Poulenc and Saint-Saëns. Despite that degree of predictability they cannot be considered narrow-minded pianists. They were invited by the Holland Festival, that programmes a great deal of contemporary music, to perform Stockhausen's *Mantra*. Furthermore, they were able to discuss their performance at length in a popular TV talk show in which the interviewer did not half-jokingly dismiss the music as difficult and elitist. The brothers considered it expressive music they believed in; that belief was something they wanted and were able to express, first on TV, afterwards in concert. And so it does not come as a complete surprise that Dutch contemporary composer Theo Loevendie (born in 1930) wrote a piece especially for them entitled *Together*.

The brothers' CDs exhibit a clear development: from a certain hesitation in the interpretation of

Beethoven to a resolute blend of robustness and refinement in the French compositions. And even though the albums are good, like so many artists, their playing is also more exciting in front of an audience than in a studio.

The brothers also have active solo careers. The older of the two is more fiery and classical. I have not yet heard them in recitals, but in piano concerts (for the time being they are limiting themselves to the iron repertoire) they both love to accentuate the expression of detail (the influence of Pires?) and appear to regard lyricism more important than architecture. When they play as soloists there is a slight deviation from the way in which they perform as a duo, where a certain degree of regularity is clear cut and inevitable but in which their familiarity with the classical repertoire enables them to give it more surprise and nuance.

The brothers' fame is starting to make international inroads. On a number of occasions, they have accompanied the members of the Dutch royal family on state visits. True, their first CD was released on the international label DGG, but only in the Netherlands. The fact this very quickly changed speaks volumes.

EMANUEL OVERBEEKE

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Politics

For the 'Ordinary' Dutch Citizen

The Third Government Led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte

General elections were held in the Netherlands on 15 March 2017; the new government took office on 26 October 2017. After more than 200 days of negotiation – the longest cabinet formation process ever in the Netherlands – Mark Rutte presented his third cabinet. It is a government with a completely different make-up from the previous two.

Mark Rutte himself is a member of the centre-right VVD party, which has been the largest party



Mark Rutte

in the Netherlands since 2010. And although the party lost seats at the most recent elections, it held onto that position. Mark Rutte is regarded as a master of the balancing act, someone who can work with everyone. And that would seem to be a logical conclusion if we look at the composition of his cabinets.

In 2010 he formed a government in coalition with the Christian Democrats. That government received the support of the anti-Islam PVV party led by Geert Wilders, though without them being members of the government. Wilders withdrew that support two years later, prompting another election and ushering in a coalition with the social democrats (PvdA). The new government was formed within a few weeks. As an alliance of the centre-right and the left, it had a totally different make-up from Rutte's first, conservative cabinet (Rutte I).

The coalition of the PvdA and VVD made it through a full term, with five years of give and take by both parties. When it came to the elections on 15 March 2017, it was the social democrats who had to swallow most of the bitter fruits of this collaboration, with the PvdA losing no fewer than 29 of its 38 seats.

This election result opened the way for a series of highly complex negotiations. Mark Rutte's VVD party remained in the driving seat. But Rutte was no

longer willing to work with the party that came second, Geert Wilders's anti-Islam party, and attempts to forge a coalition with another of the election winners, the Greens (Groen Links) failed. For its part, the PvdA had lost too much to be willing to venture into government again. Forming the new government was thus a lengthy and complex challenge.

If the second Rutte government (Rutte II) was characterised by give and take between two parties, the arrangements for the Rutte III were set out on paper right down to the last detail. Ultimately, four parties managed to reach agreement: the centre-right VVD, the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), the social-liberal D66 and the small, religiously inspired Christian Union (CU), a party with social principles but also conservative ideas on intangible issues such as euthanasia.

Rutte I was a conservative, right-of-centre government; Rutte II was a government of the centre-right and left; and Rutte III is in reality a mix of everything. The *NRC Handelsblad* newspaper summarised the coalition agreement briefly as government of the individual and the community, from gender-neutral registration with the authorities to the obligation to sing the national anthem (the *Wilhelmus*) in the classroom; an attempt to unite two totally different political worlds: that of the cosmopolitan, individualistic city-dweller and the uncertain citizen of the provinces who attaches importance to his or her local community.

The new government describes itself as being above all for the 'ordinary' Dutch citizen: '[...] and above all the shared conviction that the groups in the middle, people with an ordinary salary and an ordinary home, owner-occupied or rented, should now start to see that the sacrifices they have made in recent years to overcome the crisis have not been for nothing. They deserve to get ahead. And, to be absolutely clear: that word "ordinary" is inclusive: it makes no difference where your roots lie, where you live, what you believe or what your station in life is.'

A government for everything and everyone, then, but still a government with the smallest possible majority in Parliament. Several MPs of the new coalition parties have been extremely critical of Prime Minister Rutte whilst in opposition in recent years. The leaders of the various coalition parties have therefore opted to continue sitting in Parlia-

ment and not to become ministers, the idea being that this will give them a better chance of controlling the critical colleagues in their own parties.

Whether Rutte III will manage to see out a full term is of course difficult to say. For the moment, however, the next national elections in the Netherlands are scheduled for 17 March 2021.

JORIS VAN DE KERKHOF

Translated by Julian Ross

Brussels, I Love You But You Make Me Cry

Minister Pascal Smet of Brussels recently learnt a lesson when, in an interview with the European news site Politico, he compared Brussels with a 'whore'. Anyone can gripe about Brussels – and a great deal of it goes on – but do not touch the residents' love for their city. That means a return to 'one for all'.

Of course the minister's comparison was entirely misplaced, but the core of his argument holds. Brussels is a city which simultaneously attracts and repulses. *Brussels, I love you but you make me cry.*

That's something the capital has in common with many capital cities. Talk to a rural Frenchman about Paris and he will mix equal measures of disdain and pride. The social, geographical and cultural gap between town and country is one of the deepest fault lines in western societies. Only now that 'country' occasionally gains the upper hand – take Brexit and Trump, for example – are we acutely aware of it.

Traditionally cities are beacons of freedom and progress. That's why conservative MPs have always viewed them with suspicion. And that's why Belgium in particular maintained an anti-urban spatial planning policy in previous centuries. People were permitted to live anywhere, but preferably not in the big, chaotic city. Besides freedom, the metropolis was also always associated with alienation and dilapidation.

Now Brussels does have a problem. The city really is dilapidated in some places. A fitting symbol is the still new pedestrian zone. From Gothenburg to Seville the trend for car-free city centres has

been a formidable success. In Brussels it is an improvised, filthy mess, and sadly also a choice arena for anyone looking to cause trouble.

Brussels is certainly not the only metropolis in the world where poverty, disadvantage and migration form a brew which sometimes boils over. What is unique is that social disadvantage is located in the old city centre. Brussels has no suburbs. The districts where migrants showed up and settled decades ago are the city centre. Brussels is in that sense less hypocritical than other world cities. Here you cannot avoid confrontation with poverty and multicultural challenges.

Not that that has brought a solution any closer. Brussels has been too monstrously disfigured in an institutional sense for that. The Brussels Capital Region numbers 1.2 million residents and as the capital of Belgium is officially bilingual, with the Dutch-speakers forming a protected minority. It is one of three regions of Belgium and consists of nineteen municipalities, with as many mayors and six police zones.

Not only are there far too many mandates in the region and municipalities for the scarce political talent; the 'powers' also hold one another locked in a desperate standstill. There is movement, but, in the international perspective of urban renaissance, it progresses frustratingly slowly.

Flanders and Wallonia have long taken little notice of all that. Even the people of Brussels often consider this surreal amateurism rather charming and 'quaint'. That is changing. The fact that the labyrinth of Brussels has proven an ideal hiding place for jihadi terrorists has shown many city residents the ugly side of their political improvisation act. Recently scandals of self-enrichment among the many political mandates have been added to the picture. Again, citizens have discovered that there are limits to political permissiveness.

So, who knows, perhaps that double shock will be the kiss this beautiful city needs to awaken her from her deep sleep. Although, to be honest, it is far from clear which prince will emerge from the ballot box in October 2018.

BART ECKHOUT

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