

COMPOSER BIOGRAPHIES

Louis Andriessen

Louis Andriessen (b. 1939, in Utrecht, Holland) is, without question, the most significant living Dutch composer—and, by most accounts, he is one of Europe's most eminent and influential composers. His music blurs the boundaries between “high” and “low” arts, not just in his choice of instruments (often dominated by wind, brass, pianos, and electric guitars), but in his musical language, which combines a jazz/rock aesthetic with post-WWII intellectualism. He has explored, in relation to music, the subjects of politics, time, velocity, matter and mortality in five works for large ensemble: *De Staat* (1976), *De Tijd* (1981), *De Snelheid* (1983), *De Materie* (1985-88), and *Trilogy of The Last Day* (1996-97).

When asked how he became a composer, Louis Andriessen will usually answer: “I merely joined my father's business.” The Andriessen family boasts generations of musicians, beginning with Louis's great-grandfather Cornelis (1816-1893), a choir conductor and music teacher, and his grandfather Nicolaas (1845-1913), a prominent Dutch organist. Louis grew up hearing the music that was admired by his father Hendrik (1892-1981) and brother Juriaan (1925-1996), both composers and his first two teachers. As Louis recalled, his father “favored a French classicist approach to music. Music was extremely important as an objective beauty, and we should therefore realize that we are not important. It is the music that is important. That means that almost any French composer was better than any German Romantic composer. He also liked Stravinsky a lot....” Juriaan was influential in introducing Louis to American jazz of the 1940s and 50s, especially the music of Count Basie and Stan Kenton. As Andriessen readily admits: “I must say that what was the most influential on my music, when I look back now, was the big-band culture: the writing, settings, arrangements, the harmonies of large groups of brass instruments. It all came from Stan Kenton, Dizzy Gillespie, and others.” Additional influences on the development of his unique compositional style were Kees van Baaren (the first Dutch serialist and his first non-familial teacher) at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, and Luciano Berio, with whom he studied for two years; Andriessen also professes an admiration of Maurice Ravel, whom he believes to be the first truly avant-garde composer, and for Olivier Messiaen, with whom he “shares a fascination of harmony.” Beginning in the 1970s, Andriessen began to accept minimalism as an important influence, incorporating aspects into his style for both political and aesthetic reasons. Andriessen, however, does not believe his music sounds much like American minimalism: “It has not the cosmic sound of those pieces which Reich and Glass wrote at the same time. What is different from my music is that in America there is not enough angst! I'm much more aggressive, I would say.” As K. Robert Schwarz, author of *Minimalists* (1996) writes: “Louis Andriessen.... achieved the most startling synthesis of all, forging a unique language informed as much by European modernism as American minimalism.... Andriessen remains very much a European modernist, and so [his] scores possess a gritty dissonance and a spiky chromaticism that speaks as much of Stravinsky, Messiaen, and Ligeti as of Reich.”

Andriessen describes his musical style: “From Stravinsky to Steve Reich, from the gamelan to Miles Davis and Stan Kenton, this is all part of my musical language. But one thing is clear: I almost completely shied away from the nineteenth century [Romanticism].” He takes as the ultimate compliment the indictment made by Dutch playwright Karst Woudstra: “That Andriessen is a bloody classicist!” As the epitome of the Hague School (which is characterized as writing loud, aggressive, rhythmically energetic music devoid of all neo-Romantic sentiment), he has developed a musical language marked by extremes of ritual and masquerade, of monumentality and intimacy, of formal rigor and intuitive empiricism. Although a non-academician, Andriessen has held several teaching positions (including at the Royal Conservatory, Yale, and Princeton) and he has won numerous awards, including: first prize of the Rostrum of Composers in 1977; the Matthijs Vermeulen Prize

twice, for *De staat* in 1977 and in 1992 for his works of the previous year (including *Dances*, *Hout*, and *M is for Man, Music, Mozart*); and the World Music Contest, Kerkrade in 2001 for his contributions to wind music.

A self-professed Marxist and Catholic, Andriessen was very involved in socio-political movements in the 1960s and 70s in the Netherlands. He played an active role in the increasing politicization of the arts put into practice during the Holland Festival in 1969 with the collective work *Reconstructie*, a music-theatre morality based on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and the life of Che Guevara, composed jointly with four other former students of Van Baaren. Later the same year Andriessen was involved in the infamous *Notenkrakersactie* ("Nutcracker"), the disruption of a concert by the Concertgebouw Orchestra, whose artistic policy the protesters regarded as reactionary. (Andriessen and his colleagues leapt onto the stage, papering the hall with leaflets while sounding noise-makers, during a performance of the Flute Concerto by Quantz, creating a minor riot.) This controversial act has since come to be seen as a turning-point in postwar Dutch musical life, as what has been termed the "ensemble culture" of Holland emerged.

For Andriessen it led to a near-permanent abandonment of the medium of the symphony orchestra and a revaluation of the "materials and methods of musical production." In 1971, together with his friend jazz saxophonist Willem Breuker, Andriessen assembled a band of nine musicians (three saxophones, three trumpets, and three trombones)—some of whom were jazz players, some of whom were classical players—who were committed explicitly to redefining the role of musical performance in socio-cultural terms; as Andriessen wrote at the time, the group was trying to "uncover the relationships between the conception of music (phase 1, the composer), the production of music (phase 2, the performing musicians), and the consumption of music (phase 3, the listeners) and to change them." These were musicians who were protesting the Vietnam War, capitalism, and the commodification of music; they believed that music could change the world (or at least be a part of a process), and so they sought to create musical experiences that would point to a different conception of society. With Andriessen on the piano, the yet-unnamed ensemble debuted on 12 May 1972 at the Carré, performing Andriessen's *In C*-inspired *De Volharding* (whose Socialist title, "Perseverance," resonates throughout The Netherlands). As the debut performance was wildly successful, the ensemble decided to remain together; and so, when a flutist, hornist, and bassist joined the group after the premiere, the Orkest de Volharding was born: a thirteen-member, democratic ensemble that performs standing shoulder-to-shoulder, dedicated to the creation of new music and the development of new socio-musical relationships. *Volharding* is a democratic ensemble; ensemble members not only each have a say in how music will be performed, but they also select the music to be performed, where it will be performed, and so on. Until recently they rehearsed and performed without a conductor (when the level of difficulty of music became so great that they were not able to adequately perform without one); even now, the conductor is considered the fourteenth member of the group, albeit a "silent" one, a leader who does not impose or dictate, but merely listens and suggests. The idiosyncratic "sound" of *Volharding* is characterized by extreme individualism and a lack of homogeneous blending, described by Andriessen as "loud, out of tune, and asynchronous." Andriessen is fond of labeling the project of *Volharding* as "de-hierarchizing," music; in an attempt to create the "Terrifying Orchestra of the Twenty First Century," Andriessen intended *Volharding* to be "an orchestra that vigorously and vociferously breaks with the division between 'high' and 'low' art"—or, in the words of Tira Gijs, to remove the "ludicrous discrepancy between the two forms of music, jazz and classical."

The two works of Andriessen's performed this evening are both indebted to the formation of the Orkest de Volharding—and both clearly reflect the ensemble historically evolving philosophy and project. While the *Symphonies of The Netherlands* was written for full symphonic band, its aesthetic is

that of *Volharding*—just as *Volharding* is one re-interpretation of Riley's *In C*, one might not be wrong in subtitled the *Symphonies* "In B-flat." Both the aggressive, quickly re-articulated passages the layering of independent-but-similar lines seem to be culled directly from *Volharding*—and even the scoring is similar, concentrating more on the saxophones and brass, at the expense of less extensive for most of the woodwinds. Two features that would become hallmarks of the Andriessen's style—the utilization of chorale preludes and the incorporation of elements of popular music—are already evident in this "incidental" work, while the philosophy of collective work is similar to that in his influential *Worker's Union*, too. Andriessen's *Passeggiata* was written for the Orkest de Volharding and seems to synthesize his current compositional interests with the style of previous *Volharding* works. While the most striking aspect of the piece is its dramatic lyricism and almost Berio-esque beauty, remnants of earlier works still pervades: the opening piano solo is a harmonically-enhanced version of the piano solo (which Louis would have played!) that opened *Volharding* and the stacked chords and poly-rhythmically oscillating harmonic sequences recall his *Hymne to the memory of Darius Milhaud* (which was given its American premiere by the Symphonic Winds 23 March 2006).

Leonard Bernstein

Arguably the most famous and successful native-born figure in the history of American classical music, Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) was a composer, conductor, pianist and pedagogue. As David Schiff writes: "he bridged the worlds of the concert hall and musical theatre, creating a rich legacy of recordings, compositions, writings and educational institutions." In 1958, Bernstein was named the music director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (the first American-born conductor to hold the position), introducing thematic programming and creating the televised Young People's Concerts; he was named Conductor Laureate when he left the orchestra in 1969. In 1973 Bernstein gave the Norton Professor of Poetry lectures at Harvard (filmed for TV and published as *The Unanswered Question*). He won almost every award the American music world had to offer, except the Pulitzer Prize—among others, he was awarded the Kennedy Center Honor for a Lifetime of Contributions to American Culture Through the Performing Arts, election to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, eleven Emmy Awards and the Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. A student of Walter Piston (at Harvard) and Virgil Thomson (at the Curtis Institute), Bernstein created a musical style that was uniquely his. His most profound influence, though, was Aaron Copland; as Schiff continues: "Bernstein took up the Judaic and jazz elements from 1920s Copland, which Copland had mostly abandoned, bringing the jazz up to date in a manner derived from Woody Herman, and giving the prophetic, cantorial elements of early Copland a less austere, more lyrical treatment."

Bernstein's achieved international prominence through a series of events in the early 1940s. A year after being named Serge Koussevitzky's assistant at Tanglewood, Bernstein was appointed assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1943. When Bruno Walter, then conductor of the orchestra, was indisposed on the evening of November 14, 1943, Bernstein replaced him; this dramatic debut, in a concert broadcast nationally, brought him instant fame. He immediately followed that success with three others. His *Symphony No. 1* ("Jeremiah"), premièred by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in January 1944, won the New York Music Critics' Circle award as the best American work of the year. Also that year, the ballet *Fancy Free*, choreographed by Jerome Robbins, was first performed at the Metropolitan Opera House and *On the Town* opened on Broadway. Not even thirty years old, Bernstein had already catapulted to the center of the American music scene, as a conductor and as a composer of both concert and stage works.

Buoyed by his theatric successes, Bernstein began work concurrently on two new theater projects in the 1950s: *Candide* and *West Side Story*. Although *West Side Story* was begun first, its artistic

collaborators had numerous creative difficulties, and so, somehow, *Candide* was finished first in 1956—even more remarkable since, by most accounts, *Candide* was a theatrical flop. Walter Kerr of the *Herald Tribune* called it “a really spectacular disaster,” Elliot Norton found it “clumsy and plodding,” while Edwin Melvin of the *Christian Science Monitor* criticized it as “pretentious and freighted with allegory and symbol;” noting that, in addition to Bernstein, such artistic luminaries as Lillian Hellman, Richard Wilbur, John Latouche, Dorothy Parker, and Tyrone Guthrie contributed to the show, Cyrus Durgin of the *Morning Globe* concluded: “It seems incredible, when you think of all the talent involved, that *Candide* should have proved so sorry an entertainment.” Part of the reception controversy stemmed from the fact that critics (and perhaps some of the collaborators?) didn’t seem to know what *Candide* was: was it a musical? operetta? comic opera? (Bernstein was inclined to equivocate between the latter two options.) In addition, it was generally thought that Hellman’s sharp-toothed adaptation (in which she allegedly was attempting to criticize McCarthyism) of Voltaire’s satire of Leibniz’s philosophical optimism was too heavy-handed and serious.

However, all parties involved seem to have regarded Bernstein’s score as an unqualified success. In his autobiography, Guthrie wrote: “Bernstein’s facility and virtuosity are so dazzling that you are almost blinded.... If ever I have seen it, the stuff of genius is here.” Recognizing the quality of the music, and despite the show closing after less than three months, Columbia Records, in an extremely rare decision for a show deemed so unsuccessful, decided to make an original-cast album—and so, between that recording and the unparalleled success of the Overture as a concert piece, *Candide* lived on, if in purely musical form. In 1989, just one year before he died, Bernstein recorded a final, definitive version of the score—winning the Grammy for Best Classical Album, and helping to cement the lasting merit of this music.

David Maslanka

Now living in Missoula, Montana, David Maslanka (b. Bedford, MA, 1943) is a free-lance composer who has written extensively for the wind ensemble medium, including *Tears* (performed by the Symphonic Winds in February 2003), *Golden Light* (performed by the Symphonic Winds in February 2006), *A Child's Garden of Dreams* (based on the writing of Jung), a Mass, and several symphonies. He has served on the faculties of the State University of New York at Geneseo, Sarah Lawrence College, New York University, and Kingsborough College of the City University of New York. He has received three National Endowment for the Arts grants, five MacDowell Colony fellowships, and grants from the State University of New York Research Foundation, the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the American Society for Composers, Authors and Publishers. Maslanka studied clarinet at the New England Conservatory as a high school student; he later attended the Oberlin College Conservatory (B.M. 1965) where he studied composition with Joseph Wood and clarinet with George Waln. After spending a year at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria, he pursued graduate studies at Michigan State University (M.M. 1968, Ph.D. 1971), studying composition with H. Owen Reed.

Maslanka’s musical style is characterized by Romantic gestures, a tonal harmonic language, and clearly articulated large-scale structures. He views Bach’s chorales as a sort of “touchstone”: not only does he begin each day playing several chorales at the piano, but numerous of his works have been inspired by the elegance and powers of these seemingly simple pieces. When asked by saxophonist Russell Peterson to describe his method of composition, Maslanka revealed his metaphysical process by responding:

...many composers disregard simple ideas because they seem too simple and they seem kind of dumb. If you have an idea which goes (singing) "do-sol-me", that's in about ten thousand pieces already! But if an idea like that strikes me really hard it will have a particular glow to it. The notes and the rhythms may be

simple, and the pitches unexceptional in any way, and yet they will have about them a glow, which says there is something here underneath all that. And when I get an idea like that that has a simple shape, simple contour, simple rhythm, but it has a glow, it is telling me that it has a whole world of feeling that that idea is covering. And then it's my work to move into that idea, move down deeply into the simple thing and to find out what's happening here. So it's a matter of just letting the mind open up wide and receiving onto paper everything that comes out. It becomes a sorting process at a certain point. This goes here, this goes here, this belongs to this piece and so on, so you end up with piles of paper that you're elaborating a bit at a time.

Maslanka once described his *Symphony No. 4* (1994) as “the spontaneous rise of the impulse to shout for the joy of life”—a description equally apt for his *Mother Earth*. As he continues:

Music performance is one of the antidotes to the evils rampant in today's world. It is the antithesis of modern man's dissociation and isolation. It is the antithesis of the human capacity for killing and environmental destruction. You can't make good music without love, which means that you accept the people with whom you are making music. This knitting together of the human community at this local point is remembered, and spreads over and beyond a lifetime. Music making is one of the true models for world peace, and ought to be the basis for all education.

Judd Greenstein

Judd Greenstein (b. 1979) was born and raised in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City, where he began his compositional life by writing hip hop beats as a teenager. His concert works reflect those origins, as well as his traditional piano background, combining an urban, beat-oriented sensibility with a late Romantic classical harmonic language. After turning to classical music, he received degrees from Williams College (B.A. '01) and the Yale School of Music (M.M.), studying with Martin Bresnick, David Kechley, Aaron Jay Kernis, and Ezra Laderman. Judd has been a Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center and the Bang on a Can Summer Institute of Music, and was chosen as an Emerging Composer in last season's ZOOM: Composers Close Up series at Merkin Hall. Recent awards and commissions include a Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a First Music Commission from the New York Youth Symphony, and a Morton Gould Young Composer Award from the ASCAP Foundation. Judd's work has most recently been performed by the Seattle Chamber Players, as part of the Kyiv Music Festival in the Ukraine, by the University of Texas at Austin New Music Ensemble, by Present Music (as part of their 25th Anniversary celebration), percussionist Sam Solomon, soprano Anne-Carolyn Bird, cellist/singer Jody Redhage, and violist Nadia Sirota. Judd is the Director of NOW Ensemble, the founder and co-Director of New Amsterdam Records, the co-Director of Free Speech Zone Productions, and is a doctoral Fellow in Composition and Taplin Scholar at Princeton University, where he is writing a dissertation on hip hop.

Benjamin Wood (b. 1986) is a junior from Bethlehem, CT, majoring in music and computer science at Williams College. At Williams, Ben has studied composition with David Kechley, Ileana Perez-Velazquez, and Stephen Dankner (who, in this week's Advocate, describes Ben as “a very talented young man with lots of promise as a composer and conductor”). He also plays trumpet and percussion with the Symphonic Winds and several other ensembles, including the Student Symphony, Percussion Ensemble, and Brass Ensemble. Last February, Ben guest conducted the Symphonic Winds, in a performance of Benjamin Britten's *Russian Funeral*.