

DARK DAYS FOR DUTCH MUSIC

by GILES EASTERBROOK

In something like a year, Holland has lost two of its major composers, Hans Henkemans and Tristan Keuris. Scarcely known outside the Netherlands, Henkemans, brilliant, inspirational pianist, professional psychologist, scholar, authority on impressionist music, misanthrope and curmudgeon in his later years, composer in a vacuum, had been consigned almost to the footnotes of memory even in his own country, and yet he might have been recognised, still might, as a significant and unifying figure in the bewilderingly diverse stylistic maelstrom of new and fairly new Dutch music. His contribution to wind music was small but valuable, the beautiful **Elegies** for four flutes and orchestra being a real gem, and his two Wind Quintets, particularly the second, a source of pleasure.

With Keuris the loss is both more widely-felt and more sharp. Ten years and more ago he told me that he would die when he was fifty, and so indeed it proved, to within a few weeks, and yet it was really within that decade that he had established himself as a composer of international calibre (not just internationally performed, though that also was true) - no easy task for a Dutch composer, though easier if you have his quality of talent, imagination, technique and probity - and vision.

Connoisseurs of wind music have much reason to be grateful for the life and work of this man, who produced extraordinary works at every stage of his compositional career. The early pieces are overtly exploratory - investigating sound, unusual combinations of instruments; gradually external and internal discipline is imposed on them, though initially not a lot; he realised that his style was not fully formed, and concentrated on perfecting his technique in deploying material; the early **Play** for Clarinet and Piano and **Fantasia** for solo flute are good examples. Occasionally he would play over bits of these pieces to me, proud of this aspect or that, saying "I shall re-write that properly one day, there's a good idea in it" but he never did, and now never will. The **Concertino** for Bass Clarinet and Strings was something he constantly looked back at wistfully, while some pieces made him wince just to think of, **Muziek** for Clarinet, Violin and Piano, for instance.

There were several failures then of course, but no cul-de-sac. Everything taught him something, even the first **Saxophone Quartet**, which the public adored and he hated, served as an exercise for his mature work, **Music for Saxophones** and its still greater scion, **Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra**. Two pieces that retain the raw spirit of adventure while anticipating the structural and expressive subtlety of the mature scores are the **Divertimento** for Winds and Double Bass, and the **Clarinet Quartet** for four clarinets, razor sharp, challenging and yet "there". **Catena** is probably the high water mark of his wind catalogue, a work of consummate structural mastery and the greatest expressive force, looking back over its shoulder to the joyous days of care-free, irresponsible revelling in sound while bringing to it the consideration of reflection and, restraint isn't the word, organically generated power and

eloquence. The mature personality is present and a reconciling of the conflicting elements that make, made, up his complex musical and private personalities; the austerity of the severe grand-mother who brought him up, the warmth of his devoted family life, the spats with critics and fellow-composers, the evening spent playing chess in drinking holes. Discipline and excess; a good combination.

The world of wind music, like the world of all other music, should lament profoundly the passing of this not-always so gentle giant, a man of intense artistic vision and integrity. The one I miss is the friend with whom I ate herrings in Hilversum market, consumed beer in a dozen brown bars, smoked and argued over every conceivable topic into the small hours in his friendly kitchen, attended his premières, and assisted at the post mortems, the man who trod on John Manduell's foot and almost crippled him, who burned holes in the sheets in my spare bedroom, hated humbug of any kind, emptied my whisky bottle at a sitting and never ate vegetables in his life. That's who I miss.



Tristan Keuris.

Wind Music by Tristan Keuris

- N Aria for Flute & orchestra or piano
- N Canzone for solo clarinet
- N Catena (Wind Ensemble)
- N Clarinet Quintet (Cl & strings)
- D Clarinet Quartet (Four clarinets)
- D Concertino (Bass Cl & Strings)
- N Concerto for Saxophone & orchestra
- D Divertimento (8 players)
- D Fantasia for solo flute
- N Five Pieces (Brass Quintet)
- N Intermezzi (1 2 2 2 2+1:2)
- N Music for Saxophones (4tet no 2)
- D Muziek (cl, vln, pno)
- N Passagiate (4 recorder players)
- D Play (cl & pno)
- D Saxophone Quartet no 1
- N Three Sonnets (Alto Saxophone & Orchestra)

N = Novello; D = Donemus

By Hans Henkemans

- D Wind Quintets no 1 and 2
- D Elegies for 4 Flutes and Orchestra
- D Aere Festivo for 3 Trumpets & 3 Trombones

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