



MAARTEN VAN NORDEN

A PORTRAIT



Music Center
The Netherlands

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BIOGRAPHY



Maarten van Norden graduated in composition at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague studying with Louis Andriessen, and holds a Master of Music-degree from Yale School of Music where he studied with Jacob Druckman, Martin Bresnick and Allen Forte. In 2003 he obtained a degree in "Contemporary Music through Non-Western Techniques" at the Sweelinck Conservatory, studying with Rafael Reina.

For several years he worked as composer and saxophonist in Orkest "De Volharding" and in his own jazz-rock band "Future Shock" before he dedicated himself to writing music for classical ensembles. The performance of Van Norden's "Cookie Girl" by The Volharding on the "Bang on a Can" Festival 1990 in New York brought him in contact with the young american composers and led to his 2-year stay and graduation at Yale University. There he got familiar with the use of "pitch-class sets" which later proved to be of great value for his compositional techniques.

Since his return in Holland he wrote for ensembles and orchestras such as the Radio Filharmonisch Orkest, Nederlands Blazers Ensemble, Osiris Trio, Amsterdam Sinfonietta, Matangi Quartet. His orchestral works, chamber-music, movie-scores and popular music are published by MCN/Donemus and have been performed at the Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), "Bang on a Can Festival" (New York), Crossing Border Festival (Toronto), Huddersfield New Music Festival (Eng.), Warschauer Herbst (Pol.), Dutch Music Days, North Sea Jazz Festival, Djakarta Jazz Festival etc. Besides writing music he worked as a teacher of music-theory at the Utrecht Conservatory, publishes articles on the use of set-theory and karnatic (south-indian) techniques in composition and regularly joins the Willem Breuker Kollektief on tour.

see also: www.vannorden.demon.nl

SONGS TO MAKE THE DUST DANCE



Fascinated by the expressivity of The Second Viennese School all the way up till free jazz on the one hand, enthralled by Allen Forte's system of pitch-class sets and complex Southern Indian rhythmic techniques on the other hand, composer Maarten van Norden maneuvers between intuition and intellect, arriving in his works, amazingly often, poised between the two.

Consider his start as a professional musician. After a year of studying mathematics, Van Norden instead chose music. He was not interested in the study of classical clarinet and since a department for jazz-music did not yet exist, he decided to play saxophone in free jazz formations. Playing free jazz, he admits, is probably as far removed as can be from the total control he would later seek in the Carnatic (Southern Indian) music and in set theory.

"When I began in music, my great passion was the jazz-rock of Weather Report and Miles Davis", says Van Norden. "Later, in my own band Future Shock, I was able to live out that fantasy. I was acquainted with other kinds of jazz as well, but at that time it was chiefly improvisation which was important in the Netherlands. I learned a lot from Willem Breuker and Arjen Gorter, but also from listening to, for instance, Ornette Coleman and Archie Shepp. That enormous range of expression: fantastic! But at a certain point, I had reached a limit."

Van Norden began composing while playing in De Volharding Orchestra. "In that period, I composed music as if I were playing free jazz, simply writing down whatever came into my head, without any idea of what I was doing. I wanted to know more about what I could do with music, which led me to study composition with Louis Andriessen in The Hague."

His work **Cookie Girl** (1988) hails from that period, a piece which ultimately would aid him in his decision to continue his study in America. **Cookie Girl** was performed during the Bang On A Can Festival in New York; when Van Norden applied to Yale, teacher Martin Bresnick remembered the piece. "You could say that I was accepted because of **Cookie Girl**. I wanted to study in Yale with Bresnick, an inspiring man. But ultimately I discovered Allen Forte and his set theory. Forte taught in the musicology department instead of in the School of Music, but his course, Introduction to Atonal Music, was so interesting that I stayed an extra year to further explore the subject matter."

How to unite Forte's harmonic system and the rhythmic techniques of the Carnatic music with Schönberg's expression and free jazz is a question Van Norden admittedly asks himself each day while composing. "La bonne chanson, for instance, is a romantic piece, written at a time when I had just ended a relationship. That's my emotional side. A piece such as Rondo 2, on the other hand, is my most abstract work on this CD, especially when one considers the Carnatic rhythmic aspects. Here I applied Southern Indian techniques in my music."

Although Van Norden sometimes compares composing with scientific research, he admits not to be able to wrest himself completely from history. "As an artist, you can take small steps forward by incorporating new techniques and by using existing techniques from other disciplines and other parts of the world, but you still have to link up with the existing mode of expression. In recent years, I've been able to better combine my systematic side with my own expressivity."

"**Movement for Band** is a piece in which a Carnatic rhythmic series repeatedly appears, once even in a jazz-rock type of form. That works well, the series sounds as if it were a riff from the Brecker Brothers. And then Wiek Hijmans plays a splitting jazz-rock electric guitar solo on top of it, which is, by the way, completely written out. The piece also makes references to Steve Martland's music, which is standard repertoire of the Combustion Band.

'Movement for band' is reminiscent of a Stravinsky title: at that time I was reading a book about Stravinsky's later works. He used the twelve-tone technique in a particular way, with intervals and rotations as starting points. I devoured that book. One of the analyses deals with Movements for Piano and Orchestra. I found the title Movement for Band a befitting reference, also because of the movement it possesses."

"I returned to jazz in a roundabout way, with the aid of Carnatic techniques. I noticed in Movement that those two elements unite effortlessly. It seems as if it's a swinging piece for big band, but the rhythmic accents evolve from a Carnatic rhythmic series that you hear at the outset in the piano as well."

"I can't say much about **Strange Duck** other than that there's a lot of Beethoven in it. His string quartets I consider to be the ultimate in music, which can be listened to hundreds of times, revealing new things each time. In Strange Duck, I hid a quotation from Beethoven's Razumovsky quartet."

"The title for the piece suggested itself after studying my own annotations. I noticed a note with a small circle around it, and the letters 's.d.' beneath it. It struck me that I myself couldn't remember what it meant: 'subdominant' perhaps? After some reflection, I realized it stood for 'strange duck' in the sense of 'this note doesn't belong to the Forte set I had planned.' Once you allow these 'strange ducks', the best things of course can happen. A bit like Louis Andriessen's 'right wrong notes'."

"**Songs to make the Dust Dance** is the last piece I wrote in the United States. I remember walking about in the library of Yale University, one of the largest libraries in the world, looking for texts. I couldn't find anything suitable, and had almost given up hope, when I stumbled upon the Japanese department. That's where I found the bundle entitled 'Songs to make the Dust Dance'. That particular book immediately drew my attention. It contained short, haiku-like, twelfth-century poems. These poems were sung at the time by courtesans. It was my first piece with text and I wasn't yet working with the

set theory. It is fair to say that 'Songs to make the Dust Dance' could sooner be called atonal, much in the spirit of the early Schönberg. What I myself hear is the cantata *Zvezdoliki (Le Roi des Étoiles)* by Igor Stravinsky."

"I have a peculiar relationship with Stravinsky. When I started composing, Stravinsky was already the great hero of Louis Andriessen and The Hague School. Although recognizing Stravinsky's undeniable qualities, I was more fascinated by Schönberg and Mahler. I thought Stravinsky was too much pleasing his audience while composing. And as a jazz musician I was naturally already aware of the incorporation of popular and folk music. Only much later did it dawn on me what an innovator he really was. By now, Stravinsky has also become one of my heroes, in particular because of that integration of innovation, technique and esthetics. Few composers can boast such qualities. A lot of contemporary music loses itself in either technique or unbridled expression."

"I wrote **La Bonne Chanson** in a turbulent period of my life. Paul Verlaine's texts again refer to America. Studying with Allen Forte, I followed courses on the music of Debussy. I presented a discourse on Debussy's *Fêtes galantes* using Verlaine's poetry and only then did I discover its true beauty. During the time he wrote the poem 'Le bon disciple', Verlaine's life was a drama. But to me, those three poems meant more. The first, *Le piano que baise une main frêle*, could have been a precise description of my parental home. How I, as a young child, sat under the piano while my mother was playing, is nearly literally described, even including the atmosphere and fragrance in the room. 'Le bon disciple' describes the tension arising when one wants to be a good pupil, while at the same time not wanting to forsake one's own identity and not being able to express oneself. As a young child, I was one of those well-behaved pupils. The third poem, 'La Bonne Chanson', is an unimaginably beautiful description of nature itself. A summer morning in the countryside: that is nature. That's why I introduce the female singer at this point in the piece as *Sprechstimme*, because no human element has yet been added. Then, suddenly in the middle of this poem, the first person, the dreamer, the

artist makes his entry. That's when I realized that, although nature is a beautiful thing, it doesn't become art until someone observes it and gives an interpretation of it. The surrounding elements make the first person suddenly think of his beloved."

"In 'La Bonne Chanson', I wanted to give my emotions more room to breathe, although I did try to abstract just that. Whereas the poetry represents Romanticism, the instrumental intermezzi stand for abstraction. The blocks of chords in the brass make one think of the black squares of Malevitsj, the ultimate abstraction after all."

"**Bring in da Fonk** is the first part of a triptych written for the Osiris Trio. The third movement deals with funk, the first one does not. The title of this movement is Tsumi, a corrupted version of the word tsunami. It sounds like an overwhelming barrage of notes, an acoustic tidal wave that engulfs you."

"I consider **Rondo 2** to be my least accessible and most abstract piece. In it, I went to extreme limits of applying the Carnatic techniques, sometimes going as far as making very odd calculations for a rhythmic structure. For the harmony, I used a 6-5 set from Forte's system, Schönberg's favourite set as well, which he used, for instance, in his Variationen für Orchester. A twelve-tone melody may be heard recurring three times, each time presented by a different instrument: that is exactly the harmony of that 6-5. Additionally, I used harmonies which develop parallel to the rhythmic structure, in a combination of set theory and Carnatic techniques. I originally composed Rondo for string orchestra, later adapting it to this version for the ensemble *Insomnio*.

Anthony Fiumara

cover-notes CD "Songs to Make the Dust Dance", translation Alayne Leslie

photo page inside: Joyce Vanderfeesten

COMPOSITIONS

CHAMBER MUSIC

Movement for Band (2006)

Duration: 12'15
alt-/ten-/bar.sax/tp/tb/Fr.hrn/vl/el.git/basgit/
pno/marimba/perc

Serenade for Gustav and Arnold (2005)

Duration: 8'
fl/ob/cl/fg/pno/mar-perc/vl1/vl2/vla/vc/cb

Strange Duck (2005)

Duration: 11'
vl1/vl2/vla/vc

Rondo 2 (2004)

Duration: 15'
fl/cl/fg/v/vla/vc/mar-vibr-perc

Korvai (2003)

Duration: 3'
rec/fl/alto-sax/b.cl/lafta/keyboard/perc

Sruti and the Beast (2002)

Duration: 7'
voc/recorder/vl/vc/Bcl/pno

Raaf (2002)

Duration: 6'
altosax/tape or altsax/hpsc/perc

Überbrettli (1998)

Duration: 9'
2 pno

Towa-Towa (1998)

Duration: 9'
harpichord and bassguitar

Amenhotep IV (1998)

Duration: 5'
vl/vla/vc/pno

Bring in da fonk (1997)

Duration: 9'
v/vc/pno

Warmest regrets (1998)

tsax/pno
self-published

Grosso Modo (1997)

Duration: 11'
fl/ob/cl/B.cl/bsn/hrn/tp/tb/perc

East Rock (1996)

Duration: 11'
fl/3sax/hrn/3tp/3tb/p/cb/6perc

Battle of the Saxes II (1995)

Duration: 11'
sax.quartet

Three Phrases for Stringquartet

(1993)
Duration: 10'
vl1/vl2/vla/vc

Lonesome Hobo (1992)

Duration: 13'
ob/pno

Het Kamerstuk (1992)

Duration: 9'25
3tp/3tb/4hrns/tuba/4perc
self-published

Battle of the Saxes I (1991)

Duration: 11'

fl/2ob/cl/Bcl/bsn/2Fr.hn/2tp/2tb/tuba/b.git/pno
/perc/sax.quartet

Woolfie (1990)

fl/ob/cl/Bcl/bsn/tp/hrn/tb/tu/pno/perc/vi-II/vla/
vc/cb

self-published

Cookie Girl (1989)

Duration: 10'

fl/3sax/hrn/3tp/3tb/p/cb

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Epitaph (2008)

In memoriam Igor S.

Duration: 14'45

2fl/2ob/2cl/2bsn/4Fr.hrns/2tp/2tb/tuba/perc./c
elesta/strings

Rondo (2003)

Duration: 15'

strings/3perc

Square Roots (2001)

Duration: 28'

3fl/2ob/Eng.Hrn/2cl/B.cl/2bsn/C.fg/4hr/3tp/3tb
/tuba/timp/3perc/strings/pno.solo/sax.solo

Red House (1999)

Duration: 11'

2fl/2ob/2cl/2bsn/2hrn/2tp/timp/perc/strings

Forte (1997)

2fl/1ob/1Fr.hrn/4tp/4tb/g/b.dr/strings

self-published

Two Worlds (1994)

Duration: 20'

stringorchestra

VOCAL MUSIC

Pluriform (2007)

Duration: 9'55

sopr/pno

self published

La Bonne Chanson (2002)

Duration: 21'

2fl/ob/2cl/B.cl/b.sax/Fr.hrn/4tp/3tb/tu/3perc/b.
git/pno/hpsd/strings/vocal

Songs to Make the Dust Dance

(1995)

Duration: 11'

choir S/A/T/B, vl/Bcl/perc

MOVIESCORES, JAZZBAND

Moviescore (2005)

for the documentary "Het Schitterende
Scherm" by Pieter Fleury

Moviescore for North-Korea, A

Day in the Life (2004)

for the documentary by Pieter Fleury.

Mene Tekel (1997)

moviescore for a film by Pieter Fleury

self-published

Music for Fourteen Musicians

(1989)

jazz-bigband

self-published

Kontrafunkt (1983)

jazzband

self-published

Future Shock (1985-97)

alto/ten/tp/tb/gt/b.gt/dr

app. 20 compositions for jazz-rock band,

recorded on CD's Electric Night

(Timeless 305), Handclaps (Timeless 374)

and It's Great (BVHaast)

PRESS REVIEWS



...The surprise of the evening was Maarten van Nordens latest orchestral work Square Roots, [...] composed for the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Paul Daniel. The piece offers a highly individualistic response to the musical legacy of both the old and the new world... the works title refers to Van Norden's dissociated musical roots... wild and swashbuckling fragments in which the saxophone screeches raucously above the stomping orchestra... a sublime duet between saxophone and piano forms the eye of the storm, after which the

piece once again erupts in a typhoon of colour.

(Anthony Fiumara, Trouw)

...Van Norden plays with Schoenbergs twelve-tone technique according to his own rules... the piece is richly developed and sparkles with colour and vitality... it lays a three-way link between jazz, searching the confusion of the present and the accomplishments of great composers of the past... the packed Concertgebouw lapped it up with gusto and applauded it enthusiastically.

(Ivo Postma on Square Roots , De Gelderlander)

...as a work of art, La Bonne Chanson was the highlight of the evening: an intelligent, superbly proportioned piece of music in which the skilful application of a vast array of orchestral colours goes hand in hand with rewarding and text-enriching vocal lines, sung by mezzo Monique Scholte. This concentrated masterpiece has found the perfect balance between musical constructivism and sincere, non-sentimental expression.

(Utrechts Nieuwsblad on La Bonne Chanson)

... judiciously-dosed, pithy jazz-rock passages were alternated with a French idiom...

(De Volkskrant on La Bonne Chanson)

...Van Norden is an excellent orchestrator and has a feeling for melody...

(Het Parool on La Bonne Chanson)

... the punctuated rhythm and the impelling harmonic developments are keenly interwoven... the first movement may remind one of Stravinsky, but [Van Nordens music] certainly measures up to that of his predecessor.

(Frits van der Waa on Two Worlds for string orchestra, De Volkskrant)

.. downright surprising... funky, highly-refined rhythms... a richness of melodic and rhythmic motives is couched in a precarious balance between concrete notes and suggested music: snippets, contours and impulses refer to an vast realm of sound that is only partially audible... And the best part is that this compositional subtlety does not detract from the power of Van Norden's music.

(Jacqueline Oskamp on East Rock for the orchestra De Volharding, De Volkskrant)

...Maarten van Norden evolved himself in a remarkable way into one of the forerunners in the field of contemporary composed music.

(Martijn Sanders, director of the Concertgebouw Amsterdam in his nomination of "Square Roots" for the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition)

...I am greatly impressed by your theoretical insights and your artistic talent.

(Prof. Allen Forte, Yale University)

Maarten van Norden is a good example of the development in music making where 'high brow' and 'low brow' material are combined in a new intelligent musical language. He is a fine musician and composer and has developed a brilliant musical style...I highly recommend him.

(Louis Andriessen)

DISCOGRAPHY



Songs to Make the Dust Dance

Movement for Band

Songs to make the Dust Dance

Strange Duck

La Bonne Chanson

Bring in da Fonk

Rondo 2

Combustion Chamber, cond. Rutger van Leijden; Remco Jak, altsax;

Koor Nieuwe Muziek, cond. Huub Kerstens; Jan Erik van Regteren

Altena; Erik van Deuren; Herman Halewijn; Matangi Strijkkwartet;

Metropole Orkest; Jan Stulen; Monique Scholte; Osiris Trio; Insomnio

Ensemble, cond. Ulrich Pöhl.

**Attacca CD 28106*



Orkest De Volharding – Dutch Masters

East Rock

Orkest De Volharding; Percussion Group The Hague,

cond. Jurjen Hempel,

**CV 95*



Osiris trio and guests

Bring in da Fonk

Osiris Trio: Ellen Corver, piano; Peter Brunt, violin;

Larissa Groeneveld, violoncello

**NM 92108*



Wie is bang voor Nederlandse muziek?

Bring in da Fonk

Osiris Trio: Ellen Corver, piano; Peter Brunt, violin;

Larissa Groeneveld, violoncello

**NM 93007*

MUSIC EXAMPLE

Movement for Band

Maarten van Norden

A ♩ = 84

The musical score is arranged in systems. The first system includes Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone, Trumpet, Horn, and Trombone. The second system includes Marimba, Vibraphone, and Drums. The third system includes Piano. The fourth system includes Violin, Electric Guitar, and Electric Bass. The score is in 4/8 time with a tempo of 84 beats per minute. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *sim.* (sforzando). Performance instructions include *(tenuto)* and *non vibrato*. A box labeled "clean jazz sound" is placed above the Electric Guitar staff.

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