



SANDER GERMANUS

A PORTRAIT



Music Center
The Netherlands

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BIOGRAPHY



Sander Germanus was born on March 16, 1972 in Amsterdam.

Education

In 1988 he began his saxophone study with Ed Bogaard at the Sweelinck Conservatory of Music in Amsterdam, and received his diploma with honors in 1994. He studied for two years musicology at the University of Amsterdam. From 1992 he studied composition with Peter-Jan Wagemans and instrumentation with Klaas de Vries at the Rotterdam Conservatory of Music, where he graduated in 1998. From 1994 he studied also with Luc Van Hove at the Royal Flemish Conservatory in Antwerp. In 1995, he received an invitation from the Dutch Opera to follow a master class with Pierre Boulez. In 1999, he went to the Orpheus Institute in Gent (Belgium) where he received a laureate title in 2005 for his thesis 'Muziekthermiek', relating to microtonality in general and the contemporary applications of quarter tones.

Activities

Sander Germanus has been the director of the Foundation Huygens-Fokker since 2007, a center for micro tonal music, located in the Muziekgebouw aan het IJ in Amsterdam. At present he is also chairman of the Componisten 96, the professional union from and for composers.

Compositions

He has written music for the Nieuw Ensemble, DoelenEnsemble, Danel Kwartet, Asko Ensemble, Schönberg Ensemble, Calefax Reed Ensemble, Percussion Group of the Hague (Slagwerkgroep Den Haag), Aurelia Saxophone Quartet, Escher Ensemble, Noordhollands Philharmonic Orchestra (now Holland Sinfonia), Il Solisti del Vento, Doelen kwartet and The Hague Philharmonic. His compositions have been regularly broadcasted on radio and television and

performed internationally. In his recently completed Lunapark trilogy (2005-2008) his quarter tone theory has met with other musical resources in the realm of tempo and rhythmic.

Prizes

In 1998 he received for Adamsarchipel the Aanmoedigingsprijs Muziek (Incentive prize) from the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts. In 2000 he was nominated for the NPS-cultuurprijs for Continental, a composition for double chamber orchestra.

WRONG-FOOTING THE LISTENER: THE COMPOSITIONS OF SANDER GERMANUS

Is there a divide between nimbleness and intellectualism? Does basic research on the sounding principles of music automatically exclude humour? And is it impossible for music written in 5/12 or 6/20 meter to just swing?

Not according to the composer Sander Germanus. On the contrary, his music actually develops out of the blending of such apparent opposites. In fact, that symbiosis sometimes even seems to form the essence of what his compositions are about.

Germanus likes playing games with his listeners. He wrong-foots them by, for instance, giving the impression of an *accelerando*, after which the tempo does not actually seem to have changed at all. Or he uses quarter-tones to build harmonies that seem to the ear to evolve in the most ordinary way, yet which also result in a sudden blurring of our perceptions of what is and is not 'in tune'.

Not surprisingly, one of his recent works is called *Lunapark*, named after the amusement parks of old days, known for their wild atmosphere and moving attractions all blaring at once. Abrupt transitions, tempos gone askew, boisterous blasts of sound and little, cartoon-like motifs all set the tone.

Lunapark gives a good sense of Germanus's nonconformist theories about tempo and microtonality, which clearly begin to make themselves felt in *Continental* (written in 1999), a work for two differently tuned chamber orchestras, and the virtuosic *Le Tourne-disque Antique* (2000–1) for five reed instruments. In these compositions, one can hear that, after emerging from a more exploratory period, Germanus has found his niche.

Le Tourne-disque Antique begins with two jazz-coloured chords whose microtonality hardly intrudes and which attain speed like a steam train (or, for those influenced by the title, like an old-fashioned record player) starting out at a standstill and gaining momentum through bewildering changes of metre. Owing to the lightning-fast changes of time signature and subtle irregularities in the pattern, the effect is anything but mechanical – the music swings and sparkles, jumps and skips.

Germanus is also one of the few composers of his generation to have developed his own music theory to accompany his compositions. The title of his thesis, 'Muziekthermiek' (Music Thermal), refers to the sensation of weightlessness which he aims to evoke in his music. For harmony and tempo, which he considers the most important musical parameters, he seeks material not outside but between traditional lines.

Germanus has also developed a new theory of micro-harmony for the 24-tone scale, which features quarter-tones in between the usual semitones. Although he applies traditional part-writing rules in a certain sense, he does so on a reduced scale, thereby connecting the simultaneous sounds fluidly in what he calls 'horizontal harmonies'. He uses a system of coloured note heads to notate the music in an accessible, playable manner.

Germanus understands that most listeners will still hear microtonal music with 'tonal ears'. For this reason, he makes use of what he refers to as 'sound repair technique': when inaccurately pitched notes are heard in traditional tonal music (e.g. an out-of-tune fanfare), listeners usually still know which pitches were intended. He intentionally uses this principle to wrong-foot his listeners with what sounds like pure intonation, thus undermining their tonal expectations.

He employs similar means in relation to tempo. In 'deceleration circles' and 'acceleration circles', the notes run counter to a continuously changing tempo: for example, as the music continues to gain in speed during an *accelerando*, Germanus gradually extracts more and more notes in variations, thus tricking the ear into thinking that the tempo has not changed at all. When the *accelerando* is evident in other layers of the music, the listener starts to doubt what the 'real' tempo is, and his music plays with this perplexity.

Germanus also invented 'interpolated metres', which allow the measure to be subdivided more intricately than is customarily the case – not only in twos, threes or fours, but also in sevens or twenty-sevens, for instance. He actually uses the subdivisions as local variations in tempo which can be linked together quickly, precisely and systematically. They play a particularly important role in works like *Beetje Precies* (1993–4) for solo piano.

The chain-like structure of this work, in which events succeed one another at lightning speed, seems to illustrate an observation Germanus has often made, namely that 'the power of a gesture exists by virtue of the gesture that follows it'. By this, he means that the understanding of music, of his own music in particular, often occurs retrospectively. The function or meaning of a musical event is largely determined by what directly follows it; a work as a whole is thus made up of a chain of events that can be fully understood only after the final note has been heard.

There is also clear evidence of this kind of linear thinking in Germanus's other early works (in so far as they can already be referred to as such). These often have a distinctly narrative structure: the ensemble piece *Adamsarchipel* (1997) depicts a boat trip along IJburg, a residential neighbourhood in the eastern part of Amsterdam, which is reminiscent of a radio play, while *Zo vergaat 't* (1996), Germanus's first string quartet, is a rather romantic sketch of what could be called the course of a human life.

In contrast, his most recent works are striking in that, as a whole, they are much more pictorial than narrative, despite a higher level of activity. Take *Piccadilly Circus* (2007–8), for example, a work inspired by London's monumental public space and road junction. While the ancient statues and buildings look on motionlessly, so many things are constantly happening: the traffic rushes past, tourists walk back and forth, a street artist begins his act – in effect, we hear a big jumble of small events without one single compelling development encompassing them all.

And this is also how Germanus's music functions; it is as if the listener lacks sufficient eyes and ears to take it in, and other details are forever revealing themselves on subsequent hearings. The unmistakable joy of composition, of experimentation and of life is infectious, and although Germanus regularly challenges listeners and musicians alike, every second of our attention is richly repaid.

Jochem Valkenburg/MCN, 2009

Translation: **Josh Dillon/Muse Translations**

COMPOSITIONS

CHAMBERMUSIC

Strings, Grass and Mushrooms,
hallucinations for string quartet
(2007)
2vl vla vc

Microphobia (2005; rev. 2007)
Duration: 7'
sax-a tapshoe

Le Tourne-disque Antique (2001)
Duration: 8'
ob cl sax-a cl-b fg

**Capriccio voor genoeg
violsnaren** (1999)
Duration: 3'
In: 24 capriccio's voor viool solo

Klimmen en dalen (1998)
Duration: 11'
sax-s 2sax-a sax-t sax-b 2vl vla vc cb

**Kamerconcertje for altsaxo-
phone and ensemble** (1995)
Duration: 9'
ob trp 2vl vla vc cb sax-a-solo

Beetje Precies (1994)
Duration: 7'
pf

Jatwerk voor vier helers (1992)
Duration: 8'
4sax
in preparation

ORCHESTRA/LARGE ENSEMBLE

Waldorf-Astoria, for 17 musicians
(2009)
ob cl sax-a bh fg perc fl cl-pic ob-am h trp trb
2vl vla vc cb

Stretch your ears! (2008)
big band
in preparation

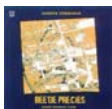
Piccadilly Circus, for 18 musicians
(2007) 8'
ob cl sax-a bh fg perc fl cl-pic ob-am h trp trb
tb 2vl vla vc cb

Lunapark, for 16 instruments
(2006) 9'
ob cl sax-a bh fg perc fl cl-pic ob-am h trb 2vl
vla vc cb

Continental (1999)
Duration: 13'
fl 2ob cl 2fg 2h 2trp trb hp str(5.4.3.3.2.) :
2fl ob 2cl fg 2h trp 2trb hp str(5.4.3.3.2.) 2perc

Adamsarchipel (1997)
Duration: 9'
fl-a ob cl perc g man hp pf vl vla vc cb

COMPACT DISCS



Beetje Precies

Gerard Bouwhuis, piano

*NM Classics (Present) 95006



Capriccio voor genoeg snaren

[= Capriccio for enough violin strings]

'24 capriccio's for violin from the Netherlands'

Janine Jansen, violin

*NM Classics 92120

Beetje Precies (B-tje pre cis / Bit Precise)

1. "Liedje voor piano" (1993)

Sander Germanus

(♩ = 120)

mp *p* *mf* (Uit volle borst / Lustily)

(ped.) → Λ (non ped.)

6 $\frac{2}{8}$ $\frac{5}{12}$ $\frac{2}{8}$ $\frac{4}{12}$ $\frac{6}{8}$

f *mf*

staccatissimo

13 $\frac{2}{8}$ $\frac{6}{12}$ $\frac{3}{8}$ $\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{13}{24}$

f *p*

19 $\frac{13}{24}$ $\frac{2}{8}$ $\frac{9}{24}$ $\frac{3}{8}$ $\frac{7}{8}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{6}{8}$

f *mf* (*mp*)

(ped. langzaam neerdrücken / slowly press down the pedal)

KAMERCONCERTJE

voor ALTSAXOFOON & ENSEMBLE (1995)

SANDER GERMANUS

Handwritten musical score for Alto Saxophone and Ensemble. The score is written on a grand staff with six parts: alto sax., C-trumpet Oboe, VI. I, VI. II, Vla., and Vc. CB. The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 92$. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score begins with a 3/4 time signature and a **f** dynamic. The alto sax part features a trill (tr. (b)) and a section marked **stacc.** with four 'x' marks. The C-trumpet Oboe part has a section marked **f** and includes triplets. The VI. I, VI. II, Vla., and Vc. CB. parts are marked **f** and include pizzicato (pizz.) markings. A section marked **A** is indicated by a box around the first measure of each part. The score concludes with a **mp** dynamic and a **stacc.** marking with four 'x' marks.

*) Growl by drawing the bow under the bridge /
Onder de kam gestreken gorgel

commissioned by the Calefax reedquintet and the Muziekcentrum De IJsbreker Amsterdam

Le tourne-disque antique (2000/2001)

for 5 reedplayers

Sander Germanus

$\text{♩} = 90$ *)

Oboe *mf*

Bb clarinet *mf*

Altosaxophone *mf*

Bassoon *mf*

Bassclarinet *mf*

5

Oboe

Bb clarinet

Altosaxophone

Bassoon

Bassclarinet

*) All voices must be in balance. Never a stronger uppersvoice.

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