

HENDRIK ANDRIESSEN

Dr David C F Wright

Hendrix Andriessen was born in Haarlem on 17 September 1892 to the organist Nicolaas Hendrik Andriessesn and the painter Gezsina Vester. Music and art was in his life from the very beginning. He had an older brother Willem (1888-1964) who became a concert pianist and director of the Amsterdam Conservatory from 1937 and his younger brother, Mari, became a sculptor.

Hendrik showed early proficiency at the piano and organ and was aided both by his father and Willem. He began to improvise and then wrote his music down and composition became his life. He said, “ I cannot remember a time when I was not composing!”

Louis Robert was Haarlem’s city organist and Hendrik went to him for lessons while earning his living as a journalist for the Roman Catholic newspaper De Nieuwe Haarlemsche Courant. Later he replaced his father as organist at Haarlem’s Sint-Jozefkerk and was named successor when his father died. At the age of 22, Hendrix enrolled at the Amsterdam Conservatory studying organ with Jean-Baptiste de Pauw and composition with Bernard Zweers. Around this time he met Alphons Diepenbrock with whom he became friends and whose music influenced his own.

Andriessen was particularly interested in composing church music but wrote music in every genre. From 1930 to 1954 he was a lecturer in composition at the Amsterdam Conservatory and, at the same time, taught organ and composition at the Netherlands Institute for Catholic Church Music in Utrecht. He was the organist and choirmaster at the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Utrecht from 1934 and his organ improvisations were almost legendary. He was appointed director of the Utrecht Conservatory in 1937 until 1949 when he became the director of the Royal Conservatory of The Hague until his retirement in 1957. For many year he was also the professor of musicology at the Roman Catholic University in Nijmegen until 1957.

Andriessen was a very busy musician and sometimes could only compose at weekends puffing on his pipe. He was also the father of six children and he set them a fine example of hard work. His eldest son, Nico, became an architect. His youngest daughter, Caecilia, became a concert pianist and his other sons, Jurriaan and Louis became composers.

His earliest works were spiritual songs with organ or orchestral accompaniment often with texts by Thomas a Kempis (Magna Res est Amor and Fiat Domine) and St John of the Cross (Cantique Spirtuel). He was influenced by Cesar Franck’s organ music and his own organ music such as the Three Chorals, Sonata da Chiesa and the Passacaglia are highly regarded among Dutch organists. His first masses have an intimate character and lend themselves to be performed in small churches such as the Missa Simplex, Missa in Festo Assumption Beatae Mariae and the Missa Sponsae Christi. It is true that Andriessen created a different spirit in Dutch church music and the Missa Lauda Sion is probably his most admired mass setting.

One of Andriessen’s first successes were the Variations and Fugue on a theme of Johann Kuhnau of 1935. It is scored for string orchestra and is probably the most performed work of Andriessen. It was his daughter Helen who discovered the theme when she had to practise a minuet for her piano lesson. Andriessen said that the writing of variations are due to the composer’s admiration of the theme. Later he was to compose some variations on a theme by Couperin. Andriessen’s variations are unique is that he takes part of the theme or perhaps just a bar from the original and turned it into something his very own. He did not use the harmonies that Kuhnau used and the purists of harmony will object to his use of parallel fifths

The Couperin Variations date from 1944 and are scored for flute solo, string orchestra and harp and were written for his daughter Helen’s final music examinations. It is, in effect, a flute concerto and close in style to the Kuhnau variations.

There are four symphonies dating from 1930 to 1954. The Symphony no. 1 was his first full orchestral piece and is in four concise movements lasting about 14 minutes. It was premiered by Edward van Beinum to whom it is dedicated. It is a fine work and we have to record that the composer’s wife meticulously wrote out all the orchestral parts. She was a marvellous help. She had graduated from the music conservatory and been a pupil of Hendrik’s and was excellent at paper work including income tax forms.

The Symphony no. 2 is more modern in style but again shows the composer's interest in early music. The three movements are headed Fantasia, Pavane and Rondo respectively and lasts just over 15 minutes. Its harmonies are more advanced and seems to show the composer's quest for a more modern idiom. The work is dedicated to van Beinum and was written for the 50th anniversary of the Concertgebouw Orchestra. It also seems to have been influenced by the Dutch master Willem Pijper although Andriessen never wrote in his style. The pavane is an orchestral transcription of a piece that had been composed for Andriessens's daughter, Gesina, who used to dance to it.

If the Symphony no. 2 is not immediately accessible to the music lovers it is to professional musicians. However, the Symphony no. 3 of 1946 is a familiar reaction by a composer after writing a modern work. It is a splendid piece in four movements with established titles to the movements Overture, Sonata, Sarabande and Fuga and lasts about 23 minutes. It makes an immediate impact. It was completed on the composer's fifty-fourth birthday.

Between the third and fourth symphonies there appears the Symphonic Study of 1952 which should not taken as an exercise for the Symphony no. 4. The Symphonic Study may be a miniature symphony in itself with four movements lasting about 10 minutes. It was first performed by the Residente Orchestra under Willem van Otterloo on 15 October 1952. The work is important since it uses a 12 note row but it is not strict serial music. The composer called this work his work from the laboratory but that is misleading. It is a work of strength.

The Symphony no. 4 dates from 1954 and is in three movements lasting about 24 minutes. It was composed for the 50th anniversary of the Residente Orchestra and dedicated to Willem van Otterloo. It begins with a twelve note row but it is not a serial work. The twelve note row is a cantus firmus. The big opening movement moves from molto grave to energico and is probably Andriessen's best symphonic movement.

Andriessen's interest in early music and its forms is also shown in his Ricercare for orchestra of 1949. This was composed in the summer of 1949 while the composer and his wife were staying at the home of the organist Susi Jeans. Earlier, in 1939, he had composed a Sinfonia for organ.

He also wrote a cello concerto and an oboe concerto. As you might expect there is also an organ concerto. There are two operas: Philomela cast in three acts and dating from 1950 and the one act chamber opera Der Spiegel von Venedig of 1964.

His church music includes eight masses including Missa in Honorem Sacratissimi Cordis for choir and organ of 1919 and the Missa Diatonica of 1963. There is a Magnificat with organ (1936) a Missa Solemnis with organ (1946) and a Te Deum with orchestra of 1968. The Two Madrigals for choir and orchestra of 1940 are attractive pieces. A successful secular choral work is Ommagio a Marenzio of 1965.

His songs have found favour with discerning performers and audiences. Of special note is Miroir de peine for soprano and orchestra of 1923.

He wrote a Piano Sonata (1934) a Violin Sonata (1932) and a Cello Sonata (1926) and, in 1957, a String Quartet in the ancient style.. A Piano Trio dates from 1939. He wrote a book about Cesar Franck in 1941 and there are other writings on musical subjects including his book of essays Over Muziek which is popular among Dutch music lovers.

He died on 12 April 1981. He was eighty eight years old.

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