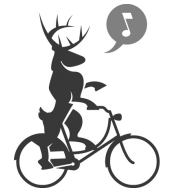


the continuum



December, 2008

SHIFT and our European Tour a success!

With the successful completion of activities in Amsterdam, SHIFT – the ambitious, Continuum-led festival of Canadian and Dutch music, film and literature – makes its return to North America. The name says it all: the festival follows centuries of migration, transforming and continuing in Canada what began in Europe. But it's more than that. The greater *shift* was to be in understanding between the Netherlands and Canada, where clichés would be put paid or transmuted into fresh insight. Surprise is the currency of such an undertaking – one cannot know before hand which new discoveries will resonate most and become central to the new sense of the other. As it turns out, there were many surprises, on and off the stage and screen. And it all took a great deal of effort (speaking specifically of the musical aspect of SHIFT) as we began, two Mondays ago in Amsterdam, the process of putting together two new pieces with the Ives Ensemble, rehearsing and coordinating five new works with film, and experimenting with all the sounds that can be made inside a piano by six people.

The first concert was performed by Asko|Schönberg with Canadian superstar soprano and former Continuum member Barbara Hannigan, conducted by Etienne Siebens. Premieres of works by Michael Oesterle and James Rolfe, the first ever Canadian commissions by Asko|Schönberg, as well as the Dutch premiere of *Lettura di Dante* by Claude Vivier and a new piece by Corrie van Binsbergen provided an auspicious beginning. The *Volkskrant* review was titled (my translation) “Vast Canada meets Nederland in art -- In multi-coloured SHIFT Festival comes great diversity from two countries together” (or something like that.) In her on-line article, well-known musicologist Thea Derks found Vivier's work to “mark the upbeat

for a richly varied festival, in which initiator Jennifer Waring of the Canadian Ensemble Continuum is searching for common themes and differences between the Dutch and Canadian culture.” She concluded by saying, “this opening concert makes me long for the rest of the Shift Festival.”

On day 2 Quatuor Bozzini performed a dazzling programme that included premieres of Dutch works by Hanna Kulenty and Richard Ayres. The latter actually had had a previous partial performance but this was the first time a quartet had been able to handle the difficult middle movement. Other string quartets were by Martijn Voorvelt, Michael Oesterle and Martin Arnold. Jarko Aikens, Artistic Coordinator of the Muziekgebouw, declared that before the year was out he would have Dutch string quartets performing *contact;vault*, the work by Martin Arnold that he had just heard; after Friday night's film and live music event, which included a new work by Martin, Jarko pronounced him the discovery of the festival. Bela Luttmer wrote in the *Volkskrant*: “The string quartet by Martin Arnold excelled in superlatives of soft dynamics with many ways of playing with wooden bows on metal strings.”

Continuum's concert with the Ives Ensemble included works for the combined ensembles by Linda Bouchard and Guus Janssen, works for each ensemble alone by Mayke Nas (for Continuum) and Gyula Csapo (for Ives), while Continuum performed a work from its touring repertoire, *raW* by James Rolfe. In my opinion, and not to diminish the quality and accomplishments of the other concerts and events, this was the gravitational centre of the festival. It is only natural that I feel this way -- a joint concert with the Ives was my original proposal to Jan Wolff over three years ago. He insisted, though, that I make the event bigger and include other art forms,

and so SHIFT took form. But for other reasons, this concert on Thursday Nov 20 embodied for me the spirit of the festival. Two ensembles from different musical cultures (cultures produced by differing systems and levels of funding, by different musicians' work regimes and conditions, by starkly contrasting fundamental national realities) came together, not always easily but with huge good will and a determination to make the pieces work. Continuum and the Ives rehearsed together and separately, in the capacious rehearsal studios of the Muziekgebouw, for up to ten hours a day over four days. The Ives performs without conductor, no matter what the difficulty of the piece or the circumstance; with limited resources and busy freelance schedules to reconcile, Continuum has only just begun moving in this direction. Working with the Ives was a learning opportunity, one not without friction and frustration. Every problem that came up, however, was satisfactorily dispatched; the result was a concert that was proclaimed “schitterand” (dazzling), by a member of the audience sitting close by.

Pieces ranged from Mayke Nas' *Douze Mains* (which required Continuum's six musicians to play inside the piano with the different sonic possibilities contained in credit and membership cards, wooden skewers and coffee stir sticks, dish washing and percussion brushes, hard and soft guitar picks, fingers and finger nails), to Guus Janssen's *Ex Tempore* for mirrored ensembles with the French horn in the centre providing cues for everything that happened. The pieces in between were new works by Linda Bouchard and Gyula Csapo, as well as *raW* by James Rolfe. The concert was broadcast live on VPRO radio.

Immediately following the concert, the Ives Ensemble was presented the award for ensemble of the year, a bittersweet recognition in the face of their total elimination at the latest round of Dutch

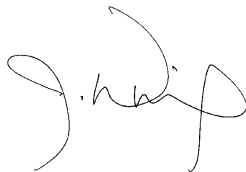
funding applications. Except for their upcoming tour as part of SHIFT in Canada (with concerts and workshops in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Kitchener and Vancouver), this unique ensemble, instrumental in the development of so many composers and aesthetic movements, will cease to exist. It is a devastating loss not only for the Dutch new music community but internationally. On the positive side of Canada's ledger as one compares the two systems, one cannot imagine such a thing happening here, not in one granting round and not without consultation.

The technical complexity of the film and live music event the following day taxed even the resources of the Muziekgebouw. Unfamiliar with the setup in the hall, we couldn't know until we got into the space precisely how the synch up with films would work, and myriad other details. What brought it all together was a marathon technical and dress rehearsal, the tireless assistance of our colleagues at Images festival (with whom we collaborated in programming this event), Greg Oh's brilliance as conductor, and, by Day 6 of non-stop rehearsing and performing, the musicians' stamina. Works dealt with themes of the sea as the Pacific Ocean and the North Sea were juxtaposed on a split screen; the mutual invasion of the human and natural worlds as represented by clips from old movies intercut with highly processed images of birds and bats in flight; a poignant view of the loss of connection with water in Toronto's urban environment; trees in Parc Mont Royal in Montreal, with music improvised by violinist Malcolm Goldstein; and an aging gangster's paranoid delusions, near death experience and revival through highly unconventional means...means which prompted the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, where Continuum gave a second performance just days after the Amsterdam premiere, to give the work and our concert an X-rating! (If you'd like to know why, the next performance is in Toronto, the opening night of the Images Festival at the Isabel Bader Theatre, April 2, 2009, 8pm.)

Earlier during SHIFT there were late night screenings, on Tuesday and Wednesday night, of Canadian and Dutch short films, curated by The Images

Festival and Utrecht's Impakt Festival respectively. Some remarkable works were presented to a small but enthusiastic audience. And on Saturday the festival concluded with two afternoon literary sessions assembled by the International Festival of Authors: the first, moderated by Canadian author Lewis De Soto, was a rousing discussion on the theme of the past in contemporary literature of Holland and Canada; the second, moderated by CBC host Eleanor Wachtel on the subject of immigration will be broadcast at a later date on the CBC's Writers and Company.

Before and after SHIFT, Continuum performed at other major European festivals: in Aberdeen at the remarkable **sound festival**; in s'Hertogenbosch for two concerts as part of **November Music**, a tri-national festival that takes place also in Ghent, Belgium and Aachen, Germany. In s'Hertogenbosch, the venue was a refitted Verkadefabriek (cookie factory), a model for what might be possible in Toronto; about our performance the *Brabants Dagblad* declared "Another successful premiere was the one by Martijn Voorvelt. For the sublimely gifted ensemble Continuum from Canada he wrote 'Continuum': with jerks and jolts, squeaks and creaks, the musicians cleared themselves a way through the score towards a fuller, more harmonic total sound." Following SHIFT, our tour concluded in Huddersfield, at the **Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival**, where we played two works that we'd just premiered in Amsterdam, plus Nicole Lizée's *Marsh Chapel Experiment* and the works by Martin Arnold and James Rolfe that had accompanied us throughout the tour. While in Huddersfield we bumped into Rick Sacks and Quatuor Bozzini (who we'd just worked with in Amsterdam) and Eve Egoyan. We sensed the growing reach of Canadian music abroad.



Jennifer Waring
Artistic Director
Continuum and SHIFT

SHIFTing into Toronto

SHIFT's Canadian activities run February 25 to March 3 and also include opening night at The Images Festival on April 2.

February 25

Leading authors from Canada and The Netherlands exchange ideas and spark debate about issues of mutual interest to their respective cultures. Dutch authors Gerbrand Bakker, Lieve Joris, Lucette ter Borg, and Anja Sicking appear with Canadian authors to be announced. Presented by Authors at Harbourfront Centre

February 26

An evening of Canadian and Dutch short film presented by The Images Festival in cooperation with the Impakt Festival

February 27

The always remarkable Gregory Oh and Toca Loca perform works by Dutch and Canadian composers at the Music Gallery

February 28

A repeat of the extraordinary Amsterdam concerts featuring the Ives Ensemble and Continuum performing separately and together

March 1

Quatuor Bozzini presents a concert of string quartets by Canadian and Dutch composers

March 3

The Ives Ensemble workshops new pieces by emerging local composers in an event open to all students and composers

April 2

Opening night of the Images Festival features a repeat of the film and live music collaborations premiered in Amsterdam

For complete SHIFT event details, to get involved as a volunteer, or to make a donation, please visit www.shift-festival.ca.

The Dutch are coming to Canada, not for the first time, and always to lasting effect. Come out and be affected.



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