

Notes on the Program

by Nadia Sirota, The Marie-Josée Kravis Creative Partner

The first time I ever heard of composer **Louis Andriessen**, it was because my close friend at Juilliard, a percussionist, got sciatica. He had been attempting to perform Andriessen's epic *Workers Union*, originally written for "variable ensemble"—usually a large, gangly group of raucously played instruments—as a duo. To compensate for the group's lean numbers, he was smashing his way through the 20-minute, unrelenting piece with his gloved left and right hands on a piano keyboard and a graduated pile of cymbals, respectively. Andriessen writes with an energy, a kind of visceral joy that reaches from the page through the performer and all the way to the audience, inspiring people to go to all sorts of lengths to realize his scores, back injuries notwithstanding. His music does what the best art does, and startles us with odd-angled glimpses of our own humanity.

It would be difficult to overstate Andriessen's impact on contemporary music. This, I believe, is creditable to two factors: his ability to coin new, addictive musical idioms (his music often employs a more sinister and, to be honest, kind of *metal* rendering

of the pulses and seisms of minimalism) and his generosity as a teacher. Not only has he taught many of the towering figures to emerge from two generations of contemporary composers, but his pedagogical tendrils extend to virtually every conservatory and music school in the world.

Now, at the age of 79, it is extremely fitting that the New York Philharmonic is celebrating his phenomenal career with *The Art of Andriessen*, one of the Orchestra's 2018–19 season pillars. While the main course of this celebration is the World Premiere of *Agamemnon*, a mythology-inspired work commissioned by the Philharmonic, Andriessen has spent most of his career shying away from traditional "classical" ensembles like the symphony orchestra, focusing on timbrally fascinating, often unexpected pairings of instruments. This *Sound ON* concert, "Going Dutch," is designed as a kind of tasting menu of Andriessen's alchemical creations, moving through his work for the smallest forces to some of the largest. Along the way, we will listen to works by two of his students: Martijn Padding and Vanessa Lann.

Image de Moreau* *Hout (Wood)* *Symphony for Open Strings

Louis Andriessen

Born: June 6, 1939, in Utrecht, the Netherlands

Resides: in Amsterdam

Works composed and premiered: *Image de Moreau* composed 1999; premiered March 2, 2000, at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, Kuang-Hao Huang, soloist. *Hout (Wood)* composed 1991; premiered November 3, 1991, at Frascati, Amsterdam, by Ensemble Loos. *Symphony for Open Strings* composed 1978 as a teaching project for a group of string players at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague.

Andriessen's *Image de Moreau* was written in 1999 for Dutch pianist Ivo Janssen's *toccata!* project, which was designed to build a new repertoire of music riffing on the Baroque-era keyboard form. The word *toccata* comes from the Italian "to touch," and is often a kind of virtuosic musing on the dexterity of the keyboardist. Andriessen writes that the *toccata*

was the starting point for *Image de Moreau*, but the piece soon turns toward French late-Romanticism, the time and spirit of painters like Redon and Gustave Moreau. The paintings of Moreau combine large areas of abstraction with very sharp figurative details, faces and objects, opening up unexpected emotional feelings.

Martijn Padding's *Mordants* also draws inspiration from musical concepts dating back to the Baroque era, exploring the DNA of the mordent, a very short ornamental trill. Padding plays on the energy of this ornament, developing a multifaceted single stream of music for the piano and violin together. At times the two instruments toss the ornaments back and forth as idle sunbathers might a beach ball. Eventually, these energetic outbursts develop into something more insistent—the game cannot be lost! The piece then settles back into an uneasy

calm, the violin now transformed into something terrifying and still. Padding writes:

recently I have become more interested in ambiguity in music: saying yes, but meaning no. In *Mordants* this becomes clear through the "double" violin part. There is a "real" part and a "shadow" part of very high flageolets. In the coda, the violin briefly sounds as if coming from the grave, an effect produced by attaching a rusty paper clip to the G string.

Vanessa Lann composed ***The Key to the Fourteenth Vision*** in 1999 as a short virtuosic caprice for solo violin. Building from a single note pulsed in a lopsided rhythmic figuration, the caprice builds up voices while adding and subtracting beats in a series of gentle climaxes. Ms. Lann writes:

To actually compose in a traditional key at that time was unusual for me as a composer of modern music (it's not anymore, by the way), so the title is related to the double meaning of the "clue" to understanding something, as well as the idea of a major key. A performer needs the obvious virtuosity and stamina for this work, but there is also a nod to the idea of the performer as sublime magician, transporting and transfixing those in the space to an altered level of consciousness—in the

Mordants

Martijn Padding

Born: April 24, 1956, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Resides: in The Hague

Work composed: 2002

World premiere: 2002, in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, by Heleen Hulst, violin, and Gerard Bouwhuis, piano



same way as Paganini can be said to have uplifted and energized audiences in his day (as in a shared "vision").

Andriessen's *Hout (Wood)*, written in 1991 for tenor saxophone, marimba, electric guitar, and piano, is a canon—all four players play the exact same material, offset from each other by a single note. This piece is a sterling example of Andriessen's ability to control form and proportion, for while the conceptual framework behind the piece is simple, the listener is brought through a complexly textured, variably timbred world, complete with transformations and revelations. The title takes its inspiration from a quirk of the Dutch language. Andriessen writes:

Although the whole work is in principle a strict canon, the successive voices are so close together that it is more like a unison melody with ramifications. Ramifications and branches are the same word in Dutch. This especially refers to the branches of a tree, so the use of wooden instruments—marimba and woodblocks—help explain the title of the work.

Symphony for Open Strings, the oldest work on this program, dates from 1978. It was written for a modified string orchestra in which each of the 12 solo string players

has tuned her instrument in an unorthodox manner, so the 12 pitches of the chromatic scale are represented over four octaves in open strings alone. Notice that the performers do not use their left hands at all, except as a means to support their instruments. All of the melodies heard in this piece need to be hocketed from instrument to instrument like a Ping-Pong ball. These open strings, necessarily played with no vibrato, resonate in a pure, immediate way, and thus they blend almost as the reeds of an organ would. Andriessen writes:

As regards the composition technique, I employed symphonic procedures: recurring motives, a developing musical motion, and something like a recapitulation. I had not used techniques like these since the fifties, and they could be my answer to the neo-romantic movement: young composers writing once again for the symphonic orchestra. In this sense the *Symphony* is ambiguous, using "symphonic" techniques, while an open-string orchestra will never sound like a real symphony orchestra. This work has benefited from that discrepancy—in other words, for a symphony orchestra I would have written a different work.

It is fitting that we revisit this piece during a week when Andriessen has returned to the symphony orchestra at last.

The Key to the Fourteenth Vision

Vanessa Lann

Born: April 6, 1968, in Brooklyn, New York

Resides: in The Hague, Netherlands

Work composed: 1999

World premiere: autumn of 1999 as part of the Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition, in Rotterdam, Netherlands, Benjamin Schmid, soloist

