

Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller, Program Annotator, The Leni and Peter May Chair

TAO

Louis Andriessen

In 2016 Louis Andriessen became the third recipient of The Marie-Josée Kravis Prize for New Music at the New York Philharmonic. He had previously been named Composer of the Year by *Musical America*, in 2010, and was honored with the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition in 2011. This performance is part of *The Art of Andriessen*, the Philharmonic and Music Director Jaap van Zweden's celebration of the acclaimed Dutch composer from a variety of perspectives, October 4–14, 2018.

Music is in Andriessen's DNA. His father was the organist and composer Hendrik Andriessen, one of Holland's leading musical lights through the mid-20th century; his uncle, Willem Andriessen was a notable pianist and composer; and his older brother, Jurriaan, also achieved distinction as a composer. Andriessen studied at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague and pursued advanced work with Luciano Berio in Berlin and Milan.

Returning to the Netherlands, he became a standard-bearer of his nation's musical avant-garde. In 1969 he was involved in the *Notenkrakersactie*, a demonstration that disrupted a concert of the venerated Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra as a protest against that ensemble's lack of attention to new music. Viewed as a politically potent act, it marked a turning point not just for modern Dutch music but also for state-funded music education in Holland and for the burgeoning historical-performance movement in which that country was then gaining prominence. Rather than continue to write for what, for him, had come to represent a medium

drowning in reactionary expectations, Andriessen ceased composing for standard orchestras, casting his instrumental music instead for large or small ensembles of less predictable make up.

From the late 1960s through the '70s he was central to founding three modern-music organizations — STEIM (Studio for Electro Instrumental Music), De Volharding (Perseverance), and Hoketus (Hocket); the last remained active for a decade, while STEIM and De Volharding continue to this day, giving rise to important musical technologies and repertoire.

Andriessen's style has developed through various phases, from early efforts in neoclassicism and serialism toward the cleansing reduction of minimalism and the liberating

IN SHORT

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

Resides: in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Work composed: 1996, on commission from the Sudwestfunk for the 75th anniversary of the Donaueschinger Musiktage, and with financial support from the Foonds voor de Scheppende Toonkunst

World premiere: October 19, 1996, by the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra, Peter Eötvös, conductor, Tomoko Mukaiyama, soloist, Helen Wiklund, Francine van der Heyden, Johannette Zorner, Gerda von Zelm, singers

New York Philharmonic premiere: these performances

Estimated duration: ca. 18 minutes

possibilities of jazz. Stravinsky has served as an ongoing influence, reflected sometimes literally and often subliminally. Stimuli from other composers or extramusical sources have played key roles in several of his works: quotations of Charles Ives in his *Anachronie I* (for orchestra, 1966–67); the visual art of Piet Mondrian in *De Stijl* (for speaker, voices, and large ensemble, 1984–85); and medieval poetry in *Hadewijch* (for solo singer, voices, and large ensemble, 1988).

His oeuvre crosses many genres, including the stage works *ROSA Death of a Composer* and *Writing to Vermeer*, created in tandem with Peter Greenaway; and his collaborations with filmmaker Hal Hartley, including *The New Math(s)* and *La Commedia*, the latter being an operatic treatment of Dante. His latest opera, *Theatre of the World*, about the 17th-century polymath Athanasius Kircher, bowed in Los Angeles and Amsterdam in 2016; this coming spring will bring the pre-

Listen for ... Asian Atmosphere

Although Louis Andriessen states that, in *TAO*, he has not attempted “to relate to what is known as ‘music from the Far East,’” listeners may well think of its sound as Asian at least in a general way. The work makes use of two traditional Japanese instruments near the end: the *rin* (a Buddhist ceremonial “singing bowl,” heard only once) and, more prominently, the *koto* (an instrument of the zither family). The standard Western instruments of the orchestra can also summon up Asian sounds; for example, the very high string parts at the outset — played with mutes and without vibrato, bowed at the bridge of the instruments — suggest the Japanese *shō*, a high-pitched mouth organ.

Notwithstanding such allusions, and the inclusion of texts in Chinese and Japanese, Andriessen has created a piece of utterly original language. The work is dominated by descending melodic contours, which endow the piece with a spirit of lamentation. In fact, when the piano emerges as a dominant player, almost at the movement’s midpoint, the score directs that its high-pitched, *for-tississimo* chords be played “as if crying.”



Japanese woman playing a koto, by Hasegawa Settei, 1868

miere of a new work commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic as well as a series focusing on his music at the Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam.

A succession of major pieces for large ensembles cemented Andriessen's place in contemporary music: *De Staat* (*Republic*, 1976), *De Tijd* (*Time*, 1981), *De Snelheid* (*Speed*, 1983), and *De Materie* (*Matter*, 1985–88, a theater piece created with Robert Wilson). *De Staat* will be performed by The Juilliard School's Axiom Ensemble on October 14 as part of *The Art of Andriessen*.

His *Trilogie van de Laatste Dag* (*Trilogy of the Last Day*) was envisioned as a tripartite piece from the outset, consisting of *De Laatste Dag* (*The Last Day*), *TAO* (*The Way*), and *Dancing on the bones* — but it reached its

eventual form in stages from 1993 through 1997. The entire *Trilogy* runs almost an hour, although Andriessen authorizes that its movements, which have entirely different personalities, may be played as stand-alone pieces. In this concert we hear its middle movement, *TAO* (*The Way*).

Instrumentation: flute and two piccolos, oboe and English horn, two horns, piano (doubling celeste), rin (“singing bowl”), harp, crotales, orchestra bells, cowbells, vibraphone, xylophone, two bell plates, chimes, two gongs, large triangle, strings, four women's voices (two sopranos, two mezzo-sopranos), and solo piano, with the pianist also playing koto, speaking, and singing.

Sources and Inspirations



Louis Andriessen has shown an ongoing fascination with the idea of time, which is treated as the principal subject in several of his works. Contemplating the intersection of time with humanity inevitably led to a consideration of mortality and how various cultures have confronted it. In *TAO*, the composer turns toward Asian cultures. He writes:

In this part, the choir sings a text from *Tao Teh Ching* (*The Classic of the Way and its Virtue*), written by Lao Tzu in the sixth century BC. The piano soloist ends the piece with a poem, “Knife-Whetter,” written about 2,500 years later by [the Japanese poet and sculptor] Kotaro Takamura (1883–1956). There is a kind of contradiction between the two texts: in *Tao Teh Ching* calm and emptiness dominate and, in the chosen fragment, invulnerability. But Takamura’s poem is primarily ominous. This composition is based on a series of 13 chords corresponding to the 13 companions which Lao Tzu speaks of. I have made no attempt to relate to what is known as “music from the Far East” or, even worse, “world music.”

Depiction of Lao Tzu, by Ming Dynasty landscape painter Zhang Li

Texts and Translations

Louis Andriessen's TAO

from *Tao Teh Ching (The Classic of the Way and its Virtue)*

by Lao Tzu (early 6th century BC)

Chū sheng ru si. Sheng zhi tu shi you san; si zhi tu shi you san; ren zhi sheng, dong zhi si di, shi you san. Fu he gu? Yi qi sheng sheng zhi hou.

When one is out of life, one is in Death. The companions of life are thirteen; the companions of Death are thirteen; and, when a living person moves into the Realm of Death, his companions are also thirteen. How is this? Because he draws upon the resources of Life too heavily.

Gai wen shan she sheng zhe, lu xing bu yu si hu, ru jun bu bi jia bing; si wu tou qi jue, hu wu suo cuo zhua, bing wu suo rong qi ren. Fu he gu? Yi qi wu si di.

It is said that he who knows well how to live meets no tigers or wild buffaloes on his road, and comes out from the battleground untouched by the weapons of war. For, in him, a buffalo would find no butt for his horns, a tiger nothing to lay his claws upon, and a weapon of war no place to admit its point. How is this? Because there is no room for Death in him.

*Translation by John C.H. Wu
© 1961 St. John's University Press*

“Knife-Whetter” (1930)

by Kotaro Takamura (1883–1956)

*Damate hamono o toideru.
Mō higakatamukunoni mada toideiru.
Urahato omote o pittari oshite
tomizuo kaetewa mata toideiru.*

Wordless, he whets a knife.
Sun setting, on he works.
Pressing the blade down,
changing the water, on he whets.

*Nanio ittai tsukurutsumorika,
sonnakotosae shiranaiyouni,
isshunnokio mikenni atsumete
dobano kagede hamono o toguhito.
Konohitono sodewa shidaini yabure,
konohitono kuchihigewa shirokunaru.*

Brow furrowed and intense,
what is the task, does he know?
Shaded by green leaves he whets the knife,
but to what purpose?
His sleeves gradually tear,
His moustache turns white.

*Ikidourika hisshika mushinka,
konohitowa tada tohoumonaku
mugenkyūsū o otteirunoka.*

Fury, necessity, innocence;
or the pursuit of an infinite sequence
simply, prodigiously?

*Translation © 1999 by Boosey & Hawkes
Music Publishers Ltd.
Reprinted by permission of Tadashi Takamura*