

## Summaries

---

**\*\*Talk with Maarten van Veen at Vapiano. Rotterdam, April 3, 2015.**

The piano cycle: *What is beautiful is loved, and what is not is unloved* is written for Van Veen. He premiered it in The Doelen, Rotterdam the Netherlands on November 14, 2014.

*Maarten van Veen is pianist and artistic director of the DoelenEnsemble. In 1998 he worked with Robert Craft on Stravinsky's piano repertoire, and recorded "Les Noces" with the latter in the Abbey studios, London. He recorded the complete piano-works of John Adams and Magnus Lindberg, as well as many other CDs.*

**PvD:** Are titles important in coming to an understanding or interpretation of the score? In what way?

**MvV:** I can't say that it doesn't influence me and I can't say that it is the only influence. It's one part of a complete story. I won't go as far as Mendelssohn, who said that music can say more than words. If I know the story behind a composition, it has an impact on me as an interpreter. I will make other choices; I will play this *f* a bit more or less.

**PvD:** I remember that you played the first movement at our first meeting and after this we talked about the title. The two sides of the title: the kind of "naïve fairy-like" side, with a tragic quality and the "destructive-danger" side. This "naïveté" that is constantly under pressure of the "darker" counterpart. You said something like: "Then I could play it like this", and you played it differently than before.

**MvV:** Yes, a lot happens at such a moment. I played the top notes of the right hand differently, less legato. I started to play the bass a bit softer to create a longer tension curve. I look for a musical translation of the images I get from the title. But there is something else: the on-going discussion about music as something that has meaning. When is music communicating by itself? And what is it? Language is a translation of what we perceive. I translate your score, and this happens immediately, because I am going to compare it with my own background, to create a relationship, an interpretation or a form that I understand. This has to do with the nature of a performer who gets on stage to show an interpretation of a work, and by doing so, communicates with the audience. So at the moment I look into the score it happens. I get ideas, discover possibilities ... I try to see what is possible, what are the different options ... There are endless possibilities, or possible combinations. I don't believe that everything has already been done. The possible combinations are inexhaustible. And in ten years, I'll play it differently again.

**PvD:** Would you investigate into the background of the title/titles? How? (For example use Google, visit a library, etc.)

**MvV:** No, I didn't. Maybe I will at a later stage. But for now I didn't. The music itself gave me enough ideas for now. The curve in the three movements was clear; the way to get there wasn't so easy.

When I play Messiaen, I listen to all the real birds that are mentioned in the score. It gives a good indication of how one should play it. Birds sing (mostly) less aggressively, more round, then one would expect from the score. One plays the *ff* differently.

**PvD:** If you would do more research, for example on where the titles come from, or on who the authors of these titles are, or for example on the text at the top of PDF page 4: 'What is .... Skrijabin'. What would happen with your interpretation?

**MvV:** It's an endless process. One's views are constantly enriched and changed by the surroundings. The moment I played your pieces, I had a good image of the pieces and that was enough. But it says nothing about how these pieces will develop in the coming years. I can't exclude the possibility that something will change my view on your pieces. If I go to a play and suddenly in the play I see Razumikhin as one of the characters [see the 3<sup>rd</sup> piano piece] ... This is a very organic and lively process that is continued there... If I were to play your pieces on a Bechstein, it would change the way I play them. Every concert hall changes the performance. Little details make a big difference. Why does everything have to be invariable? Diversity is inevitable and much more interesting.

**PvD:** But at this moment society doesn't seem to look for diversity ...

Would the way you approach the music be influenced by the title/titles? In what way? Or maybe you don't like it that you are pushed in a direction by a title? Do you prefer for example a more neutral title – such as Sonata?

**MvV:** For me it works quite simple. If I would get a new work, without any clue or reference and I don't know the composer, it's nice to find [everything] out by myself. But that's it, then. But talking with a composer accelerates the process; one arrives more quickly at an interpretation that one never could have made by oneself. That's positive, but it's not the one or the other. It is possible that another pianist plays your pieces "better" and never met or talked to you. And I must say, at the performance in the Doelen I had the feeling that it was going beyond everything we talked about during the rehearsals. You can't write this in the score or in text ...

---

**\*\*Email correspondence with Marcel Worms, March 5 – April 4, 2015.**

The first movement *Sí calpestando fiori errava hor qua, hor là...* is written for Worms.

He played it in Egypt, France and The Netherlands.

*Marcel Worms is a pianist and performs new and forgotten music all over the world, from the Netherlands to Egypt and from Sudan to Georgia. He has recorded over 30 CDs with music of Jaques Goudappel, Rosy Werthheim, Frederico Mompou, New Dutch Blues, Agnes Jama, Arvo Pärt to name just a few.*

**PvD:** Can you say something about your first encounter with the score?

**MW:** The elaborate and mysterious title immediately gave me the feeling that I was confronted with a "momentous" piece. Not one that you write easily in an afternoon. Related to this: you've sent me an extensive explanation and a poem. This explanation was very useful, but also restrictive because it was hard to see the music as absolute music. The interpretation, in principle, comes from the notes. Debussy wrote the titles of his Preludes between brackets at the end of the composition and each title is followed by three thought-dots. In this way he indicated that the titles were only suggestions that do not need to influence the performer too much.

The global layout of the piece was immediately clear. There were many pedal indications [that I later changed, PvD] and I noticed the detailed notation. Therefore I focused on the square millimetre and had less an eye for the bigger line of the piece.

Later you sent me the revised version in the DoNeMus edition, which had a bigger size. Because of the larger size, I started to play it "grander".

PvD: Do you prefer to see music as “absolute” music? Would you have preferred that I did not send you the explanation and the poem, so you had more freedom to make your own narrative? Do you think a performer should not be influenced too much by the composer?

MW: No, but it does affect me to a certain extent, and it also clarifies things.

PvD: You told me the first time that you immediately noticed that the title was not modern Italian. How did you see that?

MW: I speak Italian, and *Hor* is not a word used in today’s Italian.

PvD: Have you done something with the title? Did you look where it came from? Did you do more research and discovered anything?

MW: No, your explanation was extensive and gave no reason for further investigation.

PvD: Do you find this at all necessary or are the notes and structure more important?

MW: Depends on the situation. I have read a lot about the Goldberg Variations. With your piece I had a written explanation and a few times your physical presence.

PvD: Is a title important for you? Or would “Sonata” be the same? Would you have played it differently?

MW: I like a title. Once a composer wrote a composition for a group I had called *for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and piano*. I find this deliberately neutral.

PvD: How did our meetings add to your understanding of the work?

MW: You pointed out the importance of the descending lines in the upper and middle voices. I hadn’t recognized them as such.

PvD: Is the relation of these lines to the title important?

MW: Yes, that’s important to know.

PvD: To what extent is the title important for an audience? Or do you make the title important for the audience in the form of a written or verbal explanation?

MW: Yes, it’s important. If the title isn’t clear, I explain it to the audience. But, well, on the other hand, music should be accessible without explanation.

---

**\*\*Talk with Mike Compitello via Skype. April 12, 2015.**

He premiered “*Figures from 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'*” (2015) at The Spectrum, New York June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

*Mike Compitello is one half of the New Morse Code, for whom I wrote “Figures from 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'”. Currently he is Director of Percussion at Cornell University. He has worked with composers Helmut Lachenmann, Nicolaus A. Huber, David Lang, John Luther Adams and Alejandro Viñao on premieres and performances of new works, and has performed as a chamber musician and soloist with the Ensemble Modern, the International Ensemble Modern Academy, and with members of the Bang on a Can All-Stars.*

**PvD:** Is the title important in coming to an understanding or interpretation of the score? In what way?

**MC:** I like this, because it gives me things to think about: clues, leads, it's opening up a lot of possibilities. For example the instruments in the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement: every day objects – maybe I can see if there are some in the painting that I could use...

**PvD:** Would you investigate into the background of the title? How? (for example use Google, visit a library, go see the painting, etc.)

**MC:** As a kid we went to the Prado every year. My parents are Spanish teachers, so they took me there every year, and I didn't particularly like it, all these saints and angelic paintings, but the Bosch painting I remember very well: the colours, the strangeness of the figures. What can be said about these figures in relation to the music? I look for elements in the music that underlines my idea of these figures, and also go for something opposite. This would indicate a certain range within which you can start thinking about an interpretation. Another questions that I would ask myself: is it a parody, or ironic, is it serious?

**PvD:** The performers have to speak: is the text or the source (Shakespeare) important in coming to an understanding or interpretation of the score? In what way?

**MC:** I have read the Shakespeare. What is firstly important to me is how I have to say the lines in relation to how I should play the notes. Body movement in relation to expression is to my opinion important to this. For example the first line 'like a servant' – I shouldn't be too wide with my gestures. The way I would understand the character will steer the way to play it. Also the question: to whom am I talking: audience? Hannah? myself? And like the pictures, I would look for a meaning/connection with the music: is there something in the music that has a relationship with clocks or time? All these aspects would influence the way I would choose the stage set-up, the instruments (3<sup>rd</sup> mov.), what sticks I will use, how Hannah and me communicate/play together...

**PvD:** Are the above-mentioned aspects important in communication with an audience? In what way?

**MC:** The audience is of course very important. Not in the way that I want to please the audience, but I want to be clear in my performance. What can you give them to have an opinion, positive or negative? That is an important thing.

---

**\*\*Email correspondence with Hannah Collins and talk via Skype. April 14, 2015.**

She premiered "*Figures from 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'*" (2015) at The Spectrum, New York June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

*Cellist Hannah Collins is one half of the New Morse Code, for whom I wrote "Figures from 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'". In 2011, I wrote Monologue for her; a 20-minute piece for speaking, singing and acting cellist. Hannah currently performs and teaches in New York City where she appears regularly with Exponential Ensemble, Cantata Profana, and NOVUS NY.*

**PvD:** Is the title important in coming to an understanding or interpretation of the score? In what way?

**HC:** The title certainly gets an interpretation started. In this case, identifying the painting already opens up a palette of things for the player to be thinking about (colours, sounds, human moods) that can be seen or imagined from the painting. It also suggests that there is a narrative or a description that needs to be relayed by the performer to the audience. For example, if a piece is titled, "Crossing the Choppy Atlantic," I automatically assume that it is my duty to transport the audience to a sonic depiction of a bumpy sea voyage.

**PvD:** and in relation to how you play it?

**HC:** If I look at the first page and see I have to make all these noises, hit the wood, rub the strings, and I look at the painting, I look for those sounds in the painting. If the piece would have had a relation to something completely different, like electronic music, I would approach the sounds differently. The title puts me in the context of the painting, so I could be looking at the items that are in the painting and what kind of sound they produce, instead of looking for a sound that could be produced by a computer.

**PvD:** Would you investigate into the background of the title? How? (for example use Google, visit a library, go see the painting, etc.)

**HC:** I would (and have) googled the painting and painter, read some biographical information, looked closely at a digital version of the painting, looked at some other paintings by Bosch. I would be less likely to arrange to go see the painting in person unless I happened to be passing through Spain for another purpose.

**PvD:** The performers have to speak: is the text or the source (Shakespeare) important in coming to an understanding or interpretation of the score? In what way?

**HC:** The play isn't quoted enough to truly tell the audience a full story or version of the original source. Sometimes it's just the timbres and sounds of the consonants and vowels that the composer is interested in, and other times it's the meaning of the words isolated on their own. I would consult with the composer about how the texts were chosen first. Once I spent quite a bit of time trying to understand titles of different movements, and it turned out to be combinations of words randomly selected by a computer program!

**PvD:** would the title, pictures or text influence the way you approach the music? In what way? Or maybe you don't like it that you are pushed in a direction by a title? (You prefer for example a more neutral title –such as Sonata)

**HC:** I love having titles that evoke reaction and give some direction. More neutral titles such as "Sonata" naturally lead me to focus more on form and organization and relaying those items to the audience instead of character and narrative. The first question I would probably ask the composer is, "What inspired you to write this piece? What were you thinking about?"

If you handed me a piece called Rondo, my first reaction would be that the most important part of this piece is that it's a Rondo, so how can I clarify that? Maybe it's not obvious, I have to find the form. I ask myself, "What Rondos do I know"? and how can I contrast middle sections, how can I vary returning sections. I enter into a conversation with history of that form. Even if Rondo is a kind of a neutral title, it is actually very charged with meaning and history.

In your case, *Creature reading a book*: maybe I'm the creature, or Mike is the creature because he has the book, or the creature is somewhere in the air and we are providing his soundtrack or his world, the focus is immediately on the character and the drama.

**PvD:** Could you say that the references I use in the score steer you or manipulate you, into a certain direction?

**HC:** Yes absolutely, and that's interesting for you to decide. I can't even tell you how many times it has happened to me that I play a premiere and in the concert, at the premiere, the composer talked to the audience about his piece and mentioned something that I didn't know, and you think, "why didn't you tell me"? Sometimes it's not important for the composer, because it said something about the way he organized the piece and not how it should sound or be listened to.

In your piece we want the audience to understand the relationship between this music and the other pieces of art. For them to understand that, I have to understand that. But maybe I don't have to understand it on the same level that you understand it to construct it.

**PvD:** There is always a translation, from my score to you, and an extra translation from you to the audience.

**HC:** What I do with the score is totally out of your control, but you can have a guess how I would react. We had this experience in *Monologue*. With the stage directions, I sometimes had a very different reaction to what you were expecting.

**PvD:** Are the above mentioned aspects important in communication with an audience? In what way?

**HC:** Yes. I enjoy performing in an interactive way, talking to the audience to frame certain pieces to them. This may involve sharing a little bit more backstory about the composer's intent or something personal about how I feel about the piece or what I am thinking about as I play it (whether approved by the composer or not). The above aspects would be important in either case.

**PvD:** (For the next question, the composer is not available to give you answers)

How would you invest in finding out certain aspects you don't understand from the score, e.g. why are these figures chosen? Why are the Shakespeare-fragments chosen? What is the relation? Would you look things up (Google, visit a library, something else), or try to make a hypothesis about this?

**HC:** I would research online, look at other works by the composer to see if I could spot any trends, and take a look at the selected figures and the other figures in the painting to see what the options were. I would seek out other performers of that composer's work as well. I think I would allow myself to form certain hypotheses about why texts or figures were chosen and how they relate in a way that makes sense to me. This wouldn't necessarily be something I would share with an audience, just an idea that I would use to organize my own thoughts and movements. I may assign a certain character or aspect of the painting to a certain passage of music to help me focus on a certain effect or contrast it against another section. I do this with neutral-titled pieces as well, so why not here?

I would take the privilege of creating my own understanding, even if the composer is available, because at the end of the day I have to be able to navigate through the piece. It doesn't necessary have to make sense to anybody else the way you are thinking of it. The text of Shakespeare triggers for me an instinct to come up with my own version of the

character since I have to deliver it. I have to figure out how I connect to it as a person. And to whom do I speak: do we speak to the air, or do we speak to each other?  
The text is also interesting, because there is a male and a female character in it, so if another group would perform it, two men, that would change the situation.

---

**\*\*Talk with Pete Saunders at *The Royal Conservatoire*. The Hague, March 9, 2015.**

I've sent him "*Figures from 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'*" (2015).

*Pete Saunders is a trombone player with the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and until recently with the Netherlands Wind Ensemble.*

**PvD:** Is/are the title/titles important in coming to an understanding or interpretation of the score? In what way?

**PS:** I first looked through the score and noticed that it's rhythmically very complex. If I would play it, I would analyse it harmonically. Not chord for chord, but more the direction of the chords. This has a relationship with the emotional content. First I want to get an idea of the structure of the piece.

Secondly, I would go more into detail; precise rhythmic and harmonic patterns, and then I would go to the title. First, I want to have an impression of the notes, that's more important for me. Music should speak for itself, without references. But the references do add some depth to the interpretation. I don't necessary think too much about a title, but your piece is really asking for it. And I must admit, I found it nice that the title is related to a painting and that there are Shakespeare indications. I'm more sensitive to the relationship of image-music than text-music; so automatically I tend to look more at the painting. The text, maybe I would skip it at first.

**PvD:** But in the piece you have to speak the text.

**PS:** Yes, then I have to see what the context of the lines in the actual play is.

**PvD:** I indicate with each line how to speak it: rhythmically and intentionally, ex. "demanding", or "correct, as a servant". So you don't need to know the play.

**PS:** Yes, that's true. I think the painting will inspire me more in seeking for inspiration, because I want to get an idea of the emotional content of a piece and the painting helps me in this. I won't ignore the Shakespeare text, though.

**PvD:** Is a title important for you? Or would *Duo* be the same? Or would you have played it differently?

**PS:** It would be different, it would be less rich. You added a lot to the music: the title and showing the images during the performance, and throwing and kicking the book. It becomes very theatrical. It creates an atmosphere. I wouldn't wait too long with looking at the title.

**PvD:** Would you investigate into the background of the title/titles? How? (for example use Google, visit a library, etc.)

**PS:** Yes, absolutely. The painting is so fantastic.

**PvD:** How would you invest in finding out certain aspects you don't understand from the score, e.g. why are these figures/titles chosen? What is the relationship between them, and with the music? Would you look things up (Google, visit a library, something else), or try to make a hypothesis about this?

**PS:** No, not really. I would let it happen, because the combination [Bosch-Shakespeare] doesn't seem obvious. And there doesn't need to be a reason, maybe I discover it along the way, but it doesn't have to be there. To explain it can take something away. That's a conscious choice, to leave it and just see what happens.

**PvD:** That's one of the ideas I have: to surprise people, and with the surprise you create a space in which a person can fill it with her own thoughts.  
But still for me there is a causality between the Bosch figures and the Shakespeare lines.

**PS:** Yes, but that is not so interesting for me. The causality I create is more important for me. But you also don't have to be afraid to state your intentions, because this can stimulate the performer, and there is enough depth in meaning to create one's own interpretation.

---

**\*\*Talk with Maggie Urquhart at her kitchen-table, Rotterdam, March 19, 2015.**

I've sent her "*Figures from 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'*" (2015).

*Maggie Urquhart is a double bass and violone-player and has been a member of many baroque ensembles such as La Petite Bande, the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, the Leonhardt Consort and Collegium Vocale Gent. Since 1986 she has been a member of the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century.*

**PvD:** Is/Are the title/titles important in coming to an understanding or interpretation of the score? In what way?

**MU:** To get me in a certain mood. Because of the reference to the painting, I get an idea of a dream world. And the sentences [Shakespeare] seem to be something, but actually it is something else. It's a kind of confusion. But on the other hand, you are very precise in your notation: accents, dynamics, character; so how much freedom I can take... Maybe if I first try to play what you wrote and then see what I can bring...

In playing old music, we always try to read as much as possible. About the composer, the period, the instruments etc. What was the relationship of Bach with the texts he used? That's how we do it.

**PvD:** If you play a cantata, which has an instrumental introduction, would you look for a relationship with the text of the cantata? Would you look for certain rhetorical figures?

**MU:** Sure, that's a major part of what we do. Some figures had a certain meaning and Bach used it on such a high level, there are so many layers. We are never finished with that. But we never know for sure what is exactly meant or how it should be performed. What exactly was Bach's relationship with text? We can read a lot, do a kind of archaeological work, but we never know.

**PvD:** The music becomes then a kind of door to other areas, for example Bach's life, where you dwell for a while, and then you return to the score. What is then the relationship with an interpretation?



**MU:** It's a feeling, sometimes you hear a performance, which is nice, in tune, the notes are right, but you feel that it's wrong. It doesn't work.

**PvD:** What doesn't work?

**MU:** If you play a religious work and you are not religious, you still have to understand why it is written as it is, from a humanistic perspective. At the performance you have to be "religious", pretend like an actor, and in order to pretend you need to know what's happening.

**PvD:** How would you invest in finding out certain aspects you don't understand from the score, e.g. why are these figures chosen? Why are the Shakespeare fragments chosen? What is their relationship? Would you look things up (Google, visit a library, something else), or try to make a hypothesis about this?

**MU:** Yes, I looked at that. But I don't know. I looked for it and I found a thesis, I think, that talks about a connection between these two. But I didn't go into that. I couldn't figure it out, they are 100 years apart and didn't live in the same place, so I started to invent my own hypothesis around it; about this dream world, a kind of surrealistic view.

**PvD:** But, would it be an important question for you?

**MU:** Yes, sure. If I were to play it, I would ask you.

---

**\*\*Email correspondence with Wouter Verschuren, March 11 – April 2015.**

I've sent him "*Figures from 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'*" (2015).

**PvD:** Is the title important in coming to an understanding or interpretation of the score? In what way?

**WV:** First I would play it and from there try to understand how it could have influenced you.

**PvD:** Would you investigate into the background of the title? How? (for example use Google, visit a library, etc.)

**WV:** I happen to know this work, but if I didn't I would use Google and read about the history of the painting, the painter and the context.

**PvD:** The performers have to speak: is the text or the source (Shakespeare) important in coming to an understanding or interpretation of the score? In what way?

**WV:** You ask if the text is important in coming to an understanding of the score. But the text is part of the score, right? Text has content, but also sound. I would put the text next to the notes, to get an idea of what the relationship for you could be, and try to discover what the relationship could be for me.

**PvD:** Would you investigate in the background of the text? How? (for example use Google, visit a library, go see the play, etc.)

**WV:** I would search the Internet first to see if I could view the play there. I know there are some nice BBC recordings.

**PvD:** would the title, pictures or text influence the way you approach the music? In what way? Or maybe you don't like it that you are pushed in a direction by a title? ((You prefer for example a more neutral title)

**WV:** I don't mind the title. I wouldn't have the feeling you are steering me. To me it feels more like the composer wants to show the seed where the piece came from. Interesting for a performer. But not leading to a very specific interpretation I'd say.

**PvD:** Are the above-mentioned aspects important in communicating with an audience? In what way?

**WV:** Not sure. Hard one...

**PvD:** How would you invest in finding out certain aspects you don't understand from the score, e.g. why are these figures chosen? Why are the Shakespeare-fragments chosen? What is their relationship? Would you look things up (Google, visit a library, something else), or try to make a hypothesis about this?

**WV:** I would have a look at other works from your hand. See if I can find a lead there. I would try to figure you out. There must have been reasons why you did what you did. Have a close look at the text; meaning etc.. See if I can find similarities in the work of Bosch. If I cannot figure you out I would leave it and go my own way being personally inspired by the painting and text.