

Chiel Meijering - Bassoon Compositions

Introduction

For anyone looking for interesting bassoon literature, the site of Chiel Meijering¹ is highly recommended. Many pieces are to be found: with electronics, duos for bassoons, concertos, double concertos, triple concertos, up to and including a concerto for twelve bassoons and string orchestra. Any attention seems too little for so many works, in this article we focus on the most eye-catching. We discuss the pieces with electronics and, as part of the series, the double concertos.

Who is Chiel Meijering and where does this impressive oeuvre come from? Meijering was born in 1954 and studied percussion and composition. His attention to the bassoon was drawn because Meijering's high school music teacher played the instrument, and occasionally brought it to class. This teacher stimulated creativity among the students, for example by asking the students to compose opera music for a given libretto. Meijering's first work with a prominent role for the bassoon was "I can't get no satisfaction", with a big nod to the Rolling Stones. It dates from 1983 and was written for the bassoon-piano duo Marieke Stordiau and Marjolein Bakker.

With over 1200 works altogether the oeuvre of Meijering is huge. Anyone who thought that Vivaldi left many bassoon concertos should definitely take a look at Meijering's works. No less than 143 concerts with a solo bassoon are listed. In the 20th century, Meijering mainly concentrated on writing works for small ensemble, although symphonic work has always been represented. Since 2006, the opera genre has become more prominently present, due to the success of the Alzheimer Opera.

What is characteristic of Meijering's music? At any case a healthy sense of humor. When you read in the list of works, and discover that a piece for saxophones is called "I like rats but I don't like Haydn", it makes you curious.

Electro

When browsing recent works for bassoon, the name of Kathleen McLean stands out. This Canadian-born bassoonist tells on her website in a blog² how a stream of compositions came her way after she had written an email to Meijering. She had played the work "Nocturnal Residents" at the 2010 idrs³ conference, and considered another Meijering piece for the recording she had planned for her sabbatical in 2016. What followed were an unprecedented number of bassoon pieces coming her way, including bassoon concertos, double concertos and an

1 chielmeijering.com

2 www.kmbassoon.com/wp-content/uploads/My-Surreal-Sabbatical-How-One-Email-Transformed-Bassoon-World.pdf

3 International double reed society, seie idrs.org

extensive collection for bassoon and electronics⁴. Eight albums have been released so far, in which Meijering, in addition to having composed the music, also handles the electronics, the synths. They have a double numbering: Volume (Vol) according to the Meijering/McLean count and Donemus Cross Over (DCO) according to publisher Donemus⁵, as follows:

Title	Vol	DCO
Rave on	1	016
Shimmy Shimmy	2	017
Night Ride	3	014
Nonstop Electronic Love	4	015
Spaceways of Time - cinematic samplings	5	018
Guilty Pleasures	6	013
Happy Hours	7	012
Pipes and Dreams	8	019

Each album contains about an hour of music. Sometimes the bassoon plays along with the bass line, sometimes it plays a counterpart against it. The music often contains riffs, small fragments with a rhythmic pattern that are repeated. The Happy Hours album was originally composed for bass clarinet. Its premiere⁶ was in the middle of the lock down, June 2020, with only the composer as an audience in the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ.

The recordings are available on Spotify or Apple Music. When you buy an album, you can access to the complete recording as well as a recording without bassoon. In this “music minus one” you then can play along yourself. The bassoon parts are not easy: the pace is generally high, quarter=140 is no exception. The notation is in three keys, and the range is from low B-flat to E'. The rhythms are quite complicated as well, although of course it helps that you can play along with McLean to practice. A few examples from the song “In the Beginning” on the album Rave On.

With tempo quarter = 136, the bassoon part starts as follows:



Fig. 1: *In the Beginning*, mss. 17-19

Without a break, this fragment continues with a very low bass line.

⁴ www.kmbassoon.com/recording-projects/forging-a-path-to-the-future-with-bassoon-and-electro-music/

⁵ donemus.nl/releases/crossovers/

⁶ youtu.be/2iybcWUqAU4

Later on, the bassoon has an dotted eighths, still with 4/4 time signature. The first three beats are divided into four notes, followed by two regular eighth notes on the fourth beat, as in Fig. 2. This fragment remains for eight bars.

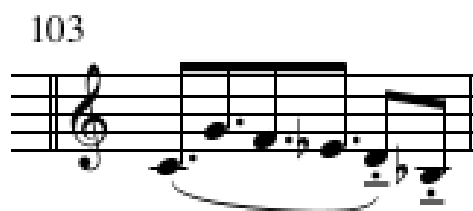


Fig. 2: *In the Beginning*, m.103

The music refers to old masters such as Bach or Gabrieli. There are also references to Kathleen McLean's Scottish origins, such as "The Jig" (Shimmy Shimmy) or "Pipes and Dreams". If one had to pinpoint the style, it would be funk. The first song on the album Shimmy Shimmy is "Can't help being Funky", a recycled riff. Meijering wrote the original with that title in 1978 for his funk band TX109. Another song at Shimmy Shimmy is unmistakably a pop song titled "Freddy M. is in Heaven".

The titles of the songs also arouse curiosity here, for example "Who's the Guy in the yellow Pants", a comment from Kathleen McLean when seeing an old photo with band members (Happy Hours). Another example is "You'll know the Spot when you feel It", a title in the style of Frank Zappa (Guilty Pleasures).

Concertos for two bassoons and orchestra (part 7)

Meijering wrote more concertos for two bassoons and orchestra than anyone else in this series. To date, there are five for two bassoons and strings, and one for bassoon, contrabassoon and strings. In this article we discuss the oldest three, the other three will follow.

Locust Street Mantras (2017/2018/2020)

The title refers to the street in Philadelphia where the Curtis Institute is located. The bassoonists Kathleen McLean and David McGill studied there, and they are also the people to whom the concerto is dedicated. What you would expect from a work with mantras in the title are repetitive motives, the 'spells', that are repeated over and over. However, this is not the case, the music is always changing. The bassoons and the strings are usually not involved in the same



thing. They do have the same note material, but at different times. The strings make a lot of noise due to their playing manners such as *spiccato* (the bow bounces up and down over the strings), *pizzicato* (plucking a string by hand), *bartok-pizzicato* (same thing, but in such a way that the string also touches the neck). There are almost only *crescendi*, no *decrescendi*. When the strength has to be restored, this is done step by step, so that

Fig. 3: *Locust Street Mantras*, solo bassoons m.16

there is room for a new build-up. Eventually the mantras culminate in *ffff*. At the beginning there is a different measurement division, in the way described above for the electro. In a four-four time 4x4 sixteenths, it is 4x3+4 sixteenths, as in Fig. 3.

That moment, the bassoons play in parallel minor thirds, written in the bass clef. In general, the two bassoons complement each other. It takes a long time for the strings to join with the almost repeating notes of the bassoons, as in Fig. 4. In total the piece has 520 bars, so this is the apotheosis.

Fig. 4: *Locust Street Mantras*, m.511

Soldier in Silhouette (2018)

When listening to the recording⁷ on youtube with Kathleen McLean and Cornelia Sommer as soloists conducted by Chiel Meijering himself, there is a strong association with *l'Histoire du Soldat*. This is no coincidence, the subtitle reads “Homage to Igor Stravinsky's ‘The Soldier's Tale’ (1918)”. Initially the bassoons play together, while the strings accompany (violins) and play march-like footsteps (violas, cellos and double basses). Gradually there is more interaction between the groups and the footsteps also fade. The similarities with Stravinsky become less and it becomes more recognizable as a work by Meijering.

Muggles (2018)

This work is for bassoon and contrabassoon solo, with an orchestra of strings, tubular bells and vibraphone. Although this series started as a series for concertos for two bassoons and orchestra, the concerto is too cute to pass. Like the muggles from the title, the bassoon and

Fig. 5: *Muggles*, solo parts, m.72

⁷ youtu.be/YzdzHantDwE

contrabassoon often form a front together against the orchestra, but at times they join in with the crowd. The roles the bassoon and the contrabassoon play, differ. Immediately after the introduction, it is up to the contrabassoon to play solo, while the bassoon “doubles” the violas with downbeat notes. In other places the bassoon and contrabassoon play complementary parts. There are also places where the muggles get really angry, as in Fig. 5. The principle of a unison solo in bassoon and contrabassoon is reminiscent of such solos in Shostakovich's symphonies. Because of the overtones that reinforce each other despite or actually because of the octave difference, the instruments stand strong together.

Twelve bassoons and orchestra

With the title “The (green) reed which bends in the wind (is stronger than the mighty oak which breaks in a storm – Confucius)”, Meijering composed a work⁸ that partly premiered during a double reed day in 2018 at the university where McLean teaches, Jacobs School in Bloomington, Indiana. The second part was played during the idrs conference in Granada in August of that year. The Confucius proverb is about a flexible green reed, but of course bassoonists need a flexible reed that is yellow (or one made of plastic).

The second movement starts in the same manner the first movement ends: the bassoons “stack” the end of a short sixteenth-note fragment into a twelve-part chord, as in Fig. 6. In total, they form four times a three-part major-third stacked, from bottom to top starting on b, b-flat, a and g. The second movement begins with similar stacking and dynamics, except that now it's three major chords, on c, b-flat, and a-flat, and a diminished one on f-sharp. In the second movement the reeds have a harder time than in the first movement: the tempo is faster, the dynamics are stronger and the strings and bassoons rage fiercely. The piece was played in full at the latest idrs convention in Boulder, Colorado, July 2022.

8 part 1: youtu.be/CD0IuuYk30M, part 2: youtu.be/3KfZAqHqEys

The image displays a musical score for 12 solo bassoons, labeled bsa.1 through bsa.12. The score is arranged in 12 horizontal staves. The music is written in bass clef and includes dynamic markings such as *f* (forte), *ff* (fortissimo), *pp* (pianissimo), and *ffz* (fortissimo zando). The notation features various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. The final bars of the piece are indicated by a double bar line and a repeat sign. The tempo marking *ad libitum* is visible in the top right corner of the score.

Fig. 6: Solo bassoons, final bars part 1