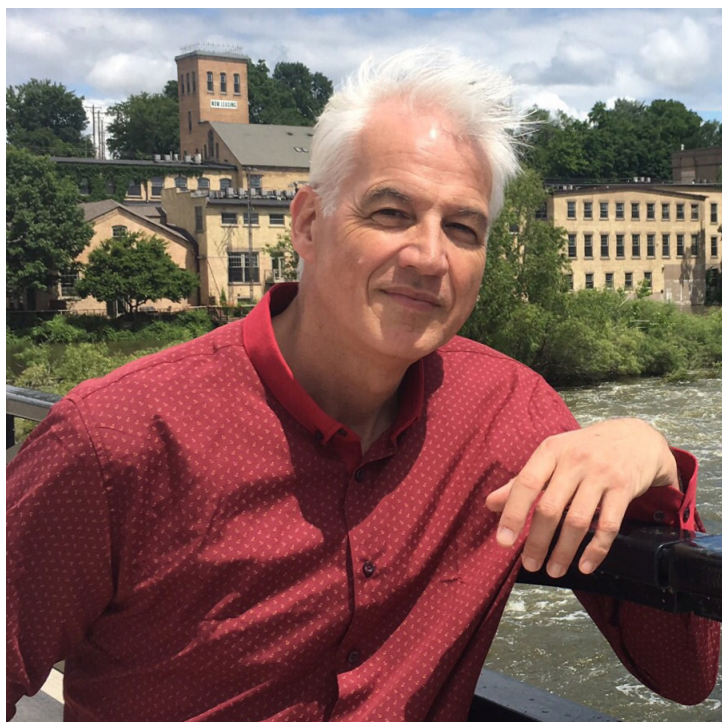


# Meijering - concerts for two and more bassoons and orchestra

by Ellen Kruithof

One of the first bassoon concerts I attended was a recital by Marieke Stordiau (so good!). I do not remember the works played except for “Betty Boop. It is a piece by Chiel Meijering<sup>1</sup> for bassoon and piano. He had “transposed” the title into a recurring motif: low Bb-B-C. I wanted to be able to play it, so I practiced. Being an absolute beginner, I did not stand a chance. However, I still remember it, many years later.



## Meijering's music

Chiel Meijering is an exceptionally productive composer. He has written over 2000 works, many of which include bassoon. Just for fun, search for “bassoon” at the publisher’s site<sup>2</sup>, and you will find over 1000 hits. Having written so many works for or with bassoon, an article on any single piece, or even some of the pieces, will not do justice to the whole. There is so much more to say. Anyway, the chosen scope of this series was to discuss the concertos for two bassoons and orchestra. In principle, we will stay with that for now, but including some concertos for more bassoons and orchestra. In Meijering's case, the orchestra usually consists of a string orchestra.

## Concertos for two Bassoons and Orchestra – Part 9

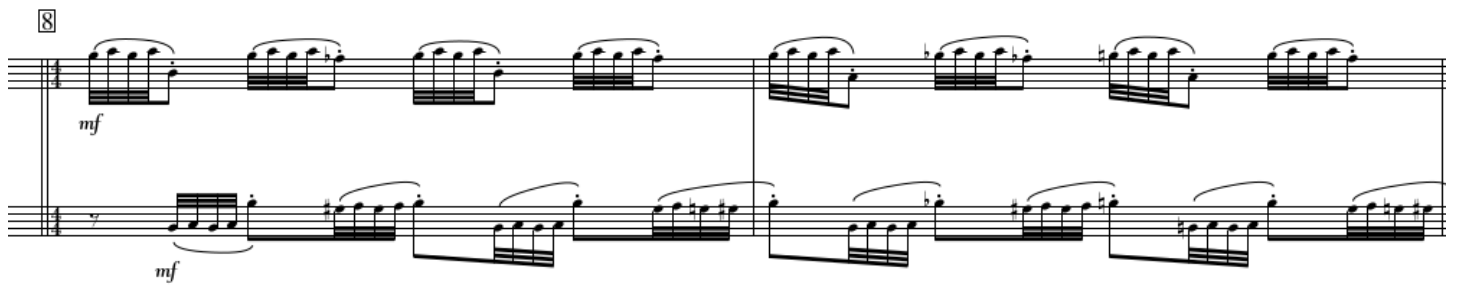
### A New Day, a New Life

The piece A New Day, a New Live (2020) is scored for two bassoons and strings. Each string section has been split, except for the double basses. The opening is for the strings, in preparation of the following bassoons’ movement. The groups complement each other perfectly by playing the rhythm eighth note + four 32ths or four 32ths + eighth note alternately, so that each quaver is filled with eight 32ths. They pass on their pitch, the starting note of a fast group has the same pitch as the previous eighth, as in Fig. 1. This principle forms a building block for a large part of the piece.

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1 chielmeijering.com, much obliged!

2 donemus.nl, thanks for permission to reproduce the score fragments



**Fig.1: Bassoon entrance, both in bass clef**

As the “new day” progresses, the bassoons each get an expressive melody. This is followed by a catchy rhythm by the strings in 9/16 time. The division in the groups remains, although some groups have been strengthened by playing the same line, as in Fig. 2.

The 9/16 measure is divided into 2+2+2+3, a so-called Aksak rhythm<sup>3</sup>. As a former percussionist, Meijering often applies this principle. The term Aksak is Turkish and means “stuttering”, because the groups are uneven, either consisting of 2 or 3 units. Together they form a larger entity. Meijering has been inspired by Stravinsky, who also uses this technique.

The principle of “passing on” the pitch as in Fig. 1, later returns in a 6/8 time.

**Fig.2: mm.183-184, bassoons and part of the strings**

## The Mask Painted White

The Mask painted White (2013) originally was a concerto for one bassoon and string orchestra. The version for two bassoons and string orchestra dates from 2023. The indication at the beginning is “as if from another planet”, all players

<sup>3</sup> as explained e.g. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aksak>

have *p*. The bassoon(s) play quintuplets over two beats *détaché*. The strings play *con sord.* half notes in 4/4-time. The timbre contributes to the otherworldly feeling.

The quintuplets in the version for one bassoon have been divided over both bassoons in the newer version. In the first part no new notes were added.

The second part continues “dreamy”. In the version for one solo bassoon, it has a slow melody, with pauses. In the later version the melody becomes continuous, as the bassoons circle around each other.

The work is inspired by an experimental poem by Mark Sonnenfeld. It is an indictment of the life, seemingly impeccable, where self-criticism is hard to find, “interior eyes like 500 miles away”.

### When the Bell blew Up

The work *When the Bell blew Up* was also inspired by a poem with the same title. It was written in 1893 by the Australian poet Edward Dyson. It describes the consequences of an explosion, resulting in a large fire. Several men try their best, panicking around, not knowing what to do, or where to help. Furthermore, there is the dismay of the spectators and people who have lost each other.

In music, the bassoons start off slumbering, with a soft flowing, ongoing melody in 6/8. The strings play *spiccato* (bouncing on the string, shorter than staccato). As the piece progresses, it becomes louder. The bassoons play ties versus separated, short string notes. Gradually, both groups play with more emotion, audible by many and short *cresc./decresc.*

Finally, one bassoon goes berserk, “as fast as possible, freak out”. What exactly should be played is not written, the instruction looks like this:

217

*as fast as possible, freak out*



*f*

**Fig.3: *When the Bell*, m.217, first bassoon**

Meijering explains that he prefers to leave it up to the soloist what to play exactly. It will result in the same thing as something unplayable written down.

The poem ends with the terrible realization that a loved one has died. In the music, the strings chase the witch of terror with a large glissando. Here the witch who has tormented the Bell family<sup>4</sup> for years shows up.

4 a well-known story, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell\\_Witch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell_Witch)

## More for more bassoons: 3 bassoons and strings


There are two pieces for three bassoons and string orchestra: *City Tribes Talk* (2017) and *Foolery and Fun* (2019). The soloists in *City Tribes Talk* play three independent voices. In *Foolery and Fun* it takes a while before they get into their own rhythm, after having tumbled over each other in the first part. Because of the light-hearted nature of *Foolery and Fun* the dress code for the soloists is in white. Meijering explains that with this title you expect some light-hearted thing, and in the entertainment industry the dress code often is white is.

## More for more bassoons: 4 bassoons and strings

### Fuzzballs

The title “Fuzzballs” (2017/2022) refers to the wool balls, after years of usage, came to hang from Meijering’s favorite sweater. He says he lived in it so comfortably and sends along a photo from 1995(!) wearing that same sweater.

Musically, there seems to be a division between the producers of the dust and the dust itself. The strings as producers play the machine and the bassoons play the dust. It starts quite gently, but the dust cloud grows, and the work ends ***fff.***



The image shows a musical score for solo bassoons, labeled '18' in a box at the top left. The score is written in bass clef and consists of five staves. The first staff has a dynamic marking of *mp* and *mf*. The second staff has a dynamic marking of *mp* and *mf*. The third staff has a dynamic marking of *mf* and *mp*. The fourth staff has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The fifth staff has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines. The first measure is in 3/4 time, the second in 3/4 time, and the third in 9/8 time. The music features various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

Fig.4: Solo bassoons *Fuzzballs*, mm.18-20

The low strings play an important role in “whipping up” the orchestra. Other than that, the strings have sound effects within their rhythm, such as *bartok pizzicato* (low strings: bouncing the string on the key while playing pizzicato), and *con legno* (higher strings: using the wooden side for bowing).

Fig.5: Solo bassoons *Fuzzballs*, mm.18-20

## Delta of Dreaming

In addition to the four bassoons and string orchestra, *Delta of Dreaming* (2017) is scored with a drum set. Often, a ‘ping’ of a crash cymbal is heard. The start of the work is in 13/16, prescribed as 4+4+3+2, again an Aksak rhythm. Despite the suggested complexity, the rhythm feels like a trance, it has a hypnotizing effect. After this introduction, the time signature becomes a “regular” 4/4. The bassoons start playing quietly, dreamily, in quarter notes. The dream ends up-tempo, driven by a drum beat, as in Fig.6.

Fig.6: Drum *Delta of Dreaming*, m. 191

Although the entire ensemble plays with stronger dynamics than the bass drum, it remains audible because of its different timbre.

## All’s Fair in Love and Work

What would be the proper way to deal with each other in love or at work? The atmosphere is expected to be rather unfriendly. *All’s Fair in Love and Work* (2018) is a work for four bassoons and string orchestra. The beginning is peaceful “like praying”. The bassoons play quintuplets over two beats, while the strings play neatly in time, as in *The Mask Painted White*. On several occasions, Meijering scored bassoons 3 and 4 to play a riff a little longer, that was played by all bassoons before. It is as if the shadow of what was going on becomes audible.

The groups are self-occupied, without much interaction. They have their own style of playing (e.g. tied versus separated). There are also passages where they speak in blocks. Then suddenly bassoons 3 and 4 have “stolen” the *spiccato* playing technique, as in Fig. 7.

137 ♩ = 126

*mf*

*spicc.*

*mf*

*spicc.*

*mf*

**Fig.7: All's fair, mm.137-140, bassoons *spicc.* in bsn3 and 4**

Is *spicc.* even possible on a bassoon? No, it is not, for the lack of a string to dance over. However, this is about the feeling of stealing someone else's playing technique. Of course, playing as short as possible is possible.

Too bad for the bassoons, the final word is up to the strings. In the very last bar, they prominently play a large glissando. Indeed, hard for bassoons to imitate.

As said before, there are many works for bassoon, a large part in combination with strings. One tastes the humor and the fun of playing in titles like "And Yet...", for bassoon and string quartet.