

## Musicians' portrait: Corrie van Binsbergen

*Guitarist, composer and band leader Corrie van Binsbergen finished her classical guitar studies in 1983. She has been active in a very wide musical range and played with numerous different bands and groups, in pop, jazz and improvised music, music for theatre and dance productions, recording sessions, TV-shows and even the circus. In 1986, she started her own band 'Corrie en de Brokken', consisting of twelve top musicians from the Dutch jazz and pop world. Ten years later, Corrie founded the 'Stichting Brokken', with which she realises a new, surprising and successful production every one or two years, where she brings together different musical styles and (cross) art forms for a far broader audience than jazz concerts can reach. In 1999, Corrie van Binsbergen received the VPRO/Boy Edgar prize (the most prestigious award in Dutch jazz- and improvised music) for her creativity, craftsmanship and versatility. This prize is considered an oeuvre-prize. She received numerous commissions, from the NPS Jazz marathon, the European Woman in Music Congress, the Mondriaan String Quartet, the Holland Festival, Scapino Ballet Rotterdam, Film museum, the Netherlands Wind Ensemble, The Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Asko Ensemble. Currently Corrie works successfully with the concept 'Writers in Concert', where writers and improvising musicians interact.*

"Those are the most marvellous moments, that is the extraordinary thing about writing. This strange combination of mathematics and intuition, something touching me deeply in my inner self. It is comparable to playing Bach in the past, this feeling of things coming together, only now and then, but those moments make me very happy."

### *Background and childhood, growing up with music*

Corrie van Binsbergen grew up with two guitar playing brothers, one five years and the other three years older. She was born in 1957 in the small city of Tiel in the centre of The Netherlands, where she spent her childhood and part of her youth. Corrie's father worked as a civil servant in an agricultural institution and her mother was at home, taking care of the family. Both parents are still alive. Although neither of the parents was a professional musician, Corrie feels that she inherited her artistic skills from her mother, who sang in a choir, and from her grandmother, who had literary skills and wrote poetry.

At an early age Corrie encountered music in an informal way. She learned a lot about music making and specifically playing the guitar, because both her brothers played the guitar. They played in bands which very much interested Corrie. "My oldest brother played in a *bluesband*, which rehearsed in a farm. I used to go there with my friends to watch the band playing. It appealed to me enormously. One can say that music entered my life naturally. I have never given it a moment's thought. All kinds of musical genres existed together and mixed and merged throughout my childhood."

Corrie's parents encouraged the music making of their children. She feels that she had the advantage of being the third child. "My brothers paved the way; my oldest brother wanted to go to the conservatoire, but my parents didn't agree, so he studied English first and later went to the conservatoire. My younger brother also went to the conservatoire at some point, but he didn't finish his guitar studies; he became a music educator instead." Neither of the brothers became a performing musician, as Corrie did.

Corrie started to play the guitar when she was about seven years old and soon after that she had guitar lessons. Her teacher recognised her talent and suggested at some point to Corrie's parents that she should have a good classical guitar. "I played on a guitar with steel

strings, a kind of egg slicer. The strings were placed quite high, which hurt my fingers. After one year of lessons my teacher talked to my parents, offering them his guitar for 60 guilders, as he was intending to buy another one." By then Corrie was eight years old.

Her teacher was Cor van Meeteren and Corrie has good memories of him. He taught her for a long time, even throughout her period at grammar school. Corrie had private lessons, and when later a music school was founded in Tiel, Van Meeteren was appointed there and Corrie became a pupil of the music school.

She does not remember much about music at primary school, although she has a photo from that time with children dancing and her herself playing the guitar.

In 1969 Corrie went to grammar school. In general school went well, although Corrie did not have much joy in going to school. She found it especially 'dull and boring'.

Playing the guitar went on, until this period. "I had this famous dip of puberty when I was approximately 12 or 13 years old and I didn't want to play the guitar anymore. I stopped and felt I wanted to play the piano; meanwhile there was a piano in our house and I used to like messing about on it. But then I got official piano lessons, which I didn't like at all. Starting from the very beginning, doing exercises, playing boring studies, I didn't have any patience for that." In total Corrie stopped the guitar for one year and after her little excursion to the piano she took up the guitar again. "This time I was dead serious; I had now decided that I wanted to go to the conservatoire."

Corrie has positive memories of her childhood. "There were a lot of boys around and I found that highly interesting."

One vivid memory remains with her: "I must have been 14 years old when there was a Christmas concert organised by my school. It took place in St. Maarten's Church, which had glorious acoustics. I was allowed to go there one day before to practice and try out the acoustics and that was a wonderful experience. I felt that was the *real thing*."

Corrie doesn't feel she practised so much, but nevertheless her development was rapid. She thinks it must have had a lot to do with the fact that she had played the guitar from early childhood.

#### *Making up her mind about a career in music*

She had to repeat the third form of grammar school. By then Corrie was 15 years old and she developed her own plans: "I knew that one could do an entrance examination at the conservatoire after three years of grammar school, so I set my mind on that. Meanwhile my oldest brother studied at the conservatoire and he advised my parents against my plan, telling them he thought that I was way too young. I have often wondered how things would have turned out if I had had my own way. I didn't like my brother's interference. I saw my future clearly, having a solo career as a classical guitarist. I had this incredible experience in the church, which had made me make up my mind. Nevertheless I think that in the end it was a good decision to remain in grammar school, because in the end it wouldn't have been my pathway to become a classical solo guitarist."

Two clear moments are alive in Corrie's mind when asked about the role of music in her childhood and adolescence. The first is the memory of Bach's music. "When playing Bach my mind would open up. That is difficult to explain, having to do with a feeling deep down. But it was the role of music during my puberty, it touched something extremely fundamental." The other experience was when Corrie was 16 or 17 years old: "I was alone at home watching a documentary film about Nicaragua on television. It was very striking and quite terrible and it touched me deeply. After that I took up my guitar and started improvising. I had not done it much by that time and I remember it as an extremely important point in my development."

Corrie obtained her grammar school diploma in 1976 and subsequently took an entrance examination at the Utrecht Conservatoire. Her parents supported her decision, especially her

mother, who never had the opportunity to study and was happy that Corrie got hers. "I also think that I had an advantage in having two brothers who grew up before me; my parents gave me more space." Corrie's oldest brother occasionally had a hard time with her. He was at the conservatoire but had been playing the electric guitar in the first place, so he hadn't had much experience in classical guitar, which was a disadvantage for his study.<sup>1</sup> "He had to learn a lot, and when he came home I would play the pieces he had to practice easily. That must have been quite irritating for him."

#### *Period at the conservatoire*

Corrie was admitted to the preparatory class of the conservatoire, although she had her diploma from the grammar school. "That was due to my technique. The jury found that I played beautifully, but at the same time they felt I was playing like a wild horse that needed to be tamed. I had to work at my technique despite how long I had been playing. By coincidence a few months ago I met my old teacher Cor van Meeteren again, and he told me that he had often wondered whether he had worked well enough with me on my technique. He felt he hadn't been strict enough with me, and said that he had always found that technique didn't matter so much, as long as one can play what one wants while sounding really well. Well that was for sure. He could have challenged me much more. I had to go back to basics, also in terms of the level of the music I played. That was deadly boring, especially for someone like me."

Corrie got lessons from Hans Verzijl, who also taught the lute at the conservatoire. During the first year in the preparatory class Corrie also started to read Philosophy at Utrecht University in order to fill her week in a useful way, as she had only lessons on Saturday. In the end she spent two years in the preparatory class. In the second year she stopped her philosophy study and took on some small jobs, posing as a model and teaching a bit at home. "Actually I made quite a mess of it. I was really discovering life by then. I had to live on 'bread and water' at the conservatoire, which I didn't like, but I clung to that at the same time because I knew the *rock 'n roll* life I was leading wasn't healthy. To be honest and without wanting to sound melodramatic, I clung to my study to prevent myself ending up in the gutter. The friends and vague acquaintances I had at that time... I knew intuitively that it was quite a mess, having bad drinking and smoking habits, I knew I had to get out of it."

In 1978 Corrie started in the first year of her classical guitar study at the Utrecht Conservatoire. Her teacher was Hans Breedendebek, who had studied with the world famous guitarist and composer Leo Brouwer in Cuba. This appealed to Corrie. She remained for the full five years of her study with this teacher.

She experienced the time at the conservatoire in an ambivalent way. Some of the lessons were wonderful, like the lessons of Ton Hartsuiker, the well known specialist in contemporary music, whilst others, like the lessons in guitar pedagogy, she found terrible. There were quite a few guitar students, "they were shy; we had those guitar evenings where all students had to play which felt like a kind of wrestling with music and those evenings were so boring. I didn't like it at all."

Corrie was eager for a bit of challenge, but met bureaucracy instead. "In my last year the response of my teacher became less and less. He was so easily satisfied, just like my previous teacher."

Corrie always lived closely with the experience she had with improvising when she was 17 years old. At some point she asked her teacher whether she could improvise during her final examination and she had to fight hard to gain permission to do that. "I was told that I had to play different genres from different stylistic periods. Why? For five years they had been able to hear that I could do that. I didn't like guitar music from the classical period at all. I liked *Renaissance*, Bach and from Villa Lobos on to contemporary music. But it couldn't be changed." Also, when she was not allowed to change her Bach piece into a piece of Bach she preferred, she got angry and refused to do an examination in front of an audience. "I was

angry and I played my final examination behind closed doors, with the jury sitting at a large table.”

During the period at the conservatoire Corrie started to write music. She also got befriended by the pianist Albert van Veenendaal, with whom she started to play a lot and they even lived together for seven years. Meanwhile Corrie played in bands, among which with Albert, she sometimes played the electric guitar and she started to play the bass guitar. At that time it was not allowed to combine these instruments.<sup>ii</sup>

Corrie graduated in 1983 and received her teachers and performance diploma.<sup>iii</sup> After her examination she was offered the opportunity to continue her study for gaining a soloist diploma<sup>iv</sup>, but she had had enough and besides: “I couldn’t bear the idea of practising the guitar for four hours a day.”

#### *Looking back to the period at the conservatoire*

Corrie feels that she was granted space at the conservatoire except for the final year, when things became so rigid for her final examination. She had good times at the conservatoire as well, with friends, and inspiring teachers. She listened a lot to music.

In her fourth year she had a wonderful opportunity to play in a theatre show of the cabaret artist Frans Halsema and directed by Bram Vermeulen.<sup>v</sup> “I was fortunate. I got a card in my letter box, inviting me to take an audition. I did the audition and was accepted immediately. It was quite an experience, from which I gained a lot of expertise. Looking back it must have been the most luxurious tour I ever had in my life. Everything was taken care of, like flowers in the dressing room, clean towels waiting for us, my guitars being tuned and brought on stage. I think we did more than 100 performances, which was of course quite hard while preparing for a final examination as well. But I didn’t bother and I earned a lot of money.”

#### *Development of career and personal life*

After graduation Corrie went on with what she had started during her study, playing gigs here and there. “I did many different things, actually just things people asked me for.”

An important incentive for her career was playing in UIL, the *Utrecht Improvisation Laboratory*, initiated in 1984 by Albert van Veenendaal and his duo partner saxophonist Dick de Graaff. “It was a project carried out by a group of musicians, and I kind of invited myself there. It was an important stimulus for me. It was the first time I performed in the Bimhuis.<sup>vi</sup> We had nine concerts and two of the pieces we played were written by me. It inspired me. Just after it finished I suddenly heard a band playing, *Ray Anderson and the Slickaphonics*. I liked it very much and I wondered whether I should start my own band. Looking back I think these two things were the incentives for starting *Corrie en de Brokken* in 1985 and 1986.

Corrie remembers vividly when she made her decisions about her future career. “On my 27<sup>th</sup> birthday I realised all of a sudden that time was passing and that in three years’ time I would be thirty years old. I wondered what I was actually doing, why there were never things I was doing to which I considered inviting my family or friends. I just did things that came in my way; I didn’t choose the direction myself. I earned my money with music, but not with something I regarded as special, which was actively connected to *me*. I then decided that I wanted to change this in a very concrete way. My experiences in the UIL and with this fun band I heard triggered me off.”

In 1985 Corrie started to create her own band. She called four musicians with whom she would like to play. “I had nothing to offer, except myself and my compositions. People just had to feel like trying.” Initially things did not work out ideally in the rhythm section, but after a few different drum and bass combinations the group got its form as Corrie imagined it, when the double bass player Hein Offermans joined. The band *Corrie en de Brokken* was immediately successful. “Our first season was wonderful. We earned money, so I could pay the members of the band; in those days you got paid immediately after the concert. It was

marvellous that I could pay my musicians by playing my own music. We played our first programme seventy times in The Netherlands. That does not exist anymore.”

Meanwhile Corrie's relationship with Albert came to an end. They continued to work professionally. Corrie started a relationship with Hein and since then they have lived together in Amsterdam. In 1991 their daughter Jasja was born.

#### *From Corrie en de Brokken to Corrie en de Grote Brokken*

Ten years after the start of *Corrie en de Brokken* Corrie founded *Corrie en de Grote Brokken*.<sup>vii</sup> The latter was a band, consisting of twelve top musicians from the Dutch jazz and pop world.

At that point Corrie received a subsidy for her band. “I felt that we were beyond the stage of ‘Let's try something fun, keep your agenda empty and we don't know whether there can be any payment.’” Corrie got a subsidy from a foundation of performing arts.<sup>viii</sup> “It was a very ambitious plan, connecting pop musicians and jazz musicians; it would need quite a lot of rehearsals as some people were unable to read notes. I wanted it to be an exciting and *cool* band, with a lot of freedom.”

Continuing to be entrepreneurial she established the foundation *Stichting Brokken*, with as its aim ‘initiating border crossing collaborations, stimulating cross-pollinating projects and working on chasing away narrow-mindedness’.<sup>ix</sup> From this point Corrie started realising a number of astonishing musical projects and products, bringing different musical styles together.

“I made three different programmes with the *Grote Brokken*, the last one is called ‘The Country is Tired’<sup>x</sup>, from 2005 which we will perform once more next July.” The second programme was ‘Kado uit de Hel!’<sup>xi</sup>, from 2001, which also made use of texts.

What started as a project managed to sustain itself. After the first programme both Corrie and her musicians felt that they needed to continue. A recording company got interested in releasing a CD, so then the second programme emerged, actually out of the number *Present from Hell* from the first programme. “One event triggers the other, it is a continuing story.”

Since 2005 Corrie's foundation is supported by a yearly subsidy from the Dutch government, which gives some kind of peace of mind. It also enables Corrie to have some administrative support. “That is superb, I cannot imagine that for years and years I did it all on my own. It happens all at the cost of one's artistic energy. I made that clear when applying for the subsidy.”

It is especially during the periods of hard work in rehearsing and giving concerts that a lot of things cross Corrie's path concerning publicity and practical matters. Often it tends to be too much. “The weird thing is that you have to organise new work in the period that you are quite busy with playing, in order not to find out that you encounter a huge gap as soon as the concerts are over.”

#### *Acknowledged by the Boy Edgar Prize*

In 1999 Corrie got the *VPRO Boy Edgar Prize*, the most prestigious award in Dutch jazz and improvised music, meant as an oeuvre prize. She was very happy with it. “Especially because I was then in a phase of my career where I was doing what I really wanted to do and what fitted me. It was wonderful that just in that period I got acknowledged for that fact.” Corrie was not only pleased, she was also surprised: “I had always thought that this was a prize for virtuosic jazz musicians.” She is quite critical about her work: “Things sometimes go easily and when people are enthusiastic I tend to wonder what the fuss is about. There are things I am satisfied with, but I also often feel that sometimes I could have made more of it.”

#### *Writers in Concert*

With the programmes *Writers in Concert*, which Corrie started in 2003, a new highlight in her career emerged. In February four successful literary concerts took place in the Bimhuis in

Amsterdam with a group of eleven musicians, consisting of a group of improvising musicians in combination with a classical string trio. The writers who took part were Remco Campert, Toon Tellegen, Manon Uphoff and Kees van Kooten. This initiative turned out to be such a surprising and successful concept that a national tour followed in 2004. The concerts were released on CD. In May 2005 a new series of literary concerts took place in the Bimhuis. A diversity of writers and poets were invited: Ramsey Nasr, P.F. Thomése, Renate Dorrestein, Josse de Pauw, Rascha Peper, Erik Jan Harmens, Hagar Peeters and Jules Deelder. In 2006 more concerts took place and again a number of new CDs were released.

“Two things made me think of this concept. I had worked with texts in my programme ‘Present from Hell’. What was even more concrete was a commission I got from the VPRO, to make music to a Japanese fairy tale.<sup>xii</sup> It was a spoken fairy tale with music sounding at the same time. This writing, it made me totally happy. It went well and somehow it also went easily. I realised that I wanted to do much more, and more often with texts, it was so fantastic. So I pondered what I would like, what would be beautiful. I considered that I preferred listening to writers telling their own stories instead of actors saying texts. This dryness, I like it. So I made a wish list of writers I would love to work with. I contacted Huub van Riel, artistic director of the Bimhuis, to ask what he felt about me working with musicians and writers as an experiment. I wanted to try it so much, to write myself and work with a number of *big shots* who could improvise so wonderfully, like Tobias, Joost and Wilbert.<sup>xiii</sup> Combining it all seemed much fun. Fortunately the Bimhuis responded positively and we had great evenings. Remco Campert was the first writer I approached. I had read his work and admired him already when I was twelve years old. At some point I wrote him a letter explaining what I had in mind. He phoned me and we agreed to meet in a café. I was quite nervous, and wondered what would happen if things didn’t work out in our conversation, but things went easily and well from the start. All in all we had a wonderful time, drinking too much of course. Remco suggested that we should use poems. But I had two small novels in mind, one of them being *Als in een droom*.<sup>xiv</sup> He liked the idea. While working on it I found out that the text would be too long. So I contacted him, asking how we would go about it. And he said, ‘you just skip what you feel is redundant.’

I couldn’t believe my ears! But I tried and did it and when we met again he agreed on every suggestion I made. The writers I work with are all very different and that makes it so exciting. Of course I discuss things with them but in the end nobody interferes with what I am doing, except for Kees van Kooten, he sometimes starts improvising as well, with language.

Maybe it is best to explain how I work artistically on this concept by giving the example of Toon Tellegen, *De Trein naar Pavlovsk en Oostvoorne*. These are stories which he tells as a child about his grandfather. A few of his stories immediately gave me ideas. When I read this first quote ‘my grandfather told me that the Russian language knows at least eleven different words for *guilt*, as the Eskimo’s know thirty different words for *snow*’, I immediately saw that the word ‘guilt’ comes up a lot, every time having another meaning, and sometimes having the same meaning. So I made something heavy of it, as if feeling the weight of guilt on your shoulders. I wrote it in an 11/8 metre, which I felt was fitting. I composed a melody on the bassoon as a basic line. Each time when the word ‘guilt’ comes along, a chord must sound. Every musician has its own line, jumping up and down. The musicians don’t have a score in front of them; instead they have the literary text, with cues written in it. So actually I tell the bassoon player, ‘Here the melody begins, you are free to improvise over the rhythmic basis that is laid by the double bass, the percussion, piano and guitar.’ The other musicians form a chord, a sound, each time the word ‘guilt’ appears. I have an image of instruments and of colours of course.

The whole programme of the evening needs to be an arch, embracing music and content. I look at every detail. The recordings that are made are live recordings, with all mistakes occurring. Only that is natural. Except for the sound check we don’t rehearse

with the writers, which makes it quite tense for both the musicians and the audience. It happens once and it needs to be spontaneous. The writer tells his or her story and I give the cues.

I told Remco, 'First we play the cover of the book, which is abstract music and takes about two minutes. When the cello starts playing a melody after that, you can start reading aloud. If you don't feel confident, look at me. Take pauses, if you like, we'll fill it in.' The music can be illustrating, sort of programmatic even, like in Tellegen's *De Wandeling* (the walk, RS). It can be multi layered.

In the *Writers in Concert* series I am a composer in the literal sense of the word. I also use material that has already been written and gear it to the text. Sometimes I nearly automatically think of music that seems to be written for it. That can be my own material but also from others. In a certain passage in Campert's text I immediately thought of *Till there was You*. And in one of Josse's (de Pauw, RS) stories about an irresistible but unapproachable strawberry he saw somewhere in the countryside, I made a little *minuet*. I also used a minuet as a negative little piece of music for a very crude text of Tellegen of two old women.

In the piece *Sisyfus* I gave a structure to the basis of the chords which becomes a kind of turning around in circles, coming back automatically where you started. That is a kind of philosophical given, and I used it as well with a longer story of Tellegen about an existentialistic quest of an ant. Tellegen has a kind of nasal voice, I like that. And Campert recites quite monotonously, which I actually find beautiful. It gives me the opportunity to use a lot of musical devices.

The aspect of time in music is fascinating. When composing jazz music I have a kind of track in mind which I determine beforehand, but actually I do not write more than a framework for the improvising musicians, within which they have their liberty. Improvising musicians can influence time while they are playing. In the *Writers in Concert* series the framework is of course the literary work. Within this frame the improvising musicians have this peculiar sensitivity of time; it fascinates me enormously.

Another important given in *Writers in Concert* is the fact that the form of course already exists, especially in a poem. It holds a danger as well, because I don't want anything to be predictable. I am striving to build different layers, leading to a concentration during the concert, carrying along both the musicians and the audience on an evening in which something really happens.

I now intend to start something new with the actor Josse de Pauw, whom I invited for the second series. We will make a piece together in the long term, in cooperation with the Asko Ensemble.<sup>xv</sup> We will have our first brainstorm in a few weeks; I look forward to that tremendously."

### *A life in music*

Music plays a big role in Corrie's social life. "Nearly all my friends and acquaintances are musicians. My social life takes place before and after concerts." She is often on tour with only male colleagues, but it is not an issue for her. "People sometimes ask me about it, but I grew up with two brothers, that is telling enough." There is not much free time. "I hardly see other friends; I try to see my parents regularly." Corrie doesn't mind being very busy. "I have less and less moments of stress. I am very busy, but the more experience I get, the less it bothers me being so busy."

Still there is place in Corrie's life for her passion, which is reading. "Reading has always been an anchor, especially in my *rock 'n roll* period. One can flee into another world: 'I won't open the door right now, because I am reading.' During the period of the literary concerts I would of course read a lot, it was wonderful to realise that I was reading *and* working hard through reading at the same time."

### Composing

Corrie receives quite some commissions, for example from the NPS Jazz marathon and the Asko Ensemble and she also wrote for the Radio Symphony Orchestra. She considers herself a 'Sunday child'.<sup>xvi</sup> "I have been writing (composing, RS) for a long time, but that was always for my own bands and projects. Obtaining commissions is a quite recent development. After I obtained the Boy Edgar Prize I was reflecting about my future and I realised that I would like to write more. On the moment I decided I should look for opportunities the phone rang, and since then things went fast. I wrote for the Riciotti ensemble, the Netherlands Wind Ensemble, the VPRO broadcast, it was amazing."

"While composing I work intuitively but at the same time there is a plan. So it is both. The last piece I composed for example was written for the *Mondriaan Quartet* and the *Loeki Startdust Quartet*. Two quartets, one a string quartet and the other a recorder quartet. I became quite practical, considering that they would probably play this programme only a few times together, so that it would make sense when I would make miniatures, which can also be separately performed. They should be able to collide or merge, but would need clear ideas at the basis. So that is an assignment I gave myself. I feel I am good at miniatures, writing long lines remains difficult for me.

I know quite soon how I want to begin and end. From that point I work quite intuitively, using a number of sounds or chords or a series<sup>xvii</sup> which I consider to be my point of departure. Once I have this plan I sit at the piano and work it out. I don't work at the computer, someone else writes out my scores on the computer.

I find it important, also when having a commission, to know for whom I am writing. The first commissions made me wonder what was expected of me. It is easier to write for oneself, because then you set up something you have already in your mind. I look for people who fit my idea. In the compositions I did with the writers, I knew that I wanted to have an ensemble consisting of an improvising trio, a string trio, and a kind of 'bridge' trio. I also knew I wanted to have Alan (Purves, RS), Tobias (Delius, RS) and Wilbert (de Joode, RS) as improvisers, giving me the ideas and sounds. You know what to expect in the most positive sense of the word.

Writing for orchestra is difficult, I feel. When I wrote for the Radio Symphony Orchestra I felt challenged. I worked hard on the imagination of sound colour, on the inner hearing of chords being performed by different groups; I had never done that before. But in the end it was wonderful to notice that it came out as I had imagined it. It is like you can work with a whole palette of colours. I felt very pleased when the conductor asked me who had made the instrumentation! But I feel that this piece was mainly a kind of 'studies in sound colours'. I want to gain ownership of new techniques.

There is this piece I wrote for two guitars, for Anton Goudsmit<sup>xviii</sup> and myself, called *Dr. Schweitzer's Last Mission*. I wanted to write a piece with a long melody line. I then saw a kind of pattern in the chord progression and I felt that I should pursue that. At some point you have this *groove* in your head, which unfolds, you put the bass line below and suddenly you discover this pattern. So actually in this case the idea emerged from intuition, and the structure started to unfold itself.

At the moment I am really writing, there are all kinds of strands in my head, logical connections, which you suddenly see at a later stage. You are in a real *flow* at such a moment. Those are the most marvellous moments, that is the extraordinary thing about writing. This strange combination of mathematics and intuition, something touching me deeply in my inner self. It is comparable to playing Bach in the past, this feeling of things coming together, only now and then, but those moments make me very happy. The feeling of development is wonderful. Remco Campert writes that a poem is at its best when it is on its way to be completed. You read it in a flush, you know you are making something really good; it is very fulfilling in that moment.

I remember having an enormous amount of drafts when I wrote for orchestra; it was a big complicated network going on in my head. I don't think I could reconstruct the development of my thoughts anymore, but at that time it was all very logical.



Sometimes I also got stuck in a certain area and then I would leave it for the time being and would work on another part of the piece. On orchestration for example, which is a lot of work, a few bars can take a whole morning. Sometimes I cannot bring myself to that, because then I have all these things in my head that still need to be jotted down, terrible! I then wish that I was more of a genius and would be able to write it down more easily.

I learned how to work effectively in composing. I prefer to work in the morning. When I have worked for three hours it is done. The creative process then stops for a while. I can then take on other things, in administration, or even working out things in the composition. Composing is an amazing process.”

#### *Learning as a musician – important influences*

Corrie mentions listening as an important factor for learning. She is an inquisitive and intuitive musician. “People sometimes tell me that my style resembles Frank Zappa. I think that this is because I have listened to him a lot. Unconsciously it influences you.” She mentions Stravinsky as a very important influence for her.

Corrie learns from other musicians mainly in terms of attitude. “I can look with amazement at someone like Alan Purves, who has really extraordinary *antennae*, who can open his ears at any time and perform or improvise something absolutely to the point at that particular moment. I keep wondering how that works. It is a special gift, I don’t know whether I learn from it, but I love it and I admire it. All in all I think that I am a quite autonomous musician. I don’t feel directed very much by other musicians or composers.”

#### *Changes in the cultural environment*

Corrie experiences that nowadays there is less money for culture in The Netherlands and that at the same time the offer in total is increasing. “It is getting more difficult. Theatres became enthusiastic about the *Writers in Concert*, but playing with a new quartet for example, is very difficult. You need to think of a theme or put a certain flag on that. I find that such nonsense. But it is definitely a trend in The Netherlands.”

#### *Current aims and longer term ambitions*

Corrie feels that the programmes of the *Grote Brokken* are ready and finished now. She has a lot of other plans. First she wants to pursue the plans she has for the work with the actor and theatre maker Josse de Pauw, although she has not a focused idea yet what it will be. She likes pioneering and she knows exactly when the moment comes for change: “That is when I already know how a new piece would be sounding. I then wonder why I should do that.”

She earns an income that is sufficient, but income is never personal issues for her in terms of having it determine her choices: “I don’t mind at all to jump into deep waters. Of course I mind when I take other people along. Some of my colleagues are often concerned about their future, but I am not, I will see what happens. I experienced that often when I hope that things will happen, they actually came true.”

Corrie is sometimes considering writing an opera. “That is quite a big word, but I love working with texts. We shall see what happens. I am occasionally thinking of writing for film as well.”

It is important for Corrie to have it her way; she is not the person to deliver on demand. “I just worked in a theatre production called *Lucy in the Sky* and when I was asked to make the music for it I warned that I am a person who wants to interfere. In general that is accepted, although of course you must be able to let go occasionally as well.”

Corrie is very satisfied with the fact that she is capable of carrying out projects successfully, and can offer the people she works with a proper fee. “When I am on tour with my musicians, I want it to be well organised and I like to take care of them.”

“Things are moving continuously. I am now well on my way with composing, I enjoy it tremendously. Fortunately I am a disciplined worker. I still like *having a ball* enormously, but I do it more and more in a planned way. I am a hard worker, actually I can never stop.”

Interview held June 2, 2006

Text by Rineke Smilde

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<sup>i</sup> By that time no jazz departments existed yet in conservatoires. Hence the fact that he couldn't study electric guitar at the conservatoire.

<sup>ii</sup> Ironically Corrie was asked much later to teach the electric guitar to classical guitarists at the Utrecht Conservatoire, as meanwhile it had become a compulsory subject.

<sup>iii</sup> Called 'Teaching Musician', comparable to the current Bachelor's diploma.

<sup>iv</sup> Comparable to a Master's diploma.

<sup>v</sup> Both artists are meanwhile deceased.

<sup>vi</sup> Most famous stage for jazz and improvised music in The Netherlands, housed in Amsterdam.

<sup>vii</sup> 'Grote' is the Dutch word for 'big'.

<sup>viii</sup> In Dutch: Fonds voor de Podiumkunsten.

<sup>ix</sup> Source: [www.corrievanbinsbergen.com](http://www.corrievanbinsbergen.com).

<sup>x</sup> The first was called 'Brokstukken'(1998).

<sup>xi</sup> 'A present from Hell'.

<sup>xii</sup> A Dutch broadcasting company. The commission was for a children's programme, *Villa Achterwerk*.

<sup>xiii</sup> Tobias Delius, tenor saxophonist and clarinettist; Joost Buis, trombonist and Wilbert de Joode, double bass player.

<sup>xiv</sup> 'As if in a dream'.

<sup>xv</sup> A well known Dutch ensemble for contemporary music.

<sup>xvi</sup> Well known Dutch phrase for someone having a lot of fortune.

<sup>xvii</sup> A number of notes in a certain order.

<sup>xviii</sup> A Dutch jazz guitarist much admired by Corrie.