

## Franz Brüggen at 60 - by Walter van Hauwe

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For over 40 years, during which Frans Brüggen's influence on the music world has been felt internationally, much has been written by both his admirers and detractors. You can find a good survey of his career summed up in the excellent article written by Dr. Hermann Moeck in Tibia (3/84 pp. 191 ff.) on the occasion of Brüggen's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Whether one likes it or not, no one can deny that our current view of the recorder as a musical instrument would have been totally different without Brüggen's efforts and influence.



Although much has been written about Brüggen's abilities as both performer and conductor, little has been written about his enormous influence on recorder instruction. Now I would like to say a few words on this important subject. When Frans Brüggen began slowly withdrawing from his teaching positions in the early 70's, he had already established a solid 20 years of pedagogic work. Not only was he able as a player to wrest away the recorder from the stereotypical image well-known to us, but he also left behind a legacy of students strongly influenced by his ideas, especially in Holland, but later also in the rest of the world. During his 20 years of teaching a diverse student body - whether too old, too young, too slow or too clever, we can say in hindsight that recorder instruction throughout the world experienced a definitive metamorphosis.

In the meantime, at numerous music schools and conservatories within and outside Europe, there are instructors who, for a significant part of their studies, were influenced and completely convinced by what Frans Brüggen espoused. A certain level of playing is taken for granted; what is more important, however, is how the instrument is approached. Brüggen often said that "Playing the recorder takes a special kind of mentality" by which he meant that for a self-

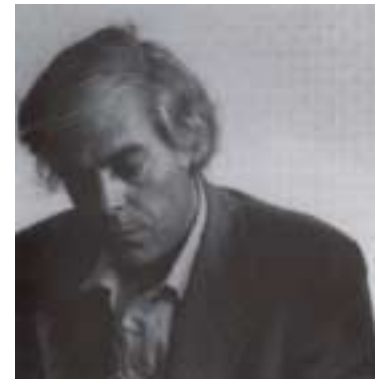
respecting musician there must exist (or be developed) strong extra-instrumental reasons for staying with the recorder, an instrument which remains so frustrating on many fronts. Without this intense participation and interest, "nothing can become of the recorder or recorder players." Beyond this, a deep love of the instrument itself must exist.



I remember a statement of Brüggen's during an interview before a hall filled with recorder "freaks." He was asked why with all his musical talents he remained in the recorder world. After a long pause, waiting till the auditorium became very quiet (timing was never his weak point), he asked his questioner one of his own, "Do you yourself play the recorder?" After an affirmative nod of the listener and others in the audience came the carefully formulated question, "During all your times of playing recorder, did you ever just get tears in your eyes?" whereupon the hall hushed down even further.

The urgency and intensity he used when speaking induced many listeners, including this writer, to gulp in amazement. That was Frans Brüggen's essential nature of love and life - his capacity to bring forth with apparently simple means, but with a perfect feeling for timing and subtlety, a performance that could quietly hold a full hall in rapture with his natural charisma.

To put it succinctly, Brüggen was able to infect his direct students with a contagious enthusiasm for playing the recorder, which



## Franz Brüggen at 60 (continued)

then lodged like a benign virus into their whole musical system. Speaking from my own experience, I must say that I had to really become accustomed, in the initial period of my four years of study with him, to the severity of his instructional methods. This severity could manifest itself even while he showed such a mild and friendly face, which could quickly slip into a frown of pity if my playing faltered. But his real disapproval was reserved for two cardinal sins: laziness and stupidity. He demanded complete dedication, with no excuses, otherwise one could go elsewhere to study.

Each hour lesson began with at least 30 minutes of scales, arpeggios etc., while he read the newspaper or drank his coffee. After that one was asked to play his lesson assignment, which was then perfectly dissected and reconstructed for five minutes at the end of the lesson, or much longer, depending on how much the student himself was able to bring to the piece. The more one could manage to play well the longer the lesson lasted.

Since he was not available sometimes for months at a time, one's own musical self-development was enormously stimulated. From him I learned that an instructor is not there to solve the problems of the student but to strengthen his problem solving capacity, which could then be applied to new problems again and again, each time challenging the student.

The most stimulating moments were when he himself wanted to play a new duet. In these moments, you were not treated as a student, but rather as a colleague. He also expected you to be able to discuss various aspects of the piece rather than just lecturing you about it or telling you how it should be played. Of course you tried to imitate his playing as you were his fan and disciple, but he did not advocate that or counsel against it either. He wanted you to enjoy it and even if you chose to imitate him absolutely, you still had to be prepared to criticize your playing. Once you became critical enough you were no longer satisfied to be only a clone of the instructor, but rather you had be-

gun the process of searching for your own identity as a performer.

Part of this requirement for maintaining your individual identity was an unspoken rule never to do that in principle what a colleague had already considered or prepared. One had to come always with new literature, primarily from the baroque or contemporary repertoire, which were both far from being exhausted and which held many new and unexpected finds. Later still different sources were sought, not only from Asia and South America, but also from certain jazz styles and other types of improvisation. For all of these styles you were expected to provide solutions (preferably original) for the numerous technical and interpretive problems which inevitably arose in performance. Much attention was given to the critical judgment of the literature to be played; with second and third tier music pushed to the side, and well-written, honest music treated with the appropriate respect without regard for the degree of difficulty involved.

Another decisive aspect of the atmosphere was the sharp humor, which permeated everything that Brüggen did. The lesson hours were already often filled with nonsense and jokes, but the full pleasure became only perceptible for me, after 1971, when together with my fellow student, Kees Boeke we formed the recorder trio "Sour Cream." During our numerous tours through Europe and especially America, we exhibited playfulness and jokes with our already oddly named little trio. There was a regular flow of laughter behind the curtains or even onstage. This joy, which produced a very relaxed and accepting attitude towards the instrument recorder and its literature, as well as towards the small world in which all this took place, You can still see this in the generation of students



## Franz Brügger at 60 (continued)

who had the good fortune to be under Brügger's guidance for a while. It may be that not all are still equally active participants in the recorder world. As far as I know them, however, all convey the impression of having been touched by this period of their development in an extremely positive way.

As I have already mentioned, imitation was a kind of sin. Sometimes we carried that principle too far. For example, Kees Boeke often performed "Gesti" by Luciano Berio, which was really quite a difficult piece. At that time I didn't dream of adding this fantastic piece to my practice list and it took me many years until it became emotionally "free" for me to play it. In the same way Boeke

did not practice "Sweet" of Louis Andriessen - that was again my department. Never did we do the same Telemann fantasias, never the same Vivaldi concertos etc. etc.

Likewise it was also then more or less obvious that Kees Boeke and I couldn't strive to imitate the same solo career as Brügger, because he had already done that. Therefore we did together what he could not do alone and formed the group "Quadro Hotteterre" using 2 recorders [plus baroque cello and harpsichord]. Frans answered that then again with 3 recorders for "Sour Cream." Shortly thereafter two students of Kees Boeke and two of mine established the Amsterdam Loeki Stardust Quartet with 4 recorders. Recorder students today may consider all this very strange indeed, but we thought it natural at the time in order to accelerate the development of the playing level and also to expand the relatively small existing repertoire of music for our instrument.

Frans also had some interesting ideas about which instruments we used. Although he was totally addicted to and loved the fantastic original instruments in his private collection, he found in his daily practice that the equipment was completely subordinated to musical

ideas. Instruments were merely the means. It was the ideas that counted. With "Sour Cream" we usually played on really impossible instruments that we could blend together only with the greatest effort. We learned much from that experience by having to solve many direct practical problems.

Perhaps it is this relatively relaxed bearing of Frans Brügger that keeps him youthful. Brügger is one of those people who gathers the years into himself. He won't be impressed by 1 times 60 this year, but rather 60 times 1. He has absorbed all these years individually, one after the other into his feeling and memory. He will be able to reveal each and any age to you in all its details and illumination and brightness. He has very deliberately experienced and linked all his years in order to jump effortlessly from one to the other year, with no single moment of his life ex-

pressed as being "fixed." He can always express the appropriate age and feeling for each moment because which makes him now, as he celebrates his 60th birthday, an extraordinarily multifaceted musician and a wise person.

Just because he hardly ever plays recorder any more does not mean he has lost interest in the instrument: rather it shows that

he is continually open to new musical experiences such as conducting. It is worth noting that a new double-CD set of "Sour Cream" is being released soon. I know that the further development of his playing during his "lean" recorder years is expressed here. Of course it's not so easy to pin Frans Brügger down to any particular age and this essay could also be taken to honor him on the occasion of his 40<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> or even 70<sup>th</sup> birthday!

