

## THE NEW ROTTERDAM JAZZ ORCHESTRA

In the early years of the RJO, when the orchestra still played in a standard big band line-up, Plomp was responsible for most of the arrangements as conductor and fantastic concerts were given in a concert series in Grand Café Prachtig. Later, in collaboration with SJIR (stichting jazz international Rotterdam), the RJO got a concert series in the Doelen. There the orchestra had many memorable evenings, with Frank Lacy, the American trombonist, member of the Mingus Dynasty who performed a Charles Mingus tribute with the orchestra, Frank Möbus, the German multi-instrumentalist on the one night with, as a result of a snowstorm and negative travel advice, almost no audience, to mention a few... From this period there are also three, for Johan, important recordings; Introducing, Suite to a T and Take the Spacetrain.

After ten years of many highlights, the artistic committee came to the conclusion that the orchestra, which had come together in 2001 as kindred musical spirits in need of another big band (different from the big bands existing at that time), was breaking up. A number of members wanted the band to grow by exploring the big band tradition in depth and a number of others wanted to seek the experiment. Because the core of the orchestra belonged to the second group, the artistic committee took the difficult, and in the jazz world, unusual decision in 2010, to change the lineup of the orchestra, to say goodbye to a number of musicians and to move on with new like-minded souls. This time also not in the standard big band line-up, but in a different composition, especially to free the band from the big band tradition in terms of repertoire and thus pave the way for a different type of arrangements and with that also a different type of arrangers. From this moment on, the entire orchestra should be able to contribute to the repertoire. The new band plays without a conductor, so that Plomp could pick up the bass and take the place in the rhythm section.

The first project of the new band, now appropriately called "the new Rotterdam jazz orchestra" (NRJO), was a collaboration with independent filmmaker Rob van Pelt and resulted in the first CD One Million Escapes. Plomp wrote the composition De Baron for this project, which has been a true NRJO anthem ever since, it is played almost every concert. In the past ten years, this new orchestra has made and developed many, very beautiful productions. Collaborations with trumpet player Eric Vloeimans, former bandmember Reinier Baas, the American jazz virtuoso Joshua Redman, cellist Ernst Reijssiger, DJ Kypski and the American keyboard player Jason Lindner have resulted in fantastic concerts. The collaboration with Anton Goudsmid has resulted in a live CD, 'NRJO meets Anton Goudsmid', a recording of a concert in the Paard in The Hague ...

The Rotterdam Suite (2017) was an important project for the orchestra. In the year that Rotterdam celebrated 75 years of reconstruction, the orchestra selected 8 locations within the fire boundary and asked 8 composers to write a composition for these locations. Two composers from outside the orchestra, Stefan Lievestro and Arend Niks, as well as 6 composing orchestra members have written impressive music for this project that was played at the respective locations in the city, as well as released on CD. The Erasmus Bridge was the location on which Johan would base his composition and he has tried in various ways to express this monumental structure in music. Without getting too technical, you can

hear the steelworkers in the piece, as well as harp-like effects, inspired by physical resemblance between the bridge and a harp.

Another important production was the LAB, a series of 10 concerts at different locations in Rotterdam in which the orchestra would experiment and step out of its comfort zone. Unexpected collaborations or themes were leading in this series. These experiments resulted in, besides many remarkable evenings, the collaboration with city poet Derek Otte with whom the NRJO launched the program VERS!, unfortunately the nationwide tour of this production was rudely interrupted by the Covid-19 lockdowns. But the music from this collaboration has become beautiful, a large part can be seen on YouTube and some of it will be released soon.

The NRJO was also invited to the Red Sofa City project, an initiative of de Doelen in which Rotterdam composers are invited to compose and present their new works. The invitation consisted of a composition assignment and a concert. Some of the pieces composed for this concert will be recorded and released soon.

IKEI (ieder kind een instrument), is a project of the SKVR in which music teachers go to schools with a car full of instruments and enable children, who normally would not come into contact with music education, to, once a week, learn an instrument for two years. At the end of these two years there is a presentation and since a few years the NRJO has taken on a number of concerts to give this final presentation together with the children. On these days the orchestra shares the stage with 50 to sometimes 90 children and gives a performance in which the pleasure of making music together is the central focus. Every year this is a time to look forward to and the whole orchestra enjoys interacting with so many children.

The NRJO is an exciting group of highly creative people and every concert is an experience and musical adventure. "The band is so special, because it is so difficult to describe what happens on stage and how you experience it when you sit in the audience ..." to quote a spectator. Hopefully we will meet you on one of these special evenings!