



Der Wanderer 2.0

Stefan Prins

Nadar Ensemble

FITTINGinSIDE (2007) for trombone, walking tour, headphones and soundtrack (25 min)

Generation Kill – Offspring #2 (2023) for gamecontroller performer and live-video (14 min)

Piano Hero #3 (2016) for piano & liv-electronics (23 min)

Mesh (2022-2023)

Ideally each composition is performed in a different space/hall/venue. During the walk from one space/hall/venue to another a soundtrack is heard on the headphones.

Walking through a virtual world

Der Wanderer: the word conjures up the image of a displaced romantic, like one wandering through the songs of Franz Schubert or gazing out over a sea of mist in a painting by Caspar David Friedrich. The addition 2.0, however, leaves no doubt that

we are in the 21st century. With a trail along four compositions and as many concert spaces, Stefan Prins and Nadar Ensemble outline a science-fiction-like universe, in which tangible and virtual reality are irrevocably intertwined.

From inside to outside to inside

We speak to each other - appropriately - via Zoom: Stefan Prins in Berlin, me in Antwerp. Asked about the sources of inspiration behind *Der Wanderer 2.0*, the composer hops swiftly from one thought to another. Artificial intelligence, driverless cabs and dystopian future scenarios pass by, as well as walks through the city. The impact of technology on everyday life is and remains a central theme in Stefan Prins' work. The question of how the outside world seeps into the inside world has also occupied him for some time. What happens when the two (aurally) intermingle? What place do virtual environments occupy? And how does it feel to watch a live stream of a walk in the real world through a screen at home?

Der Wanderer 2.0 opens with *FITTINGinSIDE* (2008/2018), a work that literally and figuratively takes the listener in tow into Prins' musical world. A guide leads the audience, equipped with headphones for the occasion, from outside to inside the concert hall, where a trombonist awaits them. Meanwhile, the soundtrack in their ears travels the opposite path. Outdoor space, concert space and the listening space under the headphones fit together like a matryoshka.

Generation Kill revisited

From there it's on to *Generation Kill - offspring #2*, a brand-new composition for one game controller player, which builds on *Generation Kill* (2012). That title refers unequivocally to the TV series of the same name about American soldiers of the first "play station" generation who went to war in Iraq. The stage set-up of the piece is unusual to say the least: at the back are four semi-transparent projection screens, behind each of which a musician is hidden. These musicians are sometimes visibly highlighted, other times they disappear behind projections of themselves. In front, the same number of players sit on the floor, armed with a laptop and a game controller, with which they control a sea of sound manipulations and video projections. In *offspring #2*, only one musician remains, Dries Tack. This time he appears on both sides of the stage: in his familiar spot as a game controller player as well as a clarinetist on screen. The latter is new, and that is precisely where the major difference with the original *Generation Kill* lies, where the game controller players control the avatars of other musicians. *Der Wanderer 2.0* is also a walk through his own oeuvre, says Prins, and such a "revisiting" of an existing work has two sides. Besides the opportunity to update works, it gives the composer a chance to break free from his own work. Large parts of the initial concept are abandoned in *offspring #2* in favor of the further deepening of other aspects. Telling is the way in which *offspring #2* is infected by the other pieces that underpin *Der Wanderer 2.0* (especially *FITTINGinSIDE*). Indeed, here too the composer opens a door between

inner and outer worlds, literally in the combination of live player and video projection, but also figuratively, in the gradual shift of attention to ambient sounds, which are thus in turn ushered into the composition.

Changing spaces

The third stop on the concert trail is Piano Hero #3 (2016). Crucial to this work, Prins explains, is the idea of shifting and overlapping spaces. First, there is the space of piano itself, with around it the space of the "extended piano" - the piano and speakers surrounding the audience. Much of the sounds that characterize that space are feedback sounds from the piano itself. A soundtrack forms a third virtual space. New spaces are also opened up within it, from very large to tiny. For example, Prins makes generous use of sound recordings of the Tempelhofer Feld, the vacant space in the middle of Berlin where there was an airport from the 1920s to 2008. Elsewhere, two high, loud tones, very close together, set off the experience of a "difference tone. That is a low tone that exists only in the listener's head. "The smallest possible space you can hear!" emphasizes Prins. The smallest head movement changes how well you hear that effect. "So actually here you are playing with the space yourself, making your own theater in your head, so to speak."

The latter thought is carried through into the new composition that forms the finale of Der Wanderer 2.0. Prins eagerly stacks three musical layers on top of each other: live musicians, a layer of electronics in the speakers on stage AND a soundtrack that the audience listens to through headphones. "But there is no ideal version of the piece," the composer explains. "Each listener, by putting on or taking off (half) the headphones, gets to decide which layers they hear. A walk through the music, so to speak, where different connections can emerge."

Rebecca Diependaele

Interview with Stefan Prins on Jan. 10, 2023, via Zoom.