

Text presentation

Welcome to the presentation of 'Musical Paintings in Process'. I thank the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for their hospitality to provide the attic space for this event. And a special welcome to Kim Dijkstra, who made the video film and flew over today from Amsterdam to join us.

I am especially proud of this video because it started by chance, by just taking pictures of the canvasses I was working on, as I always do. Painting in oil on canvas often results in layers of paint which can cover the previous states, and sometimes I like to keep a record of what it looked like before.

The two canvasses presented here are:
„Z nového světa“ - *From the New World*, based on Antonín Dvořák's Symphony No.9 in E minor, 'From the New World' and
Largo - Shostakovich, based on Dmitri Shostakovich Symphony No.5 in D minor, Largo movement.

Both Symphonies made a tremendous impact on me when hearing them in concert. I was very much captured by the music and I wanted to paint it. To explain why may not be possible; often this is a sort of mystery. These are life experiences that bring you almost in a trance, take you beyond yourself to a realm which is not from this world.

When an experience is not from this world, perhaps we can say that it comes from another world or From the New World. The New World in this sense can have two meanings:

A New World of a kind that one can point to on a map, and a New World that is a fictional place, or rather: a state of mind.

When in the 16th century, Europeans set foot on land that would later be called 'America' (after Amerigo Vespucci, a Florentine) they called this the 'New World'.

The Old World was the worldview of the classical geographers with only Africa, Asia and Europe on the map.

The other sense of the New World is more metaphorical; it is a mythical world that is not on any map. A Utopia. A longing - Sehnsucht - which goes along with feelings of Nostalgia. As we have legends of Arcadia,

Kitezj, Atlantis, Heavenly Jerusalem: it tells us something about our striving and the human condition.

In *Dvořák's Symphony 'From the New World'*, I feel, both New Worlds are combined, as are the new influences and impressions of America - musically, the encounter with Native Indian songs and Negro-Spirituals, combined with the syncopic rhythms of Bohemian and Moravian folksongs, the melodic lines and the nostalgic mood of Dvorak's own Slavic soul.

In 1892, Dvorak had left his country to adopt the position of director of the National Conservatory of Music of America in New York until 1895. In 1893 he wrote this Symphony No.9 'From the New World' which premiered in Carnegie Hall, conducted by Anton Seidl, the same year.

Perhaps I should say a little more about the idea that these musical influences were combined. Dvorak's own words are: I have not actually used any of the [Native American] melodies. I have simply written original themes embodying the peculiarities of the Indian music, and, using these themes as subjects, I have developed them with all the resources of modern rhythms, counterpoint and orchestral colour.

The theme from the Largo - the amazing, almost archetypal melody for solo English Horn - was later transformed into a spiritual-like song, often mistakenly considered a folk song or traditional spiritual, by Dvořák's pupil, who wrote the lyrics in 1922. So Dvořák's music inspired a spiritual of later date, instead of the other way around.

Also, Dvořák never directly quotes or uses musical motifs of Native Indian songs or Spirituals, but taking this musical idiom as a point of departure, he writes his own work.

For me, Dvořák's Symphony of the New World has more of a tragic character than an optimistic one. You can feel the longing, the striving in every phrase; in addition, even when there is a part which is like a joyful dance, you can hear an other element of sadness. People's interpretation of the New World Symphony can diverge; not everyone agrees with me here, but in my mind, the end is not a triumphant statement, but intertwined with grief and it has an open ending.

In that sense it is Slavic to the core where the experience of intense

beauty is accompanied by the atmosphere of nostalgia and longing for transcendence.

Largo - Shostakovich, based on Dmitri Shostakovich Symphony No.5 - Largo movement.

To me, the Largo is a human document for all times, deeply moving, devastating, and this combined with an unbelievable sense of irony. I don't have the experience Shostakovich has, but the thought of him is striking, like an immediate affinity, and it gives a value intention to my own life as an artist.

The *Symphony No. 5 in D minor* was composed in 1937 and first performed the same year in Leningrad with Yevgeny Mravinsky conducting. This was the time of the terror of the Stalin purges. *Symphony No.4* was taken out of rehearsal under threat of Shostakovich's life. Since Stalin banned Shostakovich because of his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk District*, Shostakovich found a way in the Fifth to turn the simplicity demanded by the socialist-realism of the authorities, into a virtue. Without self-betrayal he appeared to be adjusting, but at the same time he was mocking the exalted rhetoric of socialist optimism. In a hidden way - clear for the public but not for the authorities - turning restrictions into great art.

I hear a strong emotive force of empathy in the Largo movement.

The ability to feel the grief of others at a level that brings people together, moving them as in a wave, all at once without holding back, to surpass it, to transcend it.

If I could make a wish, it is to be instrumental as an artist in this sense.

Now that I live in Prague and identify with and absorb Czech culture, I am even more aware of what has been taking place in the history of the Slavic nations. Western Slavs, Eastern Slavs, Southern Slavs - all

belong to the same linguistic family, have overlapping cultural characteristics, have genetic similarities - and from the past to the present day the relations range from a feeling of connectedness to mutual hostility. The poetic soul of Shostakovic's symphony urges us all not to loose sight of what unites the peoples of Eastern Europe; especially under the present circumstances.

With the Shostakovich painting in this evening, I wish to say there is another side to Russia, the side of the musicians and artists, the writers and thinkers of the 19th- and early 20th century, a side where beauty can still save the world - however much damage has been done by the history of its leaderships.

On the making of the video
Musical Paintings in Process

During the time I was working on the paintings - on the Dvorak New World it was one year; on the Largo Shostakovich it was 2 and a half weeks! - I took photographs to keep record of the changes. Working in oil on canvas it often takes layers which cover the previous states and make the *process* as a whole invisible.

One of the main differences in (to put it simply) 'translating' music into a painting is the time element. Music exists in the *duration of time*, while a painting is a *static* realm in which all the movement takes place within a canvas frame.

One way to give a time element to the painting was to make a *montage* of all the separate photographs, so the process of the painting could be shown *as a sequence of images in time = a film*.

To *coincide* with the rhythm, impact and atmosphere of the music, I asked Kim Dijkstra to make the montage in a way that the *changing of the separate images* would *follow the audio-track*. For the Dvorak 'From the New World' painting, the montage moves from kaleidoscopic details to a turning point, where the canvas rotates from a horizontal- to a vertical composition and is finally zoomed out of the movement to become an object in a studio space.

For the montage of *Largo Shostakovich*, Kim Dijkstra made use of a special technique called '*morphing*', where the picture *frame is kept static* and development of the painting is taking places *within* this frame, following the audio-track. You can see the painting 'grow', so to say. The painting is a reflection of the musical movement and visualizes the inner mood as composed by Shostakovich.

I was really amazed to see the result and it is great Kim Dijkstra can be here with us, this evening of presentation at the Embassy. Welcome to Kim!

First I want to thank Maryleen Schiltkamp for organising this event and express how happy I am to be here and to see Maryleen's paintings together with the short films we worked on. Finally all elements of her work are shown together, all gaining strength because of it

Maryleen is deeply inspired by the musical works her paintings are based on. Especially with the creation of her work 'From the new World' the process was faceted and took many different phases before it was finalised. Maryleen's paint brush traveled on every millimeter of the canvas many times, following the music she listened to while she created her work.

I remember the first time Maryleen showed me photo's of her interpretation of 'From the new World'. At first there were only a few, but surprisingly soon I could reflect to her she wasn't working on 'a' painting, she made at least one hundred paintings. Using her body in combination with the paint brush to capture both musicality and the meaning of Dvorcak's piece. Knowing all the different stages of her work, made me realise the final painting holds a memory of them all. The process of creation was every bit as fascinating as the result.

Maryleen asked me to find a way to make that visible.

I suggested to animate Maryleen's documentation to make a time-based work about the process she had been through.

I chose a method of animation by listening to the music, just as Maryleen had done in the first place. By combining movement, and dynamic editing techniques on each of the stages of creation, I united 'From the new World' with the music again.

The Largo Shostakovich painting has a different story to tell and therefore I had to use a different animation technique. The music asks for a gradual change from one phase to the next. Therefore I chose to Morph between the different stages. You can see each phase transform into the following step. Almost as if the canvas paints itself.

I trust you will enjoy to see de hidden process of Maryleen's magnificent paintings revealed.

We will first look at 'From the new World', followed by 'Largo Shostakovich'.