

Ed Starink: A genius in his own right.

Dutch born Ed Starink (1952), composer, orchestrator and musician, decided after a hectic period of more than three decades of total immersion in the field of music, to relocate and take on a sabbatical of undefined duration to refuel and have a fresh look at life. At the age of 45 he moved house to Southern France, to the enchanting scenery and stunning fragrances of Provence. He settled down near a picturesque village at a stone's throw from Cannes, the majestic place at the French Riviera.

The charme of France lay dormant - among many other reflections and hindsight - in its embedded concept of being one of the cradles of Western European culture. But why France, why not Italy, or Germany with its composers to which Starink feels more connected than to – generally speaking – French composers?

Visiting Cannes for the first time at the age of 22, however, was an overwhelming encounter with a totally different, sumptuous way of life and *savoir vivre*. The former Palais des Festivals, built in 1949 and architecturally merging perfectly with the splendour of the *Croisette*, and venue for the annual trade show and convention MIDEM (Marché International de la Musique) became an anchor point in the many years that followed and led Starink's way to France.

Since then his multiple million-selling Synthesizer Greatest Hits at the dawn of the new electronic era were propelled across the globe.

Although he does not feel comfortable with the, what he describes as 'slightly negative connotation of the word cover', his productions – often very inventive ones and not seldom valued over the original versions – provided him with the freedom to develop several projects of his own. One could say that in fact practically all classical music is 'covered', since there is no other medium left but paper partitions, hence no original representations.

Starink proved to be more than a virtuoso musician, composer and orchestrator *pur sang*. He also developed a talent for acquiring the wonders of state of the art technology in the field of music, recording and computers. By not just scratching matters superficially but work in a methodical way he familiarised himself with the latest inventions and achievements and rode with the VIPs of the electronic audio arts.

Having settled down in Provence in 1997, contemplating and clearing his midlife susceptible mind, the omnipresent and mostly unclouded nightly skies evoked new inspiration. But it would take several years before Starink decided to re-install his studio, still in storage in the Netherlands.

In the meantime, possibly incited by a spore of interest in astronomy, long ago planted by one of his college teachers, Starink began acquainting himself with thorough insight in the celestial dome, the universe. From the newly set up studio, however, not a single sound emanated – it was dominated by a huge telescope instead. Starink would show people his new *atelier* and would drag his visitors along to show them a corner to which he referred to as ‘my little museum’. A place where he treasured his dearest old analogue gear, like little Korg and Roland synthesizers, vintage items today. Then, returning to his full-blown multi-track digital recording equipment, flashy outboard gear, esoteric sound processors and computer music instruments such as the Fairlight and Synclavier, he would stop short and mumble: ‘but then again – actually all this is a museum’, making a big, panoramic gesture at the cluster of electronic miracle workers. An interesting observation indeed, recognising the speed of technological change, and possibly induced as well by a feeling of smallness which cannot escape even a blind man when he is gazing and listening at the stars for hundreds of sleepless nights.

Slowly but surely it became clear that Starink’s fascination for the universe was not just a whim, but that he was seeking something.

Not the Holy Grail, but close to it: he was looking for a key. *The key.*

Like many composers over the past centuries, Starink wanted to encrypt, translate, convert reality into musical patterns. Anything could be instrumental in such a process: the initials or characters in a name of a beloved one, a mathematical formula, a series of events transformed into numbers – pitch, duration, loudness, timbre, rhythm, tempo, time signature. In short, a key to mould a liaison between observations, feelings, dreams, idealised images and thoughts. It is said that Beethoven encrypted his *tempi* to make sure that only clever people would play his music as he wanted it to be played. Greek contemporary composer Iannis Xenakis, staring out of the window of his Italian hotel room, noticed that the people, walking across the *piazza* below created a wonderful, random pattern, ideal to be used as a basis for new compositions.

How strange this concept may seem in association to music, which after all is totally intangible and immaterial, it could be considered a materialisation of mental flux leading to inspiration and also to a protocol, a set of rules, allowing the artist to take a back stand in case of a confrontation with or interpellation by his audience. An argument to hide behind – a scapegoat: ‘Sorry, this has all been very carefully calculated and it was dictated by events over which I have no power!’

One should understand that every artist, revealing in public a personal creation, a brain and love child, is extremely vulnerable. It is putting all cards on the table, it is an ultimate statement and sublimation of deepest emotions. Going one step beyond that, encryption could well be the intangible concept of ‘inspiration’ – a variation on *beauty is in the eye of the beholder* : inspiration is in the senses of the creator.

Starink, however, feels that aside from all this reasoning, anyway there is great value in limiting scope and elbow room by constraining one’s means and liberties because this may very well incite creativity. And he is in good company with this view unfolded by his teachers.

And with Goethe (1749 – 1832) who put it in a concise statement: *‘Wer Grosses will, muss sich zusammenraffen; in der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister, und das Gesetz nur kan uns Freiheit geben’*: To create great things one has to restrain oneself; constraint is the proof of the master, and only limitation (law) can give us (new) freedom.

Probing along in Starink’s realm of thought and throwing names of composers at him of whose music might support a presumption of being an influential link with his creations – Stravinsky, Skrjabin, Busoni, Ravel, Alkan, not to forget Schönberg, all late 19th, early 20th century composers – Ravel turns out to be his favourite French composer and pivotal in Starink’s approach to deal with matters. Ravel, methodical, conscientious, well organized, well prepared, technically perfect, and a staggering sensitivity for proportions and delicate blending of melodic, harmonical and timbral lines – rigidly arranged, down to the geometrical order of any object on his working desk.

The difference now between Ravel’s genius and Starink’s is that the latter takes a noticeably milder approach to his self-dictated set of rules in order to allow him at least some freedom to play with – and *in* - the universe.

One of the key points was to extract a *Leitmotif* from thousands of permutations Starink extracted from constellations, solar systems, planets and nebulas, in which he could express the nucleus of his feelings without sacrificing his roving fantasies. A fine example of this kind of bound freedom within a main theme can be found in the wistful soundtracks written by Vangelis for Ridley Scott’s shocking and stirring movie *Blade Runner*, 1982, already since its release a cult film.

The aforesaid ‘controlled limitation’ in Starink’s personal alphabet is unveiled by himself in this package and quite extensively. Scrutinising it, one will not find encryptions for e.g. tempo, time signature and duration, nor the typical ingredients that guide the performer with expression signs

(for instance ppp – p – pf - f – ff, etc., and ral, rit, dim. etc.) used in music partitions, to make the piece sound as the composer wanted it to sound.

Here Starink liberates himself, staying in line with his philosophy of combining constraint and freedom.

Results of this are very obvious in several pieces in which Starink applies subtle electronic effects and demonstrates extremely refined playing techniques and *toucher* to render additional voices to the piano, emanating separate musical lines, normally captured within the chords or floating with counterpoint.

Set at liberty by the skies, incited by the visual, temporary universe which seems to become so bright and get so close in Provence that one could almost touch it, Starink found his personal set of constraints to incite his slumbering or suppressed talents.

In this rare collection which deserves the predicate masterpiece, 86 gems are squeezed in about 10 hours of fascinating music, Starink unfolds himself as a thoroughbred romantic. In a way the story depicts the transformation of a life from cover to uncovered. From covering music into a state of unveiling oneself and become totally uncovered, musically, and emotionally.

A personal statement by Ed Starink, a genius in his own right.

Felix Visser

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