

Classical & Opera

Sax appeal

Tim Peterson speaks with Paradiso Orchestra co-founder **Brandt Attema** about getting down and classical with the pop crowd

Imagine John Coltrane, Bill 'Slick Willie' Clinton and Yanni on the same stage, each clutching a saxophone, in front of a sold-out audience in their late teens. Head spinning yet?

Pardon the cast of characters in our illustration (some of us didn't know many saxophonists by name at age 18 either), but this is the type of scene the Paradiso Orchestra hopes to create with its 21 April performance, 'Paradiso's Only Night of the Saxophone'.

'We want to aim for a different audience than the Concertgebouw, so we try to mix the styles a bit,' says Brandt Attema, who co-founded the Paradiso Orchestra in 2006 with cellist Wilmar de Visser. 'Paradiso is a pop temple with a certain goal for the audience. We want part of that audience: young people, 16- to 18-year-olds who think, "Wow, Beethoven's fifth, I've always wanted to hear that live."'

This month, Attema and De Visser are trying out their formula for enticing younger crowds that has them replacing Ludwig with Johan – Johan van der Linden, to be exact. The pre-eminent Dutch saxophonist (not Coltrane), a member of the Netherlands Blazers Ensemble and freelance musician (he's jammed with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and Rotterdam Philharmonic), shuffles seamlessly from jazz to classical to world music, explains Attema.

Van der Linden will be joined for the concert that promises jazz, pop, classical and world folk numbers, by Dutch pop saxophone phenom Allard Buwalda (not Yanni) and Amsterdam native (certainly not Clinton)

David Kweksilber, also a jack-of-all-reeds whose E flat clarinet and bass saxophone can otherwise be heard squealing and grunting with his eponymous big band and the New Cool Collective.

Three times a year for Paradiso, Attema and De Visser hatch a classically based concert concept and recruit instrumentalists from around the Netherlands' professional soundscape to fill in the music stands appropri-



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Reed between the lines: Johan van der Linden crosses genres with the Paradiso Orchestra

ately. After groups like the Nieuwe Ensemble and Asko|Schönberg went from playing Paradiso to Muziekgebouw when it opened in 2005, the pair saw an opportunity to offer Paradiso

audiences musical flavours not typically found on the same agenda as Cee Lo Green and Voltt.

'We want our programmes to intrigue the audience,' says Attema, who is also a trombonist

with the Nederlands Blazers Ensemble and the more experimental New Trombone Collective. 'Once they're there, you can offer them all kinds of music and sounds.'

February's concert featuring Beethoven's 'Symphony No 5' was

saxophones, 'Four'⁵.

The pop venue may offer performers a more intimate and flexible environment, says Jan Dietvorst, the classical programmer for Paradiso. 'Certain institutions present it as a kind of museum-like culture,' he says. 'But many contemporary musicians are looking for some other approach that goes past the conventions of the Concertgebouw

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and Muziekgebouw. It's not a matter of criticism, they just don't feel the same energy – it's informal, accessible and the prices are low.' For Paradiso Orchestra, this also means coming down from the stage to perform on the floor, level with the audience.

But how well is classical-contemporary going over with the popular kids? The orchestra typically brings in about 250-300 listeners, says Dietvorst, and, 'in general, the audience is the same age as the people on stage.' Meaning, they're not quite hitting their target listeners yet.

Still, Attema and company think they can eventually gain youthful trust. 'If they come with an expectation that they'll have a great evening and we put musicians onstage with good charisma, playing at a high level, they'll see the beauty of it all,' he enthuses. 'We expect to have variation, tension, climax at the end. We bring in the audience to a certain atmosphere with emotion – that can happen with all kinds of music.' Pop, classical, whatever.

Paradiso Orchestra performs at its namesake venue Thursday 21. See listings for details.



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