

The in-betweens of Tansy Davies

Tansy Davies is a composer who is always crossing boundaries. Moving from one genre to the next and back again is only part of that mentality: almost always, her music functions as a way of communicating between different worlds, different ways of being. As part of her residency with the Concertgebouw in 2018/2019, she will be compose a new piece for Asko|Schönberg. To do justice to the transcendental nature of her music, we asked her to react to different pairs of opposing or complimentary terms and locate the in-between position.

Dancing vs working out

I like to keep the two separate, although there are forms of working out that are a kind of choreography. I prefer a good, hard work-out to feel I'm achieving something and pushing my body. Dancing is connecting with the body in a different way, to close my eyes and let the music control me. It's the difference between active and passive.

Making a work is a constant flow between choosing a direction and being led, making my own path and having a conversation with the universe. In my piece *Iris*, some really unexpected dance music comes out, this was a passive result from the direction I had taken. Later, there is an afrobeat-like passage, which was more contrived and also more muscular and earthy.

Guitar vs French horn

I have improvised on both. French horn was my main instrument. It's all about the mouth and breathing, while guitar is about the whole body, the hips and the limbs. Guitar I have never studied, I just picked it up.

I'm thinking of actually focussing on the guitar in the new piece for Asko|Schönberg. Through this new piece I'm going to be examining the Dutch-Indonesian part of my family history. I'm thinking also about the pattern-making and layering in the music from that part of the world, you know, like gamelan music, it's very similar to how I think about music. Counterpoint is much more my thing than harmony. Horn is more harmony, guitar for me is much more counterpoint. I'm planning to buy a really cool guitar from the shop around the corner and compose on the guitar as an almost autobiographical journey. Bringing the patterns of that part of the world into the realm of notated music, which to me is the world of the French horn.

My family in the Netherlands has helped me to research my past and we are very much of mixed descent, making it personally important to incorporate different perspectives on this colonial past.

This world vs that world

I'm no expert, but I'm fascinated by tarot cards. I'm interested in systems that are all about exploring the intangible. I think music is exactly that: it's a kind of science, but it's not. It's one of the most spiritual art forms, but at the same time it's very technical.

I'm thinking of the magician, which is one of the major arcana cards in the tarot deck. His table is full of instruments and he has one hand pointing up and one pointing down towards the earth. So he's very much a conduit between worlds.

The kind of systems that I come up with are a kind of communication system, a tool for translation between two languages. Through music and dramatic moments within that music, one can as it were prepare for transcendental moments.

Simon Holt vs Louis Andriessen

I've met Louis a couple of times when I was younger. Simon Holt is all about drama, fear and nightmares. It's hot music. Louis' music is ultimately quite dry and rhythmical, he says it like it is.

What would be in between those two? Maybe it's me!

To be honest, I don't really feel close to Louis Andriessen's music. I think my music comes from a completely different place. I am however happy and honoured to have my music featured alongside his in one concert.

Like Simon Holt, I'm interested in taking dream-like journeys, although they can have a very strong rhythmical element. It's very hard to get a good rhythmic feel with notated music and I feel like that's what I'm trying to achieve. I think David Lang might fit in between those two. And outside of notated music I think of Prince, who is a major influence for me.

Rolf Wallin, who is a Norwegian composer, wrote a bass concerto for Ida Nielsen, the bass player from Prince's last band. He wrote very funky, it really has the feel. It's so thrilling to feel and hear an orchestra and her create this unique groove. My grooves are like grooves from another planet, because I use a technique of layering grooves in different tempi. It's slightly wrong and slightly awkward.

Undertow vs Cave

If we are looking at the trajectory of my career between my early work and today, then it would be coming out of the modernist period, composers like Ligeti and Boulez, to a way of working that has become more and more a way of connecting those two realms, the physical and beyond. *Undertow* is a playful interaction that is all about pattern making. Then in 2012 I wrote a piece called *Nature* which was the first piece that channeled extremely personal feelings as music in a very clear and direct way. From there I went to *Between Worlds*, which is like an explosion of very deep emotion and to *Cave*, which is a continuation of that trajectory.

Between Worlds and *Cave* are both opera's, which I never would have considered making early on in my career. It perhaps stands for the spiritual and emotional realm and when I go back to instrumental music it allows me to get down and dirty and be rhythmical again. *Cave* is earthy and physical, but also very spiritual. It's about going into a cave to achieve spiritual enlightenment.

Composer vs shaman

They're the same. They have to be the same.

Music vs architecture

They're very similar. One is about making physical space, the other about imagined space. Music is a kind of ritual space, but I see it in my head as a physical space. I like the idea of music as a skin around the audience, a community experiencing something within this invisible space.