Louis Andriessen:

The Musical Egalitarian

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Music is a reflection of the composer's creativity, theoretical prowess, and philosophical convictions. Although all elements are equally important in enjoying a piece and objectively assessing its worth, identifying and studying a composer's philosophical convictions through his or her music is the most accurate reflection into the political insights, social insights, and past history of a composer; these are qualities that one cannot infer simply from a composer's creativity or theoretical prowess. In the case of Louis Andriessen, the Netherland's most prolific composer, one can see his musical egalitarianism in his music. Musical egalitarianism is the belief that those who perform and observe music are equal in importance to the composer; there is a complete lack of hierarchy, including but not limited to: instrumental, genre-related, and monetary hierarchies. All musical genre from all time periods and from all stages of creation, deserve equal consideration, yet synthesis of these genres into modern music is left to the discretion of composers, performers, and audiences. In respect to genre, authentic performance practices from past time periods must be followed. One finds this concept in Andriessen's music through observing his past, his political activism, and aspects of his compositional style.

Louis Andriessen was born in Utrecht on June 6, 1939.[1] He was born into a Bach-like family in that he had musicianship in his family, whether in the capacity of composing, performing, or a combination of both mediums.[2] His father, Hendrik Andriessen was an avid organist and composer who is well known in the Dutch music history for his exemplary improvisational skills on the organ and his primary role in returning traditional Catholic

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[1] Jos Wouters, et al, "Andriessen," *Grove Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.umw.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/47613pg4?q=louis+andriessen&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit (accessed 6 February 2014).

[2] Maja Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5-7.

liturgical music to Dutch churches.[3] His brother, Jurriaan Andriessen, gained prominence as a film and stage music composer.

Louis' childhood was filled with music and frequent training in French romantic music, piano lessons, and organ lessons, despite the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands from 1940-1945.[4] The Dutch are Arian in appearance; thus, the Nazis claimed to be helping the Dutch keep their race pure through occupation. During the occupation, however, the economy and national creativity dwindled and national identity disappeared altogether. Those who refused to adhere to the anti-creative regulations, such as Hendrik Andriessen, were punished. The Nazis held Hendrik hostage for approximately five months, putting the Andriessens through emotional turmoil.[3] Even as a child, Louis was determined to help his family stay positive; he remarked in Maja Trochimczyk's book, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, that:

> there was no food, nothing: no wonder that musical life suffered as well. Today, it is difficult to imagine these kinds of hardships. For this reason, we had to provide music for ourselves; I was completely dependent on banging on the piano and singing the songs of Fauré with my sisters.[5]

Yet another rich aspect of Louis Andriessen's upbringing was his musical education. Because he grew up in the highly musically influential Andriessen family, he had exemplary education resources available. His father, Hendrik, was more than qualified in training Andriessen musically, and was responsible for most of his musical training; he was trained in piano, organ, and composition.[3] His piano prowess is such that he can play piano for four hands. When Louis turned eighteen, he began his five-year study at The Royal Conservatory in the

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[3] Jos Wouters, et al.
[4] Joeri Teeuwisse, "Life During the Dutch Occupation – Part 2: May 1940, The Battle for The Netherlands," *Armchair General*, March 2006, 6.
[5] Maja Trochimczyk, 7.

Hague, The Netherlands' premier music conservatory.[6] After graduating from the Conservatory, Andriessen studied under Luciano Berio from 1962-1964.

During the 1960s in The Netherlands, when Andriessen was in his 20s, The Royal Conservatory in the Hague developed a curriculum based on aesthetic.[7] The aesthetic style seeks to have a philosophical effect.[8] Composers who write in the aesthetic style implement techniques which encourage their audiences to form philosophical conclusions; the experimental and non-traditional music of Andriessen typically has a non-conformist and anti-capitalism effect due to the fact that his music itself does not compose to social or political norms. In light of all that has happened in music, writing in the aesthetic style can still write new, unique, and exciting music. The curriculum also encourages individuality and originality, and seeks to culminate in its composition students completing two goals: the strengthening of individual identity and talent and *samenwerking*, or collaboration. Andriessen first began teaching at the Conservatory in 1973, drawing in many American students, among whom were prominent American composers David Lang and Julia Wolfe.[6] Andriessen still holds this teaching position today.

A large part of what shaped Andriessen's egalitarian philosophy was his experience of living in and escaping from two pro-segregation political and social structures. Prior to the Nazi occupation, The Netherlands operated under a social and political system called *verzuiling*, or pillarization.[9] This system divided society into "pillars" that were completely isolated from the other pillars. Each pillar had its own political parties, schools, hospitals, banks, newspapers, broadcasting stations, among other tools of isolation. The three dominant pillars in this system

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[6] Jos Wouters, et al.
[7] Uno Yayoi Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 145-149.
[8] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "The Philosophy of Music," http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/music/ (accessed June 23, 2014).
[9] Harry Post, *Pillarization: An Analysis of Dutch and Belgian Society* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Avebury, 1989), 2.

were the Catholic, Protestant, and Social-democratic pillars. Although the Nazis undid this particular system under their occupation of The Netherlands, their system was still highly focused on segregation and stream-lining society into the Nazi rite; thus, to re-establish their Dutch identity after the Nazis left, The Netherlands re-instated *verzuiling*.

In the 1960s and 1970s, however, The Netherlands experienced yet another sudden and riotous social and political change in the form of protests, closely paralleling the sexual and cultural revolutions that the United States experienced in the same decades. This process was called *ontzuiling*, or depillarization, and sought to create positive changes in women's rights, sexuality, disarmament, and environmental issues through segregating society by effectively breaking down society's figurative pillars.[10] This rapid *ontzuiling* became the groundwork for the now Socialist Netherlands.

Among the societal and political changes were rampant musical changes, in which Andriessen would become incredibly active. The impetus for the musical change in The Netherlands was Jewish philanthropist's Walter Maas' Gaudeamus Foundation.[11] Founded in 1945, this foundation funded composers to write Dutch music in any sort of style they wanted, which created a collaborative group of composers in The Netherlands who were well-versed in new music. This foundation also began Music of the Week concerts, which have taken place every year since 1951, and seek to play music by current Dutch composers, thus bringing new music to Dutch and international audiences alike.

In 1947, Donemus, a foundation dedicated to the promotion and publication of Dutch music, emerged. This foundation also sought to include Dutch music in long-standing Dutch festivals, such as The Holland Festival; this festival had not played any Dutch music until 1954,

[10] Jan L. Van Zanden, *The Economic History of The Netherlands 1914-1995: A Small Open Economy in the 'Long' Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1998), 10.
[11] Uno Yayoi Everett, 20-25.

yet it continues to play Dutch music today. Under the Gaudeamus Foundation and Donemus, Dutch composers were able to be paid for the process of composing and studying new music, as well as having their works published and promoted.

Although these two foundations were positive changes in creating nationalistic Dutch music, there were still archaic musical standards present in The Netherlands that were keeping music from fully developing. One such standard was the Concertgebouw, The Netherlands' premier orchestra. Before Andriessen's influence, the Concertgebouw rarely played Dutch music, or music written during the twentieth century. In the 1960s, a group of composers that included Andriessen asked the Concertgebouw to begin giving more modern concerts and to play more Dutch music. The Concertgebouw briefly complied and played a few experimental and new music concerts between 1965 and 1968; however, when Andriessen's group of composers petitioned with the Concertgebouw's board of trustees to make experimental music concerts an annual event, they refused. When Andriessen turned the proposal into a public debate, the board still refused.

Taking drastic measures, Andriessen and his group of composers began to call themselves the *Notenkrakers*, or Nutcrackers, and staged a protest during a concert at the Concertgebouw during a flute concerto. They used penny whistlers and rattlers to disrupt the concert before promptly being escorted out; the Notenkrakers then handed out leaflets criticizing the Concertgebouw's "undemocratic" programming policy. A few days later, the Notenkrakers occupied the Concertgebouw's concert hall and demanded negotiations with the orchestra's administrators. A week later, the Notenkrakers reign of terror ended when they were taken to court and sentenced to a week in prison for their protests.

Ultimately, musical justice was served to the Concertgebouw in that they eventually did comply with the Notenkrakers' demands. In the 1970s they began to hold annual concerts that program experimental and new music, and they perform some of Andriessen's compositions, which exemplify his philosophy of musical egalitarianism.

One such aspect of his musical egalitarianism is his use of non-traditional instrumentation. Andriessen employs this technique because it forces the performers to be more aware of their surroundings through de-familiarizing the environment.[12] Typically, instrumentalists and singers perform with musical groups to which they are accustomed; cellos typically perform with philharmonic orchestras or small string ensembles. In Andriessen's works, cellos must suddenly learn how to perform with a tenor saxophone or with a bass guitar, such as in Andriessen's 1975 work, *Workers Union.* This work uses indeterminate instrumentation; the piece simply calls for a loud group of instruments.[13] This technique encourages the performers to co-produce the piece through not only defining the instrumentation, but by also selecting the pitches as Andriessen states in his composers notes: "this piece is a combination of individual freedom and severe discipline: its rhythm is exactly fixed; the pitch, on the other hand, is indicated only approximately, on a single-lined stave" as shown in Figure 1.[13]

[12] Noah Gideon Meites, "'Alienating the Groove': Defamiliarization as Compositional Resource in *Counting* (2012), for large ensemble and solo vocalists" (doctoral thesis, University of California at Santa Cruz, 2012), 105.

[13] Louis Andriessen, *Workers Union* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1990).

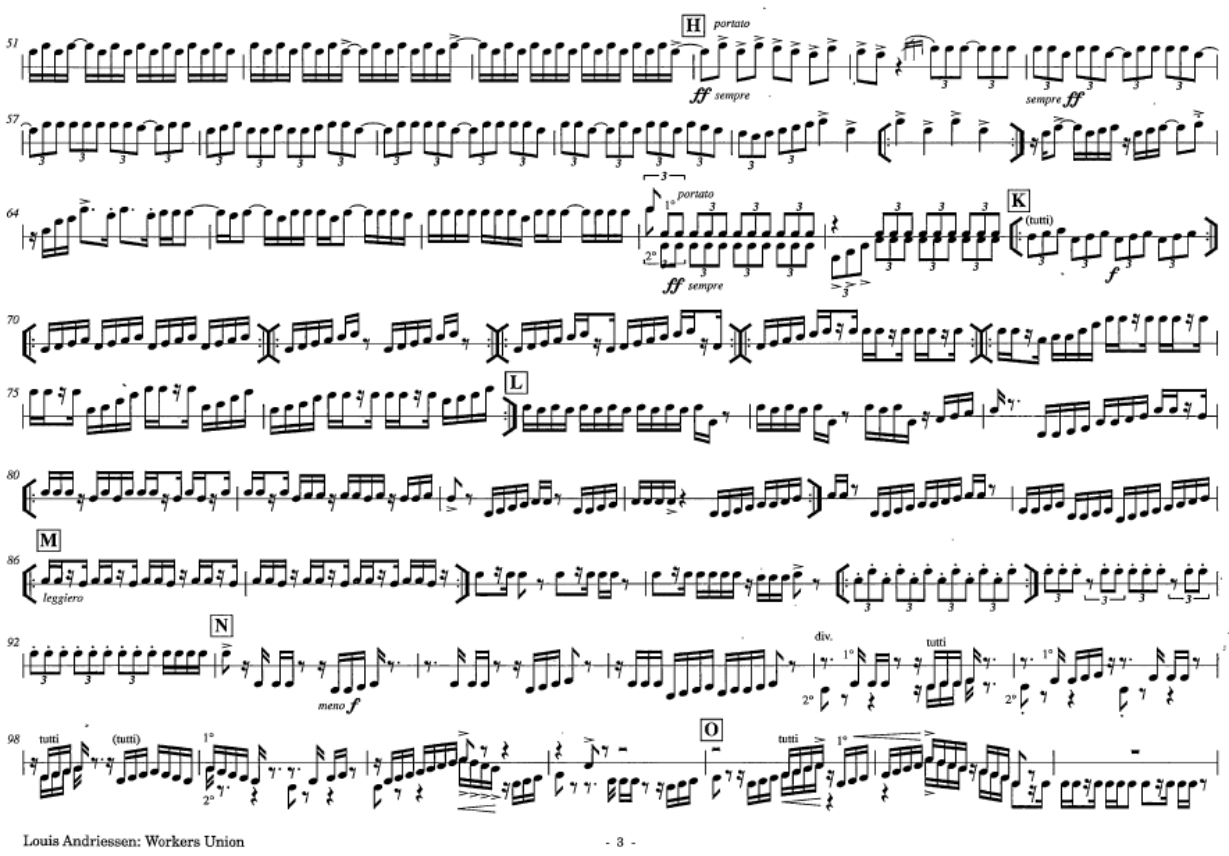

Figure 2: Measures 51-104 of Workers Union.

This style of writing also destroys instrumental hierarchy; no instrument is the leader of the group and no instrument has a soloistic part. This element of musical egalitarianism encourages the performers to co-produce the work, putting the composer and performers on an equal playing field.

Andriessen also adopts Igor Stravinsky's concern toward authentic performance practices as part of his musical egalitarianism. Stravinsky was Andriessen's biggest influence for both authentic performance practices and for understanding music in the twentieth century:

> …in general, there isn't really a contradiction between what my generation of composers do [sic] and Baroque music, and unlike ninety percent of contemporary classical music, they are not oriented toward German Romanticism,

> which I find was one of the biggest disasters in the history of music. Stravinsky was my real example of how to deal with musical material in the 20th century.[14]

Most of Andriessen's and Stravinsky's disdain for German Romanticism is specific to their treatment of authentic performance practices. They used enormous orchestras and adult female sopranos with mature voices in lieu of boy sopranos even when performing Baroque music. This completely changed the timbre, quality, and nature of the Baroque pieces, which, under musical egalitarianism, is disrespectful.

Andriessen is well-versed in authentic Baroque performance practices, having studied them in both Milan and Berlin.[14] He is also talented in making Baroque music applicable to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries without dismissing its performance practices. His 1997 opera, *Writing to Vermeer*, uses a 32-piece orchestra, a choir, three women, and two children.[15] A 32-piece orchestra, although reasonable in size, features non-traditional orchestral instruments such as an electric guitar and a gong; it also features both adult female sopranos and boy sopranos, making the Baroque elements applicable to the twentieth century.

Overture to Orpheus (1982), also applies Baroque techniques to the twentieth century and is in favor of authentic performance practices. This piece is for solo harpsichord, written as a two-voice unison canon and featuring "athletic rhythms in regular pulse."[14] Andriessen chose to focus on the harpsichord's plucking sound for this piece, which, along with the unison canon are neo-Baroque and neo-classical techniques, respectively. The emphasis on the plucking sound of the harpsichord over the keyboard sound allows the harpsichord greater relevancy in the twentieth century because it allows the instrument to be understood in a modern way through use of modern microphones to amplify the plucking thus broadening its use with twentieth century

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[14] Pamela Nash, "A Discussion of *Overture to Orpheus* with Louis Andriessen," *2001 Contemporary Music Review* 20 (January 2001): 110-112.

[15] Louis Andriessen, *Writing to Vermeer* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1997).

technology. Andriessen's rhythmic and canonical treatments are in the Baroque style as shown in Figure 2.[14]

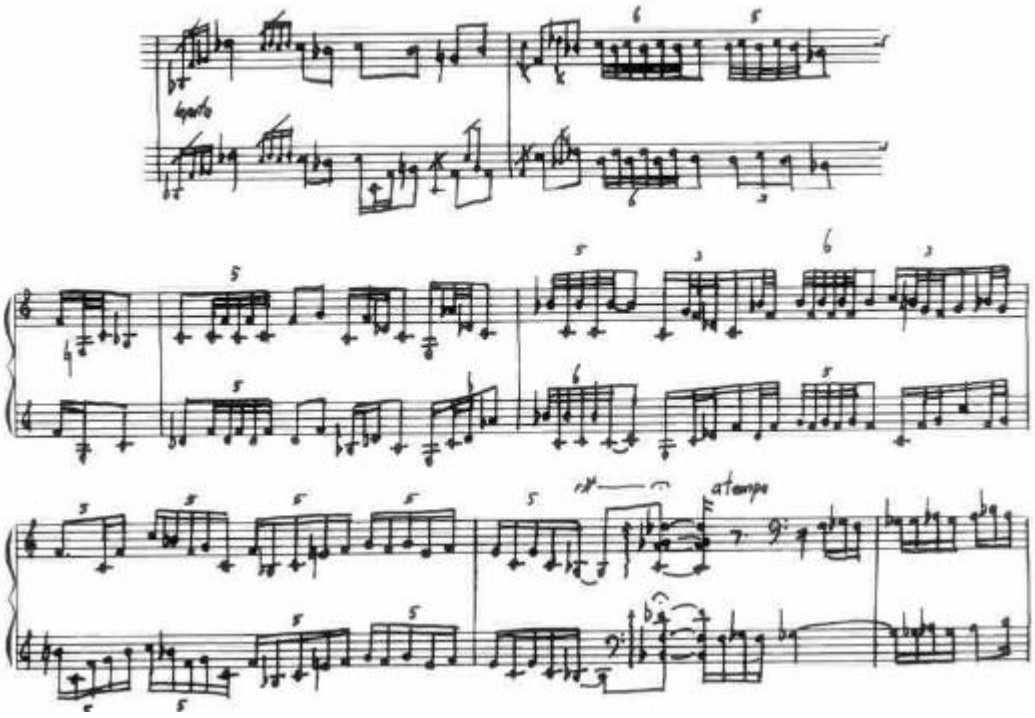

Figure 2: Measures 199-205 of Overture to Orpheus

Andriessen's ability to combine twentieth century techniques with authentic Baroque performance practices exemplifies musical egalitarianism because of its elimination of genre-related hierarchy.

Andriessen's highly political vocal topics also contribute to his musical egalitarianism. One such work is his 1969 opera, *Reconstructie* (Reconstructive), a collaborative, Marxist opera.[16] The subject matter is highly critical of American capitalism and focuses on the resurgence of the proletariat and anti-establishment. This opera subscribes to musical egalitarianism under its call to remove monetary and social hierarchies.

[16] John O'Mahony, "Louis the First," *(Manchester) The Guardian*, September 27, 2002, http://www.theguardian.com/music/2002/sep/28/classicalmusicandopera.artsfeatures1 (accessed February 6, 2014).

Andriessen's 1972 oratorio, *De Staat* (State), also has Marxist undertones concerning the consumption, conception, and production of music. *De Staat* uses a text from Plato's *Republic* and emphasizes the overarching theme of democracy and unison present in Plato's work.[17] This idea is expressed in Book V of *Republic*:

> Can there be any greater evil than discord and distraction and plurality where unity ought to reign? Or any greater good than the bond of unity? There cannot. And there is unity where there is community of pleasures and pains – where all the citizens are glad or grieved on the same occasions of joy and sorrow? No doubt. Yes; and where there is no common but only private feeling a State is disorganized – when you have one half of the world triumphing and the other plunged in grief at the same events happening to the city or the citizens? Certainly. Such differences commonly originate in a disagreement about the use of the terms 'mine' and 'not mine' and 'his' and 'not his.'[18]

As seen above, Plato believes that people are stronger in unison, especially politically.[19] Andriessen adopts the same belief and brings it to life in *De Staat*. He believes that everyone has the right to the same information; thus, everyone should seek to spread knowledge in order for everyone to have access to the same information. To exemplify this, *De Staat* is almost entirely in rhythmic unison. This shows that all of the performers in *De Staat* have the same information and are seeking to spread it through performance. The improvisational solos in the piece show the ability to still have freedom and autonomy even while working together in a democratic fashion. To further illustrate this unison, there are no dynamics in the work because the key to spreading knowledge is not elegance; the key is clarity and precision. This complete lack of hierarchy both in reference to the instrumentalists and in reference to the message of democratic unity *De Staat* represents, exemplifies musical egalitarianism.

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[17] James H. North, "The Wound Dresser," *Fanfare: The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors*, May 2012, 102.
[18] Plato, *Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics, 1994), http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html (accessed July 4, 2014).
[19] David Pay, "Don't Get too Comfortable: An Essay and Conversation About the Ideas and Music of Louis Andriessen," *Music on Main*, April 2009 http://davidpay.com/David_Pay/Writing_files/Dont_Get_Too_Comfortable.pdf, 3-4.

Following with musical egalitarianism, Andriessen also mixes current and past popular genres. One such genre is jazz – the quintessential American genre. Andriessen appreciates the anti-alienation present in jazz that is not present in classical music; a jazz musician can simply walk up to a jazz combo and begin to play, whereas a classical musician cannot simply walk up to a string quartet and play with them. Jazz composers, such as the great Duke Ellington, also encouraged their players to co-produce the music; Ellington would create simple melodic ideas in his head, then call his band together and ask them to pitch him melodic ideas through improvisation – this was ultimately the writing process that created his memorable melodies. This is analogous to Andriessen's encouragement of instrumental co-production in *Workers Union.* The heavy improvisation in jazz also encourages the co-production of the instrumentalists.

Baroque music, yet another stylistic period that Andriessen often employs, also features heavy improvisation. Andriessen models his big pieces after the salient features present in J.S. Bach's works, such as dense harmonies, counterpoint, and virtuosity.[20] He is able to closely imitate Bach due to the fact that he begins each morning playing a prelude and fugue from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier.*

A piece that combines both traditional jazz and Baroque traditions is Andriessen's 1991 work, *Hout* (Wood), for tenor saxophone, marimba, guitar, and piano.[21] *Hout* features a four-voice unison canon with each voice entering a sixteenth note apart; this canon features the same subject in *Overture to Orpheus.* The treatment of canon is Baroque, yet the use of guitar and tenor saxophone and "a more jazzy, loud … kind of playing," are quintessentially jazz elements.[21] Andriessen's authentic treatment of both the Baroque and jazz styles and his lack of

[20] Frances-Marie Uitti, "Louis Andriessen," *Contemporary Music Review* 25 (October 2006): 541.
[21] Pamela Nash, 109

instrumental hierarchy in that all instruments in *Hout* play an equal part in the canon are both representative of musical egalitarianism.

Performers are equal in Andriessen's compositions, as are audiences. Through his music, he encourages his audiences to be intellectual participants in his works rather than passive bystanders. Andriessen, defining himself as a classicist, simply creates the form although the form will still have holes that the audience will have to fill in using their imagination; this engages the audience into autonomous collaboration, thus encouraging them to participate intellectually.[22] Lack of audience collaboration is part of Andriessen's disdain for Romantic music and why he considers himself a classicist:

> One thing I'm sure of, my music structurally has more to do with Classical music than Romantic music … There's something in Romanticism that I don't like, which is that there's no space for the listener to fill in his own music; you are taken away with it.[23]

Romantic music, with its frequent variation, "flashy orchestration, crescendos and accelerandos," which all act as "artificial stimulants, tells" its audiences how to feel, instead of encouraging the audience to be autonomous.[24]

Utilizing periods of space between loud, sonorous chords and frequent time changes such as in his 1979 work *De Tijd* (Time) is one method Andriessen uses to encourage audience collaboration. This method, as Andriessen describes it, creates "an environment which seems to open possibilities for deeper thoughts … or feelings."[25] In his 2008 multi-media opera, *La Commedia*, with text based on Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, Andriessen involves his audience through frequent and abrupt aesthetic changes. These changes include celestial choirs

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[22] Noah Gideon Meites, 104.
[23] Louis Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, ed. Mirjam Zegers and trans. Clare Yates (Todmorden, UK: Arc Music, 2002), 151.
[24] Julia Wolfe, "Embracing the Clash" (doctoral thesis, Princeton University, 2012), 21.
[25] David Pay, 1-2, 4.

who sing heartfelt songs about love and death and frightening electronic sounds. The opera meets and abrupt ending with a children's choir singing a blunt message from Dante. With these methods, Andriessen sought, as he describes, "not to control sentiment, but to show the different sides of it."[25] The environmental and sentimental ambiguities present in these pieces encourage the audience to involve themselves in the piece by encouraging them to make decisions; involving the audience is an integral part of musical egalitarianism.

Louis Andriessen, with his philosophy of musical egalitarianism, is the face of new music. His concern with musical egalitarianism is remarkable because it simply makes music about the enjoyment of music. Equalizing the performers and audiences to the composer, respecting and adhering to authentic performance practices, eliminating hierarchies, and consideration and synthesis of several genre encourage all involved in this music, whether they are writers, performers, or audience members, to become intellectually involved in the aesthetic quality of Andriessen's music with no hierarchies to limit enjoyment. Andriessen's musical egalitarianism serves as both a musical model for those who participate or observe music and as a social model; all are equal under humanity's oldest and most prevalent past time and creative outlet – music.

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