

Henk Meutgeert

Pianist, composer, orchestrator, conductor

When **Henk Meutgeert** completed his piano studies in 1975 at the academy of music in Zwolle – Chopin, Schumann and Beethoven resonating still – he was the only one, together with one of his teachers Frans Elsen, who knew that jazz was going to play a leading role in his life. Not that he turned his back on classical music. 25 years later he merged all kinds of music in a sort of synthesis in a very special way. With his own **“Jazz Orchestra of the Concertgebouw”** he performs regularly, together with the Gelders Orkest, the Orkest van het Oosten and recently even with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. At the Noord Nederlands Orkest and the Limburgs Symfonie Orkest he is guest conductor.

The jazz that sounds in all its forms every month for many years now in the Bimhuis, temple of jazz in Amsterdam, is produced under the leadership of Henk Meutgeert as well.

Henk Meutgeert is a real builder of bridges, who writes arrangements for his orchestra with unparalleled virtuosity, based on compositions by soloists. Examples of these soloists, who are guests to the Amsterdam **Concertgebouw** and the **Bimhuis** are **Elvin Jones, Joe Henderson, George Coleman** and **Tom Harrell**, but also **Han Bennink, Jean “Toots” Thielemans, Misha Mengelberg, Guus Jansen** and **Theo Loevendie**.

Henk also brings together musicians who have never played together before.

In 1980 **Henk Meutgeert** was asked to become the pianist for **AVRO’s Big Band The Skymasters**, a radio orchestra, that under the leadership of at first Tony Nolte and later on Herman Schoonderwalt, grew to be one of the most renowned big bands in Europe. This orchestra even toured through the United States in 1988. During his time at the Skymasters pianist Henk Meutgeert conducted an incredible number of jazz musicians from around the world, especially during the weekly radio program **“Swingtime”** broadcast from Nick Vollebregt's legendary jazz cafe in Laren. Some examples of the impressive musicians Henk Meutgeert worked with are: **Dizzy Gillespie, Mel Tormé, Freddie Hubbard, Clark Terry, Al Cohn, Zoot Sims, Mel Lewis, Phil Woods, Frank Wess** and **Johnny Griffin**.

In 1985 Henk Meutgeert founded his first own professional big band:

The Netherlands Concert Jazz Band, an orchestra in which the best Dutch jazz musicians took part of, for example **Ack van Rooijen, Bart and Eric van Lier, Ruud Brink, Piet Noordijk, Herman Schoonderwalt, Ferdinand Povel, Wim Overgaauw, Rob Madna, Frans Elsen** and **Kees Kranenburg**.

During five years the orchestra performed on many stages in The Netherlands and abroad under the leadership of Henk Meutgeert.

The last 15 years of the 20th century, **Henk Meutgeert** has been a desirable pianist, composer, arranger and orchestra leader. He often performed as guest conductor at the **Metropole Orkest**, for which he also wrote many arrangements. Under the leadership of **Henk Meutgeert** and his colleague **Jerry van Rooijen**, the orchestra took part in a television production. This production entailed a composing assignment that was given to both musicians in 1989 by the world broadcasting services and the Avro, and was given the title "**Nature in Concert**". **Madeline Bell** sang her lyrics and a selection of soloists supported the production: trumpeter **Rick Kiefer**, pianist **Monty Alexander** and tenor saxophonist **Ferdinand Povel**. The program was broadcast worldwide through television.

During many years, **Meutgeert** performed as pianist in the quartet of saxophonist/clarinetist **Herman Schoonderwalt**, which could be heard on radioshows regularly. He also gave a series of concerts of a somewhat educating character. Together with, among others, singers **Francien van Tuinen** and **Deborah Brown**, he performed the music of **Gershwin** (and other American composers), and explained about the music as well.

In 1994, **Henk Meutgeert** was given a composing assignment to write a suite for a big band by the **EBU (European Broadcasting Union)**. The result of that became the "**Eburnian Elephant Songs**", a composition of five parts, of which the premiere was broadcast on the radio throughout the whole of Europe.

In 1996 the **New Concert Big Band** was born. From that year on, Henk Meutgeert conducted an orchestra of 18 people, mostly young musicians who each conducted a group themselves as well.

The big band started to perform on Sundays in the earlier mentioned Bimhuis. Initially, the band performed the repertoire of the conductor himself, later on also compositions of the members of the orchestra. Weekly changing guests from The Netherlands and from abroad, and also musicians from the band's own circles performed there with the band.

Every guest soloist brought own compositions, which were revised by Henk Meutgeert especially for his orchestra. Colleagues like Rob Horsting, Johan Plomp, Jurje Haanstra and Henk Huizinga supported Henk Meutgeert with that.

This way, since 1996, a **musical library**, which enforces admiration, has been built. This musical library contains no less than 800 titles, most of them by the hand of Henk Meutgeert himself.

The success of these Sunday Night concerts did not pass unnoticed by all sorts of people from the musical world. **Martijn Sanders**, then the director of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw proposed for instance, to change the name of the orchestra into "**Jazz Orchestra of the Concertgebouw**" and placed his stage at the disposal of the orchestra for several concerts every year.

That is how it happened that, since 1999, the **Concertgebouw of Amsterdam** is not just the home port of the **Royal Concertgebouworkest**, but also that of a fixed **big jazz formation**.

By now, the **Jazz Orchestra of the Concertgebouw** under the leadership of **Henk Meutgeert** tours in Germany, Southern Africa, Austria, Hungary, Lithuania, Japan and China and performs in theatres and festivals throughout The Netherlands. From the season 2009/2010, during the winter season, always from October until May, the orchestra will perform the last Thursday every month in the Bimhuis in Amsterdam.

Henk Meutgeert conducted the **Netherlands Concert Jazz Band** and is chief-conductor of the **Jazz Orchestra of the Concertgebouw**.

He is guest conductor of the **Noord Nederlands Symfonie Orkest** and the **Limburgs Symfonie Orkest**. He also conducted the **Metropole Orkest**, the **WDR Big Band**, the **Gelders Orkest** and the **Orkest van het Oosten**.

He had the lead of several workshops held in Hamburg and Cologne.

International tours:

1988	USA	Skymasters (Houston, Chicago, New York)
1989	Bulgary	Netherlands Concert Jazz Band (Sofia)
2002	South-Africa	Jazz Orchestra of the Concertgebouw (Capetown)
2004	Austria/Hungary	Jazz Orchestra of the Concertgebouw (Vienna, Budapest)
2008	Lithuania	Jazz Orchestra of the Concertgebouw (Vilnius, Klaipėda)
2008	Japan	Jazz Orchestra of the Concertgebouw (Tokyo, Misima)
2008	India	Henk Meutgeert Quintet
2009	China	Jazz Orchestra of the Concertgebouw (Beijing, Shanghai)

Several important musical works from the oeuvre of Henk Meutgeert:

- CC-Minor Symphony (1980) 20 min. For brass sextet and solo trombone
- Flying Dutch Saucer Concerto (1985) 30 min. Suite for big band (assignment Wereldomroep)
- The Voyage of a Villager (1989) 40 min. Suite for big band (assignment NOS)
- Eburnian Elephant Songs (1994) 50 min. Suite for big band (assignment EBU)
- CD productions with among others Yuri Honing, Caroline Breuer and the Concertgebouw Kamerorkest.
- Numerous compositions and arrangements for his own orchestra and other ensembles.

Henk Meutgeert was awarded with the **“Bird Award”** during the **North Sea Jazz Festival** in 1999 and in the previous year with the **“Peter Schilperoort Award”**.