

# SYMPHONIC CONCERTS IN ANTWERP DURING THE FIRST AND SECOND WORLD WAR

- Hedwige Baeck-Schilders -

Antwerp's concert culture did not come to a halt during World War I and World War II. During the First World War, after one year of German occupation in 1915, symphonic concerts were performed by newly founded Antwerp symphony orchestras and from 1916 on, also by a German Symphony Orchestra which had been formed in Brussels. During the Second World War, the two main Antwerp symphony orchestras resumed their concerts, but by April 1940, a new Antwerp symphonic orchestra was formed to play concerts in both summer and winter seasons. The Antwerp Benoit cult, started at the beginning of the century, flourished more than ever during the Second World War, and became a mainstay of collaboration with the Nazis.

The city of Antwerp has long been known for its history of rich musical culture and lively concert culture. Very little, however, has been published about symphonic concerts which took place in Antwerp during the First and the Second World War. Is it fathomable that a metropolis like Antwerp with a tradition of concerts in beautiful theatres such as the *Théâtre Royal d'Anvers* (Royal Theatre, now called Bourla Theatre) and the *Vlaamsche Opera* (Flemish Opera, since 1920 Royal Flemish Opera) and in prestigious concert halls such as the *Société royale d'Harmonie d'Anvers* (Royal Harmony Society of Antwerp) and the *Société royale de Zoologie d'Anvers/Koninklijke Maatschappij van Dierkunde van Antwerpen* (Royal Zoological Society of Antwerp) was deprived of concerts during the German military occupations of Belgium? Our extensive research in contemporary newspapers and periodicals as well as in various archives, will shed light on the orchestras, musicians, and repertoire of the symphonic concerts in Antwerp in both the First and the Second World War.

## 1. The First World War<sup>1</sup>

During the Belle Époque, the metropolis on the Scheldt boasted no less than five societies with their own symphonic orchestras, namely the Royal Harmony Society, the *Orkestvereniging* (Orchestral Society, disbanded in 1910), the Royal Zoological Society, the *Société des Nouveaux Concerts/Maatschappij der Nieuwe Concerten* (Society of New Concerts) and the *Maatschappij der Concerten van Gewijde Muziek* (Society of Concerts of Sacred Music)<sup>2</sup>.

After the outbreak of war and the German invasion of Belgium in August 1914, all symphonic societies suspended their concerts and, for patriotic reasons, refrained from organizing activities during the German occupation. After all, in public opinion, entertainment was inappropriate while Belgian soldiers were fighting for freedom. In August 1914, many musicians had joined the Belgian army or fled to the Netherlands, France, or England. When some of them returned after the occupation of Antwerp by the German army on 9 October 1914, they found themselves unemployed.

Motivated to gain public confidence, the German occupier allowed the Antwerp municipality to remain in office although they were under the authority of the Military Provincial Governor, who was also head of the *Zivilverwaltung* (the German civil administration) that censored the press, books, and spectacles, and controlled the language policy.

In the first months of occupation, the *Zivilverwaltung* issued a ban on concerts, opera and theatre performances, and entertainment. However, Antwerp was not deprived of symphonic concerts during the following years. Two new Antwerp orchestras were formed: the *Nieuwe Orkestvereniging van Antwerpen* (New Orchestral Society of Antwerp) and the so-called *Leonidasconcerten*. Moreover, the *Deutsches Generalgouvernement Belgien* (German military government in occupied Belgium) created the *Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester in Brüssel* (German Symphony Orchestra in Brussels) which played concerts both in the Royal Conservatory of Music of Brussels and in the Antwerp Flemish Opera<sup>3</sup>.

To help subdue complaints from radical Flemish nationalists (named activists since 1915), General-Governor Moritz von Bissing tried to utilise a Flemish friendly policy, the so-called *Flamenpolitik* to promote German war policy. Moreover, von Bissing's initiatives to reduce the influence of French culture in favour of Germanic culture, implemented by the *Bildungszentrale* (German Education Center), also affected Antwerp's concert culture<sup>4</sup>.

## New Orchestral Society of Antwerp

In the spring of 1915, the *Zivilverwaltung* repealed the ban on entertainments, although three Antwerp cinema theatres, namely Odeon, Alhambra, and Prince Albert, had already been screening

1. This section summarizes and partially republishes information that was published by HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS, "Symfonische concerten in Antwerpen tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog", in *Revue belge de Musicologie*, 73, 2019, p. 93-123.
2. ERIK BAECK and HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS, *Het concertleven te Antwerpen in het midden van de 19<sup>de</sup> eeuw*, Brussel, 1996; HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS and ERIK BAECK, "Muziekleven", in GUSTAAF ASAERT and LUC DUERLOO, ed., *Antwerpen in de 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw. Van Belle Époque tot Golden Sixties*, Brasschaat, 2008, p. 317-335; HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS, "Van de Beurs tot de Singel: Antwerpse concertzalen vroeger en nu", in *Post Factum. Jaarboek voor Geschiedenis en Volkskunde*, 3, (Provincie Antwerpen) 2011, p. 9-52.
3. Letterenhuis Antwerpen: some printed programs of the *Nieuwe Orkestvereniging* and the *Leonidasconcerten* in the files of the *Nieuwe Orkestvereniging* (O 36458) and the *Folies Bergère* (F 3898); all programs of the concerts in Antwerp by the *Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester in Brüssel* in the files of the Koninklijke Vlaamse Opera (O 3374/boxes 46-48).
4. FRANK SEBERECHTS, "Antwerpen tijdens de Twee Wereldoorlogen", in GUSTAAF ASAERT and LUC DUERLOO, *Antwerpen in de 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw...*, p. 117-124; ULRICH TIEDAU, "De Duitse cultuurpolitiek in België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog", in *Bijdragen tot de Egentijdse Geschiedenis*, no. 11, 2003, p. 21-45.

films since December 1914<sup>5</sup>. Even more interesting are cinema screenings which started in April 1915 in *Anvers-Palace* theatre, enlivened with an orchestra conducted by Frans Van Dyck, a former trumpet player in the orchestra of the Society of New Concerts and conductor of the brass band *Broederband*<sup>6</sup>. In the fall of 1915, the press announced that Van Dyck would also conduct concerts in *Anvers-Palace* with a newly founded symphonic orchestra of about 60 musicians, namely the New Orchestral Society of Antwerp. J. Van Heurck, party director of *Anvers-Palace* managed the concerts and rented the orchestral scores that were usually the property of the editor or composer. Tickets for these concerts were priced rather low, with the goal of attracting as many people as possible<sup>7</sup>.

The repertoire consisted of symphonies and concertos by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, works by Berlioz, Bizet, Chabrier, Saint-Saëns, Grieg, Smetana, Rimski-Korsakov, as well as by Flemish composers such as Peter Benoit, Jan Blockx, Edgar Tinel and Paul Gilson. During the first season (7 November 1915 to 14 April 1916), Van Dyck conducted eleven concerts on Sunday-morning, sometimes on Friday-evening and once on a Monday-evening; during the second season (22 October 1916 to 25 March 1917) six concerts on Sunday-morning and one charity concert were played; the third season (4 November 1917 to 14 April 1918) was reduced to four symphonic concerts and one chamber music concert. These 21 symphonic concerts featured 25 works of German composers,

21 French, 19 Flemish, and 1 Walloon, 10 Norwegian, 7 Russian, 2 Bohemian and 1 Polish, totalizing 82 compositions. All soloists were Belgian, among them many Antwerpians.

In a review on the first concert of the first season with works of Blockx, Beethoven, Théodore Dubois, and Dvorák, an enthusiastic journalist, named Merlyn, noticed in the Flemish activist newspaper *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws* that the organizers had given Flemish music the place of honour which it deserves in Flanders because “after all, now the time has come to make the creators speak, who arose in our midst, those who at present must be for us a guideline, a support, a security, and a hope in the future [...] A nation like ours, which produced composers like Benoit, Blockx, Tinel, is not yet a nation doomed to ruin”<sup>8</sup>. However, during the second season, performances and programs of the New Orchestral Society were severely criticized by Frank Berthen in *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*. For instance, he argued not only that conductor Van Dyck should pay more attention to correct playing and less rigid movements, but flamed also against the lack of Flemish compositions in the concert of 28 January 1917<sup>9</sup>.

Reviews in *Het Tooneel*, an Antwerp weekly dedicated to theatre, opera, and concerts, were more favourable. Already after the first concerts in November 1915, an anonymous critic, considering the growing interest of the public, was convinced that these concerts filled a gap in Antwerp concert culture. Moreover, Van Dyck astonished his public

5. *Antwerpsche Tijdingen*, 16 December 1914, p. 2. For cinemascreenings brightened with music, see also LEEN ENGELEN and ROEL VANDE WINKEL, *Cine Zoologie. Hoe film de Antwerpse dierentuin heeft gered*, Antwerpen/Leuven, 2018 and *Geïllustreerde Zondagsgazet*, 2 January 1916 for the names of the eight musicians who played in *Cine Zoologie*.

6. *Anvers-Palace*, built in 1913-1914 in the Appelmansstraat as a music-hall with 1400 seats by the Antwerp architect Louis Hamaïde, opened its doors mid-April 1915 with cinema performances at high entrance prices to attract a bourgeois public.

7. *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, 24 October 1915, p. 3, 5 November 1915, p. 1; *Geïllustreerde Zondagsgazet*, 14 November 1915, p. 4. The Antwerp newspaper *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws* was published from 13 January 1915 to 13 November 1918 and was run from 27 June 1915 by notorious activist leaders August Borms and Albert Van den Brande, joined by Raf Verhulst as chief-redactor on 4 November 1916.

8. *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, 8 November 1915, p. 3: “Thans immers is het oogenblik om de scheppers te doen spreken, die in ons midden opstonden, zij, die voor ons Vlamingen, in deze stonden een richtsnoer, een houvast, een zekerheid en een hoop op de toekomst moeten zijn [...] Een volk als het onze, dat een Benoit, een Blockx, een Tinel heeft voortgebracht, is nog geen volk dat gedoemd is tot ondergang”. The Flemish composers Peter Benoit, Jan Blockx and Edgar Tinel are figureheads of the Flemish music history.

9. *Idem*, 30 January 1917, p. 3.



De Nieuwe Orkestvereniging

van Antwerpen.

d'Anvers.

ZONDAG 9 JANUARI 1916,

DIMANCHE 9 JANVIER 1916.

## 5<sup>e</sup> Symphonisch Concert Symphonique

met de medewerking van

avec le concours de

MEV. ELISA LEVERING

CANTATRICE

ouder de leiding van

sous la direction de

M<sup>r</sup> FRANS VAN DYCK.



Anvers-Palace.

1916 - Drukker: J. FN. WILS, BALESDIJKSTRAAT 12.

03645

Program of the Nieuwe Orkestvereniging van Antwerpen, 9 January 1916. Following the death of her father, Elisa Levering was replaced by Helena Krinkels. Source: Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuis, O3645S.

with finely styled performances<sup>10</sup>. And the edition of 10 November 1917 stressed that the attempts of J. Van Heurck and Fr. Van Dyck, who thought two years ago that Antwerp had to keep its name as an art metropolis even in wartime, succeeded splendidly because the 18<sup>th</sup> concert [on 4 November 1917] demonstrated once again that the action of the New Orchestral Society was approved by the art-loving public<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, after the fourth concert of the third season on 14 April 1918, the New Orchestral Society was disbanded because ticket sales did not cover organizational costs<sup>12</sup>.

## Leonidas Concerts

In September 1915, the *Leonidaskring/Cercle Leonidas* (Leonidas Circle) was founded on the initiative of Antwerp citizens in tavern *Den Arend*. Its aim was to help Belgian prisoners of war and their families with the charity organization *Le Havre sac/De Soldatenransel* (Soldier's knapsack)<sup>13</sup>. To raise money, chairman Billiet and party director Dewalhens organized all kinds of events but decided in 1917 to also give concerts at the Antwerp film and music-hall theatre *Folies Bergère*. Here the orchestra that accompanied the cinema performances on a daily basis was conducted by John Faes, former first oboe player in the Royal Harmony Society. The first *Groot Liefdadigheidconcert* (Great Charity Concert), conducted by Faes took place on 26 January 1917<sup>14</sup>. The hall and the orchestra for this concert were made available by the board of the *Folies Bergère*, while the public was invited to consume a drink.

In March 1917, the board of the *Folies Bergère* engaged organist César Borré as music conductor.

In 1912 he was second conductor at the Flemish Opera in Antwerp and in 1913 conductor of the orchestra of the *Théâtre Trocadero* in the *Galerie Toison d'or* in Brussels where he had troubles with the occupier. In the Antwerp *Folies Bergère* he was very successful with his music arrangements for song, organ, and orchestra during the cinema performances and also with so-called "art concerts" before and after the cinema screenings, for which he engaged singers of the *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie* (Royal Theatre of La Monnaie) in Brussels or theatres of Nice, Rouen and Aix-les-Bains.

On 5 October 1917, the Leonidas Circle made an appeal to Borré to conduct in the *Folies Bergère* an "Extraordinary art concert for the benefit of the needy women and families of our soldiers". At the expense of Leonidas Circle, he formed a symphonic orchestra of about 75 musicians and engaged three soloists for the performance of opera arias, violin pieces, concertos of Bach and Grieg, and symphonic works of Liszt and Tchaikovsky<sup>15</sup>. In an announcement of this concert in *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, music critic Berthen praised extensively Borré for his talent but wisely ignored the fact that he had also conducted the garden concerts in the *Lichtspieltheater* (Light Show Theatre) at the Lunapark in Brussels from 15 July to 15 October 1916 on the occasion of the *Ausstellung für Soziale Fürsorge* (Social Welfare Exhibition) organized by the German occupying forces<sup>16</sup>.

After the great success of this extraordinary concert, the Leonidas Circle decided to organize more symphonic charity concerts with Borré and Belgian soloists. From 5 October 1917 to 14 April 1918 Borré conducted six concerts on Friday evening and from 11 October 1918 to 28 March 1919 five

10. *Het Tooneel*, 27 November 1915, p. 3 and 5 February 1916, p. 3.

11. *Idem*, 10 November 1917, p. 3.

12. *Idem*, 20 April 1918, p. 3.

13. *Geïllustreerde Zondagsgazet*, 24 October 1915, p. 5 and 6 January 1916, p. 1. *Den Arend* was run by Jules Dufaux and located on the corner of the *Handschoenmarkt* and *Maalderijstraat* opposite the Antwerp cathedral.

14. Letterenhuis, Antwerpen, dossier *Folies Bergère* F3896, Program 26 January 1917. The *Folies Bergère*, named after the famous music-hall in Paris, was built in 1904 as a music-hall in the Wapperstraat and was demolished after the Second World War.

15. *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, 20 September 1917, p. 3: "Buitengewoon Kunstconcert, ingericht door de Liefdadige Kring Leonidas ten voordele der behoeftige vrouwen en families onzer soldaten"; *Idem*, 8 October 1917, p. 3.

16. *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, 20 September 1917, p. 3; *Belgischer Kurier*, 1 Oktober 1916, p. 4, Announcement Lunapark: "Ausstellung für Soziale Fürsorge".





Program of the Leonidas-concerts, 25 January 1918. Source : Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuis, F3895.

concerts. The eclectic repertoire of the so-called “Leonidas concerts” included works of Berlioz, Bizet, Chabrier, Lalo, Saint-Saëns, Bach, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Weber, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, and Flemish composers such as Benoit, Blockx, Gilson, and Borré himself. The programs of the seven concerts during World War I included 9 French compositions, 8 German, 8 Flemish, 5 Russian, 4 Hungarian, 2 Norwegian, and 1 Italian, making up a repertoire of 37 works. All soloists were Belgian, among them many Antwerpians.

In a retrospective review of the first series of Leonidas-concerts, *Het Tooneel* wrote that those concerts surpassed all the initiatives of other charity societies: “Real art evenings were organized and this was the most important reason for most of the charitable and art loving Antwerp citizens to attend the concerts and not to leave the tickets in second hand as it often happens with such charity parties”<sup>17</sup>. Especially the performances of Paul Gilson’s *La Mer* (22 February 1918), Berlioz’ *Symphonie fantastique* (29 March 1918), and Tchaikovsky’s *Symphonie pathétique* (29 April 1918) were reviewed as artistic achievements. After overwhelming success, Gilson’s *La Mer* was repeated on 17 May 1918 in the presence of the composer. Activist newspaper *Antwerpsche Courant* stressed that Gilson shall never forget the ovation of the citizens of Antwerp<sup>18</sup>. However, in his *Notes et Souvenirs*, edited in 1942, Gilson does not say a word of this triumph, perhaps because he did not want to recall his troubles after the Armistice,

caused by his appointment as temporary director of the *Koninklijk Vlaamsch Conservatorium* (Royal Flemish Conservatoire, acronym KVC) on 17 August 1918 by decision of General-Governor Ludwig von Falkenhausen (who had succeeded von Bissing)<sup>19</sup>.

## Volbach Concerts

In 1916, von Bissing stimulated every initiative “to organize and to promote scientific and artistic life in every respect”<sup>20</sup>. His cultural policy included the creation of the *Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester in Brüssel* (German Symphonic Orchestra in Brussels). Lieutenant-Captain Fritz Vollbach, professor of musicology and music director at the University of Tübingen, received ample financial resources to form an orchestra with 75 musicians and perform concerts which “in addition to older works, will also include modern and ultra-modern ones”<sup>21</sup>.

After a successful series of Friday evening concerts in the requisitioned Royal Conservatory of Brussels, which started on 4 August 1916 with a program entirely dedicated to Beethoven, it was decided to repeat the same programs at Antwerp in the requisitioned Flemish Opera on Saturdays. From autumn 1916, the second series of Brussels concerts was presented to the public as the first series of Antwerp concerts and so on<sup>22</sup>. The German concert programmes for all Antwerp concerts of the German Symphonic Orchestra in Brussels

17. *Het Tooneel*, 4 May 1918, p. 3: “Ware kunstavonden werden het publiek gegeven, en hierdoor kwam het dan ook voornamelijk dat het puik gedeelte van het liefdadig en kunstminnend Antwerpen regelmatig de concerten opluisterde en de kaarten niet in tweede hand overliet, zooals het veelal met dergelijke liefdadigheidsfeest gebeurt”.

18. *Antwerpsche Courant*, 19 May 1918, p. 1.

19. PAUL GILSON, *Notes de musique et Souvenirs*, Bruxelles, 1942, passim. Gilson was removed on 16 February 1919 as a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Letters and Fine Arts of Belgium, and suspended by Royal Decree of 19 August 1919 from his duties as inspector of Belgian music schools by disciplinary measure for three years with retroactive effects from November 1918. (See JOZEF ROBIJNS, “Vlaamse Musici in de Académie royale”, in *Acta van het Colloquium De Weg naar eigen Academiën 1772-1938*, Brussel, 1983, p. 191; JAAK VAN HOLEN, “Paul Gilson, bezettings-bestuurder voor twee maanden”, in GUIDO PERSOONS, ed., *Koninklijk Vlaams Conservatorium 1898-1998. Traditie en Vernieuwing*, Antwerpen, 1998, p. 281-284.)

20. *Belgischer Kurier*, 16 July 1916 (no page number): “das wissenschaftliche und künstlerische Leben im Bereich der General Gouvernements nach jeder Richtung auszubauen und zu fördern”.

21. *Idem*: “die, - neben älteren Werken - auch die modernen und allermodernsten besonders berücksigten werden”.

See also ULRICH TIEDAU, “De Duitse Cultuurpolitiek in België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog”, in HUBERT ROLAND, MARNIX BEYER and GREET DRAÏE, ed., *Deutschlandbilder in Belgiëën 1830-1940*, Münster, 2011, p. 32-38.

22. *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, 23 October 1916, p. 3.

GENERAL-GOUVERNEMENT IN BELGIEN.

Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Brüssel

Leitung : FRITZ VOLBACH.

3. CYCLUS

Fünf grosse Symphonie-Konzerte

in der Vlämischen Oper, Kunstlei, Antwerpen.

Sonnabend, den 22. September 1917, pünktlich abends 8 1/2 Uhr

3. KONZERT

SOLISTIN :

Frau Kammersängerin **Erna Denera**, Berlin, Kgl. Hofoper (Sopran).

Vortragsfolge :

1. Vorspiel zu den „Meistersingern“ . . . . . R. Wagner
2. Vier Lieder  
a. Verführung  
b. Morgen  
c. Wiegenlied  
d. Cäcilie . . . . . R. Strauss
3. Vorspiel zum II. Akt der Oper „Ingwilde“ . . . . . M. Schillings

10 MINUTEN PAUSE.

4. Eine Alpensymphonie, op. 64 . . . . . R. Strauss

Das Orchester ist für dieses Konzert auf 105 Mitwirkende verstärkt.

Während der Vorträge bleiben die Saaltüren geschlossen.

4. Symphonie-Konzert : Sonnabend, den 13. Oktober 1917.

Druck von Ligerts & Doss, Antwerpen. - Z. No. 8420, 17.9.17.

Program of the Volbach-concerts, 22 September 1917. Source : Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuis, O33745/46.



were printed by Laporte & Dosse<sup>23</sup>. German soldiers could buy tickets in the German *Kommandantur* (Headquarters of the German army garrison, stationed in Antwerp), and citizens could buy tickets in a German bookshop. The public consisted mainly of German officers, members of the so-called “German colony” (a community of wealthy German merchants which had been present in Antwerp since 1796 involved in important port activities, trading practices, and its own cultural events), and flamingants (defenders of Flemish language and cultural emancipation). For the most part, the patriotic French speaking bourgeoisie stayed home, being averse to German music, especially to symphonic excerpts of Wagner’s operas that appeared prominently on the programs.

From 21 October 1916 to 11 October 1918 the German Symphonic Orchestra in Brussels played in Antwerp no less than six concert series (series 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 with five symphonic subscription concerts, series 2 with four subscription and two non-subscription concerts). These concerts were announced in *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws* under the heading “Volbach concerts”. Volbach conducted all concerts but permitted some composers to conduct their own works, for instance Siegmund von Hausegger, conductor of the Philharmonic Concerts in Hamburg and Max von Schillings, Generalmusikdirektor in Stuttgart. And he awarded the same ‘honour’ to Flemish composer and activist Lieven Duvoesel, who conducted two fragments of his *Leie-cycle* on 26 January 1918. Volbach engaged only German vocal soloists from operas in Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, Hamburg, and Stuttgart, the most famous German pianists such as Wilhelm Backhaus, Edwin Fisher, Arthur Schnabel, and violinists such as Eva Bernstein, Jenö Hubay, Otaka Sevcik.

The programs of these 31 concerts included 130 works of which 109 were by German compos-

ers, 6 Hungarian, 5 French, 4 Russian, 2 Flemish (Benoit and Duvoesel), 2 Norwegian, 1 Bohemian, and 1 Polish. The most spectacular work was Richard Strauss’ *Alpensinfonie*, performed with no less than 104 musicians on 22 September 1917.

After the first series of Volbach concerts, F. Berthen did not hesitate to write in *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws* that “the performances were constantly far above what we are used to hearing from our own conductors. Especially the fineness with which the smallest details were played without breaking the main lines, has struck me”<sup>24</sup>. Berthen was also pleased with the announcement of Duvoesel’s work in the fourth series of concerts, but when it was played in January 1918 he was replaced as music critic of *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws* by a certain L.G. who regretted that so few Flemings had shown up to cheer Duvoesel<sup>25</sup>.

## Conclusion

All pre-war Antwerp symphonic societies suspended their activities during the First World War. However, symphonic concerts were played in cinema theatres by two new orchestras, the New Orchestral Society of Antwerp conducted by Frans Van Dyck in *Anvers-Palace* theatre from November 1915 until April 1918 and the Leonidas Concerts conducted by Cesar Borré in the *Folies Bergère* theatre from March 1917 until November 1918. The soloists were all Belgian and the repertoire consisted mainly of popular works by German and Flemish as well as French composers. Moreover, Fritz Volbach conducted his German Symphonic Orchestra in Brussels in the requisitioned Flemish Opera from October 1916 until October 1918. For these so-called Volbach concerts he only engaged famous German soloists, invited one Flemish and a few German conduc-

23. Letterenhuis Antwerpen, dossier Koninklijke Vlaamsche Opera O 3745, 48, 49 and 50. The program leaflets with explanations of the works, priced 20 Pfennig, are lost.

24. *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, 9 January 1917, p. 3: “die uitvoeringen stonden voortdurend véér boven wat wij gewoon zijn van onze eigen dirigenten te hooren. Vooral de fijnheid, waarmee de kleinste bijzonderheden naar vóór geroepen werden zonder de groote lijnen te breken, heeft mij telkens getroffen”.

25. *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, 30 January 1918, p. 2.

tors and performed mainly German compositions. Concert life in Antwerp was thus not so different than in Brussels, where the *Concerts populaires* conducted by Sylvain Dupuis, the *Concerts Ysaÿe*, conducted by Eugène Ysaÿe and the *Concerts du Conservatoire*, conducted by the director of the Conservatoire, Léon Du Bois, were suspended or in Ghent were the *Concerts d'hiver*, conducted by Edouard Brahy, had also closed their scores. In Brussels, Brahy, François Rasse, and Emile Mathieu wanted to conduct concert series in the theatre *Patria* but their initiatives remained limited to a few concerts during the war.

## II. Interbellum

Post war concert culture was not as diverse as before the war. Eleven days after the Armistice, Borré opened the second concert of the Leonidas second concert season on 22 November 1918 with the *Brabançonne*, the *Marseillaise* and *God save the King*, confirming thus once more the patriotic aims of the Leonidas Circle. He continued to conduct Leonidas concerts in the Royal Theatre until May 1919. The Society of Concerts of Sacred Music did not resume its pre-war concerts. Moreover, due to major financial difficulties the Royal Harmony Society could no longer maintain its orchestra and sold both the beautiful summer retreat with garden and concert hall outside the city centre and the big winter concert hall downtown in 1923 to the municipality.

Concert life in Antwerp during the interbellum was dominated by two Antwerp conductors, Flor Alpaerts and Lodewijk De Vocht, who respectively revived the pre-war concerts in the hall of the Zoological Garden and in the Royal Theatre. Alpaerts was conductor of the orchestra of the Royal Society of Zoology of Antwerp and the

choir *Arti Vocali* from 1919 until 1951; De Vocht, who had founded the *Chorale Caecilia* in 1915, conducted the concerts of the Society of New Concerts from its restart in 1921 until the dissolution of the orchestra in 1937. Moreover, to resolve the difficult choice between Alpaerts and De Vocht, both candidates for the directorship of the KVC in 1934, Alpaerts became director of the KVC and De Vocht conductor of the newly founded *Concertvereniging van het Koninklijk Vlaamsch Conservatorium* (Concert Society of the Royal Flemish Conservatory, acronym CKVC).

Other orchestras were short-lived, such as the *Vlaamsche Concerten* (Flemish Concerts), founded in 1926 under the artistic direction of Jef Van Hoof and Hendrik Diels, and the *Vlaamsche Philharmonie* (Flemish Philharmonic), founded by conductor Arthur Löwenstein in 1937, which was disbanded after Löwenstein's sudden death in 1939<sup>26</sup>.

## III. The Second World War<sup>27</sup>

One week after the German invasion of Belgium, on 18 May 1940, Antwerp was occupied by the German army. Ten days later the Belgian king capitulated. The occupying forces allowed the Antwerp Municipality to continue to function, but only under the supervision of a German City Commissioner<sup>28</sup>. Municipal services were subordinate to the local *Feldkommandantur* (Field Command Authority) which was in charge of daily management. The *Militärverwaltung* (German Military Administration) supported collaborating Flemish organizations such as *Deutsch-Vlämische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (German-Flemish Labour Community, acronym DeVlag), an organization, founded in 1935, that promoted German-Flemish cultural relations and pursued the incorporation of Flanders into the Third Reich during the war<sup>29</sup>.

26. HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS and ERIK BAECK, "Muziekleven...", p. 326; ERIK BAECK and HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS, "Arthur Löwenstein et la Vlaamsche Philharmonie à Anvers", in *Revue Belge de Musicologie*, 75, 2022, p. 197-220.

27. This section summarises and partially republishes informations that was published by HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS, "Les Concerts symphoniques à Anvers pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale", in *Revue belge de Musicologie*, 69, 2015, p. 127-143.

28. FRANK SEBERECHTS, "Antwerpen tijdens de Twee Wereldoorlogen...", p. 125-142,

29. Idem, "Duitsch-Vlaamsche Arbeidsgemeenschap (DeVlag)", in *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, Tielt, 1998, p. 994-997.

In 1943, DeVlag once again specified its objectives, namely unconditional loyalty to National Socialism, to the Reich and to the Führer<sup>30</sup>.

By order of 23 September 1940 the *Militärverwaltung* reopened theatres and concert halls. But opera performances and concerts were strictly controlled by the *Feldkommandantur* and the *Propaganda-Abteilung* (Propaganda Division Belgium, acronym PAB). French works were no longer promoted and Jewish compositions, conductors and soloists were referred to as ‘*nicht genehme Autoren*’ (disliked authors, see later)<sup>31</sup> and were banned from 1 April 1941 onwards.

Despite war conditions, the orchestra of the Royal Zoological Society, conducted by Alpaerts and the Concert Society of the Royal Flemish Conservatoire, conducted by De Vocht, continued to give concerts<sup>32</sup>. However, they had to declare their concert programmes in advance to the PAB<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, in April 1940, one month before the invasion of Belgium by German troops, a new orchestra, the *Philharmonisch Orkest van Antwerpen* (Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra, acronym PHOVA) was founded by Hendrik Diels, principal conductor of the *Koninklijke Vlaamse Opera* (Royal Flemish Opera, acronym KVO)<sup>34</sup>.

## Royal Zoological Society

During the interbellum, Alpaerts conducted the symphonic concerts of the Royal Zoological Society in the concert-hall of the Zoologic

Garden every Wednesday evening during the winter season. But after the onset of World War II, concerts were reduced to one per month and played on Sunday afternoons, an impossible timing for the musicians of the KVO who formed the nucleus of the Zoo orchestra in the interbellum. For the 1940-41 season, Alpaerts had to set up a new orchestra, mainly with students of the KVC, that quickly acquired great homogeneity under the baton of the “greatest conductor of Flanders” according to R. Verbeke in the newspaper *De Dag*<sup>35</sup>. The choir *Arti Vocale* continued its cooperation, but foreign soloists were no longer engaged. Nevertheless, without musicians of the KVO difficulties remained and from the 1943-44 season onwards the Zoo-concerts were given again on Wednesday, the usual opera break. Moreover, the Royal Zoological Society had to obtain permission of the *Feldkommandatur* and the *Propaganda Staffel* (Propaganda squadron) to organize concerts and sometimes had to cancel or move concerts to another date when musicians of the KVO were claimed for *Wehrmachtsveranstaltungen* (events for the German Armed Forces). Circulars of the Royal Zoological Society state thus that the concerts will take place on the indicated dates “when circumstances permit”<sup>36</sup>.

Because the Nazis had issued a ban on music by Jewish composers, works of Mendelssohn, Mahler, Milhaud, or Liebermann were no longer played<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, modern repertoire of “disliked” composers such as Bartók, Szymanovski, Ravel, Honegger, Respighi, or Malipiero which Alpaerts had conducted during the interbellum,

30. *De Dag*, 1 June 1943. p. 2.

31. *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien beim Militärbefehlshaber in Belgien und in Nord Frankreich, August 1941* (CEGESOMA, PAB Jahresbericht, August 1941, p. 39-41).

32. HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS and ERIK BAECK, “Muziekleven”, *Antwerpen in de 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw...*, p. 317-335; HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS, “Les concerts symphoniques à Anvers ...”, p. 128 et 132.

33. *Jahresbericht der Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien ...* (CEGESOMA, PAB Jahresbericht ..., p. 41-43).

34. ERIK BAECK, “The Wagner Cult at the Koninklijke Vlaamse Opera During the Second World War”, in *Revue belge de Musicologie*, 69, 2015, p. 159-175.

35. *De Dag*, 7 January 1941, p. 8: “beste kapelmeester van het Vlaamsche land”.

36. Stadsarchief Antwerpen (Felixarchief), Koninklijke Maatschappij voor Dierkunde van Antwerpen, 1#1204 Briefwisseling; id. 1#1209 Programma's van Concerten. The Antwerp *Feldkommandantur* was located in 1940 in the Pelikaanstraat 86.

The *Propaganda Staffel* was the predecessor of the PAB. But the local branches of the PAB in the major cities were also called *Propaganda Staffel*. In 1943-44 the Antwerp *Propaganda Staffel* was located in the Bexstraat 1 (see Felixarchief, Stadsarchief Antwerpen, Koninklijke Maatschappij voor Dierkunde, 1#254; *Volk en Staat*, 13 December 1940, p. 3).

37. THEO STENGEL and HERBERT GERICK, *Lexikon der Juden in der Musik*, Berlin, 1940.

Kon. Maatschappij voor Dierkunde		Société Royale de Zoologie	
WINTERSEIZOEN 1942-1943		SAISON D'HIVER 1942-1943	
Zondag 11 Okt. 14 11 u. 30	<b>SYMPHONISCH CONCERT</b> Leider: FLOOR ALPHERTS Solisten: M <sup>rs</sup> YVONNE LETTERING, DR. A. PEETERS en J. VAN BUREN. Werkten van: V. MOZART, W. A. MOZART, J. S. BACH, ... et ARTI-VOCALI	Dinsdag 11 Oct. 14 11 u. 30	<b>CONCERT SYMPHONIQUE</b> Direction: FLOOR ALPHERTS Solistes: M <sup>rs</sup> YVONNE LETTERING, DR. A. PEETERS et J. VAN BUREN. Œuvres de: W. A. MOZART et J. S. BACH, ... et ARTI-VOCALI
Zondag 15 Nov. 14 11 u. 30	<b>SYMPHONISCH CONCERT</b> Leider: FLOOR ALPHERTS Solisten: M <sup>rs</sup> BERTHE BEENHARD, pianiste. Werkten van: SYDALLE, MOZART, BEETHOVEN, ...	Dinsdag 15 Nov. 14 11 u. 30	<b>CONCERT SYMPHONIQUE</b> Direction: FLOOR ALPHERTS Soliste: M <sup>rs</sup> BERTHE BEENHARD, pianiste. Œuvres de: SYDALLE, MOZART, BEETHOVEN, ...
Zondag 22 Nov. 14 11 u. 30	<b>HARMONIE CONCERT</b> aangeboden door de Koninklijke Maatschappij „APOLLON” Leider: DR. F. BROUWIER en R. ROBYN	Dinsdag 22 Nov. 14 11 u. 30	<b>CONCERT D'HARMONIE</b> offert par Société Royale „APOLLON” Direction: DR. F. BROUWIER et R. ROBYN
Zondag 13 Dec. 14 11 u. 30	<b>SYMPHONISCH CONCERT</b> Leider: FLOOR ALPHERTS Solist: R. BENE OSTY, violoncelle. Werkten van: MOZART, VIBERTIEN, GILSON, DE BOUCE.	Dinsdag 13 Dec. 14 11 u. 30	<b>CONCERT SYMPHONIQUE</b> Direction: FLOOR ALPHERTS Soliste: M. RENE OSTY, violoncelle. Œuvres de: MOZART, VIBERTIEN, GILSON, DE BOUCE.
Zondag 27 Dec. 14 11 u. 30	<b>GEMENGD CONCERT aangeboden door „ARTI-VOCALI”</b> Leider: FLOOR ALPHERTS Werkten van: MOZART, KEYSER, SCHUBERT, GRIEG, BEETHOVEN, BRAHMS, GILSON.	Dinsdag 27 Dec. 14 11 u. 30	<b>CONCERT VARIE offert par „ARTI-VOCALI”</b> Direction: FLOOR ALPHERTS Œuvres de: MOZART, KEYSER, SCHUBERT, GRIEG, BEETHOVEN, BRAHMS, GILSON.
Zondag 17 Jan. 14 11 u. 30	<b>SYMPHONISCH CONCERT</b> Leider: FLOOR ALPHERTS Solisten: H. A. FRIJN, cellist Werkten van: V. MOZART, C. FRANCK, LISZT, BERLIOZ, WAGNER, BRAHMS, GILSON.	Dinsdag 17 Janv. 14 11 u. 30	<b>CONCERT SYMPHONIQUE</b> Direction: FLOOR ALPHERTS Soliste: M. A. FRIJN, celliste. Œuvres de: V. MOZART, C. FRANCK, LISZT, BERLIOZ, WAGNER, BRAHMS, GILSON.
Zondag 14 Febr. 14 11 u. 30	<b>SYMPHONISCH CONCERT</b> Leider: FLOOR ALPHERTS Solisten: M <sup>rs</sup> ZELIA PANIGIEN, pianiste. Werkten van: J. P. RAMEAU, MOZART, H. VIFFEL, H. BERLIOZ, LISZT.	Dinsdag 14 Fevr. 14 11 u. 30	<b>CONCERT SYMPHONIQUE</b> Direction: FLOOR ALPHERTS Soliste: M <sup>rs</sup> ZELIA PANIGIEN, pianiste. Œuvres de: J. P. RAMEAU, MOZART, H. VIFFEL, H. BERLIOZ, LISZT.
Zondag 14 Maart 14 11 u. 30	<b>SYMPHONISCH CONCERT</b> Leider: FLOOR ALPHERTS Solisten: M <sup>rs</sup> L. TRAPTEUR (soprano), H. SCHUY (bas), J. VAN DEN DONGEN (bas). Werkten van: V. BEETHOVEN. ... et ARTI-VOCALI	Dinsdag 14 Mars 14 11 u. 30	<b>CONCERT SYMPHONIQUE</b> Direction: FLOOR ALPHERTS Solistes: M <sup>rs</sup> L. TRAPTEUR (soprano), HM. SCHUY (bas), J. VAN DEN DONGEN (bas). Œuvres de: V. BEETHOVEN, ... et ARTI-VOCALI

Program of the Royal Zoological Society, winter season 1942-1943). Source : Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuys, A2873.



*An unidentified festive concert, organized in occupied Antwerp, by collaborationist DeVlag at the Royal Zoological Society in Antwerp. Source : CEGESOMA Photo n° 19198.*



did not appear on the programs. Nevertheless, Alpaerts performed an eclectic repertoire of works by German, French, Italian, Czech, Russian, and Finnish composers. Music from Belgian, for the most part Flemish composers, was played at every concert and Alpaerts, who had conducted during the interbellum the annual Peter Benoit Festivals, continued the Benoit cult (see later). However, in 1944 Jef Horemans expressed, in the newspaper *Volk en Staat*, regrets about a Mozart program on the anniversary of Benoit's death instead of the traditional Benoit commemoration<sup>38</sup>.

During 23 regular concerts – from 27 October 1940 until 8 March 1944 – Alpaerts conducted 44 performances of German compositions, 27 Flemish, and 1 Walloon, 14 French, 6 Italian, 3 Bohemian, 3 Norwegian and 1 Russian, for a total of 102 performances. All soloists in these concerts were Belgian.

### Concert Society of the Royal Flemish Conservatoire

During the German occupation, the CKVC, conducted by De Vocht in the *Stadsschouwburg* (City Theatre), did not change the pre-war concert repertoire, which mainly consisted of renowned German choral works by Bach, Handel, Mozart, and symphonic works by Beethoven, Franck, Liszt, Schumann, Wagner<sup>39</sup>. The concert season normally featured four concerts. However, during the 1941-42 season six concerts were played, J.S. Bach's *H moll Messe* was performed twice because the hall was fully booked for the first per-

formance and a supplementary performance was given for the benefit of the victims of the National Disaster of Tessenderlo<sup>40</sup>. In season 1942-43 the regular four concerts were augmented with two supplementary concerts, presenting respectively Bach's *Matthäus-Passion* and *H moll Messe*<sup>41</sup>.

In April 1942, after Alpaerts' retirement, Jef Van Hoof became director of the Conservatoire but De Vocht was given full responsibility for the concerts because it was stipulated that the new director could not be, as before, member of the Committee of CKVC<sup>42</sup>. With the cooperation of his *Chorale Caecilia*, De Vocht conducted so-called "festivals" dedicated to Mozart, J. S. Bach, Händel, Beethoven and, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the foundation of CKVC, also a festival De Vocht. But he did not forget Belgian composers such as Alpaerts, Benoit, De Boeck, Mortelmans, Verheyden, Gilson, and Lekeu<sup>43</sup>. With the exception of a Bohemian violinist, all soloists were Belgians.

According to newspaper reviews, De Vocht possessed thorough command and artistic inspiration and the concerts of CKVC were unprecedented artistic events<sup>44</sup>. In 21 regular concerts – from 30 November 1940 until 20 May 1944 – De Vocht conducted a total of 52 performances, of which 28 German works, 12 Flemish, 6 Norwegian, 2 Bohemian, 2 Italian, 1 French, and 1 Russian.

### Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra

In an interview with the newspaper *De Dag* of 5 July 1940, Hendrik Diels, chief conductor of the

38. *Volk en Staat*, 10 March 1944, p. 3: "K.M. voor Dierkunde. Mozart-festival".

39. The opera company of the Royal Theatre, situated at the Comedieplaats, was liquidated in 1933 and the theatre company of the *Koninklijke Nederlandsche Schouwburg* (Royal Dutch Theatre, acronym KNS), situated Kipdorpvest, moved to the Royal Theatre, which henceforth was renamed *Koninklijke Nederlandsche Schouwburg*. However, during World War II it was called *Stadstheater* (City Theatre).

40. On April 29, 1942, a stock of ammonium nitrate exploded at the chemical plant of Tessenderlo (*Produits chimiques de Tessenderlo*). Approximately 190 people died.

41. OCD, programs Concertvereniging van het Kon. VI. Conservatorium.

42. Idem, *Koninklijk Vlaamsch Conservatorium Antwerpen. Verslag over de werkzaamheden en den toestand tijdens de schooljaren 1941-1942 en 1942-1943*, Antwerpen, 1943, p. 13.

43. When the program of a concert was dedicated to the work of one composer, this concert was announced as a "festival".

44. *De Dag*, 28 April 1942, p. 5: "Konservatoriumconcerten. Glansrijke uitvoering van Bach's Hoogmis"; Idem, 17 April 1943, p. 2: "Bach-Festival der Conservatoriumconcerten".

CONCERTVEREENIGING VAN HET KONINKLIJK  
VLAAMSCH CONSERVATORIUM - ANTWERPEN

8 e Jaar  
4e en 5e Concert

1941 - 1942

Zaterdag 25 April 1942

om 15.30 uur

Dinsdag 28 April 1942

om 18.30 uur

JOH. SEB. BACH

# H moll MESSE

voor orgel, koren en orkest

door het ORKEST van het Conservatorium

met de welwillende medewerking der Chorale Cæcilia

o n d e r d e l e i d i n g v a n

Lod. de Vocht

## Solisten

Mw. Ria Lenssens, sopraan

Mw. Th. Versteegh, alt

Hr. Fr. Anspach, tenor

Hr. A. Leroy, bas

Hr A. PAPEN, orgel

Mej. I. BOGAERT, clavecimbel

Hr J. VAN POPPEL, viool-solo

Hr THEELEN, oboe-d'amore

Hr BONNE, oboe-d'amore

Hr CREVIAUX, oboe

Hr VAN DEN BOGAERT, oboe

Hr SIMOENS, hoorn

KVO, member of DeVlag, and founding member of the *Allgemeine SS-Vlaanderen*, declared that in April he had founded PHOVA which would be a permanent orchestra following the example of great philharmonic orchestras abroad, with the intent to play the masterpieces in their repertoire without neglecting works of Flemish composers, to refrain both from light music repertoire and from hazardous experiments of an exacerbated modernism, and “not to tolerate any political or financial interference”<sup>45</sup>. However, the statement “no political or financial interference” was only a lure to increase public attendance, because PHOVA was founded in the spirit of a German-Flemish friendship and the concerts were organized in close cooperation with DeVlag<sup>46</sup>. Moreover, the prices of these concerts were cheaper than those of the Zoo and CKVC concerts. PHOVA presented both a summer and a winter season and formed in its womb a chamber orchestra (conducted by Ernest Van der Eyken) and a string quartet (with Jos. Van der Smissen as first violin). The link between PHOVA and the KVO is evident: conductor Diels, first violin Van der Smissen, alto Van der Eyken and most of the 80 musicians of the orchestra also played in the opera orchestra and the official address, Van Erbornstraat, is the same as that of the KVO. Diels afforded thus a permanent job for the musicians of the KVO but the forming of a new orchestra in April 1940, in the midst of the mobilisation of the Belgian army, confirmed his political convictions<sup>47</sup>.

According to Diels’ interview, PHOVA’s first concert, scheduled for 27 May 1940, was postponed because of the invasion of Belgium by Hitler’s army on 10 May 1940. After the capitulation of the Belgian army on 28 May 1940, Diels conducted the first summer concert on 7 July 1940 in the former summer local of the Royal Harmony Society, made available without charges by the Antwerp municipality. The newspaper *De Dag* praised it as an artistic event of exceptional importance<sup>48</sup>. However, from the summer of 1941 on, all con-

certs were given at the KVO. PHOVA played nine summer concerts in 1940, seven in 1941, five in 1942, but none in 1943. Each concert featured a work of a Flemish composer. The first concert of the 1942 summer season was devoted to works of Jef Van Hoof, a fervent Flemish activist since World War I and director of the KVC since 24 April 1942. All concerts were conducted by Diels, except two in 1940 and 1941 by Renaat Veremans (second conductor of the KVO), one in 1941 by Paul Douliez (conductor for *Zender-Brussel* and member of the *Waffen SS*) and the second part of the Van Hoof-concert by the composer. All soloists in these summer concerts, with the exception of one German, were Belgian.

The winter concerts of PHOVA were organized by Diels in a different way. During the first winter season 1940-41 the concerts were played in the City Theatre but from winter season 1941-42 until 1943-44 all concerts were given at the KVO. In 1940-41 two of the nine concerts were conducted by two Germans, in 1941-42 and 1942-43 four of the nine concerts by four Germans, in 1943-44 three of the ten concerts by three Germans. In 1940-41 five Belgian, one Russian and two German soloists contributed to these concerts, in 1941 and 1942-43 four Germans and two Belgians, in 1943-44 two Germans and five Belgians. Diels engaged German conductors such as Hugo Balzer, Gustav Classens, Karl Elmendorff, Heinz Dressel, Bruno Vondenhoff, and famous soloists such as pianists Walter Gieseking and Walter Rummel or cellist Ludwig Hoelscher, but he did not neglect to also invite Belgian pianists as Lode Backx, Emmanuel Durllet, Eugene Traey, and Yvonne Van den Berghe, violinist Alfred Dubois, alto Frans Broos, and cellist Adolphe Frezin.

From 7 July 1940 to 12 June 1944, PHOVA played 21 summer concerts and 37 winter concerts, for a total of 58 regular symphonic concerts featuring 250 performances of 146 German compositions,

45. *Idem*, 5 July 1940, p. 3: “geen politieke of kapitaalkrachtige groep [zal] aan de touwtjes trekken ...”.

46. *Jahresbericht...* (CEGESOMA, PAB Jahresbericht 1941, p. 41).

47. On Diels’ condemnation by court-martial after the war, see ERIK BAECK, “The Wagner Cult ...”, p. 159-175.

48. *De Dag*, 8 July 1940, p. 9.

**PHILHARMONISCH ORKEST  
VAN ANTWERPEN**

DIRIGENT HENDRIK DIELS  
KONINKLIJKE THEATERS VAN ANTWERPEN  
VLAAMSCHE OPERA - FRANKRIJKLEI



**76°  
CONCERT**

**Maandag 14 Februari 1944 te 20 uur**

**DIRIGENT**

**HENDRIK DIELS**

**SOLIST**

**WALTER RUMMEL**

**Kodaly: Harry Janos-Suite — Beethoven:  
Pianoconcert Nr. 3 in C kl. t. — De Schrijver:  
Romantische Symphonie (1<sup>e</sup> uitvoering) —  
Smetana: Ouverture tot „De Verkochte  
Bruid”.**

**Toegangsprijzen: van 4 tot 40 Fr.**

**KAARTVERKOOP: Koninklijke Vlaamse Opera, dagelijks van 11 tot 15 uur,  
Tel. 366.85 — Huis Faes, Schoenmarkt, Tel. 267.21 — Huis Prop, Frankrijklei —  
Avondkas: van 19 uur af in de Opera.**

Drukk. v. Broos, H. Breugelmann, Antw. - A.F.P.A. 1740

61 Flemish, 15 French, 8 Bohemian, 8 Scandinavian, 5 Russian, 4 Italian, 1 Spanish, and 1 Hungarian. Diels conducted the great classical, romantic, and post-romantic repertoire which also included works of many Flemish composers such as Benoit, De Boeck, Candaël, D'haeyer, De Schrijver, Duvoisel, Gilson, Maes, Mortelmans, Van Hoof, Schampaert, Schoemaker, Van Hemel, Verheyden, Veremans, and Wambach. However, in the last season, Flemish works were not as systematically played as before. The poster of the concert of 12 June 1944 mentioned R. Strauss' *Alpensymfonie* on the occasion of the composer's eightieth birthday but the music score did not arrive in time and the work was replaced by Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony.

Some events were ample proof of Diels' political engagement, for instance the "Kunstfeest" (Art-Festival), organized by DeVlag and conducted by Diels and Van Hoof in the KVO on Sunday morning 11 July 1942 for the commemoration of the *Guldensporenslag* (Battle of the Golden Spurs in 1302) and Diels' cooperation with PHOVA, playing Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*, on 14 November 1943 at the Grand ceremony with speeches by Jef Van de Wiele (national leader of DeVlag) and *Hauptbannführer* (court territory leader) Bennewitz in the concert hall of the Antwerp Zoo on occasion of the admission of boys and girls of DeVlag in the *Hitlerjeugd-Vlaanderen* (Hitler Youth Flanders) in the presence of members of the *Waffen SS*, *Germaanse SS Vlaanderen*, *Wehrmacht* (German Armed Forces), and *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP)<sup>49</sup>.

## Conclusion

Concert life in Antwerp was not interrupted during World War II. The orchestras of the Zoological Society and the CKVC continued to play concerts as during the interbellum with their respective

conductors, Fl. Alpaerts and L. De Vocht. Moreover, confirming the link with DeVlag and Hitler's New Order, a new symphonic orchestra, PHOVA, was founded by H. Diels in April 1940 primarily with musicians of the KVO, and performed summer and winter concerts from 7 July 1940 until 12 June 1944 with Diels, German conductors, and Flemish and German soloists. The repertoire of all those orchestras consisted predominantly of German and Flemish works i.e., "Germanic music" according to the Nazis. The situation in Antwerp was thus somewhat similar to that in Brussels, where the Société Philharmonique (Philharmonic Society) continued to organize concert series with the Belgian National Orchestra in the Palace of Fine Arts, albeit with fewer foreign guest conductors, and the Concerts of the Royal Conservatoire continued their concerts, although no longer under its conductor Désiré Defauw but with Conservatoire director Leon Jongen. Finally, as in Antwerp, a new symphonic orchestra was formed, the orchestra of Zender Brussel, conducted by Theo Dejoncker and Paul Douliez, who pursued the same Nazi ideology as Diels and PHOVA.

## IV. The Benoit Cult Throughout both World Wars

A survey of concert culture in Antwerp during World War I and II would not be complete without evoking the local Benoit cult, which shows parallels between both wars.

Indeed, after much resistance and difficulties, Peter Benoit (1834-1901), director of the *Stadsmuziekschool van Antwerpen* (Municipal Music School of Antwerp) since 1867, had succeeded in having this school elevated by the Belgian government to the status of Royal Flemish Conservatory in 1898. Averse to cosmopolitanism, he defended his Flemish-nationalist ideas with writings and compositions such as songs, cantates, oratorios,

49. *De Dag*, 1 July 1942, p. 5, 9 July 1942, p. 5, 12-13 July 1942, p. 7; *De Gazet*, 15 November 1943, p. 3 with an extensive review of the ceremony and a photograph of the podium decorated with banners and a giant swastika; *De Dag*, 16 November 1943, p. 1.



and so-called “Flemish lyric dramas” on Dutch texts and became an icon of the Flemish Movement<sup>50</sup>. After the formation of the Peter Benoit Foundation in 1902, with registered office at the Royal Zoological Society in Antwerp, in order to honour the memory of “Flanders’ greatest composer”, according to Jan Boucherij, with the performance and editing of his works, Edward Keurvels, conductor at that time of the symphonic orchestra of the Royal Society of Zoology, had installed a tradition of annual Benoit commemorations supported by Zoo director Michel L’hoëst Sr.<sup>51</sup>.

As mentioned above, the Royal Zoological Society did not organize regular concerts during World War I. But on 22 June 1917, the *Antwerpsche Syndicale Kamer der Kinemas*, a cinema association also chaired by L’hoëst Sr., presented a “Great Art Evening” in the concert hall of the Zoo, featuring works of Benoit during the first part of the evening with soloists, choir, and symphonic orchestra under the direction of Alpaerts<sup>52</sup>. Four months later, a (activist) general committee with Flemish authors Pol de Mont (chairman), Emmanuel De Bom (secretary), Dutch bookstore director Lucas Hendrik Smeding (treasurer), and Flemish composers Lodewijk Ontrop (former conductor of the Concerts of Sacred Music), and Jef Van Hoof (choir conductor of the association *Liederavonden voor het volk*) as artistic leaders, assisted by an executive committee and supported by the Flemish activist leaders, organized on 14 and 28 October 1917 in the Antwerp Hippodrome-Palace, crammed to

capacity and in attendance of German officers, two performances of Benoit’s oratorium *De Schelde*<sup>53</sup>. These concerts by more than 450 performers (six soloists, mixed choir of 400 singers, and an orchestra), conducted by Ontrop and Van Hoof, were extensively publicized and praised in Flemish activist and German newspapers<sup>54</sup>. The objective to perform *De Schelde*, glorifying the historical fight for freedom of Flanders, was obvious: it supported indeed the striving for political independence of Flanders by the *Raad van Vlaanderen* (Council of Flanders) – a kind of Flemish parliamentary council established by the activists in February 1917 – proclaimed by August Borms on 23 December 1917 (but rejected by the Germans).

In World War II, the celebrations of Benoit by Alpaerts with the orchestra and choir of the Royal Zoological Society did not have the same grandeur as they had during the interbellum. But on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Benoit’s death, Alpaerts, also director of the KVC from 1933 to 1941, conducted with the CKVC a concert in the *Huurschouwburg* (Rented Theatre, i.e., the former Royal Dutch Theatre on the Kipdorpbbrug), broadcasted by Zender Brussel on 8 March 1941, with three works of Benoit, “Flanders’ greatest composer” according to *De Dag*<sup>55</sup>.

In May 1940, the Antwerp city council had planned a commemoration of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Peter Paul Rubens’ death which had to be cancelled due to the Nazi invasion. However, the *Mil-*

50. HERMAN BACCAERT, *Peter Benoit. Een Kampioen der Nationale Gedachte*, Antwerpen, 1919; ERIK BAECK and HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS, “Fétis versus Benoit. Een conflict over kosmopolitisme en nationalisme in het Belgisch muziekleven”, in *Revue belge de Musicologie*, LXII, 2008, p. 231-250; Id., “Wat gebeurde er met ‘Het Meilief’ van Peter Benoit?”, in *Post Factum. Jaarboek voor Geschiedenis en Volkskunde*, 2, (Provincie Antwerpen), 2010, p. 87-127.

51. JAN BOUCHERIJ, “Een Woord vooraf”, in *Peter Benoits-fonds. Jaarboek over 1902-1903*, Antwerpen, 1904. p. VII. See also HEDWIGE BAECK-SCHILDERS, “Edward Keurvels, violist, muziekrecensent, libretto-vertaler, dirigent en componist”, in *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, 24, Brussel, 2020, p. 721-750.

52. *Het Tooneel*, 16 June 1917, p. 3: “Grote Kunstavond” with in the second part an extraordinary cinema screening; about Michel L’hoëst and the cinema association, see LEEN ENGELEN & ROEL VANDE WINKEL, “A Captivated Audience. Cinema-going at the zoological garden in occupied Antwerp, 1915-1918”, in *First World War studies*, 8:3, 2017, p. 1-22.

53. The Hippodrome, built on the Leopold De Waelplaats in 1902 as a multi-purpose theatre that could accommodate some three thousand people, was demolished in 1973.

54. *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, 30 September 1917, p. 3, 10 October 1917, p. 3, 13 October 1917, p. 1, 15 October 1917, p. 1, 16 October 1917, p. 3, 24 October 1917, p. 1, 28 October 1917, p. 1; *Antwerpsche Courant*, 7 October 1917, p. 2, 13 October 1917, p. 1, 15 October 1917, p. 1; *Het Tooneel*, 13 October 1917, p. 1-2, 20 October 1917, p. 1; *Vlaamsch Leven*, 21 October 1917, p. 10; *Belgischer Kurier*, 16 October 1917, p. 7.

55. *De Dag*, 7 March 1941, p. 9; 9 March 1941, p. 1.

*itärverwaltung* insisted already in August 1940 that Antwerp should organize a Rubens celebration<sup>56</sup>. The fact that the famous Antwerp painter was born in Siegen (Germany) may explain the enthusiasm of German authorities for this event. After much discussion, the official Rubens commemoration organized by the Antwerp city council finally took place in November 1940 including, as a highlight, L. De Vocht conducting Benoit's cantata *Vlaanderen's Kunstroem*, known as *Rubens cantata*, on 16 November in the *Stadsfeestzaal* (City Festival Hall on the Meir) with the orchestra of the CKVC and the best choirs of the city, including De Vocht's Caecilia choir. This performance was repeated once more on Sunday 24 November 1940<sup>57</sup>.

Moreover, the choice of the popular *Rubens cantata* fitted in with the "cultural reconstruction in Flanders" as envisaged by Flemish collaborative societies. Already at the end of July 1940 *De Dag* had announced that the *Verbond van Vlaamse Kultuurverenigingen van Antwerpen* (Association of Flemish Cultural Societies of Antwerp) in collaboration with the *Vlaamsch Nationaal Zangverbond* (Flemish National Song Association) would organize performances of the *Rubens cantata* in Antwerp on 24 and 25 August 1940 (these scheduled performances did not take place) and that performances in other Flemish cities were also planned<sup>58</sup>. However, on 22 August 1940, *Volk en Staat* reported that, regardless of all official initiatives, the Association of Flemish Cultural Soci-

ties, the Flemish National Song Association, conductor Hendrik Diels and 500 performers (mixed choir, children's choir, and PHOVA) would place themselves at the service of Flemish culture with performances of the *Rubens cantata* in various Flemish cities, such as Hasselt, Brussels, Ostend, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp throughout the month of September<sup>59</sup>. On Sunday 1 September 1940, the series started in Mechelen on the Grote Markt, organized by *Kunst en Cultuurclub 'Tijl'* (Art and Culture club 'Tijl')<sup>60</sup>. Subsequent performances took place on the Grote Markt in Sint-Niklaas on 8 September, organized by the *Kunstverbond van Sint-Niklaas* (Art Association of Saint-Nicolas) in cooperation with the city administration<sup>61</sup>; in Brussels on 15 September in the great hall of the Palais des Beaux Arts, organized by the board of the *Muziekfonds* (Music Fund) "to recapture the Brussels social life by Flemish art"<sup>62</sup>; in Merksem, on 14 September, the performance was cancelled due to bad weather, and Diels conducted only the Flemish national fight song *De Vlaamse Leeuw*<sup>63</sup>. Finally, a performance of the *Rubens cantata* with Diels in the *Handelsbeurs* in Antwerp, organized by the Association of Flemish Cultural Societies of Antwerp for the benefit of *Winterhulp*, was announced for 8 December, but postponed "due to circumstances" to 21 December 1940<sup>64</sup>.

Four years later, on 24 July 1944, Diels conducted Benoit's oratorium *De Schelde* with PHOVA, the KVO choir, and vocal soloists in the KVO in Ant-

56. THOMAS VAN DRIESSCHE, "Emiel Van Averbeke en de 'herscheping' van het Rubenshuis", *Monumenten en Landschappen*, 32, 2, 2013, p. 23.

57. *Volk en Staat*, 8 November 1940, p. 6, 18 November 1940, p. 7, 19 November 1940, p. 7.

58. *De Dag* 29 July 1940, p. 6.

59. *Volk en Staat*, 22 August 1940, p. 5, 29 August 1940, p. 6.

60. *Volk en Staat*, 3 September 1940, p. 3.

61. *De Dag*, 6 September 1940, p. 7; *Volk en Staat*, 8 September 1940, p. 4; see also ILSE MARQUENNE, *Emiel Van Haver en het cultureel leven in Sint-Niklaas tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, consulted on 24 July 2021 at [www.ethesis.net>van-haver>van-haver-deel-II](http://www.ethesis.net>van-haver>van-haver-deel-II).

62. *Volk en Staat*, 15 September 1940, p. 3, 18 September 1940, p. 3: "... de herovering van het Brusselsch gezelschapsleven door de Vlaamse kunst"; *De Dag*, 17 September 1940, p. 7.

63. *Volk en Staat*, 14 September 1940, p. 3, 15 September 1940, p. 3.

64. *Volk en Staat*, 21 November 1940, p. 4, 1 December 1940, p. 4, 12 December 1940, p. 4, 14 December, p. 3, 20 December 1940, p. 4, 21 December 1940, p. 4. It is not certain whether this performance took place because no review appeared afterwards. *Winterhulp* was an organisation that came into being during World War II with the approval of the *Militärverwaltung*.

Verbond van Vlaamsche Cultuurverenigingen en  
Vlaamsch Nationaal Zangverbond

GROOTE MARKT

MECHELEN

**ZONDAG 1 SEPTEMBER 1940, TE 16 UUR**  
ingericht door **KUNST- EN CULTUURCLUB „TIJL”**

ONDER DE HOOGHE BESCHERMING VAN HET MECHELSCHÉ STADSBESTUUR

**VOLKSUITVOERING VAN DE**

**Rubenscantate**

(VLAANDEREN'S KUNSTROEM)

VAN

**PETER BENOIT**

MET DE MEDEWERKING VAN HET

**Philharmonisch Orkest van Antwerpen**

ONDER LEIDING VAN

**HENDRIK DIELS**

600 UITVOERDERS

ORKEST VAN 90 LEDEN

**Prijzen der plaatsen: 20 fr., 10 fr., en 5 fr.: zitplaatsen - Staandeplaatsen: 3 fr.**

Vrij van zegel.

(Zaak 1940) © Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van Letteren

*Conductor Hendrik Diels and the Philharmonic Orchestra of Antwerp performed the Rubens cantata in several Flemish cities. This was an advertisement for the performance on the Great Square of Mechelen (Malines), on 1 September 1940. Source: CEGESOMA Photo n° 268510.*

werp and repeated it on 28 July 1944 due to its “great success” according to newspaper reports<sup>65</sup>. Moreover, he still planned another performance of *De Schelde* in the Alhambra Theatre at Brussels on 11 September 1944, but meanwhile Brussels was liberated, and this event never materialised<sup>66</sup>. The program of *De Schelde* was thus once more symbolic for political aims. Indeed, hadn’t August Corbet, administrator-secretary of the Royal Flemish Conservatoire, written in 1942: “Thanks to him [Benoit], Flanders occupies a fully-fledged position in the breakthrough of the new ideas of the age, which we are currently experiencing in Europe”, concluding that “we get to know Benoit as one of the main levers of this change of mind in our country and for our people”<sup>67</sup>?

## V. General Conclusions

Research on Antwerp concert culture in World War I and II reveals both parallels and differences. During World War I, concert organization in Antwerp was different than in pre-war years because all symphonic societies suspended their concerts. However, after the lifting of the ban on entertainment in 1915, new orchestras such as the New Orchestral Society with conductor F. Van Dyck and the Leonidas concerts with C. Borré played concert series in private movie-theatres. The concert series by the German Symphonic Orchestra German in Brussels, named Volbach-concerts after their German conductor F. Volbach, were repeated in the Flemish Opera, which had been requisitioned by the occupying forces. In World War II, the orchestras of the Royal Zoological Society and the Royal Flemish Conservatoire continued their subscription concerts as before the war with their respective conductors Fl. Alpaerts and L. De Vocht. Moreover, a new orchestra, the Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra, founded and conducted by opera con-

ductor H. Diels, played both summer and winter concerts, affording thus a full-time job for musicians of the Royal Flemish Opera.

During World War I, the New Orchestral Society played 22 concerts, the orchestra of the Leonidas Circle barely 7, and the German Symphonic Orchestra 31, in total 60 concerts. In World War II, the orchestra of the Royal Zoological Society gave 23 concerts, the orchestra of the Royal Flemish Conservatoire 21 concerts, and the Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra 21 summer and 37 winter concerts, in total 102 concerts. The number of concerts in World War II was thus almost twice as many as in World War I, partially because World War I concerts started only in the third year of the war and World War II concerts were given during four war years, and the Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra playing moreover three summer seasons.

During World War I, the repertoire of the New Orchestral Society consisted of 30% German, 25% French, and 19% Flemish music; the Leonidas Concerts played 24% French, 22% German, and 22% Flemish works and the Volbach Concerts 83% German, 4% French, and 1,5% Flemish compositions. Works of Jewish composers appeared on the programs during World War I, but a ban on music of Jewish and “disliked” composers was issued by the Nazis in World War II. During this war the orchestra of the Royal Zoological Society played 43% German, 26% Flemish, 3% Bohemian, and 3% Norwegian works, resulting in 75% “Germanic” music; the Concerts of the Royal Flemish Conservatoire presented 54% German, 22% Flemish, 10% Norwegian, and 4% Bohemian works, totalizing 90% “Germanic” music; the Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra performed 59% German, 25% Flemish, and 3% Bohemian works, representing 87% “Germanic” repertoire.

65. *Volk en Staat*, 27 July 1944, p. 2; *De Dag*, 22 July 1944, p. 2, 26 July 1944, p. 2.

66. ERIC DEROM, “Symphonic Music in occupied Belgium 1940-1944. The role of German-Friendly Music Societies”, *Revue belge de Musicologie*, 69, 2015, p. 109-125.

67. AUGUST CORBET, *Geschriften van Peter Benoit*, Antwerpen, 1942, p. 9-10: “Mede dank zij [Benoit] bekleedt Vlaanderen een volwaardige positie in de doorbraak der nieuwe tijdsgedachten, welke wij thans in Europa beleven [...] leeren wij Benoit kennen als een der voornaamste hefboomen van deze kentering der gedachten in ons land en voor ons volk”.

The objective of the Nazis to favour “Germanic” works was thus largely fulfilled.

During World War I, conductors and soloists of the New Orchestral Society and the Leonidas concerts were Flemish; the German conductor Volbach engaged only German soloists and ceded his baton only a few times to German guest-conductors and to the Flemish composer L. Duvosel. In World War II, foreign soloists were not invited by the Royal Zoological Society and the soloists of the Concert Society of the Royal Flemish Conservatoire were also Flemish, except one, but numerous German conductors and soloists were engaged for the concerts of the Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra.

During World War I, Volbach had the best organization, the largest financial means, and the most famous German soloists at his disposal in order to demonstrate the superiority of German music, ful-

filling thus General-Governor von Bissing’s intentions. In World War II, conductor Diels fostered the aim to attain with his Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra the same level as German orchestras, inviting many German conductors and soloists but Flemish soloists as well.

During World War I, Flemish activists had already been drawn into collaboration by von Bissing’s *Flamenpolitik* and supported the performance of Benoit’s oratorio *De Schelde* as leverage for Flemish complaints, in particular striving for the political independence of Flanders. But in World War II, H. Diels, member of the *Allgemeine SS-Vlaanderen* and DeVlag, instrumentalized the music of German and Flemish composers – “Germanic music” in the Nazi racial terminology – as a major tool of propaganda in order to strengthen ties between Flanders and Nazi-Germany in the context of the New Order.

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### Abbreviations

CKVC = Concert Society of the Royal Flemish Conservatoire

KVC = Royal Flemish Conservatoire

PHOVA = Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra

KVO = Royal Flemish Opera

KNS = Royal Dutch Theatre

DeVlag = Deutsch-Vlämische Arbeitsgemeinschaft

PAB = Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien



