

# Ten Holt

## CANTO OSTINATO

### 2 PIANO VERSION



Jeroen van Veen · Sandra van Veen

## Simeon ten Holt 1923-2012

### *Canto Ostinato for two pianos*

Version Jeroen & Sandra van Veen

1. Section 01	5'46	16. Section 91 A	8'22
2. Section 10	12'22	17. Section 91 F	8'53
3. Section 17	3'51	18. Section 95, Cumulation II	9'15
4. Section 20	9'51	19. Section 105	4'11
5. Section 34	6'13	20. Section 84	3'38
6. Section 41	9'11	21. Section 89	2'10
7. Section 56	2'41	22. Incanto 6 *	3'27
8. Section 60	1'51	23. Incanto 6, Chords *	18'39
9. Section 69	3'51	24. Incanto 6, Conclusion *	7'20
10. Section 74, Cumulation I	8'23	25. Section 91 A	8'31
11. Section 83	3'14	26. Section 91 F	9'02
12. Section 84	3'33	27. Section 95, Cumulation II	9'23
13. Section 88 A	11'54	28. Section 105	1'49
14. Section 88 E	21'28	29. Section 106	2'10
15. Section 89	2'16		

\*a composition by Jeroen van Veen

Jeroen van Veen & Sandra van Veen

## Canto Ostinato

Simeon ten Holt wrote Canto Ostinato between 1976 and 1979 from behind the piano. The first public performance of the piece in Bergen, NH was both praised and criticized. It was critiqued for its sweetness and simplicity. Ten Holt wrote his pieces at a time when people were used to an entirely different kind of music; composers in aspiration for financial support from the “Fonds voor de Scheppende Toonkunst” better wrote their work in an atonal style. Nevertheless, Simeon covertly pursued his own way since he realized that the atonal style he had utilized thus far was not really working for him. He used to call his work “the tonality after the death of tonality”. Eventually it became a success. Tens of thousands of albums have been sold and it has long been an iTunes hit. That’s a unicum for a contemporary Dutch composer.

What attracts people to Canto Ostinato? It has been called immersive, tranquillizing, melancholic, vivaciously, romantic and minimalistic. The charm is in the clarity of sounds, best comparable to piano music of Chopin. The special time signature with repetitive groups of five beats (not exactly repetitive; subtle changes may be induced according the performer’s preference) has an almost mesmerizing effect on the listener. Like “going out and coming home”, music is a play of tension and relief that fades because of the elongated repetition of these groups. Using the varying repetition and the difference in orchestration, a listener’s journey through Canto varies each performance.

In addition to Canto Ostinato, Simeon ten Holt wrote similar compositions like Soloduiveldans (Solo Devil’s Dance), Horizon, Lemniscaat, Incantatie IV and Méandres. A notable change in these last pieces is Simeon’s gradually changing attitude towards the performer’s freedom to bringing variance in playing the pieces, which decreased over time. Two most contrasting works of him relating this freedom of variance are Canto Ostinato, which gives lots of freedom, and Méandres, a later work of him that gives the performers less freedom. Freedom in music has to be seen within a certain context, something that has to be *learned*, according to Simeon.

Ten Holt stopped composing in 2000. “Wat ik te zeggen had, was gezegd” (“All I

had to say has been said”) he wrote in the peroration of his memoirs (“Het woud en de citadel”, 2009). In 2013 “Canto Ostinato” by Wilma de Rek was published. She talks in detail about her interviews with Simeon ten Holt and some musicians. Simeon ten Holt died 25 November 2012 at the age of 89.

I was very lucky to have met this great composer and spend much time with him, taught him how to use a computer, write his first email, build and maintained a website and founded a foundation dedicated to Simeon and his wonderful music.

Since each performance creates a new version the piece is evolving during the years. In 1996 Sandra and I recorded the first version, in 2008 a version that Ten Holt liked the most and the last one was in 2014 (Canto Ostinato XXL, four pianos and organ). This new version you are holding now is the latest including all the varieties we developed during the many performances we did worldwide. The last few years we also included a composition written by me, Incanto 6, which is a sort of more minimalistic approach. It fits into the Canto Ostinato and has become our signature over the years. We hope you enjoy listening to this recording as much as we were enjoying the recording process. If you would like to listen to the complete Canto Ostinato, just play tracks 1-20. If you would like another version after the tracks 1-12 just play tracks 1-7 and 21-30 (including my Incanto 6). In a way an interactive way of listening to the Canto Ostinato.

© Jeroen van Veen

#### **Instructions from his first hand written score**

The first performance of Canto Ostinato took place on April 25th 1979 in the Ruinekerk in Bergen (Holland) and was realized using three pianos and an electronic organ. Other combinations are possible using keyboard instruments. But the performance with four pianos is preferred. Canto stems from a traditional source, is tonal and makes use of functional harmony; it is built according to the laws of cause and effect (tension-release). Although all parts of Canto have their fixed position in its progress and are not interchangeable without violating the melodic line, the internal logic and form, beginning and end do not have absolute meaning as boundaries of form. Time plays an important role in Canto. Although most bars or sections feature repeat signs and although the performer(s) decide(s) on the number of repeats, one cannot speak of repetition-as-such. Repetition in this case has as its goal to create a situation in which the musical object affirms its independence and can search for its most favorable position with respect to the light thrown on it, becoming transparent. Time becomes the space in which the musical object floats. The performers have a wide margin of contribution. They decide about dynamic contrast, duration (in detail as well as for the whole) about the use of opposing or non-opposing differentiation of timbres, whether or not to play passages in unison. Also about repetition and combination of bars and sections, depending on their place within the score. The performers also decide, depending on available time and physical effort, whether they will take turns or if there will be a pause. At the first performance, which took about two hours, a pause was held at number 88 in the score, a pause in which a pre-recorded tape was played of the first sections (A, B and C) following number 88. The concert was resumed after 25 minutes (tape fade-out). A performance of Canto is more like a ritual than a concert. The piece is not in a hurry and has in common with so called minimal music that one cannot speak of fixed duration. As stated the first performance lasted two hours but it could have easily been more or less. The main part of Canto is indicated by the bracketed systems in bolder type. For the right hand there are two systems on which alternatives (variants) have been notated. Likewise

there is one alternative staff for the left hand. Apart from these alternatives each bar or section of the basic part itself has the possibility for variation: by displacement of accents and dynamic contrasts. Some suggestions for these are given in the score by thinly drawn stems connecting notes within each group. A new episode begins at figure 88 in the score, a sort of interlude. Bars and sections are indicated now by letters (A,B,C, etc. to I). This episode and the transposed section from figure 91 consists of a number of sections which are more or less small commentaries on the basic structure A. Through its constant return A forms a pivotal or rest point. The ordering of A and its satellite-sections as given in the score is, in a certain sense, relative. The symbol  $\rightarrow\leftarrow$  indicates that in many cases one can either go back or forward in one's choice of sections and that, depending on the harmonies, certain sections can be combined. The variants notated as footnotes from figure 88 (for the left hand) function as a sort of 'wandering part'. They do not have to be present all the time – they can disappear and return – and they need not be filed to the notated octave register.

© Simeon ten Holt, Bergen, June 1979



#### Simeon ten Holt (1923-1989)

Simeon ten Holt was born in Bergen (N.H.) in the Netherlands in 1923 and died in 2012. From 1935 he studied piano and theory with Jacob van Domselaer (1890-1960) – the musical representative of the movement 'De Stijl'. He continued his studies in Paris at the Ecole Normale with Honegger and Milhaud. During the sixties Ten Holt immersed himself in serialism. He tried to grasp what he called 'the semantics of musical language' and looked for ways in which he could expand the possibilities of his musical expression. During the seventies, Ten Holt concentrated on tone and timbre and on sonology. His masterwork Canto Ostinato, in which he returned to a more conventional style of composing, was premiered in 1979 in the 'Ruïne Kerk' in Bergen (province

of Noord-Holland). The work was performed on three pianos and electronic organ. Later on Ten Holt felt that the best performance option would be four equal-sized grand pianos; however, the score still bears the subtitle: for keyboards. "There's Simeon ten Holt and then there's all the rest," the composer of works such as Canto Ostinato, Horizon and Lemniscaat once said jokingly of his own position in Dutch musical life'. Even today, one could say that, in a sense, this is still true. Anyone challenging a select group of contemporary music lovers to a fiery debate need only mention a single composer's name: that of Simeon ten Holt (b. 1923). In the late 1970s, Ten Holt provoked the wrath of countless musical know-alls by returning to sounds that every ear could understand. He had the courage to abandon the complex, twelve-tone scores of the post-war era, which he traded in for simple triads, shifting rhythmic patterns and repeat signs. Completely independent of American composers



like Steve Reich and Philip Glass, Ten Holt created a Dutch version of minimal music". (Paul Janssen) Now what is so typical to Simeon ten Holt's music? In what does his musical process differ so much from that of other contemporary composers? In Ten Holt's music the score is complex, in that it contains a lot of different layers, like a multi-track composition. In classical music the composer typically makes the final decisions about what and how to play; here instead, the performers are the decision-makers and are therefore part of the recreation of the composition. During rehearsals for instance, the ensemble may decide to skip certain decisions or write/compose a way to go through the music. In doing so, all performers within the ensemble have an equal input as well as equal influence on the decisions.

In other words, there is no leading 'first piano'. All compositions in this box were written down in large books. Each composition contains approximately a hundred to two hundred sections. Ninety-five percent of all sections may be repeated, the other five percent are so called 'bridges' and only appear once. Repetition in this case serves to create a situation in which the musical object affirms its independence and can search the most favourable position with respect to the light thrown on it, becoming transparent. Time becomes the space in which the musical object floats. The musicians navigate through these sections by giving each other visual signs and may even go backwards instead of forward. There is no fixed duration for a piece, but a performance may easily last a couple of hours. The first performance of Lemniscat, for instance, lasted for thirty hours! This extreme flexibility was completely new to modern music, especially since Ten Holt's music is based on the natural laws of harmony: tension and relaxation. The music has been constructed within the principle of tonality, but since the duration is more or less stretched, it brings a new perspective to the musical experience. All of this in combination with the democratic process of creation has been a major influence on contemporary music.



**Sandra van Veen** studied with the Norwegian pianist Håkon Austbø at the Conservatory in Utrecht where she graduated in 1992. She made her debut with her husband Jeroen in a performance of Canto Ostinato during Lek Art (Culemborg). The concert was live recorded and the album has sold in more than 40 countries worldwide. After this, many concerts and albums followed. Sandra is very dedicated to the music of Ten Holt, but nowadays she also plays other kinds of music, ranging from the classical music like Carmina Burana, The Planets, Rhapsody in Blue, to Tangos and Tubular Bells for four pianos. She did the premiere of several pieces

written by Dutch composers like J. Andriessen (in Russia) and Ten Holt (in Canada). Concerts and recitals brought Sandra from Miami to Novosibirsk. She takes part in many projects in Holland as well as abroad. She recorded many albums on various labels. Several concerts and projects have been broadcasted on radio, television and the Internet. Finally, Sandra is a well known, passionate piano teacher as well. Sandra van Veen is a co-founder of the Lek Art Foundation and the Simeon ten Holt Foundation. She runs her own company 'De Walnoot' based in Culemborg.



**Jeroen van Veen** (1969) started playing the piano at the age of 7. He studied at the Utrecht Conservatory with Alwin Bär and Håkon Austbø. In 1993 he passed the Performing Artists' Exam. Van Veen has played with orchestras conducted by Howard Williams (Adams), Peter Eötvös (Zimmermann), Neal Stulberg (Mozart & Bartok) and Robert Craft (Stravinsky). He has played recitals in Europe, Russia, Canada & the USA. Van Veen attended master classes with Claude Helffer, Roberto Szidon, Ivan Klánsky and Leonid Hambro. He was invited to several festivals: Reder Piano Festival (1988), Festival der Kunsten in Bad Gleichenberg (1992), Wien Modern (1993), Holland Dance Festival (1998, 2010) Lek Art Festival (1996-2009). Van Veen recorded for major Radio- and Television companies. In 1992, Van Veen recorded his first album as Piano duo Van Veen. In 1995 Piano duo Van Veen made their debut in the United States. They were prize-winners in the prestigious 4th International Murray Dranoff Two Piano Competition in Miami, Florida. After this achievement they toured the United States and Canada many times. The documentary "Two Pianos One Passion" (nominated with an Emmy Award 1996) portrays them as a duo. In 2016 Van Veen was awarded with the NPO Radio 4 2016 Award, for his efforts and promotion of classical music beyond the concert halls. His lay-down (ligconcert) concerts were praised as an example how classical music can attract new audiences.

The various compositions by Van Veen may be described as Minimal Music with different faces, Crossovers to Jazz, Blues, Soundscape, Avant-Garde, Techno, Trance and Pop Music. His Minimal Preludes for piano, and his NLXL are some of his most played pieces worldwide. His latest Minimal Piano Concerto Continuum was a great success. In 2015 he premiered his Incanto nr 2 in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw with Sandra van Veen.

Currently Mr. Van Veen is director of Van Veen Productions, Chairman of the Simeon ten Holt Foundation, Pianomania Foundation and artistic director of several music festivals. He is also active as Overseas Artistic Director in the Murray Dranoff Two Piano Competition based in Miami. Over the last 25 years Van Veen recorded

more than 198 albums and 5 DVDs, mostly for Brilliant Classics. His discography includes Adams, Einaudi, Glass, JacobTV, Minimal Piano Collections, Nietzsche, Nyman, Pärt, Piazzolla, Reich, Riley, Satie, Sakamoto, Stravinsky, Tiersen, Ten Holt, Van Veen, Yiruma and many others.

Van Veen is also praised for his productivity some say, ‘the man who records faster than his shadow’.

“Dutch pianist and composer, Jeroen van Veen, the leading exponent of minimalism today”, Alan Swanson (*Fanfare*)

“Jeroen van Veen has for many years been a powerhouse in the piano world of the Netherlands and beyond”, Dominy Clements (*Musicweb-International*)

“The Maximal Minimalist Missionary”, Raymond Tuttle (*Fanfare*)

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