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SNF-Forschungsprojekt «Ina Lohr (1903–1983). Ihr Einfluss auf die Alte Musik in der Schweiz und den Niederlanden»

Hubert Cuypers: A Self-Assertive Musician

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Abstract

One of Ina Lohr's teachers was the musician and composer Hubert Cuypers (1873-1960), highly regarded both within and outside of Catholic circles, in Amsterdam as well as the rest of the Netherlands. This paper, originally presented at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis on 12 May 2016 at the study day on Ina Lohr, places his role in the Censorship Committee as well as in a contentious discussion about the rhythmic performance of plainchant in relation to his biography.

Introduction

One of Ina Lohr's teachers was the musician and composer Hubert Cuypers (1873-1960) with whom I became acquainted when I worked on my dissertation about the confessionalization of musical life in the Netherlands.¹ For this I did research to twelve Dutch Catholic musicians from the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, of which Cuypers was one. When Ina Lohr studied at the Muziek Lyceum in Amsterdam in the 1920s Cuypers was at the peak of his career. He was a highly regarded musician and composer in and outside Catholic circles, in Amsterdam as well as the rest of the Netherlands.

Today – 12 May 2016 at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis – I will be presenting an introduction into Cuypers' life and work. It was Cuypers who first instructed Ina Lohr in the music of the Catholic church. In an article about Sprachmelodik Ina Lohr tells of how Cuypers introduced her to Gregorian chant and the classic polyphony of, among others, Palestrina.² This was an experience that stayed with her for the rest of her life and actually led to the incorporation of plainchant into the curriculum of the Schola. In this article Ina Lohr also writes that Cuypers invited her to join the rehearsals with the boys of his church choir. This was particularly noteworthy, as in those days it was

¹ van Langen 2014. This article is based on the research for my dissertation.

² Lohr 1967, 78.

forbidden for women to sing in church, to say nothing of a Protestant woman. But as my paper will make clear, Cuypers was not a person to unquestionably accept any rule. He chose his own path, was not afraid to be in the vanguard and regularly preferred (at times intense) discussion to subjecting himself to regulation.

First, I will present some general information about the upbringing and career of Cuypers and thereafter will discuss two case studies in which Cuypers had an active and remarkable role. The first is his involvement with the so-called Censorship Committee, a committee that judged newly composed music for the Catholic church. Cuypers was not only a member of this committee, but also a composer who had to submit his church compositions for adjudication. The second case study is a discussion about the performance practice of plainchant which took place in 1930 and 1931. This discussion was initiated by Cuypers and was carried out in the newspapers as well as in music journals. Both cases will reveal Cuypers as an unusual and opinionated man.

Upbringing and Career

Cuypers was born in 1873 in a little town called Baexem in the province of Limburg in the south of the Netherlands.³ He grew up in a musical environment, his father being the organist and director of the local church choir. Cuypers took lessons in violin, piano and probably music theory. When he was 15 years old in 1889 he went to Aachen to study at the Catholic music school, the Gregoriushaus. This was not just a music school for Catholic church music, but – and I quote –

also a seminary, a boarding school, where together with the sacred music also the true spirit which should animate a servant of the church was communicated.⁴

The core of the curriculum at the Gregoriushaus was plainchant and the music of Palestrina.

Cuypers was an excellent student and before his final exams in 1891 he was asked to be organist in the church of the Redemptorists. He was 17 years old when he moved to Amsterdam and had the good fortune that the choir of this church was among the best in the country. Three years later in 1894, Cuypers also became director of the Alfonsus Choir. With this choir Cuypers achieved a high standard of performance: it consisted of twenty men, forty boys and twenty pupils.⁵ The men rehearsed twice a week, the boys every day. Because of their extraordinary performances of plainchant and the music of Palestrina, the choir was requested by the Amsterdam Conservatory to give private performances for their students. It also performed outside the church in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Cuypers stayed at this church until 1917 when he decided to pursue a career as an independent musician.⁶ This was a remarkable and unusual decision, as church musicians generally stayed on their post and only left when they could improve their

3 See for detailed biographical information: Hubert Cuypers 80 jaar (Amsterdam 1953).

4 'maar ook een seminarium, een internaat, waar met de gewijde muziek ook de ware geest, die eenen kerkelijken bedienaar moet bezielen, zou worden medegedeeld'. Huigens 1906, 75.

5 Gregoriusblad 22 (1897), 49-50.

6 Interview with his son Jules Cuypers, Regionale Omroep Zuid, 18 and 25 December 1982.

status by moving to another church or died. Remarkable as it was, it was also characteristic for a growing assertiveness among Catholic musicians. However, Cuypers was the only musician I know who dared to leave a secure job.

Nevertheless, after seven years, in 1924, Cuypers resumed his career as a church musician. He was employed as an organist and choir director in the newly built Agnes church, also in Amsterdam. He stayed there until 1955 and retired when he was 82 years old.

Cuypers combined his career inside the church with a career outside the church as a choir master, teacher and composer of various vocal genres. Besides music for the church he wrote operettas, oratorios, songs, incidental music and melodrama.

Cuypers was a musician through and through, one of the best musicians and probably the best Catholic musician in the Netherlands in the first half of the 20th century. He was one of the few musicians who had had a formal and full Catholic musical training. In the Netherlands, the first Catholic music school with a program comparable with that of the Gregoriushaus was founded only in 1925.⁷ In the 1880's a few clerics went to the Catholic music school in Regensburg, but there only a one-year program was offered.⁸ So when Cuypers became organist in Amsterdam in 1891, he was the most educated church musician in the country, with a much greater understanding of plainchant and the music of Palestrina than his fellow musicians and the Dutch clergy.

But being the best did not free Cuypers from the obligation, from 1905 onward, of submitting his church compositions to the Censorship Committee.

The Censorship Committee

The Censorship Committee was founded after Pope Pius X (1835-1914) had ordered bishops, all over the world, to create committees for the maintenance of the regulations for the music in the church that he had ordained in a *motu proprio* in 1903.⁹ Besides the rules that forbade women to sing in church, regulated the clothing and described the mentality of church musicians and members of the choir, the Pope prescribed what kind of music was allowed in church. The most important music of the Catholic church was plainchant. Polyphonic music was allowed, but preferably that of the 16th century by Palestrina and his contemporaries. Lastly, new music was allowed, but only if it bore no resemblance whatsoever to secular music, in particular theatrical music.

The Dutch Censorship committee consisted of 27 members and was composed of clerics and lay Catholic musicians. Of course, the chairman was a priest and a man with great authority in the Dutch Catholic world in general and in the Catholic musical world in particular. This man also was chairman of the Gregory Society which was founded in 1878 to promote proper church music. Decades before the Pope published his rules about music in church, the Gregory Society tried to stimulate church choirs in the performance of plainchant and music of Palestrina. Ultimately,

⁷ Vernooij 2002.

⁸ Eppink 1926.

⁹ Van Langen 2014, 'Vakmanschap en zeggenschap', 113-158.

the chairman of the Censorship Committee made the final decisions, assisted by his secretary, also a priest, and in a few cases, by a third priest.

The 27 members of the committee were divided into three sections. Thus not everybody judged every composition that was sent to the committee. Hubert Cuypers was one of the fourteen musicians in the committee, but he, as his fellow musicians, had a dual role. As a member of the committee he judged compositions of other composers and as a composer he had to submit his work to the committee. He remained a member of the committee for decades, indicating that his work as a reviewer was probably well received by the leadership. His own compositions, however, time and again gave rise to debate. In the first decade only one composition was approved immediately; all his other work was sent back with the request that improvements be made.¹⁰

A striking example of this is the course of events surrounding the *Missa Trinitatis*. Cuypers wrote the mass in 1906 and in the decades thereafter it became a favourite of church choirs. There is probably no other work that was performed so many times all over the country; it is sometimes performed still today. But when Cuypers presented the mass to the Censorship Committee, it did not look as if the mass would gain such popularity.

In December 1906 Cuypers send his *Missa Trinitatis* to the committee.¹¹ Nine censors looked at the mass and eight of them were positive. Their judgments varied from not beautiful, 'but no reason to reject it' to a 'solid and really festive composition'.¹² No problem, one might think, but that would have been a too quick conclusion, as the chairman of the committee, Michael Lans (1845-1908) was not in agreement with the others. He asked some other censors, whom he trusted more than the first censors, to look at the manuscript and give advice. In contrast to the first censors, most of these censors were not given the name of the composer, which was a very successful strategy for derailing immediate acceptance. Some of them thought it was the work of an amateur or beginner; others found the mass too 'liedertafelachtig', that is too much like works for a special kind of male choir; or they found the mass too modern or concert-like; or found reminiscences of Wagner. Cuypers was informed about all of this in a meeting in April 1907. It is highly likely that one of the topics discussed was the supposed similarity between a theme of Cuypers' and the clock theme from *Parsifal* by Wagner, as on the following day the composer wrote a detailed letter in which he countered all of the allegations. In his letter he placed the motif of *Parsifal* next to that from his own mass in order to demonstrate how little the themes matched, both melodically as well as rhythmically. But, according to Cuypers, even if the motifs had matched, that would not have been a reason to reject the mass, as the motif in itself had no 'theatrale Anklänge', no theatrical echoes.

Besides, only the adaptation of a motif determines whether or not it is ecclesiastical. Not the motif itself, or it would have to have been in great

10 The approved composition was the double fugue for orgue *Lauda Sion* (1906).

11 Catholic Documentation Centre (KDC, Nijmegen): Archive Nederlandse Sint Gregoriusvereniging (nr. 972), inv. nr. 792: Beoordeling van H. Cuypers, 'Missa in honorem Sanctae Trinitatis' (1907).

12 'geen reden [...] om het N[ihil] O[bstat] te weigeren'; 'degelijke en echt feestelijke compositie'.

conflict with the plainchant. And is my head motif in conflict with the plainchant [...]? We will see.¹³

Subsequently Cuypers pointed out the similarities between his motif and that of the Gregorian melody 'Ite missa est' and asked: 'Why is my motif not considered to be stemming from plainchant instead of trying to make it resemble Parsival's clock motif?'¹⁴ He did not convince the chairman and his closest colleagues who insisted that the motif was from Parsifal. As one of them wrote: Cuypers was just unlucky because 'if Wagner had not used this motif first, then the use of the motif would not have been thusly disapproved.'¹⁵

They sent Cuypers a summary of all the reviews in order to show that only a few censors had approved the mass, and that even these approvals were weak.¹⁶ Comparison of the summaries in this letter with the original reviews show that Lans quoted quite selectively and tweaked some of them in a negative direction. After this Cuypers made several amendations, but kept the motif. Finally on September 14 1907, after nine months, the mass was approved.

By the 1920s all of Cuypers compositions were immediately approved. This probably had to do with the reputation Cuypers had gained by then, because some censors still did not like his music. Some of them called his compositions superficial, old fashioned or unworthy for a composer of his stature. Others suggested that the only reason his music was approved was because of Cuypers' popularity with the people, whether or not they were Catholic.

As this example shows, Cuypers did not hesitate to argue with the clergy, and they accepted this from him. In this Cuypers also was unique as I know of no other Catholic composer who was allowed to speak as Cuypers did. There was another composer who was in agreement with Cuypers on a number of issues, Elbert Franssen (1873-1950). Just before Cuypers clashed with the Censorship Committee about the Missa Trinitatis, Franssen also came into conflict with the self-same committee about a mass. He also was told to make some adjustments, and started to correspond with the chairman and secretary, but contrary to Cuypers, Franssen was not allowed to avail himself of the opportunity of speaking with them. He was told that the music in church was a matter for the clergy and that if he kept questioning this, he would probably not be a member of the Censorship Committee for much longer.¹⁷

13 Daarbij komt dat de bewerking van een motief over het al of niet kerkelijke beslist. Niet het motief zelf of het moest al bar in strijd zijn met het Gregoriaansch. En is mijn hoofdmotief in strijd met het Gregoriaansch [...]? We zullen zien.' Letter of Cuypers to Le Blanc, secretary of the Censorship Committee, 15 April 1907.

14 'Waarom mijn hoofdmotief niet aangehaald als uitvloeisel van het Greg[oriaans] in plaats van het trachten te doen gelijken op dat van Parsivals klokkenmotief?'

15 'Ware Wagner hem niet vóór geweest, dan zoude het gebruik van dit motief niet zoo af te keuren zijn'. Letter of Le Blanc to Lans, 2 May 1907.

16 Netherlands Music Institute (NMI, The Hague): Archive Hubert Cuypers, inv. nr. 89.12: letter of Lans to Cuypers, 27 May 1907.

17 Catholic Documentation Centre (KDC, Nijmegen): Archive Nederlandse Sint Gregoriusvereniging (nr. 972), inv. nr. 123: Kopijboek Hoofdbestuur d[er] Ned[erlandsche] S[int] Gregorius Vereeniging 23 februari 1905 – 24 september 1921: 29 July 1907.

Plainchant

In 1930 Cuypers challenged the clergy again.¹⁸ This time he called the leadership of the Gregorian Society to account for not informing the Dutch church musicians about the most recent insights in the performance of Gregorian chant.

Gregorian chant is monophonic music that is part of the liturgy. According to the legend the melodies were notated in the 6th century by Pope Gregory, hence the attribute Gregorian, but research has shown that the oldest melodies date from around 900. Research on chant began in the middle of the 19th century, dividing itself from the very beginning into two schools.¹⁹ One was under the leadership of the Benedictine monks from Solesmes in France, and the other under that of the clergymen from the so-called Caecilian movement, which had its centre in the city of Regensburg in Germany. The Caecilian movement wanted to restore church music as an integral part of the liturgy. In their research on the original Gregorian chant, the scholars of Regensburg took the Council of Trente (1545-1563) as their starting point and the edition of plainchant that was made in accordance with the Council's decisions, the *Medicaea* of 1614-1615. At that time it was thought that this publication was compiled by the Roman composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525/1526-1594). In Solesmes the Benedictines studied a number of medieval manuscripts to capture the differences and similarities in order to reconstruct the most pure plainchant.

For decades Solesmes and Regensburg were engaged in a controversy about the authenticity of plainchant. At first Regensburg was the most successful. In 1868 the publisher of the Regensburg editions, Friedrich Pustet, acquired the right for thirty years to print all official Roman hymn books and in 1871 he published the *Neo-Medicaea*. But the scholars of Solesmes continued their work, published their results and in 1889 started an impressive series of books of plainchant in facsimile, the *Paléographie Musicale*, to demonstrate that the melodies of the *Neo-Medicaea* were not those found in the manuscripts. They managed to convince Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) of this, who – after the privilege of Pustet had expired in 1898 – decided to follow the direction of Solesmes. From 1908 on they published the *Editio Vaticana*.

Then, however, a new problem arose in that the two most important scholars, Dom Joseph Pothier (1835-1923) and Dom André Mocquereau (1849-1930), came to disagree on the rhythmic interpretation of the melodies. They ended their collaboration and, in addition to the official *Editio Vaticana*, Mocquereau published an *Editio Vaticana* in which he added rhythmic signs that made it easier to sing the melodies. Although the *Vaticana* of Pothier was the official edition, the *Vaticana* of Mocquereau was tolerated by the Pope. In the Netherlands the edition of Mocquereau with the added rhythmic signs came to be used on a large scale. The Dutch clergy was not happy about this – they preferred the edition without rhythmic signs, because it was the only edition that was recommended by the Pope – but by 1920 essentially everybody accepted this preference.

Nonetheless ten years later, in 1930, plainchant once again became the subject of a heated discussion, one instigated by Hubert Cuypers. In an article in the Catholic newspaper *De Tijd*, Cuypers joined the battle with advocates of the edition of Mocquereau. He started his article as follows:

18 van Langen 2014, 'Polemiek als strijd om autoriteit', 195-214.

19 Hoondert 2003.

It is time to declare definitively and frankly to a systematically improperly informed audience that in the current ecclesiastical-musical life, the famous method of Solesmes is an untenable system.²⁰

According to Cuypers, Catholics in all of Europe knew that scholars had proven

that Dom Mocquereau's rhythmic theory is nothing more than an unscholarly system that violates all musicological, historical, philological and palaeographical data and facts.²¹

Only in the Netherlands and America did people stick stubbornly to the system of Mocquereau. Cuypers saw the cause for this in the publicists' and teachers' of plainchant lack of knowledge of the most recent musicological research concerning plainchant, accusing them of dilettantism.

In his article he also wrote that a newspaper was not the appropriate place for a scholarly exposition and therefore announced a forthcoming series of articles in the music journal *Caecilia*. But some of the addressed could not wait that long. One reader expostulated that he was not a dilettante, another was irritated by Cuypers' tone, found it stupid of Cuypers to attack a so respected man as Mocquereau and wondered if Cuypers actually had sufficient knowledge to justify such an attack. Also Cuypers was blamed for operating too much in the interest of his own class, namely that of musicians, who were of course secondary to the class of scholars like Mocquereau, as the theory of scholarly research had more authority than practical experience.

In January, February and March of 1931, Cuypers published three articles in *Caecilia*. Again Cuypers started with a provocation, suggesting that there was no room for his ideas in the *Gregoriusblad*, the journal of the Gregory Society. Therefore he was of necessity forced to turn to a general music journal. He argued that recent research in plainchant from the period before 1100 had shown that Mocquereau's rhythmic solution was wrong, but that the *Gregoriusblad* had been silent about that. The consequence of this was that to new Catholic organists and choir directors, Mocquereau's oeuvre is presented as a source of true knowledge, and that the rhythmic editions are accepted and propagated for liturgical use on the basis of a desirability of a totally fictitious unity.²²

There was great interest in the articles of Cuypers. Newspapers published summaries and reactions with Cuypers winning ground. Some of the people who previously reacted to the article in *De Tijd* held their peace, others responded in the *Gregoriusblad*, and only one or two acknowledged that Cuypers might indeed

20 'Het wordt eindelijk tijd, om beslist en onomwonden aan een systematisch onjuist ingelicht publiek te verklaren, dat in het huidige kerkelijk-muzijkale leven de befaamde methode van Solesmes een onhoudbaar systeem is'. Cuypers 1930.

21 'dat Dom Mocquereau's rhythmische leer niet meer dan een onwetenschappelijk systeem is, dat alle musicologische, historische, philologische en paleografische gegevens en feiten met voeten treedt'. Idem.

22 'dat aan den opgroeiende R.K. organisten- en directeurenstand Mocquereau's oeuvre als de bron der ware kennis wordt aangewezen, en de rhythmische edities [...] in het liturgisch gebruik aanvaard en gepropageerd worden op grond van de wenschelijkheid eener totaal fictieve eenheid'. Cuypers 1930-1931, 106.

have a point. And finally there were those who were of the opinion that Cuypers did not possess qualifications necessary to give him the right to criticize the editions of Mocquereau.

Much more than about Gregorian chant, the discussion was about the question who had the say in respect to the performance of plainchant: was it the musicians or was it the heavyweights of the Gregory Society, which officially represented the ecclesiastical standpoint in regard to the music used in the liturgy. In practice this was a conflict between the (lay) musicians and the clergy, as represented by the Gregory Society. Cuypers blamed the Gregory Society for a lack of respect towards the musicians' craftsmanship. Due to the lack of correct and complete coverage of the relevant musicological research by the proper journals, these musicians did not receive the material necessary for forming their own opinion. By neglecting this duty, Cuypers felt that the Gregory Society was imposing her vision both on musicians and on the faithful.

In Conclusion

In my dissertation I show that the Catholic musical life in The Netherlands was shaped by the interaction between clergy and musicians, who were laymen which stands in contrast with the general belief that the clergy determined everything concerning the Dutch Catholics. The case studies I discussed are an example of that interaction. The anecdote about Ina Lohr singing with the boys of the church choir points at another interaction, namely between Catholics and Protestants. So does the influence Ina Lohr describes of plainchant on her own musical development.

Obviously Cuypers himself was also not held back by boundaries, neither between the clergy and laymen nor those between Catholics and Protestants. Today, of course, we are concerned with Ina Lohr and the influence of Cuypers and Catholic musical culture on her development. But being a scholar of Catholic culture, I am really curious about whether the influence also went in the opposite direction, from Ina Lohr to Cuypers, from Protestantism to Catholicism.

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