

Oscar van Dillen

de Stad

remastered

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de Stad – remastered

de Stad is a Chamber Symphony in 6 parts, written by Oscar van Dillen in 2003.

The work was commissioned by the Museum Rotterdam (formerly Historical Museum Rotterdam), and realised thanks to the inspiring support of Prof. Dr. Paul van de Laar, the museum's director and a visionary scientist with a warm heart for the Arts.

All works, the remastering, and the cover art of this album were created by Oscar van Dillen.

Remastered

Originally released in a more surround sound type of mix, the time is ripe to now release a remastered version, much better suited for our present times and today's streaming platforms used for listening. The composer himself has

meticulously revised the original recordings, corrected and remastered these in his studio, and recreated a completely new take at his work with the help of the latest digital audio tools available.

The recording features **Ensemble Gelber Klang**, conducted by the composer:

- Thomas Reill – bass and contrabass clarinets
- Michael Peuser – bass trombone
- Merima Ključo – accordion
- Jürgen Kruse – grand piano
- Michael Kiedaisch – percussion
- Ulrike Storz – violin
- Marlene Svoboda – viola
- Scott Roller – violoncello
- Holger Philipsen – contrabass
- Oscar van Dillen – conductor

The composition **de Stad** (meaning *the City*, in Dutch) approaches the City as the very basis of Civilization, and muses about the musical as well as the several socio-historical and sometimes even the architectural aspects this entails.

de Stad – the City

With the discovery/invention of *agriculture* some 12,000 years ago, the basis of human life as it had evolved since millions of years changed completely. This new method of providing food brought about a complete revolution in how humans survived and lived together, and it created a schism in the race: there are those who create and share freely, and those who protect and appropriate wealth. Next to farmers and artists/artisans a new and hierarchical caste of soldiers came into being, possibly at first to protect the farming area and the people populating it, but the latter caste eventually started to take power and rule. We humans became a divided and sedentary species, and are still frantically grappling with the consequences today.

We proudly refer to this period as the beginning of what we call *civilization*, today usually looking down on what we call mere *cultures* (in an anthropological sense) that existed before, and which are still said to exist alongside the so-called civilized world, in what are seen as “backward” areas. Civilization created a new type of society, based on the phenomenon of *the City*. Civilization is measured by its cities: where there is civilization, cities exist, where there are no cities, the people may have a culture but are basically regarded as uncivilized. The bigger its cities, the higher a civilization is considered to be. Such is the general consensus.

“What is a city? A city is people. A city is alive. It is a community which lives on a base of agriculture, so much richer than in a village, that it can afford to sustain every kind of craftsman and make him a specialist for a lifetime.”

-Jacob Bronowski

In our 21st century however it is becoming apparent that the bigger the cities, the more insurmountable their problems seem, and the less of these are actually resolved, often not even short-term any longer. Recent research shows that although cities have serious problems, they also offer the greatest opportunities, and surprisingly, the actual percentage of serious problems is often smaller the bigger the cities are: there are in general significant differences in our perception of the cities' problems as compared to the actual problems. The city can therefore be regarded in both its aspects, on the one hand being both rich in opportunities, in mosaics of subcultures, containing a large variety of people, and on the other hand being rich in risks and dangers at the same time. All these considerations, as well as the City's *Janus Bifrons* (or Dr. Jekyll – Mr. Hyde) aspects have been used in the music of **de Stad**.

De Stad uses a wealth of sounds and silences, so much so that listeners have been noted to ask if electronics were perhaps added? No, this is music fully written and performed live by musicians.

de Stad 1

In **de Stad 1** the ensemble plays three “musics”, each with its own time signature of identical value but different structure, alternately telling episodes of its own story, adding to a developing common story, ending on a common chord all together at the end: the first time all 9 musicians play at the same time. The music is a searching for common ground, the 3 musics perhaps representing the *trias politica*, although since each has a different character, they are perhaps also various cultures seeking for ways to connect and merge. The City is the symbol for Civilization, which in itself is of a higher order than culture. Civilizations historically and presently always connect cultures into a higher coherence, and is by its very definition *multi-cultural*. Any movement away from multiculturalism therefore implies erosion of civilization.

The first music to appear is a soft music of high harmonics played by the trio of the higher strings; starting off with augmented chords, full of tension and with no inner root nor tonal centre to rest on, floating harmonies. This is

perhaps the most ethereal of musics, its phrases gradually getting longer and more intricate, more melodic and more contrapuntal. This is also the music which in its transformed aspect has its last say before the common pianissimo closing chord.

The second music to appear is louder and has many accents, it is driven by a strong melodic and rhythmic character. Played by the quartet of contrabass, piano, accordion and percussion (various woodblocks), its phrases also develop gradually and get longer, and richer in expression.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the piece "de Stad I". The score is arranged in a system with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left are Bass Clarinet (Bb), T/B Trombone, 2 trumpet blocks (2 log drums), Accordion, Piano, Violin, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The music is in 3/4 time. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *pp*, and *ppp*, as well as performance instructions like "non vibrato" and "vibrato". The music features complex rhythmic patterns and overlapping lines, particularly in the lower strings and winds.

opening measures of de Stad I

The third music is very reflective, with long chords built of basic intervals, and with contrapuntally overlapping hoquet rhythms. It uses a wide range of dynamics including crescendi and diminuendi. It is played by the trio of bass clarinet, bass trombone and violoncello. These play a music consisting of two duos, the winds on the one hand and the intervallic part, a kind of internal dialogue,

of the violoncello. The length of its phrases develops but also varies between short and longer; after its sixth, longer, phrase, there is a first new connection between instrument groups, connecting this music to the ethereal music of the harmonics, to which is added the piano while the accordion lengthens the piano's sustain beyond normal durations, a technique the composer calls *postsonance*.

Although this part of de Stad is set to one tempo, each music has its very own structure and flow, feeling like several tempi rather.

de Stad 2

The second part of de Stad is the Chamber Symphony's longest part, at 13 minutes. It is in fact a mini symphony all by itself, with three connected parts, slow-fast-slow. In the first and last part, the duo piano-accordion opens and closes the movement, first by use of *postsonance* and finally by a mirrored counterpoint duet. Three tempi have been indicated, but the first and the last are virtually similar, though counted, and musically felt, differently. The

middle part is set to the very fast 168 bpm, whereas 72 and 144 bpm feature in the first and last parts respectively.

The image shows a musical score for a transition section. It features six staves: Flute (Fl), Bassoon (Bsn), Piano (P), Violin (Vn), Viola (Vla), and Cello/Double Bass (Vcl/Db). The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the beginning of the transition, with the piano part playing chords and the strings playing open strings. The second system shows the continuation of the transition, with the piano part playing a melodic line and the strings playing open strings. The tempo changes from 72 bpm to 168 bpm and then back to 72 bpm. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor).

transition with open strings hoquets from the presto 3/4 to the middle section in 4/4

After an opening with loud block chords in the piano, of which the sustain is as before lengthened by the accordion, the strings take over and play together with the accordion. The string quartet violin, viola, cello and bass play only open strings, first sul ponticello and later col legno tratto, invoking something like the sound of an

orchestra tuning before a concert. When the piano finishes this section in a small solo playing two part melodies, suddenly the fast music starts, the strings, in a presto 3/4, intersected with open strings hoquet sections alternated with a polyrhythmic piano section. The city, so to say, has come to life, there are many hints at various music styles outside classical music (seemingly Stravinskyan orchestral accents but using rhythmic patterns more related to Afro-Cuban music). References can be heard to jazz (bass trombone solo) , to pop (piano and bass sections) and to world and folk music (rhythmical open strings hoquets, as well as the ending section with piano accordion duo), as Ulrich Dibelius explicitly noted in his article in Musik Texte from May 2008.

de Stad 3

Conceived as a *Requiem* this is the slowest music possible perhaps. The unique tempo indication gives for the whole note the symbolic tempo 33 bpm, but this is a tempo which in music is practically impossible to maintain, because it is outside the living human heart beat range,

and has to be counted at the double 66. The composer says “the only musically meaningful *absolute ear* is the one that perceives perfect tempo, not perfect pitch”.

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The notation is in white mensural notation on a five-line staff. The time signature is 6/8. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is marked with 'pp' (pianissimo) and includes performance instructions: 'delicate detached (non legato), non vibrato with heavy sordinos (like the sordino, slight sustain)', 'delicate detached, in pure vibrato with heavy sordinos (like the sordino, slight sustain)', and 'delicate detached, in pure vibrato with heavy sordinos (like the sordino, slight sustain)'. The notes are simple, often consisting of single notes or pairs of notes, with some longer notes and rests.

the look of white mensural notation belies the complexity of the sound

The music for the low string trio is notated in what looks like Renaissance *white mensural notation*, playing an imagined *Chorale avant-la-lettre*. The complicated enharmonic notation uses double flats, intending pure intonation, and the microtonal tensions that result in performance and recording are intentional, as are the overtones heard as a result of the special mutes used by the strings. At the end of the chorale's first appearance, the ambient sound of a very soft large concert bass drum evokes a funeral march, though impossibly slow. The low string trio viola, cello and bass now change from the metallic night sordinos to the normal lighter sordinos to

play the chorale yet again. This time a second layer is added, mostly in the high register, using piano, and later bowed crotales and violin. The piano part here sounds calm and relatively simple but is rather tricky to play, as it invokes bell-like timbres by uncommon positions and counterpoint. The effect of the sustain pedal for the piano chords has been carefully measured and notated, and as a consequence the releasing of the sustain pedal can be clearly heard more than once by the attentive listener.

de Stad 4

After perhaps the slowest conceivable music, the third part uses perhaps the longest conceivable melody, 101 bars length, at a medium tempo, employing chromatic modal tone material based on F (second F below central C). The *modulations* used here are literally the originally intended *change of mode*, of scale, as the original Medieval theorists perceived them. The time signature is double ternary, a 9/8 consisting of three beats, each with three parts in them, which becomes audible gradually as the music plays.

The melody is played by the bass trombone, doubled an octave lower (!) by the contrabass clarinet, a very rare and special instrument, lowest of the largest family within the woodwind instruments. Meanwhile contrabass (pizzicato) and marimba (later adding tenor and log drums) join in, creating a light accompaniment to a low and heavy melody, using rhythmical patterns reminiscent of West-African music. After exploring the modal field, the melody overreaches the octave, by 1, 3, and 2 semitones, continuing to explore the depths. Counterpoint theory traditionally teaches how to use high points in melodies and how important they are. Less is known (and hence taught) about *low points*. In a music seeking applause and appraisal they are rare nor treated with care if they appear at all. Yet this melody now searches for the depths with these low wind instruments. Semitone by semitone a new lower point is marked out to find a whole octave below the already very low basic F.

The image displays a musical score for a string quartet and woodwinds. The top staff is for the Flute (Fl), marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano). Below it are the Trumpet in B-flat (TIB), Trombone (Tbn), and Double Bass (Dbls). The string parts are divided into Violin I (Vn I), Violin II (Vn II), Viola (Vla), and Cello (Vcl). The score shows a melodic line in the flute that descends to a low point around bar 81 and then ascends. The string parts provide a rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment.

around bar 81 – the moment the lowest point is reached in the melody

The melody then climbs back up to its highest point at the last tone, and ends in bar 101, a very long melody indeed. Now the melody is being used in a contrapuntal way, acting as a subject for a 2 part fugue-like structure, in which the strings will play the second part. Meanwhile the other instruments join in one by one, gradually expanding the palette to full score. As befits a piece seeking for a low point, the composition ends on a quasi anticlimactic soft chord, in gesture similar to the ending chord of de Stad 1, but differently used. Here it is as if the composer went in to the sound listening ever deeper, exploring the sound in all

its details, but then finally returning to a more modest reality, like a scientist absorbed in viewing life through a microscope, totally fascinated, ever discerning more detail, but eventually looking up and being back in his room. No applause.

de Stad 5

In one of his films, the Italian film director Fellini shows a catholic procession with a very richly dressed and decorated Mary idol, passing through the streets of an Italian town. Fellini keeps on filming as they pass by and then for quite some time clearly shows the backside of the statuette to the film audience, a part that was always there but nobody noticed: seemingly uninteresting carpentry to keep the image from falling, clumsy patchwork to keep the mantle in place etcetera. It is this *other side, the backside of things*, that de Stad 5 is all about. Visually one can also think of a *nocturnal City*. Shapes and forms slip and sneak through the night, hardly identifiable yet part of the whole as well, and these can hardly exist outside.

of 144bpm throughout supports the sense of suspense created by the repetitive phrases in more abstract sounds.

de Stad 6

The final part returns to the fast tempo of 168bpm and uses a minimalist repetitive style of music, with very virtuoso play. "Silence is as important to music as is sound" is something we can hear in the pauses used, these are all different stops we hear. By law of exception they even emphasize the rule of the fast music. The piano plays ever lengthening pickup phrases, of which the very fast bass lines were inspired by Lennie Tristano's use of recording to transform the sound in *Line Up*. These phrases introduce stable chords played by fast arpeggio's. The percussion is used again for all it can do: producing accents, drive but also complex tones and sounds, with bowed crotales and special gongs along with a shaker playing unisono with the piano, which requires the utmost precision of timing. The music includes many partial and full stops, a hallmark to be found in many of the composer's works.

The image shows a musical score for piano and violin, measures 174-179. The score is written in 3/4 time and features a complex polyrhythmic structure. The piano part consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more active eighth-note pattern in the left hand. The violin part is characterized by a series of triplets, with some measures containing rests. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *f*, and *pp*, and articulation marks like accents and slurs. The overall effect is one of layered, staggered musical entry.

partial and tutti tacet moments, creating differently colored silences

Layer by layer the music is exposed to the ear, by creating gaps in the structure, and thus the duo piano violin exposes the second polyrhythmic layer of triplets, until the music finally stops at its loudest moment.

Oscar van Dillen

Oscar Ignatius Joannes van Dillen

('s-Hertogenbosch 1958) is composer and performer of music, professor of music at Codarts University for the Arts in Rotterdam, as well as visual artist. A polyglot and an erudite world citizen, he is also one of the pioneers from the early years of Wikipedia, having been founding president of Wikimedia

Nederland and serving as a trustee of the Wikimedia Foundation. Van Dillen has studied a wide variety of musical traditions with many renowned teachers. His music education having started at the age of 7, and performing both classical and rock music in his youth, van Dillen first studied North-Indian classical music (sitar, tabla, vocal) with Jamaluddin Bhartiya at the Tritantri School in Amsterdam and bansuri with Gurbachan Singh Sachdev at the Bansuri School of Music in Berkeley, California. Next he studied classical and jazz flute at the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam. He took composition lessons from Misha Mengelberg. As a flutist, he was taught by Lens Derogée and Dieks Visser, and followed masterclasses from Pierre-Yves Artaud, Geoffrey Gilbert and Barthold Kuijken.



After his following postgraduate studies of medieval and Renaissance music with Paul Van Nevel in Leuven (Belgium), he studied classical and contemporary composition with, among others, Dick Raaymakers, Diderik Wagenaar and Gilius van Bergeijk at the Koninklijk Conservatory in The Hague, with Klaas de Vries, Peter-Jan Wagemans and René Uijlenhoet at the Rotterdam Conservatory and with Manfred Trojahn at the Robert Schumann College in Düsseldorf, where he also received lessons in conducting from Lutz Herbig. As a composer he furthermore followed masterclasses from, among others, Isang Yun, George Crumb, Jan van Vlijmen, Marek Stachowski, Zbigniew Bojarski and Gerard Brophy.

A founding member of the Rotterdam School of composers and the author of its manifesto, he currently works as professor of music at the Codarts University of the Arts Rotterdam since 1997, teaching composing, arranging, world music composition, music history and music theory in the Jazz-, the Pop-, the World music, the Classical music and the Music Education Academies of Codarts.

Oscar van Dillen is the inventor of *original world music composition*, combining strictly composed with improvised classical and folk traditions, and their techniques and mentalities for creating music: a new and contemporary form of art music.

He is also founder, composer and artistic director of the Olduvai Ensemble for which he especially creates original world music compositions.

Van Dillen is a member of Nieuw Geneco and the Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory. As of 2020 his scores are published by Donemus. He collaborates with Donemus in publishing his recordings on OIJ Records.

Next to his fulltime work as composer, musician and pedagogue, van Dillen is also a visual artist. As composer, he has been a regular member of various juries, among which the yearly composition prize juries, in the Val Tidone Festival Competitions, since 2013.

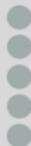
Oscar van Dillen's personal website can be found at www.oscarvandillen.com

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