

Press Release & Media Statement from Simon Murphy
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Murphy Leaves as Festival Dumps Classical & Jazz Component

Shock move by festival organisers brings 8 years of award-winning success to a halt

During a meeting at the headquarters of the Embassy Festival in The Hague earlier this month, festival organisers Prooost informed founding festival music curator Simon Murphy of their decision to ditch the entirety of the festival's Classical & Jazz component, including the festival's popular Classical & Jazz Stage, effective immediately. Murphy was not consulted on this.

A long time resident of The Hague, Murphy has been the curator and presenter of the Classical & Jazz Stage since the festival's inception in 2012. Some of the highlights of his programming have included the Dutch debut of Swedish Jazz superstar Ida Sand, celebrated Dutch harpist Lavinia Meijer playing works by Philip Glass, and the musical fireworks of the 4 Double Basses of the Oslo FAT String Quartet. The festival has received the EU's prestigious EFFE Award multiple times for its consistent, diverse, high quality programming.

In communicating the decision to Murphy, festival organisers cited desires for “new directions” during the festival's next phase. However, with a mere 6 months to go before the 2020 festival, the stage envisioned by the organisers to replace the dumped Classical & Jazz Stage is yet to be named and its content yet to be defined.

The Embassy Festival is an annual event held in September. Organisers Prooost are also behind the Pop festival “Life I Live” a.k.a. Koningsnacht. Both events are primarily funded by the municipality of The Hague.

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Background Story

Quality and Diversity

In the heart of the historic centre of the cosmopolitan court city of The Hague, on the beautiful, leafy, tree-lined boulevard of the Lange Voorhout, the idyllic setting of the Embassy Festival gazes out at some of the city's iconic palaces, theatres and churches. Its ancient, cobbled streets have borne witness to the footsteps of the city's many illustrious musical visitors including Abel, J.C. Bach, Stamitz, Mozart and Beethoven. In this exquisite setting, Dutch-based Australian conductor and violist Simon Murphy has revelled in his role as the curator and presenter of the festival's Classical & Jazz Stage.

With its distinctive blend of high quality programming within an informal but stylish atmosphere, the festival has grown steadily in popularity, garnering tens of thousands of visitors in recent years. Under Murphy's watch, the festival has won international acclaim for its musical quality and diversity. It has twice received the EU's EFFE Award – a seal of quality for remarkable, European festivals offering unique and high quality experiences. The award's jury, headed by Sir Jonathan Mills, acknowledged the consistency in quality and in the artistic choices made in programming both established and emerging artists.

Successful Formula

From the very beginning, the festival's programming formula has featured two central pillars, Pop, and Classical & Jazz, each with their own dedicated stage. Until now.

Murphy: "I am shocked by the festival organisers' decision to axe the Classical & Jazz component of the festival. I was not consulted about this. The Classical & Jazz Stage was the jewel in the festival's crown. This is a great loss for the quality and diversity of the festival's programming. The Classical & Jazz Stage offered audiences in the Netherlands a unique opportunity to experience an array of repertoire and a beautiful variety of high quality international Classical and Jazz artists – for free, in a joyous, relaxed atmosphere, and in a stunningly beautiful historical location.

I therefore have no choice but to immediately step back from my role at the festival as curator and presenter of the Classical & Jazz Stage and to distance myself from the festival as a whole at this time. I cannot in any way support the organisers' decision to discard the festival's Classical & Jazz component, especially given that it has been such a core part of the festival's identity and success since the festival's foundation 8 years ago."

Breadth & Depth

With a repertoire spanning more than seven centuries and featuring artists from all corners of the world, Murphy's Classical & Jazz Stage programming delivered a wealth of styles and musical personalities to eager audiences. From Dutch harp heroine Lavinia Meijer performing her own arrangements of works by Philip Glass, to U.S. piano virtuoso Bobby Mitchell playing Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn, to Palestinian Trio Nur performing traditional Arabian music, to Dutch contemporary composer/percussionist Arnold Marinissen playing his own works, Murphy's festival offerings featured everything from Baroque instrumental music through to Lieder recitals through to cutting edge modern jazz.

Murphy's festival programming saw several major international artists make their Dutch débuts, including Swedish Jazz superstar Ida Sand and celebrated Australian Classical saxophonist Amy Dickson. Audiences shared in unique festival collaborations with Dutch Jazz pianist Rembrandt Frerichs, Norwegian accordionist Frode Haltli and Swedish trombonist Karin Hammar performing each others' newest compositions. Other highlights included recitals by Slovenian soprano Barbara Kozelj, Dutch violinist Frederieke Saeijs, German recorder player Anna Stegmann, Greek soprano Myrsini Margariti, Swedish lutenist Karl Nyhlin, Georgian pianist Nino Gvetadze, and Belgian soprano Elise Caluwaerts. Polish outfit Bodo brought central-European music from the interbellum to the stage and the unstoppable Oslo FAT String Quartet presented re-imaginings of classical favourites mixed with stunning interpretations of modern works.

Murphy: "As well as celebrating top local talent, I am delighted to have been able to bring some of my international musical heroes to the Netherlands. Presenting Ida Sand in 2018 and hearing her sing my favourite song, "Home", as she made her Dutch debut with a solo set created especially for the festival was a very special moment for me. I am also proud to have been able to help highlight up-and-coming artists from around the world who I feel deserve to be taken notice of. Australian mezzo Anna Smith and Norwegian mezzo Kristin Mulders are two examples.

As a performing musician myself, I also have greatly enjoyed contributing to the festival experience by getting the viola out and joining some of my musical guests in several very memorable festival collaborations over the years. It was lovely to be part of the music making – both backstage and on stage."

Cultural Diplomacy

Due to his experience with cultural diplomacy and his profile in the international community in The Hague, the organisers approached Murphy to do some outreach and help sell the new festival to embassies and other stakeholders, alongside his programming work.

Murphy: *“I particularly enjoyed the early days of the festival – pitching it at press events, writing the festival's texts together with Holly Marder, and pounding the pavement together with Fleur van Rijn, visiting the various prospective partner embassies. Fleshing out the festival's sound requirements together with Marc Noble of More Stage was also very inspiring. We enjoyed exploring mutual amplification wishes together and looking at how the stage placements could best work on the festival terrain. During the process, we had our own little “nerd fest”, discussing favourite microphones and so forth. I learnt a lot from him. Marc had built some rigs especially designed for acoustic/classical music. It was beautiful to work with such a sound craftsman (!) and to see it all come alive on the day. It was very exciting, creating what would become the blueprint for the festival.”*

Grateful

Murphy: *“I'm proud to have been able to make a contribution to the cultural environment in the Netherlands through my work at the festival. At the end of it all, looking out from the festival stage at the happy faces of the audiences has been a reward in itself. I would like to thank all of the artists, ambassadors and cultural attachés with whom I've had the honour and pleasure of working during my time at the festival. I'm proud of the highly meaningful co-operations we created together and that the resulting performances so beautifully profiled the immense talent and strong cultural identities of the countries involved and simultaneously demonstrated the incredible power which music has to unite us all and to celebrate our shared humanity. I would especially like to thank the embassies of Norway, Finland, Sweden, Ireland, Australia and the U.S. for their active support in the early days of the festival. Their votes of confidence gave the festival wings to fly and have had a big effect on what it's been able to grow into during its first 8 years.”*

Future

Murphy: *“I would like to thank Proost's director Arthur Pronk for his vision and commitment to include Classical music as a core element of the festival, right from the very beginning. I wish him and his team good luck in their future endeavours.*

Alongside my own performing work, I look forward to exploring new curating opportunities, both locally and internationally, in order to continue to bring quality musical experiences to audiences in personal, engaging, vibrant and meaningful ways.”

About Simon Murphy

Simon Murphy (Sydney, 1973) is an international award-winning Dutch-based Australian conductor and violist. Nicknamed “the repertoire refresher” by France's Diapason, he has won major industry awards including an Edison (Dutch “Grammy”) for his performing, programming and recording activities including his many albums featuring world première presentations of symphonic works rediscovered by him. He is a champion of 18th century Dutch music and has made several albums profiling unearthed Dutch musical gems. His landmark recording of Corelli's *Concerti Grossi* made during the Holland Festival of Early Music Utrecht was voted one of the five highlights of the festival's history.

Murphy is music director of The Hague's Baroque orchestra, The New Dutch Academy. With the orchestra, he has toured extensively, appearing at prestigious international music festivals including the Bachfest Leipzig. Murphy has also worked as guest-conductor with major international ensembles ranging from the Strasbourg Philharmonic through to the Latvian State Choir.

Murphy has a special affinity for cultural diplomacy. Murphy has programmed and performed concert events for multilateral celebrations around the world, including in New York, Beijing, Vancouver, Rome, Ankara, Hong Kong and Sydney. He has regularly performed for members of the Dutch royal family, both abroad and at home. Murphy is also music advisor to the Netherlands' Prinsjesfestival.

Launched in September in The Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Murphy's latest album is JET SET! Classical Glitterati (PENTATONE, 2019). On it, he performs Zelter's Viola Concerto and conducts orchestral works by Abel, Reichardt, Mozart and Paisiello. Murphy's current large scale passion projects include his Gothic Project which explores the 18th century foundations of the genre in music, music theatre, art and literature, and his musical, climate change advocacy project, Garden of Eden, which centres around Handel's cosmopolitan Baroque orchestral masterpiece, *The Water Music*.
www.simonmurphyconductor.com

At a Glance

Highlights of Murphy's Classical & Jazz Stage at the Embassy Festival 2012 – 2019

Dutch Débutts including

Swedish Jazz superstar **Ida Sand**

Australian Classical saxophonist **Amy Dickson**

Unique Festival Collaborations including

Dutch Jazz pianist **Rembrandt Frerichs**, Norwegian accordionist **Frode Haltli** and Swedish trombonist **Karin Hammar** performing each other's newest compositions

Recitals including

Dutch harp-superstar **Lavinia Meijer** performing her own arrangements of works by Philip Glass

U.S. pianist **Bobby Mitchell** playing Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn

Belgian soprano **Elise Caluwaerts** singing Verdi, Liszt and Bernstein

Dutch violinist **Frederieke Saeijs** performing Bach and Ysaye

German recorder virtuoso **Anna Stegmann** with selections from Van Eyck's *Der Fluytenlusthof*

Dutch composer/percussionist **Arnold Marinissen** playing his own works ft. **Katharina Gross**

Other recitals featuring Trinidadian Soprano **Nicole Jordan**, Slovenian soprano **Barbara Kozelj**,

Belorussian pianist **Hanna Shybayeva**, Dutch flautist **Felicia van den End**, Dutch/Hungarian

pianist **Valentina Tóth**, Swedish lutenist **Karl Nyhlin**, Greek soprano **Myrsini Margariti**,

Irish pianist **Fionnuala Moynihan**, English fiddler **Mike Bailey**, Georgian pianist **Nino Gvetadze**,

Dutch harpist **Gwyneth Wentink**, and Ukrainian/U.S. soprano **Julia Kogan**

Groups including

Palestinian **Trio Nur** performing traditional Arabian music

Polish outfit **Bodo** ft. **Aldona Bartnik** performing central-European music from the interbellum

Oslo FAT String Quartet performing re-imaginings of classics together with modern works

Bulgarian **Bodurov Trio** with own new compositions

Boreas Quartett Bremen with music for recorder consort from the northern European Renaissance and early Baroque

Australian violist **Simon Murphy** and members of the **New Dutch Academy** with works by Bach, Handel, Vivaldi, van Wassenaer, Stamitz, Abel, Graaf, Zappa, Haydn, Mozart and Mendelssohn