

A Dutchman plays Bird



BackBeat

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DUTCH TREAT: Dutch saxophonist Piet Noordijk will bring his Quintet to the North Sea Jazz Festival later this month.

EUROPE has had a long affinity with both classical music and jazz. Since the infusion of jazz into this continent, starting with James Reece Europe's band during the Great War and quickening with the exodus of the African-American exiles fleeing McCarthyism (the anti-communist, anti-black madness of the 1950s) for Europe (mostly Paris at first), jazz and classical music have in a process of reciprocity edged closer to each other.

Within this osmotic process, the city of Rotterdam in 1932 saw the birth of Piet Noordijk, later to become a genius saxophonist. Unsurprisingly, the music of Charlie Parker (and Duke Ellington) helped the closer edging of jazz and classical music along.

Noordijk had lessons from his brother, tenor player Kees (1915-1987), and started working professionally as a teenager. Since the 1950s Noordijk has taken the European jazz scene increasingly to greater expressions of excellence.

Those who have wondered about the results of "process" between jazz and classical music should listen to the Noordijk albums, *Sinatra Songbook Tribute* and *Piet Plays Bird*.

Having spent hours with his *Piet Plays Bird*, I proffer that nothing could be more enjoyable than to hear the Godfather of the Dutch jazz saxophonists playing a tune called *Laura* on this outstanding album.

Noordijk is a respecter of the music of Charlie Parker. And he really knows how to play like Bird.

Piet Plays Bird, although leaning towards a "classical interpretation with strings", echoes Harold Jephtha's *Cape Town Meets Charlie Parker*.

On it, *Autumn in New York* brings a Dutch take on what used to be New Amsterdam, carrying the flow of the Hudson River on an undercurrent of strings, the alto sax picking up the rush of the river, before it fades as the river fans into the upper Hudson Bay.

For his work Noordijk has been a worthy recipient of the Bird Award. To this day Charlie Parker remains his inspiration.

Now Noordijk is bringing his Quintet to the North Sea Jazz Festival. Those who are into standards, classical music and Parker are in for a treat. Quintet members bassist Hein van de Geyn and drummer John Engels both won a Bird (Engels being the first drummer to do so).

Quintet guitarist Jesse van Ruller again has won a Thelonious Monk Award and the European press expect that pianist Rob van Bavel is also headed in the award-winning direction.

As a special treat, the Noordijk Quintet will feature itinerant guitarist Philip Catherine.

London-born Catherine, 58, who has been in the forefront of the European jazz scene since the sixties, has worked with great artists like Chet Baker, Stéphane Grappelli, and Charles Mingus.

After the Heineken Jazz Festival 1992, Het Parool said that "the greatest living jazz guitarist is Philip Catherine" and the Portuguese publication MC asserted after the 1993 Porto Festival: "Philip Catherine is a great guitarist, and a great musician."

In 1990 he too received a Bird award. Seems like the disciples of the original Bird are converging on Cape Town.