

## Cornelis Thymensz. Padbrué: A Dutch Composer Contemporary of Heinrich Schütz

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When, in 1609, young Heinrich Schütz started his studies in Venice with Giovanni Gabrieli, the principal organist of the San Marco, Schütz was well on his way to becoming one of the greatest composers of his time. Cornelis Thymensz. Padbrué, a contemporary of Schütz, was then a seventeen year old boy from Haarlem.

Let me start by saying just a few words about Haarlem. During the last decades of the sixteenth century, Haarlem had seen an impressive flow of immigrants from what is now Belgium, France and Germany. Among them were numerous skilled craftsmen and artists. They brought enormous economic growth and made Haarlem one of the leading towns in the Netherlands. It was the cradle of the »Golden Age«, the artistic center of Holland with painters such as Goltzius, Frans Hals and Heda, to name a few. Music then did not play such an important role, but that – as we will see – would change.

Padbrué's grandfather Jan Jans Patbrue (1520–1581), a singer, had travelled in 1545 from the north of France, then famous for its talented singers and its so called »Flemish polyphonists«, to Haarlem, where church chant was held in high esteem. He became a singer, »hoochconter« at the St Bavo cathedral. Jan Patbrue had two sons, the eldest one, David, who would become Cornelis' uncle, must have had a beautiful voice. As a young boy, he became chorister in the »Capilla Flamenca« at the Royal Chapel of Philipp II in Madrid; later, back in Holland, he became a musician and composer. Ten of his compositions for lute have appeared in the »Luitboek van Thysius« from around 1590. Jan's second son Thymen, the father of Cornelis, also became chorister at the St Bavo and later on »stadsmusicijn«, city-player. These professional musicians fell under the jurisdiction of the municipal authority and were quite important figures in public life, wearing a uniform with the city-arms. They played on wind instruments like the cornetto, cromhorn, chalm and trombone.

Cornelis Padbrué was Thymens second son. He probably went to the Latin School, where he was taught, amongst other things, poetry and music, subjects that would become very important later in his life. His father undoubtedly taught him to play the chalm, the precursor of the hobo. From Lossy, former teacher of the great Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, he learned vocal polyphony. Padbrué must have been an accomplished musician, playing the chalm, »chelys« (cittern) and harpsichord. He is mentioned as a good singer as well.

The Padbrué family lived on the Central Market Square in Haarlem, only a stone's throw away from the Town Hall. Four times a week, Cornelis, along with his father and brother and a fourth person, played their »mid-day« music, at noon, on the steps of the Town Hall as the official »stadspeelluiden«. So out of the ensemble of four players, three were Padbrué's, a real family-affair. In 1629, after the death of his father and brother, Cornelis became leader of the group, which gave him the right to call himself »Master«. Six years later however, he was dismissed because of continuous tensions within the ensemble. This must have been quite a disagreeable blow to him, but on the other hand, it set him free from the narrow straightjacket of performing more or less the same, often solemn, stately repertoire nearly every

single day. Now he was free and able to follow his aspirations: to compose whenever he wanted. Speaking of Padbrué as a composer: There is testimony, that he composed before his first printed work was published, but of that period unfortunately no manuscripts have survived.

In his time, Holland was part of the Republic of the Seven Provinces. There was no royal court, no ecclesiastical musical culture, no »Hofkapelle« with a »Kapellmeister«, and hence no commissions for composers. So, Padbrué had to think up something on his own initiative, and he did, as we will point out.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, vocal music prevailed. Numerous songbooks saw the light with texts on well-known melodies, so called »contrafacta«. These were very different from the sophisticated polyphonic madrigals with their intense relation between word and sound. During the last decades of the sixteenth century, several anthologies of Italian madrigals had found their way from the well known printing houses of Plantin and Phalèse in Antwerp to the Northern provinces. In 1605, a similar madrigal book, always on Italian texts, *Nervi d'Orfeo*, was printed in Leiden, with contributions by among others Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck and Cornelis Schuyt. Gradually, a few compositions on Dutch texts began to appear. Padbrué, as an accomplished singer and »sanghmeester«, must have been inspired by these volumes. He may even have known Schütz' *Il primo libro de madrigali*, composed in Venice in 1611. In 1631, Padbrué's first printed composition was published, the *Kusjes*, little kisses, madrigals based on the *Basia*, a bundle of early sixteenth-century erotic neo-Latin poems by Janus Secundus, that won international fame and had been translated into Dutch. It contains madrigals for 3 to 5 voices and basso continuo/thoroughbass or basso seguente. It was the first time a composition with basso continuo appeared in the Republic. The thoroughbass could be performed by instruments like the harpsichord, lute, chitarrone, organ or gamba. Padbrué received a lot of praise and was profusely acclaimed for his talent, which must have been quite stimulating. Among the *Kusjes* – clearly still rooted in the Renaissance style – are little sparkling gems, interesting by their harmonic and rhythmic structures, witty and intricate. It is the work of a skilled composer who knew all the rules of counterpoint, polyphony and fugato and who seems to have been inspired – not surprisingly – by the motets of Sweelinck and the »canzonets« of the English madrigalists. Padbrué probably was acquainted with the music of Bull, Byrd, Philips, Dowland, Morley, Weelkes.

The great Dutch poet Joos van den Vondel must have heard Padbrué's music. Apparently he appreciated it, because he wrote a poem, wherein he expresses his admiration and esteem for him. It led to a fruitful cooperation between the two men. Padbrué composed music for four voices for one of Vondel's plays (*Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*), with which the main theater in Amsterdam – the »Stadsschouwburg« – was inaugurated, undoubtedly a big event. Unfortunately, the music is lost, but one setting remains, that of *O Kerstnacht schooner dan de daegen*. By the way, the melody has also been attributed to Sweelinck's son Dirck, but Bob van Asperen gives the honour to Padbrué. The melody became so popular, that it was used as a »contrafactuur« many times over. In 1640, at the beginning of what was to be a very fruitful decade for Padbrué, he again wrote music for two Vondel-plays. One is *The Kruisbergh* (Golgotha), a ten part sacred madrigal for three to five voices. It is his first spiritual work, short but monumental and expressive, very characteristic for the Baroque.

The composer has added four motets on Latin texts, of which *Da pacem Domine* is an ingenious canonic double motet for eight voices, with a clearly ecumenical character. Would Padbrué have been inspired by Schütz' »doppelchörige Motetten«? Frits Noske, who was a leading Dutch musicologist, considered these motets unique within the repertory of seventeenth-century sacred music.

This time, Padbrué had chosen a printer in Amsterdam. And a prestigious one at that, the official printer of the city, Broer Jansz., who had been a student with the great Sweelinck himself. In the mean-

time, the *Kusjes* had become so popular, that they were reprinted, in a somewhat modified version. And again, they had a tremendous success. Some well-known public figures wrote flattering odes on the *Kusjes* and therefore on their maker as well. It became a cult-book, so to say, and various contrafacta were made for songbooks.

Padbrué's star was rising steadily and so he was asked to write music for wedding parties of the high-society of Haarlem and Amsterdam, so called »siphoniae in nuptias«, that consisted of dances; a stately »pavana« and a faster »gaillarde«, being favourite dances at the time. Encouraged by his success, Padbrué undertook a most challenging and interesting project. As a real entrepreneur, he took it upon himself to address a request to celebrated poets and writers to create an ode on Jubal. Jubal is a biblical figure from the book Genesis. He is described as the »father of those who play the cittern and the flute, the inventor of music and musical instruments«. Apparently, this theme then was a novelty and a very appealing one and several famous poets, Cats, Vondel, Westerbaen, and Barleaus (van Baarle) accepted the invitation to write a tribute – either in Dutch or neo-Latin – to this almost forgotten old-testamental Jubal. It gave Padbrué the opportunity to set the texts of these illustrious men to music, for four to six voices. Thus he became one of those well-respected persons himself, an eclectic and learned man of the world. In 1641, *'t Lof van Jubal* was a »golden primeur« indeed, a »scoop«, highly original. He had added four motets of a Catholic character that contrasted surprisingly with the poems on Jubal, written by mostly Reformed/Protestant contributors. We know that in his time, Catholicism was formally forbidden, but overall, in everyday life, one was quite tolerant. Along with the growing prosperity of Haarlem, the city council, that consisted mainly of wealthy and, I suppose, opportunistic merchants was more than eager to keep that wealth and thus keen on lasting religious peace. The leading motto was conciliation and peaceful coexistence within the pluriform society, the so called »Pax ecclesiastica«, so fervently defended by Erasmus and Grotius. Whether the Padbrué family was Roman Catholic or Reformed, we do not know. Because of their family history and taking into account that many in the artistic circles at the time in Haarlem were Catholic, the same was probably true for the Padbrué's.

Padbrué received quite a large sum of money from the magistrate for his Jubal madrigals and even a silver bowl with a flattering inscription. From now on, he was referred to as the »Jubalist of Haarlem«, a prestigious title – for what it was worth. On the cover page of *'t Lof van Jubal* figures a Rembrandtesque engraving of Jubal, with ears of corn coming out of his head, carrying the names of famous composers. It certainly gave the madrigals an intellectual and learned flavor. To name some of them: David (»author« of the Psalms), Salomon (»author« of the Song of Songs), Desprez, Lejeune, Lassus, Monteverdi, with whom Schütz had worked in Venice in 1628, and also the two giants of his own country: Sweelinck and Schuyt. Unfortunately no Schütz. By the way, might it perhaps be our composer himself who is portrayed here?

Two years later, a second anthology of madrigals on Jubal-hymns, again followed by some motets, went to the press, his opus 4. The style of these madrigals for three voices is more and more monodic, gradually more solistic. Once more, he had succeeded to find well known contributors who belonged to the pick of society such as Vondel and Barleaus, artists of name and fame and others, leading members of the upper class. And again, he added *laudationes*, concerning his very own person. »Let Phebus crown Padbruee! That was certainly the ultimate praise he could wish for. Unfortunately, only the tenor part remains.

It goes without saying that Padbrué now was at the zenith of his fame as a composer. In 1646, he wrote his, so to say, revolutionary *magnum opus*, music for two to five voices to Vondel's play *Peter and Pauwels, De Tranen Petri ende Pauli* about the martyrdom of the two apostles. The tenor part is written

in *stile recitativo*. It was the first oratorio (Bob van Asperen calls it a »spiritual chamber opera«) in the vernacular in northern Europe and a genuine baroque work because of its enhancing dramatic and emotional musical setting. Only two parts (tenor and cantus II) and the basso continuo remain to us now. In 1987, for the commemoration of Vondel's 400<sup>th</sup> birthday, Bob van Asperen made a reconstruction and performed the *Tranen*. This work reminds us of the first Florentine opera's from around 1600 in the modern style, the *stile moderno*, with a growing role for monody/solo-chant and one recognizes the dramatic *stile rappresentativo* of Schütz and Monteverdi. Frits Noske, whom I already referred to, called it a »unique monument of the Dutch past«, a rare example of Venetian influence on Dutch music of the seventeenth century. Here, Padbrué, as a frontrunner, definitely has transgressed – although quite late – the threshold of the Renaissance to embrace the Baroque style – and thus the so called *seconda prattica*. As goes for *The Kruisbergh* and still another play by Vondel of which the music is lost, it was the first time, that one did not use existing melodies, but that new music was especially composed, a novelty indeed. The »portée« of the *Tranen* was clearly Catholic, so it probably has not been performed in public but only in the setting of private domestic circles. Liturgical performance was just one step too far. One wonders whether Padbrué himself heard these compositions at all. The *Tranen* are followed by four short motets, of which *Da pacem* had, earlier-on, also been set to music by Lassus, Sweelinck and Schütz.

And then, in 1648, finally, after 80 years of war, the Republic and Spain signed the peace-treaty of Münster. Haarlem's city council asked Padbrué to write a cantata for the occasion, but alas, it is lost. And if ever he wrote another composition afterwards, we do not know. Times and fashions had changed – severe troubles with England, a strong decline in prosperity – and Padbrué had become a man of age. But he was not completely forgotten.

In 1660, Constantijn Huygens, the well-known Dutch diplomate with a fine taste for music and an accomplished lute player himself, wrote a poem, entitled *Dédication de quelque musique par le compositeur Padbrué au roy de la Grande Bretagne*. Padbrué either has made a new composition for King Charles II of England or, rather, the great Huygens has chosen one of the madrigals from the *Kusjes*. The iambic metrum of the first *Kusje* happens to correspond exactly with Huygens poem and it probably is not a coincidence.

At the age of 77 Cornelis Thymensz. Padbrué died and was buried in the St Bavo, the church he had known all his long life. Sure: He was not an easy man to deal with, this ambitious, idiosyncratic bachelor, who could not keep peace with his fellow-city players, quarreled with his printers, caused trouble by flirting a bit too insistently with seamstress Lijsbeth, on more than one occasion behaved rudely in taverns and inns, litigated against his booksellers. But he had a broad and curious mind and was a good friend of highly praised poets, writers and painters, both Catholic and Reformed. He was a composer of profane and religious music, between tradition and innovation, on the threshold between modality and tonality. From »stadsspeelman«, conservative per force since he was bound to play traditional repertoire, to a renowned composer and in the latter profession making a shift from late-renaissance to baroque, going from *stile antico* to the much more expressive and more free *stile moderno*. Far from being a Schütz with over 500 compositions on his account, he played his own distinctive role in musical history, certainly in that of Holland. His music has reached a far wider audience than Haarlem or Amsterdam alone, and Vondel, in his poem for Padbrué, had said: »If I am right, you'll even sing after you've died«.