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Jed Wentz

## Gustav Leonhardt, the Naarden circle and early music's reformation

IN 1980 Gustav Leonhardt ([illus.1](#)) and Nikolaus Harnoncourt were jointly awarded the Erasmus Prize for their ongoing project of recording the complete cantatas of J. S. Bach. Both men were interviewed for Dutch television at the time. In order to juxtapose the achievements of the fêted new generation with those of its predecessors, the interviewer asked Leonhardt if he had ever heard, in his youth, the famous performances of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* by Amsterdam's Concertgebouw Orchestra, under the baton of Willem Mengelberg. Initially enthusiastic, his eyes glowing, Leonhardt emphatically characterized the work of the hyper-Romantic Mengelberg as: 'Masterly performances in terms of technique; unparalleled, in my opinion'; only to cap it off with the less unexpected: 'but, I can't stand it musically any more'. When pressed by the interviewer to contrast his current aesthetic stance, as implied by the phrase 'any more', with that of his

youth, Leonhardt's reply came swiftly, and was full of import: 'Well, when I heard it for the first time I was already so converted that I found it abhorrent'.<sup>1</sup>

The verb 'converted' is significant. Leonhardt's abhorrence of Romantic performances of Bach's music was related to his early contact with what here will be called the 'Naarden Circle', a group of religiously inspired musical reformers associated with the Nederlandse Bachvereniging (Dutch Bach Society). This society, founded in the Dutch town of Naarden in 1921 and still in existence today, played a major role in preparing the way for the Dutch early music revival of the later 20th century.<sup>2</sup> The society was most famous for its yearly performances, in Naarden's Grote Kerk (Great Church), of the *St Matthew Passion*. In 1995, Leonhardt noted in an interview

I came to Naarden already as a boy, together with my father, who was on the board of directors. From the very beginning I was gripped by this masterpiece [the *St Matthew Passion*]. Even now I cannot express that ecstasy in words.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Leonhardt would go so far as to attribute his decision to become a professional harpsichordist to these early experiences, saying that he might never have become a musician if—instead of a Bach Society—there had been a Handel Society in Naarden.<sup>4</sup>

In the 20th century, Dutch early musicians fought two formidable wars of musical renewal: the first played itself out in pitched battles—waged yearly at Eastertide from 1922 onwards—between Mengelberg's Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Nederlandse Bachvereniging; the second was spearheaded by



1 Gustav Leonhardt at the harpsichord, probably 1950s

Gustav Leonhardt from the 1950s onwards, after his return to Holland from sojourns in Basel and Vienna. The former was a Reformation with religious significance; the latter, a musical-performative movement embracing increased historical awareness. The two-fold objective of this article is firstly to explore the underlying moral justifications that gave urgency to the Nederlandse Bachvereniging's reforms; and, secondly, to search for evidence of the Bachvereniging's influence on Leonhardt's own thought, and thus on the musical awareness that he transmitted, through his teaching and performances, to a new generation.

### The Naarden Circle

On 14 September 1921, an announcement appeared in the Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad*, stating that a new society would be formed in order to promote J. S. Bach's music, 'through performances that will attempt, by means of more intimate forces, to make the music speak as purely as possible'.<sup>5</sup> This demonstrates that reducing performance forces was one of the primary goals of an embryonic Nederlandse Bachvereniging. What was not made explicit at this time, however, was the society's burning desire to re-establish Bach's religious music as liturgical works. The society hoped to reclaim the *St Matthew Passion* in particular from what it saw as the too-operatic, too-secular and 'much too Catholic' performance tradition associated with Mengelberg.<sup>6</sup>

This goal was made public in 1926, when the Bachvereniging published what amounted to an official manifesto, written by its president, the clergyman and theologian Prof Dr Johannes Hermanus Gunning, entitled *Bach's music in our time* (*Bach's muziek in onzen tijd*). In it, he noted that 'in Bach's music piety is always no.1 and musical expression no.2'. He complained bitterly of those who

under the motto of making Bach's music more enjoyable to today's generation, simply falsify it. And yet that word is not too strong to describe what often, indeed usually, is heard in our concert halls, where, alas, those conductors with the greatest authority—and therefore the greatest responsibility—often set the worst example.<sup>7</sup>

This certainly would have been read as an attack on Mengelberg, who had been conducting a very successful reorchestrated and truncated version of the *St Matthew Passion* on a yearly basis in the Amsterdam

Concertgebouw since 1899. The dichotomy Gunning proposed between the audience's enjoyment and Bach's intentions was a tenet for various other members of the Naarden Circle, a group that included theologians, musicians and influential music critics, all devoted to the cause of reforming the relationship between Bach's music and the liturgy.<sup>8</sup> It is beyond the confines of this article to assess the wider significance of the Naarden Circle, therefore the discussion here will be limited to the ideas of those members who seem particularly to have influenced, directly or indirectly, Gustav Leonhardt. They include the founder and first conductor of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, Johan Schoonderbeek; music critic Herman Rutters (who was present at the very first meeting of the Bachvereniging in 1921); theologian and politician Gerardus van der Leeuw (who joined the Naarden board of directors in 1933 and was president of the society from 1948 until his death in 1950);<sup>9</sup> organist, composer and conductor Anthon van der Horst (under whose baton the Nederlandse Bachvereniging performed from 1931 to 1964); and Gustav Leonhardt's father, George Leonhardt, a music-loving industrialist who served on the Bachvereniging board of directors (1938–70) and later became its vice-president (1949–70), as well as serving as treasurer (1949–63) and secretary (1963–70).<sup>10</sup>

### Johan Schoonderbeek and Herman Rutters

Herman Rutters (1879–1961) ([illus.2](#)) was a highly influential music critic mainly associated with the newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad*.<sup>11</sup> He was a prominent intellectual force within the Nederlandse Bachvereniging from its conception onwards, and was even made an honorary member in recognition of his long-standing support. Rutters shared his profound respect for Bach's music, as well as a passion to reform contemporary Bach performances, with Johann Schoonderbeek (1874–1927) ([illus.3](#)), who was the society's first conductor. Indeed, Schoonderbeek, who addressed him in their correspondence as 'my dear, faithful, Bach brother', wrote to Rutters some time during the 1920s of their shared struggle for musical reformation:

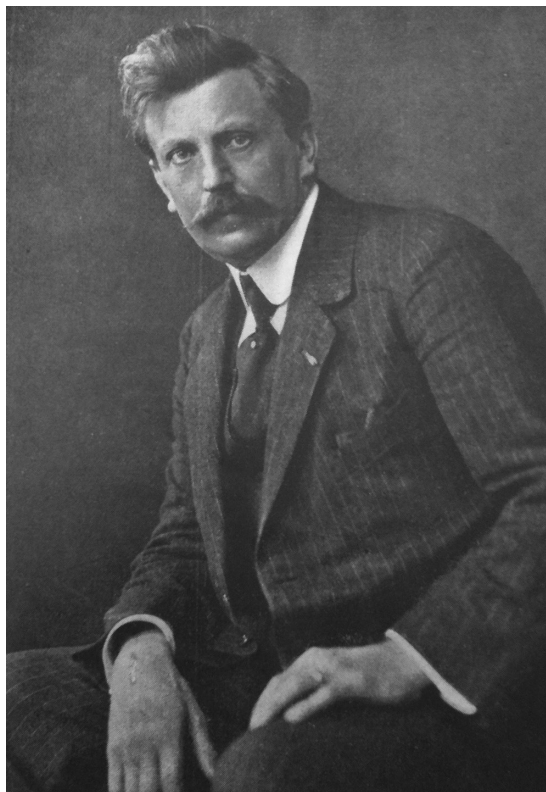
Yes, my dear Bach brother! It is appalling and Horrible to have to stand by and see Bach's musical setting of the gospel be used to shine in public ... Yes, I do feel, more and more, that it will become a matter of indifference to me



2 Herman Rutters, music critic and honorary member of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging (Courtesy of the Persmuseum, Amsterdam)

from which direction, from which point of view, others wish to comprehend Bach, though I intensely-violently disagree — But what's going on there in Paris is too awful. Never, never may anyone in the world 'use' Bach's Matthew Passion to display his own most magnificent, most beautiful, most gorgeous and most sophisticated abilities ... forwards we go, filled with confidence.<sup>12</sup>

Exactly what was going on in Paris that so raised Schoonderbeek's ire is not specified in the letter, but the accusation of conductorial vanity and artistic ego suggests that Mengelberg must be the target.<sup>13</sup> Rutters, who valued the musical score far above its performer, was, like Schoonderbeek, a fierce opponent of Mengelberg, and he had already strongly criticized the Concertgebouw conductor's performances before the Nederlandse Bachvereniging was founded. The problem was that Mengelberg, unlike Rutters or Schoonderbeek, believed it was the performer's duty to update the score in order to suit the needs of the audience.<sup>14</sup> H. J. M. Muller described the conflict



3 Johan Schoonderbeek, founder and first conductor of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging (Courtesy of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging)

between these two men as 'a tragedy. Both worked to the best of their abilities, but the clash of generations prevented them from understanding each other's work.'<sup>15</sup> Through his writings for the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Rutters would continue to apply pressure on Mengelberg to perform the *St Matthew Passion* more simply, less emotionally, with fewer musicians, and in closer agreement with Bach's score.

However, when Rutters took over the post of music critic at the *Algemeen Handelsblad* in 1916 this message of smaller forces for, and more liturgical approaches to, Bach's religious music was by no means new. Indeed, the review of the 1915 performance of the *St Matthew Passion* at the Concertgebouw, written by Rutters's predecessor W. N. F. Sibmacher Zijnen, shows that Mengelberg had come under similar criticism even before Rutters took up his post at the *Handelsblad*:

An extraordinary technical and flawless art-performance of the *Passion* (if such a thing were ever attainable) is surely something worthy of respect; but, surpassing this, we demand a strict understanding of style in reproducing this work, an extremely pure feeling for the character of sacred music, of the Protestant subjective mind of Bach. It seems to me that Mengelberg has not yet found his stance with regard to this. Although he can make whatever masterstrokes he desires with the supple, lustrous material of choir and orchestra (the extremely well-disciplined boys' choir also making beautiful sounds), what he desires is sometimes surprising, displaying more of imagination and the will to experiment than of strict, firm conviction. This is not the first time that this judgement has been pronounced: more and more, however, a feeling of protest manifests itself, an inner revolt against a lack of simplicity (chorales), against an artistic sophistication on the one hand and the overly exuberant expressive broadening and thickening of the massive sound.<sup>16</sup>

This review clearly shows that dissatisfaction with the lack of pious simplicity in Mengelberg's performances had made itself felt in Holland long before the Nederlandse Bachvereniging was founded.<sup>17</sup> When Rutters reviewed Mengelberg's performance the following year (1916), he took the opportunity to remark that Mendelssohn, when he revived the *Matthew Passion* in the 19th century, could not help but to have done so in the style of an oratorio. Rutters, on the contrary, proposed returning to Bach's intentions. He described the piece as

a Passion-work intended and composed for the liturgical commemoration of Jesus's suffering and death on Good Friday in the Thomas Church in Leipzig, written for two choirs of a maximum of 16 voices each and two instrumental groups proportional in size.<sup>18</sup>

Rutters weighed Mengelberg's performance against Bach's intentions and found it wanting. He proposed that one ought

to attempt to perform the *Matthew Passion* in such a manner as to reflect its *spirit* as purely as possible. That this first of all requires performance in a church is self-evident. And furthermore, it is difficult to view a performance from Mengelberg's point of view once one has learned to understand the essence of the work. This can awaken emotions and bestow consecration far surpassing the delight of sublime solo performances, virtuoso chorale singing and incomparable orchestral playing.<sup>19</sup>

When placed in this context, Leonhardt's remarks about his having been 'converted,' and about

Mengelberg's 'unparalleled' but 'abhorrent' *St Matthew Passion* performances, make perfect sense: there was a long tradition of such criticism leveled at the Concertgebouw conductor by the Naarden Circle.

It is therefore significant that the review written by Rutters several years later of the 1922 performance of the *Matthew Passion* by the Nederlandse Bachvereniging (its first concert *überhaupt*), contains prose tinted with words of religious import: the society 'immediately presented a confession of faith'; the effect was one of 'quiet, intense, devotional feeling' that kept the audience in 'gripped attention'; the performance had the air of a 'grave ceremony', one that 'could be the beginning of a new and blessed phase in our concert life'.<sup>20</sup>

These comments suggest that Rutters placed extraordinary importance on the society's role as an agent of broader musical, and perhaps even spiritual, reform. Indeed, Han Hulscher has underscored that Rutters's criticism was not limited to Mengelberg's performances of Bach alone:

Rutters repeatedly reiterated in his newspaper that Willem Mengelberg did not present 17th- and 18th-century music in its best light because he performed it with the typically 19th-century forces of an enormous orchestra, in the comparable environment of a large concert hall. Such reviews showed Rutters to be an early exponent of historical performance practice.<sup>21</sup>

Rutters's aesthetic stance was couched in language striking for its moralistic tone. He placed an extraordinary moral responsibility not only on conductors like Mengelberg, but on the shoulders of all musicians. Indeed, somewhere between his hopeful 1922 review of the Bachvereniging's performance of the *Matthew Passion* and his 1941 book, *J. S. Bach and our time*, Rutters seems to have lost patience with conductors and performers alike:

when musicology had developed to the point that it also found it worth its while to study the performance practice of the past, it made many surprising discoveries. It could demonstrate that so-called technical progress was not improvement, but merely change; that the harpsichord and other instruments were not at all primitive or faulty, but indeed perfect in their kind; and that the modern performance style more often blurred than clarified insight. But at this point it appeared that laziness and vanity formed an obstacle to performing musicians. Laziness resisted the effort of researching and mastering the earlier



technique; vanity placed the interest in personal success—so much more certain to be reached with a traditional technique—above serving the artwork itself.<sup>22</sup>

Later in the book, Rutters's defence of 'the artwork' reached bombastic heights:

For it is specifically the egocentric, profane character of our public music scene that presents Bach's art in mostly falsified performances. The public's taste, nurtured in the Romantic spirit; the construction of our concert halls; the commercial nature of the concert organizer; the tradition of the intermission; and more of such superficialities are given more weight than the needs of the artwork itself, which then is shamelessly inflated, mutilated, distorted and watered down by massive performing forces, cosmetic instrumentations and the expression of personal feelings until it becomes unrecognizable ... Only once the performing artist himself recognizes that the artwork is not there for him, but that he must serve it; only when he understands that he must not conform to the taste of the public, but that he must form and ennoble that taste—only then can he, in our times, open completely the way to Bach.<sup>23</sup>

Such ideas of the performer humbly serving the artwork without trying to influence the audience through the injection of personal feeling seems strongly to have influenced Leonhardt's own philosophy of performance. This becomes apparent when one compares Rutters's 1941 statements to similar sentiments found in the elaborately worded speech Leonhardt gave at the Erasmus Prize ceremony, in 1980:

Those moments, in which there is nothing to prove, but in which the performing artist experiences the satisfaction of happiness, are the result of the inspiration provided by the piece of music. This, and not the contact with the audience, is the heart of the matter. The musician who moves has contact with 'the music'; if he should seek contact with the audience then he is vain and uses the composition, instead of serving it and giving it and himself to the audience, using himself ... Therefore, the artist (creative or performing) can never, in my opinion, have contact with his fellow man. He chooses an *object* rather than a subject for the sublimation of his humanity...<sup>24</sup>

These ideas had been part of Leonhardt's message—indeed, were associated with his persona—long before this. For instance, the following is taken from a 1972 interview in the English magazine *The Gramophone*, in which Leonhardt is described as 'one of the pillars and indeed, pioneers of the current boom in pre-classical music', whose 'records have had a profound effect in this country': 'He is a

completely dedicated artist, for whom concessions to the public are neither necessary nor honest'.<sup>25</sup>

### Herman Rutters and Gerardus van der Leeuw

It would be an oversimplification to state that the Naarden Circle's proposed reforms were purely religious, and therefore entirely unconcerned with aesthetics: Rutters had, after all, noted in 1918 that

a large concert hall demands massive performing forces, and these crush to death the delicate beauties, and degrade the transcendence with an atmosphere of virtuosity.<sup>26</sup>

This transcendence, however, and these beauties, were religious in nature. The Naarden Circle differentiated between the strict spiritual beauty of Bach's aesthetic and Mengelberg's mere sensuality. For them, the former was essentially pious, communal and Protestant, while the latter was artistic, personal and, probably, 'much too Catholic'. Leonhardt's decidedly qualified admiration for Catholicism is well known. As he remarked in an interview in 1995, on the occasion of his conducting the yearly Nederlandse Bachvereniging *St Matthew Passion* performance:

I am a Protestant body and soul. I don't care to go too deeply into this, and I wouldn't persecute them, but banalities play an important role for Catholics; there are many distracting superficialities.<sup>27</sup>

It was not such 'superficialities' as personal and subjective interpretation or mere musical enjoyment that made the *St Matthew Passion* beautiful to the Naarden Circle: it was the work's liturgical, Protestant purity. For them, one of the most important ways of serving the spirit of the work was to view its music, particularly the chorales, as an expression of communal faith, rather than personal feeling. Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950)—an influential theologian, preacher and politician who was also a professor of religion at Groningen University—shared this point of view with Rutters. Van der Leeuw was, as has been noted, a member of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging board, but he interacted with Rutters in other contexts as well: for instance, they both served as editors of the *Algemeen weekblad voor Christendom en cultuur* (General weekly for Christendom and culture) from 1924 to 1939,<sup>28</sup> and in August 1936 both participated in an interdenominational conference entitled 'Muziek en religie' (Music and religion).<sup>29</sup>

It is not surprising, then, given their long association and shared religious conviction, that the two men expressed similar points of view when discussing the *St Matthew Passion*. One point of agreement between them was the proper performance of the chorales, of which Van der Leeuw wrote:

as a liturgical element, they represent the belief and thankfulness of the congregation in objective form. A chorale is not a spiritual song that a poet invests with his piety ... but the fixed expression in word and notes of generation on generation, all together.<sup>30</sup>

Here the 'Protestant-subjective' spirit that Sibmacher Zijnen attributed to Bach in his 1915 review has been replaced by a Protestant, objective, communal spirit. This communal aspect of the chorale had strong implications for its proper performance. Like Sibmacher Zijnen and Rutters before him, van der Leeuw took a critical stance to Mengelberg's version of the chorales, which were performed *a cappella*:

The chorale is completely and entirely a communal song. And nothing is in more heated battle with the essence of the Passion, nothing more clearly indicates a total misunderstanding of its intentions, than the Romantic-rhetorical accentuation of the chorales, performed without orchestral accompaniment. Of course, a highly nuanced *a cappella* chorale sung by a good choir always sounds beautiful. But it is not the beauty that Bach intends.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, both Rutters and van der Leeuw felt that personal feelings were to be banished, not only from the chorales, but throughout the entire work: van der Leeuw advised soloists to remove 'art' and subjectivity even from the arias, which: 'must not be sung as confessions in which the human voice reaches the heights of expression and virtuosity'.<sup>32</sup> This is because, he said,

The first condition for church music is objectivity; it can be totally devoted to holiness, but it cannot make this holiness into a feeling that can be interpreted purely lyrically. Church music is not the expression of a religious feeling, but service to God in tones.<sup>33</sup>

Rutters, in the same spirit, even raised a warning finger to his friend and conductor of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, Anthon van der Horst. In 1939, when reviewing van der Horst's performance of the *St Matthew Passion* with the Bachvereniging, the critic noted with displeasure the 'precious'

performance style of the chorales. It is interesting to compare Rutters's review of Mengelberg from the same year, in which he wearily notes the popularity, beauty and perfection of the performance:

Once again, as every year, enormous interest for the Amsterdam Palm Sunday tradition: Bach's *Matthew Passion* as interpreted by Professor Dr Willem Mengelberg ... An interpretation that over the years has become dear to the hearts of the audience, that has created its own traditions without its impressive power being lessened: the impressiveness of the concentrated affects; the realistically detailed expression of feeling in arias and recitatives, as well as the strong word accentuation in the chorales; the impressive power of the exuberant choir's *élan* and refinement, sharp, plastic and perfect; the expression of the vocal soloists; and the excellent performances of the orchestra, the instrumental soloists and the boys' choir. And all this with a supreme control of the material, a control that really is the greatest triumph for a leader, and for the tight-knit organism that he formed and holds to standard.<sup>34</sup>

The similarities between Rutters's review of Mengelberg (which one ought not to read as unalloyed praise) and his criticisms of van der Horst's performance of the same year are striking. Rutters feared that the Bachvereniging's 'once so taut line' would slacken. He perceived, especially in van der Horst's treatment of the chorales, a trend towards a performance style

in which the music is subordinated to declamation ... This certainly aids the expression of details; and thus an element of feeling is introduced that we feel clashes with the character of collectivity, of congregational song, and thus also with the liturgical intention ... But this disposition to subjective details, to the explicit expression of words, now slowly begins to infiltrate the performance of the arias and recitatives. There is a more lavish use of *ritenutos* and *rubatos*, of *expressivimi* and *caesuras*. Music makes place repeatedly for declamation: this is the slippery slope to the Romantic oratorio.<sup>35</sup>

Here the dangers of a personal expression of emotion are made clear: Rutters fears that van der Horst may return to Mengelbergian performance practices, and thus to a Mendelssohnian mentality. The result might be beautiful, but could never be pious. Clearly, he and van der Leeuw felt that the performer must be ever vigilant. Indeed, van der Leeuw went so far as to note that Bach himself nearly fell into the error of valuing aesthetics above liturgy in the *St Matthew Passion*. He described 'So ist mein Jesu nun gefangen' as

One of the most powerful and musically strongest pieces in the work. Liturgically it is weak. Here Bach reaches the edge of the church style, in the second half he has almost arrived at the style of opera.<sup>36</sup>

### Antho<sup>n</sup> van der Horst, Gustav and George Leonhardt

Gustav Leonhardt (1928–2012), his father George Leonhardt (1901–81) (*illus.4*) and Antho<sup>n</sup> van der Horst (1899–1965) (*illus.5*) seem, at the distance of many years, to have formed a tight ideological triumvirate, and much to have resembled one another in both thought and appearance. Without documentation to back up claims of personal affection, imitation or direct influence, a certain circumspection must be adopted here. However, it is clear that there was a good deal of contact between the three in the period preceding Gustav Leonhardt's rise to fame as a harpsichordist in the 1960s. A written description of van der Horst, currently housed in the Nederlands Muziek Instituut, could apply equally well to Leonhardt father and son, with one crucial difference:

At first sight he gave the impression of a rather genteel ... gentleman, always perfectly dressed. He was handsome and I suspect that he knew it. His appearance was more that of a diplomat than an artist ... he was from a lower-middle-class Calvinist milieu. My impression was that this upbringing explained in him a certain 'struggle for high life'.<sup>37</sup>

Each of these men, with their swept-back hair, neat suits and air of gentility, made a distinguished impression, but van der Horst's ethos was the expression of social ambition, whereas the Leonhardts were simply of a much higher class. Still, the artistic, spiritual and intellectual bonds they shared seem to have encouraged contact between them: Antho<sup>n</sup> van der Horst taught music theory to both the young Gustav and his sister Trudelines Leonhardt; he also gave a series of musicological and theoretical lectures in the Leonhardt family home in 1945; and of course, as conductor of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, van der Horst would have been in close contact with George Leonhardt, who played such an important long-term role on the society's board of directors. Indeed, George Leonhardt stood at van der Horst's side when he received, at the instigation of Gerardus van der Leeuw, an honorary doctorate in theology from Groningen University in 1948.<sup>38</sup> And, most touchingly, George



4 George Leonhardt escorts Elizabeth of Bavaria, Queen of Belgium, from a performance of J. S. Bach's *Hohe Messe* by the Nederlandse Bachvereniging in Naarden (Courtesy of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging)



5 Antho<sup>n</sup> van der Horst at the organ (Courtesy of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging)



Leonhardt delivered a eulogy for van der Horst on Dutch national radio in 1965. In describing van der Horst's stage presence, Leonhardt could, quite remarkably, have been describing that of his son Gustav:

a seeming discrepancy in [van der Horst's] performance between the immediately recognizable, more or less strict and Puritanical exterior, opposed to a more hidden, but not therefore less present, inner emotion. This form of self-control, and this inner emotion, this enthusiasm, like the works of Bach, rooted in *Soli Deo Gloria* ...<sup>39</sup>

An austere exterior infused with inner emotion characterized Leonhardt's own performance style.<sup>40</sup> But if Gustav shared a cool stage presence with his teacher, he also seems to have gained from him a respect for the work *an sich*. Van der Horst's philosophy on this topic, so close to Rutters's own, was described thus in an article in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* in 1932:

His [van der Horst] precept is 'each performance must be, as it were, a rebirth of the work'. He respects the work more than the composer. What does it matter who wrote a chorus, a symphony, as long as the composition is worth performing.<sup>41</sup>

While it is true that Gustav Leonhardt did have a feeling of serving the composer, he too, like van der Horst, thought that the work itself was of greater importance. Thus he could say in an interview:

Bach as a person does not interest me ... Look at many artists. They were scoundrels, but they painted, sculpted or composed profound things. Everyone has a good side and great artists created part of the time and the rest of the time they may have been a dirty pig! I'm not saying that Bach was a scoundrel, but if he were it would not matter. We have the music and that leaves me speechless.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, van der Horst had great respect for the composer's intentions as reflected in the music's notation, an example of yet another trait strongly associated with Gustav Leonhardt's practice:

The work must be performed just as the composer wrote it down. In order to do this as purely as possible, van der Horst attaches great importance to facsimiles. Printing can cause rigidity, which is why he prefers autograph scores.<sup>43</sup>

Such emphatic respect for the autograph was also in full sympathy with Rutters's proto-early music

stance, and illustrates another possible influence of the Naarden Circle on a young Gustav Leonhardt. And yet, above these more general concerns of performance practice, there was a still more decisive link between van der Horst and not only Gustav, but also George Leonhardt: the spiritual power of the *St Matthew Passion*. The effect of the work on Gustav Leonhardt, at any rate, was profound and dynamic: it inspired in him an ever-increasing Christian conviction, one that lasted to the end of his days, and that would strongly influence his intellectual approach to his profession. Even as he began to separate himself artistically from the Naarden Circle, imagining a new and very different performance practice from that of van der Horst, and even though Bach's church cantatas and the B minor Mass would soon establish their own importance in his musical and spiritual experience, the *St Matthew Passion* retained its significance. It is possible that this was Naarden's most comprehensive and decisive contribution to Leonhardt's development as a performing artist.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

It seems clear that certain elements currently associated with performances by Leonhardt were already being promoted as desirable by members of the Naarden Circle in the 1920s and 30s: for example, objectivity, respect for composer's intentions as represented in the autograph score, and the performer's need for humility. All of this was related to a deep conviction that Bach's religious music had a liturgical beauty surpassing that which the Naarden Circle saw as vain, subjective, Romantic, and merely artistic, expression.

It would be an over-simplification, however, to argue that Dutch Protestantism was the only source of objectivity in Leonhardt's performance style: he himself said that it was 'in the air' during his youth in the form of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*; and certainly the anti-Romantic Dutch composer, conductor and harpsichordist Hans Brandt Buys, who strongly influenced Leonhardt during the war years, was equally concerned with objective performances, without being a part of the Naarden Circle.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, it cannot but be significant that one finds so much of Naarden's message at the very heart of Leonhardt's aesthetic and intellectual world.

However, he did not merely inherit; he also renewed. Just as Rutters and van der Horst represented a new

generation, one in conflict with the Romantic traditions Mengelberg had inherited from the 19th century, so too Leonhardt energized a newer generation that eventually would sweep away the performance styles associated with the Naarden Circle. What most radically distinguished Leonhardt from his forebears was not his growing historical awareness—after all, ‘authenticity’ was simply an extension of the Naarden tradition of respecting the composer’s intentions—but rather, his distinctive style of performance. Frans de Ruiter, who heard Leonhardt play many times from the 1960s onwards, has described him as coming across, in comparison to his less punctilious

Dutch contemporaries, as a musical ‘fundamentalist’, whose performances ‘stupefied’ critics and fans alike with their ‘rigour’, ‘perfection’ and spectacular technique: their ‘logic and severity’ making a ‘crushing impression’. Leonhardt was an artist who ‘could not be ignored’.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it could be argued that Leonhardt’s genius lay in his ability to transform Naarden’s rigorous objectivity into a subjective, musically expressive device; that being able to find an emotional musical trigger in objectivity itself enabled Leonhardt to convert a Mengelberg-weary, rhetoric-wary, post-war generation of music lovers to early music, but this argument must be made elsewhere.

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1 NOS, Dubbelpportrait (broadcast 9 September 1980).

2 Indeed, the Nederlandse Bachvereniging continues to play an important role in Dutch musical life. It plans to perform and record the complete works of J. S. Bach between 2014 and 2021, when the society will celebrate its centenary. For more information on this ambitious project (entitled ‘All of Bach’) see [www.bachvereniging.nl](http://www.bachvereniging.nl) (accessed 17 December 2013).

3 C. Maas, ‘Ik beweeg niet meer dan mijn vingers’, *De Volkskrant* (7 April 1995), p.2.

4 P. Luttikhuis, ‘Voorbij het nulpunt aan sentiment’, *NRC Handelsblad* (7 April 1995), p.5.

5 Quoted in R. Schoute, *De Nederlandse Bachvereniging 50 jaar* (De Nederlandse Bachvereniging, 1971), p.9.

6 It is clear that later members of the Dutch Bach Society believed it had been founded in a fervently Protestant, anti-Mengelberg, spirit. For instance, the epithet ‘much too Catholic’, applied to Mengelberg (who was, indeed, a Catholic), is cited in an authorized history of the society (see Schoute, *De Nederlandse Bachvereniging 50 jaar*, p.12). There is also a document in the archive of the Nederlandse

Bachvereniging that explicitly states that ‘The Nederlandse Bachvereniging was founded in 1921 by Johan Schoonderbeek, as a reaction to the style of Mengelberg’s Matthew Passion performances’ (Archive of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, M 1921–1983). The author wishes to thank the archivist of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, Jan Hemmer, for his help in making such documents accessible.

7 Quoted in Schoute, *De Nederlandse Bachvereniging 50 jaar*, p.10.

8 For an overview of the evolution of the Bachvereniging’s performances, see J. van der Klis, *Oude Muziek in Nederland: het verhaal van de pioniers 1900–1975* (Utrecht, 1991), pp.37–48.

9 See Archive of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, D, 15 May 1933, p.7; and D, 5 November 1948, p.3.

10 Archive of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, L.

11 See ‘Herman Rutters zestig jaar’, *Het Vaderland* (23 December 1939), p.3. It is certainly no coincidence that the 1921 announcement of the formation of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging appeared in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

12 Archive of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, E 192? [sic].

13 As the letter is undated, it cannot be confirmed that Schoonderbeek refers here to the multiple performances of the *St Matthew Passion* that Mengelberg gave in the Théâtre des Champs Élysées in 1924, with Wanda Landowska at the harpsichord. These performances were part of a concert series that was dubbed the *Mengelbergfeesten* (Mengelberg Celebrations) by the press. All of Paris turned out to hear the *St Matthew Passion*, with Roussel, Ravel, Milhaud, Auric and Poulenc in attendance. That Mengelberg should take Paris by storm by means of repeated performances of the *St Matthew Passion*, outside of Eastertide and in a profane concert space, would indeed have been something to rouse the ire of the Naarden Circle. For a review of one of these performances, see ‘Mengelberg, Concertgebouw- en Toonkunst te Parijs’, *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* (20 May 1924), p.4.

14 In 1934, Mengelberg explicitly stated that ‘Those ... who simply plead for a reconstruction of old performance practices have an incorrect conception of the essence of music and musical performance’. He used the 1829 revival of the *Matthew Passion* as his example: ‘Mendelssohn’s practice was good for his time, because it brought Bach’s creation

back to life, opening the eyes of his contemporaries to the universal beauty of the work'. Cited in van der Klis, *Oude Muziek in Nederland*, pp.37 and 39.

15 H. J. M. Muller, 'Herman Rutters tachtig jaar', newspaper clipping with Ms. annotation (22 December 1959). Nederlands Muziek Instituut, archief 571 (Herman Rutters).

16 W. N. F. Sibmacher Zijnen, 'Bach-uitvoeringen', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (6 April 1915), p.6. It is worth noting that Sibmacher Zijnen's name appears on an undated list of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging's advisory board members (c.1921). 'Nederlandsche Bach-Vereeniging', unpaginated, Archive of the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, M 1921–1983.

17 Indeed, similar criticisms were published after Mengelberg's very first performance in 1899; see F. Zwart, *Willem Mengelberg, 1871–1951: een biografie 1871–1920* (Amsterdam, 1999), pp.97–9.

18 H. Rutters, 'Matthaeus-Passion', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (17 April 1916), p.5.

19 Rutters, 'Matthaeus-Passion', p.5.

20 H. Rutters, 'Nederlandsche Bach-Vereeniging', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (15 April 1922), p.2.

21 H. Hulscher, 'Studenten in het Amsterdamse muziekleven sinds 1878', in *Keurige wereldbestormers: over studenten en hun rol in de Nederlandse samenleving sedert 1876*, ed. L. J. Dorsman and P. J. Knechtmans (Hilversum, 2008), pp.19–38, esp. p.24.

22 H. Rutters, *J. S. Bach en onze tijd* (Amsterdam, 1941), p.112.

23 Rutters, *J. S. Bach en onze tijd*, pp.121–2. A comparison of these sentiments to the review of the *St Matthew Passion* from 1918 reveals the consistency of his thought; see H. Rutters, 'Bach's Matthaeus-Passion en onze tijd', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (31 March 1918), p.5.

24 G. Leonhardt and N. Harnoncourt, *Aussagen—Dankredes bij de uitreiking van de Erasmusprijs 1980* (Amsterdam, 1981). Leonhardt's sentiments also closely resemble those expressed in Schoonderbeek's 'Paris' letter to Rutters; see n.12.

25 R. Wimbush, 'Here and there—on Spiro Malas and Gustav Leonhardt', *The Gramophone* (May 1972), p.47.

26 Rutters, 'Bach's Matthaeus-Passion en onze tijd', p.5. For Rutters, virtuosity was a matter of 'heroic' Romantic expression, and thus involved not only nimble fingers, but also 'tempos, nuances, rubatos, and other details'; see H. Rutters, 'Ignatz Paderewski', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (14 March 1929), p.9. Remarkably, by 1930 Rutters felt that this Romantic mentality had become invalid even in the performance of 19th-century repertory: 'Different generations, different ideals'. See H. Rutters, 'Ignatz Paderewski', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (20 November 1930), ochtend, p.2.

27 Maas, 'Ik beweeg niet meer dan mijn vingers', p.2.

28 [www.hdc.vu.nl/nl/Images/Algemeen%20Weekblad%20voor%20Christendom%20en%20Cultuur\\_tcm99-138308.pdf](http://www.hdc.vu.nl/nl/Images/Algemeen%20Weekblad%20voor%20Christendom%20en%20Cultuur_tcm99-138308.pdf) (accessed 10 June 2013). The complex history of Dutch Protestant reforms in the 20th century is beyond the scope of this article; however, it is worth noting that Van der Leeuw was the 'initiator of the liturgical movement that arose in the 1930s in the Dutch Reformed Church'. See G. van Schuppen, 'Dienst van God in tonen: van der Leeuw en de Matthaeus- en Johannespassion', in G. van der Leeuw, *Bachs Matthaeus- en Johannespassion: met de complete teksten en hun vertaling* (Nijmegen, 2000), pp.7–15, esp. pp.7–8. Van der Leeuw's text on the *St Matthew Passion* was first published in 1937.

29 *Het Vaderland* (10 July 1936), avond, n.p.

30 van der Leeuw, *Bachs Matthaeus- en Johannespassion*, p.36.

31 van der Leeuw, *Bachs Matthaeus- en Johannespassion*, p.39.

32 van der Leeuw, *Bachs Matthaeus- en Johannespassion*, p.40.

33 van der Leeuw, *Bachs Matthaeus- en Johannespassion*, p.35.

34 H. Rutters, 'Matthaeus-Passie: volksuiting onder leiding van prof. dr. Willem Mengelberg—Grote zaal van het Concertgebouw', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (3 April 1939), p.11.

35 H. Rutters, 'Matthaeus Passie te Naarden', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (23 March 1939). For dating see G. Oost, *Anthon van der Horst, 1899–1965: leven en werken* (Alphen aan de Rijn, 1992), p.70.

36 Van der Leeuw, *Bachs Matthaeus- en Johannespassion*, p.54.

37 Nederlandse Muziek Instituut, archief 309 (Anthon van der Horst), doos 5, correspondentie 115–155. Letter from Willem Goedhart to Gert Oost (19 October 1988).

38 See 'Erepromotie Anthon v.d. Horst', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, dag (6 October 1948), n.p.

39 Broadcast by the NCRV (8 March 1965).

40 This rigour could lead to incongruities, as when Leonhardt performed live on a Dutch television variety show in 1961. Untouched by the banalities and superficiality surrounding him, his playing is controlled, intimate and exhibits inner fire. No attempt was made to 'play to the audience'. See KRO, Zaterdag Akkorden (broadcast 14 January 1961).

41 Annelen, 'De nieuwe leider van de Koninkl. Oratorium-vereeniging', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (20 February 1932), bijvoegsel, n.p.

42 [www.earlymusicworld.com/id2.html](http://www.earlymusicworld.com/id2.html) (accessed 17 August 2012).

43 Annelen, 'De nieuwe leider van de Koninkl. Oratorium-vereeniging', n.p.

44 This was confirmed in a private conversation with the Leonhardt family (13 June 2013). It is worth noting that when Leonhardt finally agreed, after seven refusals, to conduct the 1995 Nederlandse Bachvereniging *St Matthew Passion* concerts, he only participated in those performances that took place in the Grote Kerk in Naarden. The others (in modern concert halls) were conducted by Jos van Veldhoven. Leonhardt specifically requested that the audience refrain from applauding. As he said in an interview: 'an ovation after an entombment is quite unthinkable'. See C. Maas, 'Ik beweeg niet meer dan mijn vingers', *De Volkskrant* (7 April 1995), p.2.

45 NOS, Dubbelportrait (broadcast 9 September 1980). See also A. Smith and J. Wentz, 'Gustav Maria Leonhardt in Basel: portrait of a young harpsichordist', *Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis* (forthcoming).

46 Interview with F. de Ruiter (28 May 2013). Already in 1951 a reviewer described Leonhardt as 'possessed by a veritable authenticiteitswoede (authenticity-fury)'. Cited in P. Luttkhuis, 'Voorbij het nulpunt aan sentiment', *NRC Handelsblad* (7 April 1995), p.5.