



The following text is the English adaptation of my 2003 biography of the composer. All the translations are mine. The few references to other works in the body of the text are between square brackets.

## nico richter 1915-1945

julie muller

From the program of the Handel orchestral society, conducted by Henny Schol, March 1935:

*Coriolanus Overture:*

*Beethoven was not well served by having explanatory notes added to a number of his compositions.*

*So the purely musical - that is, what cannot be expressed in words - was pushed into the background.*

*That, however, is the only thing that determines the value of a piece of music. Therefore it seems sensible to stop here without explanations.*

N.R.

December 16<sup>th</sup> 2002 was a cold day in The Netherlands, but not as cold as the previous ones. There had already been outdoor races on natural ice in Groningen and racing officials in Friesland were in conclave. The magic word *elfstedentocht* had been uttered; the legendary race along eleven Frisian towns held only in years in which the thickness of the ice permitted. But the thaw set in on the sixteenth, to mass disappointment.

An elderly violinist was talking at dinner about the long treks across North Holland she and her fiancé had undertaken on skates towards the end of the Thirties; he balking at first and enthusiastic later on. They married in September 1940, but were only together for a year and a half. He then spent over three years in jails and concentration camps, returning home in the summer of 1945, only to die within weeks.

The beautiful Dutch landscape and the silence had inspired him, she told us and it was clear that she was seeing him as he was then. We were to hear him too, that evening.

*STRING QUARTET I*

On Monday evening, December 16<sup>th</sup> 2002, the twenty-fifth in the series of Uilenburger Concerts took place in the Uilenburger Synagogue in Amsterdam. The concert, named *The sweet light of day*, had been organised by the Leo Smit Foundation, which is dedicated to reviving the music of composers persecuted during world war II. The program included music by Willem Pijper, Piet Ketting, Tristan Keuris and Nico Richter.

Nico Richter would have turned eighty-seven in December 2002. His widow, the violinist Hetta Rester, was the same age. In the synagogue, she listened with shining eyes to his *Strijkkwartet I*. It was the first time she had heard it. Nico Richter, a Jewish member of the Resistance, only survived the war by three months. He came back from concentration camp Dachau a broken man.

The composer Richter was just starting to break through on the important concert stages. His death at twenty-nine was yet another blow to contemporary Dutch music, after the great losses during the war itself. After liberation, those works of his that had survived went unnoticed.

The string quartet was dedicated to the composer's friend Karel van Campen. It was known to exist, as it was mentioned in Richter's own list of music, compiled in 1936, where he had written that he thought it was pretty good, especially the second and third parts. What had happened to it was unknown, until the Leo Smit Foundation was offered the score early in 2001. The owner had heard a broadcast by the Dutch radio of the Uilenburger concert of October 16<sup>th</sup> 2000, which had included a biographical sketch of Richter with the performance of his 1937 *Lied*. The string quartet wasn't mentioned and he wondered if the piece were known.

That's one way lost scores are recovered. The quartet was passed on to Donemus for publication and the string section of the Leo Smit Ensemble premièred it sixty-six years after it was composed. The concert that Monday evening was well attended and the importance of the Leo Smit Foundation was proven once again.

## THE FAMILY

Nico Max Richter was born in Amsterdam on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1915, the second child and only son of Izaak Richter, a dentist from Den Helder and Sara Manheim from Alkmaar, two towns north of Amsterdam. Although the Richters had lived in what was then called Helder from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Manheims in Alkmaar from 1772, both families originally came from Amsterdam. The founder of this branch of the Richters was Mozes Joseph, who called himself Mozes Joseph Richter, the son of the unmarried VROUTJE Abraham Oorloos, also called Fammetje or Femmetje (a French translation), as stated on Mozes' marriage certificate. VROUTJE sold notions, meaning thread, ribbons and such and had been born in Amsterdam in 1788 or '89 to Abraham Gerrit Oorloos and Klara Barends. VROUTJE's father, born Abraham Gerson Levie (all given names) had taken the last name Horlogerie in 1812 when family names became obligatory. This was later corrupted into Oorloos, meaning Earless in Dutch, by a process well known to immigrants who went through Ellis Island in the United States. He was presumably a watchmaker.

Abraham and Klara had four daughters and three sons, all with the middle name of Abraham, customary among Jews at the time. They lived at Joden Breestraat 78, but by January 1812 the eldest daughter, VROUTJE, was twenty-five and living in the Zandstraat. Her illegitimate son Mozes Joseph, circumcised in Amsterdam on December 17<sup>th</sup> 1805, is not mentioned in the official document from 1812, nor on VROUTJE's death certificate. He must have been seven in 1812, his mother having become pregnant at the age of nineteen. Given the custom of using the father's name as the child's middle one, his father was probably called Joseph Richter.

The Amsterdam population register for the period does contain a Joseph Levij [Richter] who must have been married before or had an earlier relationship, as he had a daughter called Hesje, aged seventeen in December 1911, who can't have been a child of VROUTJE's. They lived at Houtgragt 5. Wives were never mentioned in that kind of document.

Towards the end of her life, VROUTJE returned to Amsterdam from Helder, living in the Breestraat. She was admitted to the Jode

Gasthuis (Jewish hospital) at the beginning of February 1829 and died there, aged about forty, on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Her son, Mozes Joseph “calling himself Richter” married on August 21<sup>st</sup> 1834 in Helder, where he was still living. His wife was Elizabeth (Betje) van der Ster, born in Helder in 1806. As a result of their marriage, their two sons, Joseph Mozes (Helder, February 12<sup>th</sup> 1831) and Abraham Mozes (Helder, April 18<sup>th</sup> 1833) were legitimised. The marriage had been blocked for years by Betje’s father, because Mozes’ parents hadn’t been married. For an orthodox Jew, marriage to an illegitimate child was unthinkable. Even after the birth of two grandsons, Gompel van der Ster remained adamant. When the young couple finally took him to court, he stated in front of the necessary witnesses that he would never consent to the marriage. The court, however, took a different view and allowed the wedding to proceed. Otherwise they would have had to wait until they were both thirty, as that was the law at the time. Another son was born on March 30<sup>th</sup> 1846, registered as Nathan Mozes, the son of Mozes Richter, merchant, at the house by the Hanenbrug. A daughter, Femmetje, born on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1848 completed the family.

In 1876 Nathan married Clara Josina Manheim, born in Alkmaar in 1856 to Izaak Manheim, merchant, and Grietje Hes. The Alkmaar regional archives are full of Manheims. The Alkmaar branch was founded by Salomon Emanuel Manheim and his wife Mietje Mozes Houthakker, who moved there from Amsterdam with their three children in 1772. Salomon became famous by saving several people from drowning and preventing the potentially catastrophic shipwreck of a barge with a drunken captain. He was awarded the town’s silver medal by the council in 1808 and a stipend of three guilders a week for life. He lived to be 101.

After moving to Alkmaar, Salomon and Mietje had at least three more children, among whom Isaac, who was to be the great-grandfather of Sara Manheim, the composer’s mother. Isaac’s brother Manus was the grandfather of Clara Josina, who married Nathan Richter and was to become Nico’s paternal grandmother. So Clara was both Sara’s great-aunt and her mother-in-law.

Clara Manheim moved from Alkmaar to Helder on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1878 when she married Nathan Richter. They had three children: Elizabeth, born in 1879, Izaak, Nico’s father, born on November 18<sup>th</sup> 1880 and Mozes, in March 1884. In December 1885,

after they had moved to Amsterdam, they had another son, Joseph and much later in 1896 Hartog, later called Hans.

In Amsterdam the family moved several times. First they lived on the Lijnbaansgracht, later at two addresses on the Nieuwe Achtergracht near the Weesperplein and eventually on the Plantage Muidergracht, where they remained.

Nathan must have run his business profitably, as his sons went to college. Izaak became a dentist, his brother Mozes a dental technician. Clara died in Amsterdam on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1933, at the age of 76; Nathan on March 18<sup>th</sup> 1940, at almost 94. Nathan's impending death was the subject of a letter from his daughter-in-law Sara to her daughter in New York in February. She wrote that Opa (granddad) had been seriously ill, but had recovered, which was too bad for him. Nico's mother Sara was a matter-of-fact lady.

As stated, Nico's father became a dentist. He married Sara Manheim in Amsterdam on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1911, when they were both thirty. Sara's grandparents were Mozes Manheim, born in Alkmaar on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1814 and Debora Josua Mossel, born in Amsterdam on July 29<sup>th</sup> 1821. Between 1845 and 1865 they had ten children of whom the second, Izaak, was to become Sara's father. He was born on August 5<sup>th</sup> 1846. The family lived at Verdronkenoord in Alkmaar in a house that had been in the family for several generations. All ten children lived (the number of miscarriages is unknown) and Debora died at the age of fifty in 1872. A year later Mozes married Saartje de Jongh, and had one more daughter, Kaatje.

On July 30<sup>th</sup> 1871, six days before his twenty-fifth birthday, Izaak Manheim, merchant, married the twenty-two-year-old Betje de Leeuw. They had seven children between 1872 and 1880, of whom the fourth, Debora, only lived for two months. Less than a year later they had twins, Josua and Karel. Josua died after six weeks. The last child was born on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1880: Sara, who was to be Nico's mother. She and Karel remained very close all their lives. Karel proved to have inherited his great-great-grandfather Salomon's love of the sea. He worked on ocean-going ships and later moved to Liverpool, where he became a steward on passenger liners, probably with the White Star Line. He remained close to his sister Sara and her children the youngest of whom, Karla, was named after him. She and her siblings knew Uncle Karel well.

After their marriage in 1911, Izaak and Sara went to live in the Eerste Constantijn Huygensstraat at number 112. Nico was their second child and only son. His elder sister, Betty, the biographer's mother, was born on May 15<sup>th</sup> 1913, Nico on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1915 and their younger sister Karla a year and a half later, on July 18<sup>th</sup> 1917.

All Salomon Manheim's sons had many children and Richter and Manheim cousins kept intermarrying during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as was customary among Jews. During the second world war almost all the members of this large family were murdered by the nazis.

## CHILDHOOD

When Nico was eight months old, the family moved into the large townhouse at Vondelstraat 104 E (now 116), more or less around the corner, with his father's practice on the second floor. Nico was to live there until he married. From boyhood he occupied the attic, which had been turned into a bedroom and study. During the first few years Izaak's brother Mozes also lived in the Vondelstraat and in later years various Manheim cousins from Alkmaar stayed with the family.

The Vondelkerk, a large church officially called the Sacred Heart of Jezus, was and is also in the Vondelstraat. It is neo-gothic and was built in 1880 by P.J.H.Cuypers, who also built the Amsterdam Central Station and the Rijksmuseum, and it was praised by the famous architect Berlage for its "harmonious completeness".

As a small child, Nico was impressed by the church and totally under the spell of its Adema organ. The Vondelkerk had a men's choir and also, after 1917, a boy's choir. This must have fired the imagination of the musical toddler, who was allowed by his parents to go and listen, which was amazingly permissive of them. He was, he said, Romancathojewish. The music made in the church was varied from the very beginning in 1890: Bach, Mozart and even Wagner on the organ; music by Johannes Verhulst was performed next to the then so popular Belgian school of composers for the organ which included Guilmant and Widor. Aside from the rapt interest in music the tiny boy evinced, his intellectual achievements were also remarkable.

There is an anecdote concerning Nico, aged four, sitting under the dining room table reading the newspaper and refusing to hand it

over to his father. Exactly which article had caught his attention is unknown, but we do know that he was already reading well. That dining room table was a favorite spot of his and of his sister Karla's and even the biographer remembers that table at Oma and Opa's as a wonderful hiding place.

Nico's mother was a perfectionist and kept a tight rein on household expenses. Although the practice and good investments led to a comfortable income, money was handled very carefully indeed. Once a week Sara would put a small pile of pocket money on the mantelpiece for each member of the household including her husband. That was it. However when Izaak looked tired she would send him off to Paris for the weekend, often with his friend Bromet. Then she would be lavish with spending money. She herself preferred the occasional trip to a spa.

The girls were kept on a very short leash but Nico too was irritated by the stern regime. At a very early age he led his younger sister into rebellious behavior. "We're not eating that, are we Karla?" was the battle cry well known to the family and it led to many household dramas. When Nico was older, a conflict sometimes led to his not exchanging a word with his father for months.

The Richter children went to the Agatha Deken elementary school, on the corner of the Jan Luykenstraat and the Van der Veldestraat which leads into the P.C.Hoofstraat, then as now an exclusive shopping area. The school was private at first and took children from the age of five, rather than six as the public schools did. The year after Karla entered first grade, the school was turned over to the city.

The Agatha Dekenschool had upper middle-class pupils and they were aware of their status. Their parents were mostly quite well-to-do but some, including Nico's classmate and later wife, Hetty (later called Hetta) Scheffer, were not. Her father had died very young.

## MUSIC LESSONS

One of the big advantages of the Agatha Dekenschool was that they had a separate teacher for music, Wilhelmina van Tussenbroek (a niece of the composer, Hendrika van Tussenbroek). Nico's class had her for solfège in first and second grade. That ended in the third, as city schools had the regular teacher for everything except gym and

needlework. The children were lucky, though. Their teacher was a music lover.

By that time two of the boys were already taking violin: Max Möller, the son of a well-known violin maker on the Willemsparkweg and Nico, who started at seven. It soon became clear that he was extremely musical. His teacher was the violist Jacques Muller, whom he called uncle, but who wasn't really a relative. Jacques Muller, born in 1903, was to become a member of the Concertgebouworkest in 1936. He taught Nico until the boy was fifteen.

Even as an elementary-school child Nico had been taken to the Concertgebouw by his father. Hetta remembered his telling her that he was particularly impressed by the conductor, even more than by the violinists. That was the most important person. "I want to do that too." said Nico. He got all excited by a concert at which he heard the composer Willem Pijper, probably on December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1927, when Pijper played his own piano concerto under the direction of Pierre Monteux. Nico had just turned twelve and was in his first year of the HBS (secondary school preparing students for university). "I want to do that too." he said determinedly. A composer appearing live on stage! Nico had thought that composers were dead by definition.

## SECONDARY SCHOOL

After elementary school, Nico would have liked to go to gymnasium, the secondary school where Greek, Latin modern languages and mathematics were taught, but his parents decided on the HBS, as they considered only math and related subjects to be of any real importance. Anyway, gymnasium took an extra year. So Nico went to the Vierde Vijf-Jarige Hoogere Burger School, called the 4<sup>th</sup> 5 for short, on the Jozef Israëlskade: a wooden building which is long gone. The school was amalgamated into the Berlage Lyceum, which is still proud of its former student.

He was admitted in September 1927 without having to take an entrance exam, which was unusual. He had very high marks from the Agatha Dekenschool, including a ten (highest mark) for arithmetic. His elder sister, Betty, who would also have liked to go to the HBS, was already a student at the four-year De Laresse ULO, which was deemed sufficient for a well-bred girl, according to the Richters. Karla was also sent to the ULO, as was Hetty Scheffer, who was

bored there and was allowed by her mother to transfer to the five-year Girls' HBS. Hetty's mother paid more heed to her daughter's own wishes. So Hetty and the young Richters lost touch for a while.

Nico spent a lot of time composing. He had a terrific memory and went through the HBS curriculum without too much trouble, taking his final examinations in thirteen subjects in 1932, at the age of sixteen. He excelled in algebra, geometry and Dutch, did very well in the other languages, French, German and English and oddly enough failed biology, which had been one of his best subjects until year five. His only other failure was in gymnastics. He never once passed gym.

Although math was obviously his best subject, he was also very interested in languages and history. Judging by the texts he chose for his early compositions, which included Goethe, Heine and Tennyson along with the famous Dutch poets Gorter and Gezelle, he must have had excellent language teachers.

It was at this time that he developed the highly characteristic handwriting of nico richter. He used art deco lettering and seldom capitalised, even where this was still the custom during the nineteen thirties in Dutch, for instance. the months of the year and even names. His friend and student the well-known Dutch composer Lex van Delden, who admired him greatly, used the same lettering for a time. This can be seen on a copy of his *La Musique* (November 29<sup>th</sup> 1939) which van Delden dedicated to him. At the top he wrote 'for nico richter' in exactly the same style that Nico used himself. Nico's notebooks show that his spelling was also futuristic.

## IMPOSSIBLE STUDENT

When Nico was fifteen, he was given a different violin teacher. Sam Tromp gave an interview in 1954 from which one can conclude that Nico was becoming too troublesome a student for Jacques Muller, who recommended Tromp. "You're getting an impossible student." Nico's father told him. Perhaps they were looking for a more salient teacher for the "impossible" boy. Sam Tromp had just become second violinist in the Concertgebouw orchestra, of which violist Jacques Muller was only to become a member years later.

"...The first time he came for a lesson, I was confronted with a tall, pale, nervous boy and I decided to spend the hour talking mostly about other things than music." said Tromp in the interview with the

critic Leo Hoost. "We talked about sports and such. When the conversation somehow turned to Mozart, Nico suddenly said: "Mozart is colossal, but Beethoven is nothing!" You see, however impulsive and strange that sounded, out of the mouth of a child, I still heard something in those words... To be brief, after a year Nico's father came again, now to complain that his son was neglecting his HBS homework because he spent hours every day playing the violin. In the course of the years I became absolutely convinced that he had an exceptional talent for composition." [Leo Hoost, "Nico Richter must not be forgotten" (transl. JM) *Nieuw Israelisch Weekblad* No. 27, March 12<sup>th</sup> 1954.] Jacques Muller was murdered in Auschwitz in 1942.]

## EARLY WORKS

Nico's first worked-out composition, a "minuet in Mozart's style" as he called it, for violin and piano, dates from 1929, when he was thirteen. He wrote it in the summer vacation between his second and third years at secondary school. At that time his grades, excepting math, were very poor and he barely scraped through to the next class. It wasn't until the middle of his fourth year that he managed to balance his many activities. We know about this from the list of his music he compiled in 1936, in which he divided his works into 'A: destroyed or lost' and 'B: acknowledged works', and discussed them.

As a schoolboy he wrote a Spanish dance, a sonatina, a piece about a twist of hair with an added litany, an epigram for a madman and a sonata, all for violin and piano. He considered the piece about the chignon or bun, as it was called, to have the beginning of a style of his own. It had many consecutive fourths, was poetical, made use of Spanish rhythms and was very subtle. The litany was related: a dirge about the bun being cut off. One suspects the presence of a girl... The *epigram for a madman*, probably from 1933, was judged by the young composer to be very fantastical and off-key, rather formless, with habanera rhythms.

Young Richter composed piano music too, including music for a puppet show, presumably at school, several dances and preludes and also, during the period of his final examinations, *blues* (May 1932) about which he wrote in March 1936 that it had an ostinato accompaniment of crotchets, with variations on a theme, impressions

of a pair of blue eyes, very light and tender. It was the first time he used chords consisting of (augmented) fourths. "This little piece was on a very high level considering my age", he wrote later.

He also composed music for cello and piano, for voice and piano and for voice, violin and piano during his schooldays. His interest in literature is obvious from his choice of song texts from Heine, Gezelle, Gorter, Goethe, Schiller and Tennyson. He also wrote a song for voice and guitar on a text of his own.

Other early works are two piano trios, two piano quartets, a trio for oboe, bassoon and piano and a number of orchestral works. He wrote four symphonies, the second of which was called *De Potkachel*, that is, the potbellied stove. His comment in 1936 was that all kinds of amazing tales were told while smoking a pipe around the potbellied stove at Ruurd's [a classmate and good friend]. He later thought that the instrumentation was poor and that the piece was structurally weak and clumsily put together. He made short work of his *burlesque*: "gross", he wrote.

His symphonic poem *PxR2* (or  $\pi R^2$  ?) was, he stated, strongly influenced by Debussy and a rhapsody for violin and orchestra had the first explicit *Irene* theme (also found in the second movement of the violin concerto). He considered it otherwise rather boring. Irene was Irene Heyting, to whom he was to dedicate his *sinfonieta I* (*serenade*) in the summer of 1934. She had moved from Eindhoven to Amsterdam in 1930 and lived with relatives. She had been admitted to the fourth year of the HBS and was in class 4a when Nico and his friends Ruurd Vierhout and Rinze Veldman were in 4b. Ruurd had gone from the Agatha Dekenschool to the 4e 5 a year before Nico, but had to repeat the second year and thus became a classmate of Nico's. Rinze entered 2b at the same time. Both boys were a year older than Nico and Irene was three years his senior. Soon Nico and Irene were "going together" as it was then called.

We know most about his early dramatic works. The fifteen-year-old wrote a comic opera about marital infidelity in November 1931, while preparing for his final exams. Although nowadays one would be expected to look for an autobiographical background to this choice of subject, the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>-century drama studied at secondary schools at that time provides more than enough material. That goes too for *the mother murderer*, composed on a text of his own in 1934.

The libretto of the marital drama was written by Rinze Veldman and had, Nico later decided: a pretty silly flute part; banquets and such. He wrote it in what he called bad Lorzing style.

The “long”opera, *the soul*, for which he wrote both text and music, was finished in the summer of 1932, just after his finals. It was the story of an unhappy love affair and had, he wrote, a weird prologue. He liked the interchange between heaven and earth and the piece had two unusual parts: a dance of souls and a lullaby.

*The golden globe* was composed in January 1933, when Nico was a first-year student at Amsterdam University. It was his music for a shadow show, for a speaker, a singer, violin, cello and piano. The text was by Ruurd Vierhout and was, wrote the composer, lost by Dr. Th. de Grauw, his chemistry teacher at the HBS. So it seems that Nico kept in touch with at least some of his former teachers and classmates. It was meant to be a symbolic representation of the good leadership of Dr. Verschuur, the principal of the school who retired in December 1932. The piece, which Nico decided later was rather obscure but not bad, must have been written for Verschuur’s retirement party.

The last of these lost early works was *the mother murderer*, composed in July/August 1934, a summer in which he took a long trip to Barcelona, Athens and Cairo. This little opera, with his own text, was on the well-known (at the time) theme of the young man who murders his mother at the instigation of his girlfriend. Richter wrote later that the vocal parts were bad.

For the edification of those who don’t know this gem, it ends with the young man running to his beloved with his mother’s heart in a little box. On the way, he stumbles and falls. From the box come the words: “Oh, my boy, you haven’t hurt yourself, have you?”.

Several things are of special interest about these early works: Nico Richter was certainly serious about his music and indicated what he thought of his adolescent compositions a very few years after they had been written. He was interested in the combination of text and music from early childhood and also perfectly happy to compose for a puppet show or a special occasion. Had he lived, opera might have become his genre.

In Nico’s final year at school he had argued with his father, who demanded that he choose a “real” profession. Making music wasn’t one; it was a valued spare-time activity. You couldn’t earn

your living at it, though. Nico had to go to the university to study medicine. His violin teacher, Sam Tromp, agreed.

The arguments became so heated that being in the house was intolerable. Father and son didn't speak to one another. Karla, then fourteen, hid in corners and Betty went off to nursing school at the Amsterdam Binnengasthuis. Ironically, it was she who would have liked to study medicine, but she had insufficient secondary education. What was closed to her, was forced on Nico.

## UNIVERSITY YEARS

In September 1932 sixteen-year-old Nico Max Richter was enrolled as a first-year medical student at the municipal university of Amsterdam and, presumably at the same time, as a preparatory year student at the music school connected to the Amsterdam conservatory. On October 11<sup>th</sup> he became a member of the student society *Unitas* (*Unitas Studiosorum Amsterdamsium*) and was installed three days later. *Unitas* was a progressive society, not an exclusive one and new members of both sexes were taught the ropes, not hazed. He joined the debating group *Palliter*. The *Unitas* debating groups were usually male or female only.

A caricature of Nico was published in the the society's official paper *Unitas*, over the caption *The Genius*. The sketch doesn't look much like him, as the boyish face has rounded cheeks. Nico was always extremely thin.

At the conservatory music school, Nico studied with Sepha Jansen, who had played the second violin in the *Concertgebouw-orkest* and was married to Eduard van Beinum who was then the substitute and later the regular conductor of the orchestra. Nico thought she was a wonderful teacher. He was taught theory by Ernest Mulder, director of theory and composition studies at the conservatory.

Richter's time at the music school is difficult to document, as the archives in question are said to have been lost in a fire. What we do have is an an extremely curious document found in Richter's file in the Dutch music institute. It purports to be a sketch of his early life but is full of mistakes and then goes on to record an incident about an orchestral suite Richter is supposed to have derived from his unsatisfactory opera. According to the document, an unnamed friend

of Richter's insisted that the suite should be played and accompanied him to the house of Willem Mengelberg, the conductor of the Concertgebouw orchestra. Mengelberg was not at home, so they went to see Eduard van Beinum, who lived on the same street as Richter's friend. Van Beinum called down from upstairs to find out who was there and when told by the unnamed friend that it was Nico Richter with an orchestral piece, said to leave it on the stairs. This was unacceptable to the friend, who took it upstairs and handed it to Van Beinum, who agreed to look at it. A week later he answered that the work was promising, but that the young composer had a lot to learn. He suggested studying fugues and writing two hundred of them as an exercise. This was in 1932-33.

According to the document, Nico did so and then wrote the violin concerto performed by the Händel Orkest in Amsterdam. It goes on to discuss the difficulties Nico had at the music school, particularly with Ernest Mulder, who is said to have held on for a long time to one of his compositions written as part of the conservatory admission exam, unwilling to give it back before "all the other gentlemen have seen this good joke". Richter is said to have passed the exam but Mulder disagreed, spoke to the director, Sem Dresden, and had the pass changed to a probationary pass. At this point the friend cancelled Nico's enrollment, without telling him but with his later consent.

The same friend is supposed to have sent Nico's *concertino for cello and six instruments* to Brussels, where it won a prize and led to the conductor Hermann Scherchen becoming his teacher. He didn't make a copy. The final paragraphs of this weird document tell us that Nico's brother (he didn't have one) was the director of a conservatory in Shanghai and that the friend's adventurous spirit had proved fatal to himself, as he went to the Dutch East Indies, stole a small boat and was sent to jail for piracy.

As the document is still in Richter's file, it seems necessary to describe it. In all probability it was written by Ruurd Vierhout, the HBS classmate who was Nico's oldest friend. Aside from that, other indications are the mention of the Dutch East Indies where Vierhout was born and the real proximity of Van Beinum's house to his. It is highly improbable that a young man only slightly older than Nico could have cancelled his conservatory enrollment. Other anecdotes about Ernest Mulder, however, do not rule out the possibility that the

story about him is true. As for the concertino, that it went to Brussels without a copy being made is correct. The original was buried in a huge storage room at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, where nobody was able to get at it, in spite of the efforts made by the representative of the philharmonic orchestra and the biographer. However in 2008 Hans van Dijk, the Louvain Professor of Musicology succeeded in having the score dug out and obtaining a copy. The piece was played in The Netherlands for the first time since February 11<sup>th</sup> 1936, fittingly, during the Nederlandse Muziekdagen on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2008. It was performed by ensemble Insomnio during the period in which the jury was out deciding who would win the Henriëtte Bosman prize, an incentive prize for young composers, offered by the society of Dutch composers (GeNeCo), in the Bimhuis, Muziekgebouw aan het IJ in Amsterdam. The chairman of the jury, the composer Jeff Hamburg, had brought Richter's piece to the attention of the orchestra. Nico Richter had been a member of GeNeCo from 1939.

## COMPOSITIONS

The first composition of Richter's that has been preserved is his *violin concerto* of 1933, when he was seventeen. It was first performed at the Amsterdam Muzieklyceum during a concert by the Handel orchestral society conducted by Henny Schol, on March 16<sup>th</sup> 1935. Nico's notebook says that the piece takes about ten minutes, but the list of his music compiled a year later, says twelve. He called it a free improvisation, the orchestra having a more important role than accompaniment and the soloist not being asked to cut any wild capers. He was convinced that solistic showmanship did not go with good musicianship.

One of the critics was less than enthusiastic about the structure of the piece, but praised the atmosphere in the *lento*. The *allegro* was of special rhythmical interest and the orchestral sound original and exciting, particularly in the brasses. Another critic considered his painting of city sounds realistic, but didn't think the solo sufficiently challenging.

These two reviews, with diametrically opposed opinions on the solo violin part, marked the beginning of the student's public appearance in the Dutch music world. Two months earlier he had

passed his first pre-med exams and in July he went to Brussels to participate in what we would now call an international masterclass on music and theatre. It was given by Hermann Scherchen, who was to become his teacher. Scherchen was a well-known music director and famous for conducting without a baton.

The two final concerts of this third Session Internationale d'Enseignement Musical et Dramatique in the Palais des Beaux Arts, were to be conducted by seventeen young people from Hungary, China and Denmark, among other places, one of whom was Nico Richter, who performed on July 4<sup>th</sup>, as was announced in the Dutch newspaper, De Telegraaf on the 1<sup>st</sup>. Each candidate was to conduct one movement of the piece in question. In Nico's case this was the Minuetto from Haydn's *Symphony in c minor*, which he conducted with great passion, according to the Belgian press. The Telegraaf critic praised his style and liveliness.

#### PRIZE WINNER

The next day, under the headline DUTCH MUSICIAN WINS the same newspaper reported that four of the thirty compositions written for the competition had been awarded the Henri le Boeuf prize by the jury. One was the *concertino for cello and six instruments* by Nico Richter. The four pieces were to be performed at the Palais des Beaux Arts on July 19<sup>th</sup> during the Concert Jeunesse (young musicians) by the chamber orchestra of the philharmonic society, under the baton of Hermann Scherchen. The young composers were to receive a thousand francs each.

Izaak Richter decided to go to Brussels to listen. This led to his meeting Hermann Scherchen and the decision that Nico was to study with Scherchen in Brussels during vacations. In later years Scherchen stayed with the Richters too, but that was not an unqualified success. Sara complained that he phoned long-distance to Belgium and ate all the chocolates.

On July 14<sup>th</sup> the entire Belgian press announced the performance, which was to be broadcast live on the radio.

Nico's piece was received favorably. "The work makes an excellent impression... There are many new sounds and the composer uses all possible means to bring them together within the fragile symphonic framework." Nico underlined the last sentence in his scrapbook.

“...subtle and unusual quality... exquisitely light... chrystal clear music... sunny...”

The critics all mentioned that he was the youngest prize winner and a medical student, though they thought he was twenty, rather than nineteen. They were also surprised and pleased at how young the audience was; Scherchen was highly praised for his initiative.

Nico's later remarks about his cello concertino of January 1935: cello with clarinet, horn, trumpet, piano and two violins; about six minutes long. I like it, but not extremely well. The second movement is very good, but as a whole it is just all right.

## LOST

The concertino has only recently been recovered, as reported above. After the first performance in Brussels and one on November 27<sup>th</sup> in Winterthur (northeast of Zürich in Switzerland), at which Hermann Scherchen conducted the local orchestra with the famous cellist Emanuel Feuermann playing the solo, the score remained in the archives of the Prix Henri le Boeuf until rescued by Professor van Dijk in 2008.

## SCHERCHEN

In the meantime, Nico composed *trio for flute, viola and guitar*, dedicated to another student of Scherchen's, Bertus van Lier, whose work Nico admired. It is dated August 1935, four months before Nico turned twenty.

In January 1936 he wrote his *string quartet I*, dedicated to Karel van Campen, a friend. Until the year 2000, nothing was known about this piece, aside from the composer's own remarks that it was pretty good, especially the second and third movements. Then the secretariate of the Leo Smit foundation got a phone call from Maarten de Vries Robbé, an amateur musician. He had heard a radio broadcast of some of Richter's music, in which a quartet that he and his friends had played and which he had found among his deceased uncle Karel van Campen's papers, was not mentioned. One of the players, Professor David de Levita, had pointed out that it was probably the only copy, so the original score was offered to the

grateful biographer and, after being published by Donemus, is now in the Dutch music archives.

On February 11<sup>th</sup> 1936, the concertino was performed in the Kleine Zaal (small concert hall) of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. That was the première and also the last performance before 2008 (see above). The *serenade sinfonietta I*, for his HBS girlfriend Irene Heyting, was also performed. The program, a dual effort by the Dutch section of the International Society for Contemporary Music and Dutch chamber music society directed by Piet Tiggers, included six pieces, all of them billed as premières. Other works were songs for soprano and chamber orchestra by Bertus van Lier and a concertino for chamber orchestra by Rosy Wertheim, with a cello solo by Jean Aerts.

The reviewers were favorably disposed towards both the initiative and the young composers; one of them noted that Richter wrote carefree music with the budding freshness of youth, full of bright ideas which he spaced with a remarkable feeling for economy and summarised concisely. At the end of the concert, Rosy Wertheim and Nico thanked the audience from the stage.

The next day, the conductor Piet Tiggers wrote a letter thanking Mr. and Mrs. Richter for something he usually didn't get on stage: flowers! (Nowadays the conductor *always* gets flowers at the end of a concert in The Netherlands.) He expressed his gratitude and went on to congratulate them on Nico's music. He had, said Tiggers, great sensitivity to music and if he continued to study hard he would undoubtedly achieve something that others cannot, namely to be a Composer.

## HETTA

Meanwhile, Nico passed his next exams at the beginning of July. During this hectic period, in which he had to divide his attention between his studies and his music, his relationship with Irene Heyting came to an end. Shortly afterwards Nico was taking a walk when he saw a pretty young woman carrying a violin case. He recognised his old grade school classmate Hetty Scheffer, now called Hetta. He stopped to talk, but at first she didn't even recognise him; they hadn't met for some seven years. Her first reaction was Wow! You *have* grown. She found him attractive and thought he had really

beautiful eyes. Their conversation soon turned to music; Nico asked her to come and play chamber music with him and some friends and she agreed. Their friendship, based on shared musical interest, became more and more intimate. At the same time Hetta was studying for her violin exams at night and working as an assistant in a dental clinic by day. Still, she found time to get the unathletic Nico onto skates, when there was ice. At first they went to the skating club on the Museumplein, but if it froze hard enough they went across the IJ and then skated all the way to Monnickendam. They usually took the steam tram back, except when the wind was northerly. Then they went by tram on the way out and skated home with the wind at their backs.

Hetta was crazy about Nico, but he was difficult, too. He never admitted being in the wrong after an argument and sometimes just stalked off angrily, but never for long. On Friday evenings they always ate at Nico's parents' and after they were married he wouldn't go with her if they had argued. He would turn up half an hour later, though.

Hetta's mother, a widow, had no racial prejudices and was perfectly comfortable with her daughter's relationship with a Jewish boy, but Nico's mother was less than enthusiastic at first about the Christian girl.

## DARK CLOUDS

In February 1936 the Spanish elections were won by a leftist coalition, to which conservatives and fascists reacted with violence. In July the army in what was then Spanish Morocco rebelled against the elected government and the anti-democrats soon came together under Franco's leadership. This is where the second world war really started. Nico's elder sister Betty and her fiancé, Fred van Santen collected money and goods in support of the government troops, as did many of their friends. Several of Betty's friends were regular visitors to the Vondelstraat and heated political discussions took place there, especially between Nico and his future brother-in-law. Both enjoyed loud debates and they disagreed. The heated debates were no bar to their friendship, however. Nico favored a much less radical approach than Betty and Fred, who supported the International

Brigade: volunteers from many countries who went to Spain to fight or to provide medical aid for the army.

Betty and Fred were married on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Fred was an only child and his father, Jo, was a director of the well-known Tuschinski Theater, a beautiful art deco theater, still in use, which at that time offered films preceded by a stage show with a live orchestra. Jo van Santen loved big parties and so after the civil ceremony (obligatory in The Netherlands) the young couple was pressured into a Jewish wedding. The ceremony was even filmed by Polygoon, the Dutch newsreel. Both the Richters and the Van Santens were members of the large group of secularised, integrated Jews in Amsterdam, but the families did want a traditional Jewish wedding. In order to achieve it, Jo had to promise to give just as much money to the Help for Spain committee as he spent on the event itself. Shortly afterwards the newlyweds moved to Scheveningen. Fred was to run the Hague's Studio Theater (part of the Tuschinski concern). Betty was the first child to leave the Vondelstraat.

#### MANETO ANNOUNCED

In February 1937 Dutch newspapers announced that a Dutch music festival would take place from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of June under the name Maneto (= manifestation of Dutch music). That name became well known later on. The organisation was to present seventeen concerts between 1937 and 1940 alone. During the war it disappeared from (public) view, like so many manifestations of the arts whose organisers refused to work under the nazis.

This first festival was to include concert performances, a cappella choir works, chamber music and oratorios by composers including Hendrik Andriessen, Henk Badings, Henriëtte Bosmans, Alphons Diepenbrock, Sem Dresden. Jan van Gilse, Hans Henkemans, Piet Ketting, Bertus van Lier, Willem Pijper, Nico Richter and Johan Wagenaar. In order to make the connection between contemporary music and a great past, the organisers wrote, the choral evening was to open with music by Jacob Obrecht, Jan Tollius and Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. Performers were to include the Concertgebouworkest, the augmented Rotterdam philharmonic chorus, several choral societies and the conductors Eduard van Beinum, Eduard Flipse and Sem Dresden. A few composers were to conduct

their own works. One of the pieces to be performed was Nico's *trio for flute, viola and guitar*, written in 1935.

## MUSA CONDUCTOR

He won't have had much time to look forward to this, as he had taken on the job of conducting the student orchestra known as MUSA. The orchestra, which rehearsed once a week, belonged to his student society *Unitas Studiosorum Amstelodamensium* (U.S.A., usually called *Unitas*).

MUSA was founded in 1912 but stagnated until 1936, *Unitas'* twenty-fifth anniversary. According to the society's 1951 commemorative book, it was then reborn; a chamber orchestra was established under the direction of Kees Hartevelde. The advent of Nico, described as "an inspiring young conductor from our own ranks", did the rest. He seems to have passed his next set of exams offhandedly in July and he became very active in *Unitas*. Not only was he conducting the orchestra, he joined the steering committee and he became an editor of the magazine. There he met a second-year student of Dutch called Wim Kriste. Wim and Nico were to become close friends and hold endless nocturnal discussions, often after editorial meetings, at *Café Reijnders* on the *Leidseplein*, which was then and still is a meeting place for literary types. The two young men would walk each other home, sometimes going back and forth for hours because the conversations never ended. They also wrote a couple of songs together, with Nico warning the student of Dutch to avoid the "ij" sound in his verse, because it was impossible to sing beautifully. Nico's first song, *Lied*, for soprano and piano, was finished on December 20<sup>th</sup> 1937. Wim's text can be roughly translated as: have you heard the bells? / At the midnight hour / high in the tower bells resounding. / The devil was on the bell-pull. / The monastery sank into nothingness / the monks are burning in everlasting fire.

## LEX

During the same period Nico formed a close friendship with a new member of the student orchestra and the editorial staff, Lex Zwaap, who reaped fame after the war as the composer and journalist Lex van Delden.

Nico gave Lex, who admired him greatly, lessons in composition and, Lex said later, taught him a lot. He gave an interview when he retired from his post as the music critic for the big national daily *Het Parool* in January 1982, in which he called Nico his composition teacher.

By agreeing to direct the student orchestra and helping to edit the *Unitas* magazine, Nico brought the two most important elements in his life much closer together: studies and music. During the same period, MUSA needed another violinist and Hetta was invited to join the orchestra. Nico and Hetta also played together in a smaller ensemble. On Sunday mornings several young musicians played at the house of the three Muller brothers in the *Uiterwaardenstraat*. Hans Muller was a fellow student of Nico's and later became his doctor. He played the piano. His brother Gerrit played the cello and Henk played the violin.

## MUSA

On *Unitas*' twenty-sixth birthday, the orchestra gave a concert at the *Muzieklyceum* in the *Albert Hahnplanson*, under the direction of Nico Richter. The program included Vivaldi's *Concerto IV for flute and orchestra*, duets for soprano and alto by Mendelssohn and Franz Abt, the *Stamitz Symphony in G*, *Sonata á cinque* by G. Francesco Malipero and *Scène Andalouse* by Josquin Turina. An extensive review in the *Unitas* magazine deplored the choice of the *Stamitz* but was enthusiastic about the première of Malipero's sonata, which had been unwittingly filched from the *Hollands Instrumentaal Quintet* as, said the review, it had been in rehearsal for over three months. The work made a deep impression on the public and the society's president had made a speech praising Nico Richter as a conductor, particularly of the modern works. The newspapers also reviewed the concert, commending the orchestra, the program and especially the conductor.

## AMORYS ANNOUNCED

Two months later, in April 1937, Nico made the papers again. He was commissioned by the director of the Netherlands chamber opera company, J. Richard Heuckeroth, to compose a Dutch chamber

opera with the journalist and music critic Hendrik Lindt, who was to write the libretto. The commission was initially given to Jan van Gilse, but according to his biographer Hans van Dijk, he was unwilling to write an opera for such a small ensemble [Hans van Dijk, *Jan van Gilse, Strijder en Idealist*, Frits Knuf, The Netherlands, 1988, pp 271-2.]

Lindt, who admired his work, had recommended Nico. In a businesslike letter dated May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1937 Hendrik Lindt summarised the conditions under which he and Nico would write the opera. Heuckeroth was to have sole rights to it for two years for The Netherlands; all other rights were to be retained by the librettist and the composer respectively. They would waive royalties in The Netherlands for the two-year period named. [Nederlands Muziek Instituut, Hendrik Lindt archive. sig. HGM-262.]

## MANETO

In June, the Maneto week previously discussed took place, with Nico Richter's *Trio* performed on the 8<sup>th</sup>, the chamber music evening, by Paul Loewer, flute, Jos de Clerck, viola and Wim Gaffel, guitar. Nico wrote the program note: "This trio was written in August 1935 and has three movements: Allegro, non troppo lento, and Presto; duration +/- 5 minutes. The Allegro is written in the principal form and is based on a rhythm of 14 (4+2x3+4). The Non troppo lento is a free improvisation. The Presto is a rondo, the alternatives are constructed from the rondo-theme itself and rhythmic figures, connected to the allegro. A short interlude, adagio, serves as a small reminder of the second part."

The newspapers were again lavish with space for the manifestation, in which Richter's work was praised. Hendrik Lindt wrote extensively about the trio in *Het Volk* of June 9<sup>th</sup>, saying that extremely succinct forms and the greatest possible clarity of instrumentation were the characteristics of his style, which was already remarkably personal. "His own sound is heard in each of the three short movements... a flawless and well-rounded whole... to which the correspondence between the motifs contributed." The journalists had many different opinions about the chamber music evening, but agreed unanimously on one thing: it had taken far too long: over

three hours. They had been in the Concertgebouw until nearly half past eleven and it was so hot there...

## AMORYS

In July the *Haagsche Courant* announced that the libretto for the new chamber opera was finished and the score was sufficiently advanced for the whole piece to be delivered to the Netherlands chamber opera in August, so that rehearsals could begin. In order to finish the score, one of the papers stated, the composer had gone to Ascona, which is west of Locarno on Lake Maggiore in Switzerland. The Richters kept their promises. Nico's parents sent him to the artists' colony at Ascona several times, so that he could finish a score or relax. Nico was studying medicine, so they royally supported his music. Nico wasn't at the forefront of his parents' minds at that time, however: they were expecting their first grandchild within weeks.

The article went on to say that the new chamber opera was to be called *Amorys*, after the main character. In contrast to most opera texts, this was not an adaptation of an existing play, but a symbolic fantasy inspired by Middle Dutch legends. The chamber orchestra was to consist of first and second violins, a viola, cello, bass, flute, piccolo, clarinet, bassoon, horn, piano and multiple percussion instruments. As a result of the close collaboration between the librettist and the composer, the musical form determined the shape of the libretto. This statement in the newspaper article, which is not really correct, conflicts with Nico Richter's principles (going back to Monteverdi) regarding the relationship between text and music, where the text is always the starting point. The full story of "the making of" *Amorys* can be found in a long, explanatory document by Hendrik Lindt, which is in his file at the Nederlands Muziekarchief. It is also reproduced on pp. 25-27 of the Richter biography in the Dutch version, on our website ([www.juulenfransmuller.nl](http://www.juulenfransmuller.nl)).

On October 29<sup>th</sup> Richard Heuckeroth wrote Nico a letter. We don't know for certain what it said, but he was clearly angry. He followed it up with a letter to "Valued... Friend Lindt" on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, sending him what he said was a carbon copy of an obviously follow-up letter to Nico and telling him to use it. (?) "THE GENTLEMEN now know how things stand." He concluded with kindest regards to Lindt's family and the carbon copy, which opens with the

statement that Lindt had called him after Nico had spoken to him about the original letter from Heuckeroth. He was furious that Nico had consulted Lindt and wanted to know why Nico did not speak directly to him. He does not accept Mr. Lindt as Nico's "ear trumpet" and has NOTHING TO DO with Lindt in that capacity, he wrote. He said he didn't want a connection observed between Lindt the librettist and Lindt the critic. He also wanted an answer to his original letter.

Heuckeroth was clearly very unhappy that Nico had involved Lindt, who was indeed an important critic. Given their close collaboration however and the fact that it was Lindt, by far the elder, who had recommended Nico in the first place, it was the obvious thing for Nico to do.

If it weren't for the reference to Lindt as a critic, one might assume that the original letter asked why the score wasn't finished yet. That would tally with the remark by Hans van Dijk in his book about Jan van Gilse quoted earlier, saying that it took so long to finish the chamber opera that Heuckeroth had forgotten all about the commission and would now have preferred to ignore it. The commission dates from the end of April / beginning of May and the opera was ready in November. That isn't a particularly long time. The contrast between the unpleasant tone of Heuckeroth's letter to Nico and his ingratiating one to Lindt leads me to suspect that he was out to disrupt the collaboration. As will be seen, Heuckeroth was in trouble.

On December 16<sup>th</sup> Lindt wrote to Heuckeroth saying that as he and Nico had spoken to him independently and had both been told that Heuckeroth would not be able even to read, let stand perform *Amorys*, which had been delivered to him on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December of that year, he would like the work back so that an extra copy and a piano score could be made. He ends by saying that of course Heuckeroth could have the piece back as soon as he was ready to copy or perform it. That never happened. Lindt complained to Heuckeroth on December 29<sup>th</sup> that he was not meeting the agreed conditions and that Lindt needed the copy of the score Heuckeroth had promised him in lieu of royalties for the first two years. On January 5<sup>th</sup> 1938 the Netherlands chamber opera company was disbanded for an indefinite period.

## MUSA

The U.S.A. yearbook for 1938 discussed MUSA's doings of the academic year 1936-37. The yearbook report was enthusiastic about the new student orchestra and included the fact that the conductor was one of their own members. In spite of his youth, it said, his leadership and choice of music had awakened the interest of the national press, as had his column in the *Unitas* magazine.

## ENGAGEMENT

Nico was clearly going strong. He and Hetta went to Ascona and on their return they announced their engagement by sending out two mini-visiting cards, *Hetta Scheffer* and *Nico Richter*, with the addition G.O., meaning *Geen Ontvangstdag*, i.e. no reception, and dated on the then Queen's birthday, August 31<sup>st</sup>, a holiday. Naturally the family organised a party anyway. Hendrik Lindt, who was on vacation, wrote to congratulate them, but grandfather Nathan Richter, orthodox and rigid in his views, was anything but polite to his grandson's non-Jewish fiancée when they went to visit him a few days later. He swore at her and the furious Nico said he never wanted to see "the old man" again. Hetta was just pleased that she hadn't been able to understand the tirade, in Yiddish.

## ARTICLES

Shortly afterwards, the first article in Nico's new music column in *Unitas* appeared. It is dated September 14<sup>th</sup> 1937:

### BACK TO SIMPLICITY

It is clear that something has to happen to bring our sickly musical life back into bloom – if The Netherlands is not to rank among the musically dead countries as it has for the past three centuries.

Due to a very one-sided focus of our concert life and more and more performances by musicians who prefer making their name to making music - and to that end played almost exclusively virtuosos pieces - the public eventually only got to hear music the non-professional cannot possibly play himself.

Naturally this affected people's urge to make music the first condition for achieving a flourishing musical life.

But there is more.

The public has been systematically trained to believe that - at least in Amsterdam - this was totally unnecessary for concert life.

Thursdays at 8:15 p.m. there is "concertgebouw" - with or without public - programmed according to a regular system based entirely on the preferences of the performers, but just as entirely ignoring the public.

Works received with enthusiasm were never repeated, while other works which clearly generated opposition were reprised in series.

And it was no wonder people decided they were superfluous and therefore [crossed out in his notebook, JM] stayed away.

And so it seems to be the job of the student society - which always claims to play an important part as a cultural factor - to intervene and to regain the public's interest in music.

And this can probably only be achieved by doing what the "big" concert venues have neglected, namely performing old and new works which are easy and which anyone can learn to play if he wants to, and which will then automatically make the music, not the performance, the most important part of the concert again.

Then too, newer pieces will be repeated - not so necessary for old ones - if they appeal, and accustom the public fully to these new sounds, giving people a basis for further excursions into the realm of contemporary music.

Naturally none of this can happen without expending a lot of time and effort, but the results will be a more than rich reward for all those who truly love music. N.R.

N.R. wrote several more articles that autumn of 1937: a discussion of songs by Johan Franco published by Broekmans and Van Poppel, a review on October 26<sup>th</sup> of a Concertgebouw concert on the 14<sup>th</sup> with special attention paid to a piece by Badings, the orchestration of which the reviewer calls "pompous and opaque", noisy, "with the valiant cooperation of Mengelberg and his orchestra", but nevertheless con-

taining “beautiful thematic finds”. On the 28<sup>th</sup> Mengelberg showed us once again how not to perform Tchaikovski’s *Romeo and Juliet*, according to Nico, but he waxed enthusiastic when Stravinski came on to conduct the first performance of his *Jeu des cartes*. The ingenious and transparent instrumentation and, the sophisticated transitions between the movements were greatly to be admired. He observed that inherently this ballet was perhaps more suited to the music hall than the concert hall and was closely related to *l’Histoire du Soldat*, instrumentally as well.

On December 21<sup>st</sup> he reviewed a concert including two duets from Hindemith’s opera *Mathis des Mahler*. Nico disliked the idea of singing bits of an opera in a concert performance. The context is missing and the absence of staging is a constant source of irritation, he said. He discussed the opera at length and praised the fantastic effects of Hindemith’s excellent orchestration, although he was less enthusiastic about the frequent use of medievalisms, unusual sounds giving the composer an easy way out, Nico thought.

#### AMORYS CANCELLED

While the Haarlem orchestral society presented its program for the new season, including work by Nico Richter, the newspaper *Het Volk* announced on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1938 that the director, J. Richard Heuckeroth was disbanding the Netherlands chamber opera indefinitely. The performance of Von Flotow’s *Stradella*, less than a week away, was cancelled as was the première of *Amorys*, planned for the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March.

Unitas nevertheless published an article by H.M. discussing *Amorys* at great length. He classified it as a morality; a secular rather than a religious drama and wrote an extensive synopsis. He ended his article by quoting Monteverdi’s dictum *l’orazioni sia padrona dell’armonia e non serox*: the words rule the music and do not serve it. We can consider this to be the motto of our composer, he said. He approaches words with great reverence. Only music born as it were from the affect of the text can be called a really good dramatic composition.

*Amorys* was eventually premiered by the Netherlands Volks-opera at Amsterdam’s Tinkel-Tangel theatre on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1966, almost thirty years later.

## RAVEL

Maurice Ravel died on December 28<sup>th</sup> 1937, shortly after his colleague Albert Roussel. Nico admired Ravel greatly and on January 18<sup>th</sup> devoted his column to the composer, whose death, he wrote, was fatal to French musical life, as he was the last strong personality; one who did not change his compositional style under the influence of any fashionable trend. In the same issue of *Unitas*, he reviewed the Roussel-Ravel memorial concert which had taken place on the 9<sup>th</sup>. He described Roussel's later works as austere, with little coloration, in almost diametrical opposition to his early, opulent, lavishly ornamented, impressionistic compositions.

One of Ravel's very last works, the three songs known as *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, were performed for the first time. Nico thought that Ravel's well-known preference for a Spanish sound contributed to the liveliness of the pieces, but he didn't consider them very original, nor as delicate and refined as his earlier works. Still, he said, better than might be expected of a man so ill.

On February 18<sup>th</sup> he wrote about another performance at the Concertgebouw, his strong opinions on contemporary music and performance again being made quite clear. His target was Hendrik Andriessen's second symphony, conducted by Eduard van Beinum. Andriessen was trying to deny his real nature in an effort to appear "modern", said Nico. Andriessen's musical ideas normally exhibited a strong leaning towards the impressionistic, but were being sacrificed to a newer method of composition. That procedure must needs result in an opaque, unpersonal sound mass; a pitiful chaos of pseudo-modern stopgaps, making it totally impossible to admire fully the many beautiful thematic finds. He seems to accentuate this mistake by suddenly exhibiting his real self during a few measures of the Pavane.

The review ends with a discussion of Bela Bartok's *Musik für Saiteninstrumente, Schlagzug und Celesta*, which, wrote Nico, is clearly one of the very best artistic efforts of our times.

## MILHAUD

On February 24<sup>th</sup> Darius Milhaud conducted his *Suite Provençale* and *Cantate Nuptiale* at the Concertgebouw. N.R. praised the

precision with which he conducted the orchestra, but was less enthusiastic about the music:

“For the first piece the composer misused graceful old Southern-French melodies, which were horribly mutilated by the violence of a bombastic instrumentation and often paradoxical-sounding harmonies. The work was also characterised by its appalling superficiality. The *Cantate Nuptiale* for soprano and orchestra was written for a family celebration. The text was derived from a French translation of the Song of Songs, which appears to have had almost no influence on the music...”

## DRESDEN

His opinions on the relationship between text and music, discussed above in connection with *Amorys*, are also expressed in a review concerning the publication of Sem Dresden's *Chorus Tragicus* by Alsbach & Co. on March 1<sup>st</sup>, in which he asserted that the expressivity with which the music supports the affect of the words is entirely successful. He described the piece as great and impressive, one of the most remarkable manifestations of contemporary Dutch music and more than worthy of the government grant that made publication possible.

## REVIEWS

The MUSA orchestra gave a concert in the Muzieklyceum for the society's twenty-seventh birthday on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1938. They played the overture to Boyce's *Power of Music, Symphony opus 10* by C.F. Abel and Mozart's *Five Contradances* KV 609. After intermission came *Serenade* for two violins, cello, flute, clarinet and guitar by the conductor, Nico Richter, followed by Honegger's *Trois chansons Extraits de la petite Sirène* and finally Roussel's *Sinfonietta for strings* opus 52.

The audience wasn't very big, presumably because most of the works were not well known. The reviewer from the student society itself was rather critical. He liked the Boyce, but thought the orchestra had bitten off more than it could chew with the Roussel. He was diffident about reviewing Nico's *Serenade*, as he was hearing it for the first time and the music was hard to fathom, but praised the

conductor and the orchestra for their enthusiastic performance of difficult music. The review in the national press the next day were much more complimentary; The Handelsblad praising Richter's "playful musical talent" and De Telegraaf complimenting the student orchestra on the interesting program as well. Hendrik Lindt wrote a long review in Het Volk, about the respect the young musicians had for older composers, together with their "gratifying understanding of the music of our own times". There were critics from Rotterdam and Haarlem too; student orchestras were considered worth reviewing.

In the next yearbook, the president of the society, looking back, wrote that MUSA's programming was the work of the conductor, who deserved to be commended.

Meanwhile Nico was working on *sinfonia divertimenta*, which premièred on the Brussels (Flemish) radio on July 23<sup>rd</sup>. The broadcasting company's symphony orchestra, conducted by Franz André, performed Dutch music in prime time (20:20), among which a violin concerto by Badings. The Dutch press announced the premièred by Richter, "in whose work our Southern neighbors take great interest". Nico went to Brussels for the rehearsals.

It was becoming very noticeable, given all the home-grown and foreign publicity, that Nico Richter's work was being ignored by the Maandblad voor Hedendaagsche Muziek (=monthly journal of contemporary music), edited by Daniel Ruyneman, which was instituted to focus on young Dutch composers.

In September Nico wrote an article for Unitas about the growing interest in making music at home which, he said, proved that people were beginning to understand that music does not just want to be heard, but wants to be played too. He defended the position that a student musical society can only be useful when the basic assumption is that the music is more important than the performers. It then follows that the middling instrumentalist whose heart and soul are set on presenting the beauty of a piece of music, is a better member than the perfect virtuoso who just uses the music to satisfy his own vanity, he stated.

## MUNICH

The Munich agreement between France, Great Britain, Germany and Italy of September 29<sup>th</sup> 1938 promised non-intervention if Germany

annexed Sudetenland, in a final effort to avoid war. "Peace in our time" cried the British prime minister Neville Chamberlain enthusiastically on his return to England. The peace was procured by relinquishing to the aggressor a region far from home. Many people were ashamed and the move was not to buy much time.

On October 4<sup>th</sup> Nico wrote a book review

ABOUT TCHAIKOVSKY'S FOURTH SYMPHONY:

"It is an almost inexplicable characteristic of the average person to show more interest in the idiosyncracies and the life of the artist than in the work of art. That publishers want their share of this is no more than natural and so vast numbers of biographies and collected letters keep appearing, which often give the most painful details about licit or illicit marital ties, money matters and so on, but in which one usually searches in vain for a satisfactory characterisation of the position of the subject among his contemporaries.

The correspondence between Peter Tchaikovsky and Mrs. von Meck - as edited by Hugo van Dalen under the title About Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony and published by De Residentiebode - diverges to some extent from this rule and was therefore a pleasant surprise..."

November 10<sup>th</sup> 1938 was the birthday of both Hetta and Nico's brother-in-law Fred. It was not however a day of celebration. The night of the 9<sup>th</sup> was Kristallnacht in Hitler Germany, during which synagogues, Jewish stores and homes were destroyed and at least ninety Jews were murdered. The occasion for these so-called "spontaneous" occurrences, in reality stage-managed by the S.A., was the assassination of a German diplomat in Paris, two days earlier. The perpetrator was a young man whose family, like 17.000 other Polish Jews, had recently been driven out of house and home in what had just become part of the "Reich". Soon afterwards some 30.000 Jews were transported to concentration camps, the first large group.

On December 15<sup>th</sup>, shortly after his twenty-third birthday, Nico reviewed a book of modern Dutch piano music recently published by Broekman & van Poppel, thanking the publishers for this first volume of contemporary Dutch piano music. He liked the intimate and lyrical *Pavane* by Hendrik Andriessen and admired the *Toccata* by Emmy

Frensel Wegener. Hans Henkemans' *Etude* and Piet Ketting's *Fuga per Pianoforte* also elicited approval, but two movements of Henk Badings' *Roemeense Reizen* (= Rumanian travels), in which foreign display served to mask the total lack of content, belonged in the garbage can of light music, he said. His most fervent praise was reserved for Bertus van Lier's second *Sonatine*, written in 1929. N.R.

On February 7<sup>th</sup> 1939 Het Volk announced the 28<sup>th</sup> U.S.A. birthday concert by MUSA at the Muzieklyceum on the 16th, conducted as usual by Nico Richter. There was to be a performance of a *Suite per orchestre d'archi* composed for the occasion by Francesco Ticciati, an English composer of Italian origin, who was coming to attend the première. On the 13<sup>th</sup> all the daily newspapers repeated the announcement, with the addition that Ticciati was expected to arrive at Amsterdam Central Station at 20:42, there to be welcomed by the senate (board) of Unitas Studiosorum Amstelodamensium and the orchestra committee. The next day there was a big picture in De Telegraaf of gentlemen in winter coats holding fedoras and shaking hands, over the caption Francesco Ticciati in the Capitol. The concert was announced once again, but two days later, on the day of the performance itself, the headlines read: MUSA CONCERT POSTPONED. Professor Dr. Scheltema had died and the student organisations assumed mourning. The concert was rescheduled for the 21<sup>st</sup>, but the composer was unable to stay that long. The students did manage to organise a private concert at which some of his other pieces were played.

Almost all the papers reviewed the concert on the 21<sup>st</sup>. H[endrik] L[jindt] wrote in De Telegraaf that Richter had compiled a program in which all four works could have been called "discoveries", if their cohesion, balance and logical alternation hadn't put paid to any thought of wild experimentation. There were rediscovered eighteenth-century composers and unexplored moderns. The program started with a pocket symphony by Pieter van Maldere, a Brussels composer of operas but especially symphonic works in the style of Johann Stamitz, who had paved the way for Haydn and Mozart as well. The first half was concluded with a Haydn string quartet, which had been sunk in the ocean of that composer's string quartets and which nobody seems to recognise, wrote the critic. The most important event was saved for last, though, he said, and that was Ticciati's *Prelude, sarabande and fugue* for string orchestra.

Francesco Ticciati, aged forty-five at the time, was unknown in The Netherlands. He had been born in Italy but was a naturalised Englishman. He was a student of Respighi and Busoni, a pianist before he started concentrating on composition. He wrote music for the famous 'teatro dei piccoli' and was well known in England for his innovations.

Lindt decided that the performance of the *Sarabande* and *Fugue* had not given the audience a very good idea of the composer's work. His *Prelude* had been omitted from the program, as it had been received so late that the conductor didn't feel that the orchestra had had enough time to rehearse it properly. Lindt much preferred the violin sonata he had heard at the private concert a few days earlier. Tempo and ingenuity evolved from the instrument's technical possibilities, playful without being superficial, in a moderately modern style of French orientation... Lindt's description makes quite clear what attracted Nico to this composer's work. Lindt also noted that Nico was conducting more freely than previously.

Most of the critics were favorably impressed by the the conductor, his programming and disciplined approach. He must have been happy to read the admiring reviews, but there were also other matters on his mind. On March 15<sup>th</sup> Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia.

A general history of music, edited by Prof. Dr. A. Smyers, was published by W. de Haan in Utrecht and reviewed by Nico on March 28<sup>th</sup>. He was favorably impressed by the fact that the authors had chosen to sketch the general development of music up to the present day, rather than print a series of biographies. The emphasis was therefore on transitional periods, rather than on the great musicians whose lives and works may be assumed to be known. There were also large numbers of music examples, admirably illustrating the text.

In May he wrote a detailed and mainly positive review of Sophocles' *Aias*, with music by Bertus van Lier, performed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Amsterdam municipal theater, the Stadsschouwburg.

He was also studying hard and early in October he passed a crucial examination. During the same period, Hetta came into some money and bought herself a beautiful violin and Nico a good viola. Of course these were acquired from the well-known shop of Max Möller

Sr., the father of their childhood classmate. They also bought bows, having to choose between the ones labelled "Möller" and those called "Meunier" (the French translation of miller, considered more elegant). "Just give me an honest 'Möller'" said Nico.

The outside world was becoming more and more threatening: towards the end of August Hitler had invaded Poland, causing France and England to declare war on Germany on September 3<sup>rd</sup>. Even when things are falling apart around them, most people continue with their daily lives as long as possible, hoping it will all go away. In November *Unitas* published another long Richter review, this time of Bertus van Lier's third symphony, which the composer himself had conducted. Nico emphasised the fact that Van Lier had used real melodies, but had nevertheless neglected to "open his heart". Nico was slightly disappointed, but still expected great things from his older colleague. He had long since shown his respect for Van Lier, dedicating his own trio to him as early as 1935.

Nico's compositions were becoming more widely known, as can be seen from a letter from Karel Mengelberg to Daniel Ruyneman, the editor-in-chief of the monthly journal of contemporary music which had thus far ignored Richter's compositions. Karel Mengelberg, not to be confused with his uncle Willem who conducted the *Concertgebouworkest*, was one of the editors of the journal and taught at the *Musieklyceum* and the Rotterdam conservatory. In his letter, he asked Ruyneman which young composer's turn it was to be interviewed for the magazine: Loman, Leo Smit, Leering or Nico Richter? [Ruyneman archive at the *Nederlands Muziek Instituut*, quoted in Jurjen Vis, *Silhouetten*, Donemus, Amsterdam, 2001, p.222.] It was to be Leo Smit.

## FLIGHT?

The final weeks of 1939 and the first ones of 1940 mark the decision that determined the rest of Nico Richter's life and that of his parents. His sister Betty's friends, returning from Spain after the lost civil war, strongly urged Betty and Fred to leave for the United States with their two-year-old daughter. While preparing for the long journey, they tried their utmost to get both sets of parents, Nico and Karla to come with them. Fred's parents agreed. They had only one child and one grandchild and moving was a less drastic step for a business-

man with ties to the American film industry than it would have been for a dentist. Nico was preparing for his next set of examinations and the Richters made up their minds to stay in Holland for the time being. Things wouldn't get that bad; there was time, they decided.

The young Van Santens couldn't get a passage from The Netherlands by then. Besides, the North Atlantic was dangerous: U boats were torpedoing shipping. In January 1940 they boarded a train for Genua, Italy, in the freezing cold, with a feverish child. There they embarked on the Conte di Savoia for the dangerous crossing. They reached New York safely on February 1<sup>st</sup>.

The first letter from the Richters to New York expressed their relief at receiving the telegram sent on the young people's arrival. They had been very worried and had hardly dared open the morning papers. They were also planning to sell their house. Although many historians have written that nobody knew what was going to happen, many people were conscious of impending doom. In the first place there were the communists and their political sympathizers who, as has been shown, knew perfectly well that a dirty war was coming. Secondly, the Richters lived in Amsterdam and had met German-Jewish refugees, many of whom lived in the city. But nobody knew that the persecution of the Jews was to lead to an effort at total eradication. Who in the Western world would have believed in such a bizarre idea before world war II? Even political and military leaders didn't start to credit it until 1942, although many persevered in denying that the facts were known before 1945. What else could they say? How else can the lack of intervention with regard to the concentration camps be explained if the truth were known, unless one assumes that saving the Jews, Roma, homosexuals - let stand the political prisoners - had no priority.

The fact that the Richters were planning to sell their house, indicates that Izaak was going to give up his practice, perhaps with an eye to leaving for America. He and Sara would turn sixty in November. Betty was married, Nico was soon to finish his studies. Karla was working for the Bata shoe company as a pedicure and earning her own living. Ies and Sara were comfortably off and could afford to take it easier. That first letter and the others that followed (correspondence with New York remained possible until the United States entered the war in December 1941), demonstrate a level of weariness undoubtedly caused not only by work, but also by the

approaching war and grief at the absence of their daughter and only grandchild.

## DIËS 1940

Nico conducted the MUSA orchestra at the student society's February birthday celebration and his mother wrote to New York that he had come home with lots of flowers and a garland, followed by good reviews. The orchestra had played a suite from Purcell's *Fairy-Queen*, Mozart's piano variations for four hands and his *Serenata notturna* KV 239. The latter piece has kettledrums and the critics were unhappy with the ones used. "Probably picked up in a junk shop somewhere" wrote one critic. Another laid the blame elsewhere: "Oh my, what horrible objects were delivered to MUSA! They sounded like boxes partly filled with cotton and with skins stretched over them and I think the instrument store which provided the badly dented things would have done better to send them to a ladies' hat shop." But they wrote about "flawless and devoted musicianship" as well.

After intermission, the orchestra played Milhaud's fourth string quartet, followed by the première of the evening, the song cycle *l'Amour* by Lex Zwaap, Richter's even younger composition student. An undoubted fresh and lively talent, full of promise, wrote Hendrik Lindt in *Het Volk*.

Lindt kept in touch with Lex Zwaap. The Lindts gave house concerts and known and unknown musicians were to be found there. Hanns Eisler was a regular guest, the Lindt's daughter remembers, and he wrote music for those occasions too. Lindt was a capable baritone, who in 1962 recorded songs from *l'Amour* by Lex van Delden, as he was known by then, with Peter Hansen at the piano. There is also a 1965 recording of parts of *Amorys*, written with Nico Richter, which Lindt sang with Rudolph Jansen playing the piano.

## HET LYK

A week after the MUSA concert, both Nico and Lex composed songs for Hendrik Lindt's thirty-sixth birthday, on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. The text for Nico's *Het Lyk* (= the corpse), for baritone and piano, was by his friend Wim Kriste.

*what weird laughter rebounds  
from the walls of the hall.  
the night falls,  
the candle flames flicker.  
and with exuberantly waving arms  
the corpse invites us to his funeral meal.*

This happy birthday song was completely unknown until I found it among Nico's papers while compiling his biography in Dutch. Even the text writer, Wim Kriste, interviewed at the time, had never heard it. It was performed for the first time since that 1940 birthday by Max van Egmond, baritone and Frans van Ruth, piano, at the eighty-fifth birthday of Nico's widow Hetta, celebrated at her concert venue De Suite in Amsterdam in November 2000. Wim Kriste was there.

Two weeks after Hendrik Lindt's birthday, Nico's grandfather Nathan Richter died, aged almost ninety-four. The family was relieved; Grandfather Nathan had wanted to die for some time. Whether he was aware of the coming war is questionable. His grandson Nico was, of course. In that spring of 1940 mobilisation had started.

The pictures of the MUSA concert show several members of the orchestra in uniform, including Lex.

## WAR

On May 10<sup>th</sup> the German's invaded The Netherlands. The center of Rotterdam was bombed out of existence. It only took three days before capitulation. Our country was occupied. A postcard to New York:

Amsterdam, May 29<sup>th</sup> '40

Dear Betty & Fred,  
All is well here. We are in good health; Nico is in The Hague, working at the children's hospital near the Bosjes van Poot (in the dunes) right now. Karla is working as a pedicure for the Bata. As it is possible to correspond with America, please write back immediately and write lots about our cute Juleke (me. JM); we haven't heard about her for so long. Greetings to everyone we know. Kisses to the dear little one from all.  
Bye-bye all

Bye-bye Juleke

from us all  
Your Pipa [jokey variant of Papa]

The first measures against Jews came quickly: in June “enemy assets” were confiscated, a step which also affected non-Jews; on October 22<sup>nd</sup> came the definition of *Volljude*: persons with three or four Jewish grandparents or two Jewish grandparents and married to a Jew. In October all civil servants had to sign a so-called “ariërverklaring”, declaring that they were not Jewish and in November over two and a half thousand Jews were dismissed from the civil service, including the president of the supreme court, L.E. Visser.

Letters to New York:

We long to hear from you... Karla is still working for Bata, Nico is back in Amsterdam, working in the Binnen Gasthuis (inner city hospital)... The practice is getting smaller and smaller, I can see now that we are getting older. We are trying to sell the house; the next letter will tell you if we have succeeded. Then we will go and live frugally, as our income is very limited. This house is getting too expensive for us and we can't it manage with less than one maid... We wish you all the best... Greetings to all, be embraced by

Opa and Oma Richter

## WEDDING

Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> 1940

Like a bolt out of the blue, Hetty & Nico came to tell us at the beginning of the week that they are planning to tie the knot in a very short time, namely on October 9<sup>th</sup>. They are going to give notice [official public notice, obligatory before marriage in The Netherlands] on the 24<sup>th</sup>. What do you think of that? For now, they are going to live with Mrs. Scheffer; [1e Helmersstraat 70] naturally we will continue to defray the costs of Nico's studies and his keep; Mrs. Scheffer has enough trouble making ends meet. If the times weren't so hard, we would of course not have given permission [necessary for marriage until one was thirty at the time] but we don't want to hear any reproaches later that we stood in the way of their happiness. And we will continue to hope for a good future for them. Whatever Hetty

can afford for her trousseau will of course be spent at the firm of Maison van Santen in the Kalverstraat... [which at that time was still owned by Fred's father]...

Father & Mother Richter

September 30<sup>th</sup> 1940

On the 24<sup>th</sup> our little Nico gave notice of his forthcoming marriage. The youngsters received many flowers and presents, including one signed Juleke (a little vase of flowers and a box of saltines). Our bouquet consisted of your baby basket filled with groceries for the honeymoon: 3 sacks of rice, 2 boxes of candles and a box of matches were your contribution to it; they plan to marry on October 9<sup>th</sup> if the Lord allows; the plan is: a tram to city hall [then located on the Oude Zijds Voorburgwal], lunch afterwards in the Vondelstraat... Carla [her name is sometimes spelled with a K and sometimes with a C] is still with the Bata, Nico will do his semi-final exams in October so it please the Lord, the practice is going on down-at-the-heel slippers...

Thank you very much for your affidavit [surety, for entering the United States], which we hope to make use of some time. Now that Nico is leaving, we think we can sell the house as soon as a good buyer comes along, as we don't need all these rooms. The plant is getting very pretty, it is full of little buds. We wonder if it will be as beautiful as last year.

Loving embraces from Opa and Oma.

"Opa and Oma" have become very careful what they write: the German censor is watching. The jolly tone of parts of this letter obscure the real reason for the marriage, an extremely unusual step for a student at the time. There is no mention of the fact that Hetta was not Jewish. Neither she nor Nico was religious. By making a "mixed marriage" he might well have escaped persecution and if he hadn't joined the resistance, that would probably have been the case. "Mixed marriages were not prohibited until March 1942.



The letter doesn't refer to the domestic problems already being caused by the war either. But it is obvious from the list of presents for the honeymoon: rice, candles and matches from the provisions Betty had laid in for her parents before leaving for New York. Not really the kind of gifts one associates with a well-to-do family. And when Nico moved from the Vondelstraat to his mother-in-law's house in the Eerste Helmersstraat, Hetta reported later, the telephone there was cut off. This didn't happen officially in Amsterdam until June of 1942.

#### BEGINNING OF THE END

On October 15<sup>th</sup> Jews were forbidden to participate in public assemblies or to make use of public facilities meant to provide the population with recreation, relaxation and information. Theaters, libraries and

concert halls were closed to Jews. Jan van Gilse, who was to conduct the Concertgebouworkest in a performance of his own works, among others, refused to appear. He seemed to be the only one, stated the later historian of world war two, Loe de Jong. Van Gilse knew that his future public appearances would be made impossible for the duration of the war and he experienced that as a relief. [L. de Jong *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* Den Haag/Leiden, 1969-1988, part 5, p.540.] The composer Marius Flothuis, working in another capacity at the Concertgebouw, also stuck to his principles.

## SEMI-FINALS

In October Nico passed his penultimate examinations, after finishing his internship at the children's hospital in The Hague. Back in Amsterdam, he took tropical medicine as his specialism, studying at the colonial institute for the tropics, now the royal institute for the tropics. Why tropical medicine? Did it just seem interesting or did he have plans for the future far away from nazi Germany? He never talked about it. The specialism was to be of prime importance later on.

## STUDENT PROTEST

The academic world was protesting violently against the progressively stricter measures against the Jewish members of the populace. At Amsterdam's municipal university, the journal *De Vrije Katheder*, banned by the Germans, called for resistance. Among Nico's circle of friends, both in and outside the university and particularly among his sister Betty's friends, protests, pamphlets and acts of sabotage were being prepared. *De Vrije Katheder* journal had ties to the forbidden CPN, the Dutch communist party and at least one of the students editing the paper, Bart Riezouw, belonged to their circle.

As early as September, the retiring Rector Magnificus of the university and member of the faculty of medicine Prof. Dr. J.J. van Loghem had made an unmistakable demand for freedom in his valedictory speech. In it, he quoted the seventeenth-century Dutch-Jewish philosopher Spinoza, to resounding applause. Nico was aware of all these things. From what became known after the war about the resistance group of which he was a member, it appears

that it was closely connected with the university's medical school. Nico never said a word about it. He had another year to go and continued to devote himself to the MUSA orchestra, but he must have become involved with the resistance movement very early on. It hardly seems necessary to explain why.

## PERSECUTION OF THE JEWS

In the middle of October, the distribution of identification documents began, obligatory for persons over fourteen. In Amsterdam people were required to go to the Apollohal with their filled-in notification cards and two passport photographs, one of which was sealed onto the new ID and the other attached to the notification, which thus became a receipt. Three fingerprints were required: two on the ID, one on the receipt and both documents had to be signed. Every ID was identifiable by municipality and also numbered in the order in which it was issued. That number agreed with the date of issue and both were registered. Forging an ID was thus made very difficult. By the end of 1941 every adult in The Netherlands had one.

Amsterdam, December 9<sup>th</sup>, '40

Dear Betty, Fred, Juleke and Opa [Oma van Santen had died of cancer a few months after arriving in New York],... We celebrated St. Nicolas [December 6<sup>th</sup>] here at the express wish of Kar and Nico; we didn't really feel like it, remembering last year. Instead of Opa van Santen with a beard, this time it was little Julia van Santen who brought the presents. She came in her own little white wagon and was dressed in her peacock-blue suit and hat from the Bonneterie [ a very upmarket dress shop] and wore high, shiny boots. Her hair was made of the former Sinterklaas's beard and her face painted by aunt Lena's sister, big blue eyes and a tiny rosebud mouth, a huge nose and very small pink ears. She was very large and extremely fat, especially her legs. She had a letter in her hand, as she was unable to speak, due to fatigue. It said that she had come by plane and that aunt Karla had better undress her quickly to see what she had brought with her. Everybody was pleased with the "surprises" [St. Nicolas gifts are traditionally wrapped to look like something entirely different and come with teasing

rhymes. Dutch families often spend weeks preparing for this celebration.]; everybody went home satisfied, even Moortje [the cat] got a present.

Sadly, the house has not yet been sold; lots of viewers, but no serious ones. We would love to move, as expenses are getting too heavy and we can't manage much longer. Maybe the new year will bring us some relief...Nico is very happy in his marriage. Kar is still at the Bata and we are getting old. We send all our love from all of us to all of you; greetings to people we know there. Oma

On January 7<sup>th</sup> 1941 the Dutch film association announced that Jews were forthwith forbidden to go to the movies. Three days later it was decreed that every Jew living in The Netherlands had to register. Everybody with one or more Jewish grandparents had to go in person to the registry office and hand in forms including address and profession. Registration cost one guilder. Almost everybody obeyed and De Jong [op. cit. part 4, p.812] called this one of the most fatal decrees of the occupation. In February, admission to the university was closed to Jews. Those already enrolled were allowed to continue their studies, at least for the time being. That was a concession to strong protests from the universities. Outside the universities, none of this made much impact, except on the leftists and on the Jews.

The S.A. (= German: Sturmabteilung) and the WA (Weerbaarheidsafdeling, the militant branch of the collaborating Dutch national socialist party NSB), presumably following orders, began to harrY Jews more and more openly on the streets and in restaurants and cafés. Orangists too, people who celebrated the birthday of little Princess Beatrix publicly on January 31<sup>st</sup>, were roughly treated. A climate of violence grew, antisemitism dominating. Jews were beaten on the streets. In Amsterdam, where the signs forbidding entry to Jews were constantly being taken down as soon as the SA had left, especially on the Rembrandtsplein, the entertainment center of the city, there were big fights early in February. The Amsterdam police couldn't cope with the combination of NSBers and the German soldiers supporting them. The thugs crossed into the Jewish quarter, where there were also a lot of non-Jews, and went on the rampage around the Waterlooplein, where there was a big outdoor market. Theft and plundering followed. The Jews organised their own groups

of fighters (there were a lot of Jewish professional boxers at the time) and were supported, particularly by the Amsterdam workers. After a series of escalating attacks, about forty WAers went back into the Jewish quarter on February 11<sup>th</sup> and that evening, on the Waterlooplein, the inevitable happened: a WA man got separated from his group and was so badly beaten that he died three days later.

That was grist to the Germans' mill. They already had plans to herd all the Jews into a ghetto. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, the Jewish quarter was hermetically sealed off. Members of pro-German organisations and German nationals were ordered to move to other neighborhoods at once. German efforts to move out all the other non-Jews were opposed by the mayor and the city council and impeded at least temporarily. The blockade was lifted after a few days, but by then large signs had been placed at all entry points: Jewish Quarter. A few days later, the Jewish Council was formed.

The Jewish Council became the focal point for what is still a burning question: is it better to cooperate as far as possible with an almost omnipotent occupying force, in order to prevent even worse damage, or to resist openly from the start? After all these years, it has become clear that going underground and resisting offer better chances of at least some success. Prominent Amsterdamers including Professor Herman Frijda and city councillor Monne de Miranda, both eventually murdered, were right about that. They refused to become members of the Jewish Council. Judging those who did, knowing only what they knew then, is more difficult.

On Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> the windows of Koco, the ice cream parlor at Van Woustraat 149, were smashed. The business was owned by two German-Jewish refugees and was subsequently guarded by volunteers. They had been told to stay next door and only to fight outside, if necessary. They hoped the enemy would turn up and not all of them kept quiet about it. On Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup> there was suddenly a large group of NSBers at the door. One of the owners had a small bottle of ammoniac gas and opened the valve before going out the back door and over the fence. The NSBers going inside smelled the gas and jumped back. The volunteers were captured and taken away; the owners were also arrested. This so-called "attack with vitriol" and the death of the WAer two days earlier were enough to provoke far-reaching reprisals.

## FEBRUARY STRIKE

There were razzias, round-ups of Jews, in Amsterdam on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of February. On Saturday afternoon, the Jewish quarter was sealed off again, this time with machine guns on the bridges connecting the Waterlooplein and the Jonas Daniël Meyerplein to the rest of the city. Nobody could get in or out. Boys and men who looked Jewish were seized. They were beaten, kicked, thrown down the stairs of the houses and assembled on the Jonas Daniël Meyerplein, where they were first made to run a gauntlet of Ordnungspolizei who lashed them with belts. Then they were taken away. The same thing happened again on Sunday morning, during the Sunday market on the Waterlooplein. 427 men and boys were found later to have been transported to what was then an unknown destination - the concentration camp Mauthausen. None of them ever came home.

In spite of the fact that all the newspapers that were still coming out were forbidden to report them, the gruesome facts became known. Many people in Amsterdam had had more than enough. Members of the well-organised communist party, which had mimeograph machines, took the initiative on the 24<sup>th</sup>. On February 25<sup>th</sup> 1941 the Februaristaking (= February Strike) took place: the only significant act of resistance in The Netherlands, or anywhere else in occupied Europe for that matter, for the purpose of demonstrating solidarity with the Jews.

The mimeographed flyer is now well known; it can be found in museums; it has been reproduced in history books:

PROTEST AGAINST THE HORRIBLE PERSECUTION OF THE  
JEWES!  
WORKING PEOPLE OF AMSTERDAM, CAN YOU ACCEPT THIS?  
*No, a thousand times NO!!! ...*  
STRIKE!!!                      STRIKE!!!                      STRIKE!!!

The strike started at the shipyards in Amsterdam North and spread like wildfire. It was the tram strike that brought the news to the farthest corners of the city: the Twitter of the 1940s, as it has recently been called. Everybody travelled by tram, so why wasn't it running?

The strike was unheard of, the Germans were momentarily paralyzed with amazement. Not for long, though.

On March 14<sup>th</sup> eighteen members of the resistance were shot, among whom the poet Jan Campert, whose verses about the events have remained famous. During the same period everybody with an independent profession (including physicians and dentists) had to sign a statement saying they were not Jewish. The next step was obvious.

On April 25<sup>th</sup> 1941 Ies and Saar Richter moved from the Vondelstraat to Beethovenstraat 38<sup>1</sup>. Their card of residence, now in the city archives, has a big red **J** on it. The move wasn't exactly the voluntary and profitable undertaking they had envisaged. At the beginning of August Jews were forced to put all their shares and money exceeding 1.000 guilders into an account at the Lippmann-Rosenthal bank, which had been taken over by the Germans. As Ies no longer had a practice, there wouldn't have been much more income, aside from the rent from a few small houses in Haarlem and Hilversum, bought as an investment. That was all the couple, Nico and to some extent Karla would have to live on. Papers found after the war show that they managed to evade these first measures to a considerable extent. Ies had also been to Switzerland twice, just before the war started. Switzerland remained officially neutral and many well-to-do Jews had been able to take some assets to safety. The disadvantages didn't become clear until after the war: it was then made very difficult if not impossible for heirs to claim their property. Very profitable for the Swiss banks. As will be seen, the Richters also bought a considerable number of diamonds.

In April, Jews had their radios confiscated. After May 1<sup>st</sup>, Jewish professionals were only allowed to have Jewish clients or patients. On May 15<sup>th</sup> all Jews were expelled from the Dutch orchestras. At the last concert with all the members of the Concertgebouworkest playing, the conductor, Eduard van Beinum programmed Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. He had planned to shake hands with the orchestra members who were being thrown out, but was advised not to.

As the occupation neared its first "birthday", small acts of resistance became more visible: anti-German graffiti on walls, sometimes encoded to look like innocent messages, but with initial letters with a double meaning: O-Z-O, meaning Oranje **Z**al **O**verwinnen (= Orange

will win) written as **Onze Zuurkool Overheerlijk** (= our sauerkraut delicious). The greeting “Hallo” equalled **hang alle laffe landverraders op** (= hang all cowardly traitors) and by May so many people were wearing bracelets or necklaces made of coins (with the queen’s head on them) that wearing representations of living members of the royal family was forbidden.

The WA demanded that hotel, restaurant and café owners put up signs saying that Jews were forbidden to enter. Starting in June, Jews were no longer allowed to swim in pools or the sea. Spas were also forbidden. The Resistance blew up a villa on the Amsterdam Bernard Zweerskade, where German officers had their quarters. On June 3<sup>rd</sup> the Luftwaffe telephone exchange at Schiphol airport was blown up. On the 11<sup>th</sup> there was another razzia in Amsterdam – carried out by the Amsterdam police force. Three hundred young Jewish men were picked up and sent to Mauthausen to be murdered. Almost four hundred communists were arrested, among them friends of Nico’s sister Betty.

That is the period during which Nico, who had hardly been aware of being Jewish, wrote an orchestration of Ernest Bloch’s *Baal Shem*.

In the summer of 1941 all the Dutch Jews were ordered by their municipal officials to come and have two heavy Js stamped into their passports with black ink. That was simple to check through the town registers, which already had the records of those who were Jewish from earlier in the year. Their cards had been made easily recognisable with black tabs. Some, like Judge Visser, refused but most people meekly did what they were told, hoping to avert anything worse. The extreme precision with which this final registration was carried out, with the aid of most of the Dutch town officials, must have been hair-raising to thinking people even at the time. The first LIRO measures, concerning financial matters, date from August 8<sup>th</sup>.

At the end of the summer vacation, Jewish elementary and high school students were forbidden to go back to their schools. They were to go to separate ones. From September on, first and second year Jewish students were barred from the university. The Jewish professors had already been removed, as they were civil servants.

## GRADUATION

On October 22<sup>nd</sup> the Germans announced that no Jewish students would be allowed membership of student organisations from November 1<sup>st</sup>. The student societies, all honor to them, responded by disbanding. Although Nico was within a month of graduation, he was still a member of the executive and the conductor of MUSA. In the 1941 Lustrum Almanak, the last until after the war, the president warmly thanked Nico, "without whom the orchestra itself would be unthinkable", for his preparation of the 1940 birthday concert by MUSA and joked about the fact that Richter's name was always at the bottom of the list of board members, because, according to the yearbook, he held no office. "That is, his function is so wide-ranging", wrote the president, "that a few words cannot possibly describe it."

The article was written in 1941 and describes activities in 1940. The 1941 concert wasn't reviewed until after the war. Along with works by Malipiero and Roussel, Nico significantly put William Boyce's *The Power of Music* on the program. He must have realised that he would probably never conduct 'his' orchestra again. On October 22<sup>nd</sup> he stopped working for Unitas. On November 18<sup>th</sup> he passed his final examination. In The Netherlands this is a personal moment of achievement, there are no general graduation ceremonies. There was a modest party for him, perhaps also a little for his father, whose birthday it was. And maybe even because that was the day on which the British offensive in North Africa began. But it wasn't really a joyous occasion. A few days earlier, a prominent member of the resistance, Schimmelpenninck, leader of the Ordedienst (OD) had been arrested. The Kultuurkamer was being set up, a "kamer" (= chamber) regulating cultural activities under the aegis of the Germans. The medical profession was also being pressured: at the beginning of December, there was a mass protest by Dutch physicians against the establishment of a Nederlandse Artsenkamer, which actually came into being just before Christmas. Medical confidentiality was revoked for the benefit of the Sicherheitspolizei, which made it possible, even mandatory, to report wounded freedom fighters. The Artsenkamer was connected to another new body, the Nederlandse Vereniging van Ziekenfondsartsen, (= subsidised medicine) which obliged physicians with a practice among the less affluent, i.e. most doctors, to become members. Those who refused

stood to lose most of their income. Nevertheless, the protests continued in spite of the arrest of prominent physicians including the well-known Dr. Floor Wibaut Jr.

Then Japan attacked the American fleet in Pearl Harbor on December 6<sup>th</sup> and the United States finally entered the war, strengthening the allies. All communications between occupied Holland and the family overseas stopped.

## RESISTANCE

Nico needed a job. As a Jew, even one in a “mixed marriage” his activities were seriously limited. There was no money for setting up a practice and besides, he would only be allowed to have Jewish patients. In that difficult period, Nico composed *Two Pieces for violin and piano*, dedicated to the violin builder Max Möller Sr. and Nico and Hetta’s former classmate, Max Jr.

In January 1942 all the Jews in the surrounding area were forced to move into Amsterdam; the beginning of the concentration of all the Jews in the capital. In February some two thousand artists and musicians protested against the Kultuurkamer. At the end of March, the Neurenburg laws were implemented, which made it illegal for Jews and non-Jews to marry and/or have sexual relations. In April, membership of the Kultuurkamer was made mandatory for all professionals in the arts.

Nico knew a chemist called Willem Mulder, presumably from laboratory classes at the university. Mulder was a contemporary of Nico’s father. He, his wife and their two sons Willem Jr. and Coen, lived at what was then Noorder Amstellaan 143, now the Churchilllaan, in Amsterdam. He ran a training course for laboratory analysts and Nico was to start teaching in the medical section of this institute at the beginning of the 1942-43 course. Formally this was forbidden, but Willem Mulder wasn’t the man to submit to that kind of rules. He was violently anti-nazi. Nico was often to be found at the Mulders, but Hetta never met them.

## ARRESTS

On April 16<sup>th</sup> 1942 Willem Mulder, his wife and children were arrested as members of the resistance. At the time, there was a fugitive

living with them, Cor van Rijn, who was wanted by the Sicherheitsdienst. Both he and Nico Richter were members of Mulder's group. Nico was arrested at dawn on the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> and taken to SD headquarters in the Euterpestraat (now renamed for the resistance hero Gerrit van der Veen) and from there to the jail on the Amstelveenseweg.

It is hard to find particulars about the Mulder group. I have distilled the following from the abundant and sometimes contradictory writings on Dutch resistance during world war II: Mulder's group had ties to the Vrij Nederland group; statements made after the war by the SDer Viebahn and by Willem Mulder's widow, establish that Mulder belonged to one of the OD (= Ordedienst) groups headed by Johan Schimmelpenninck, who had been arrested towards the end of 1941. Mulder was "convicted" at the second OD trial in April 1943; Willem Mulder, Johan Schimmelpenninck, Cor van Rijn, Rudolph Hartogs and thirteen others were then shot by the nazis on the Leusderheide on July 29<sup>th</sup> 1943.

The OD groups were so loosely organised that, according to many members' statements after the war, they were uncertain about which organisation they belonged to. Members of the I.D. (= intelligence service) protested that they had been classified as OD, but had had nothing to do with it. The reason for their protests was that the OD *leadership* didn't take part in actual resistance and was only preparing to take charge after the Germans had gone. The defence had said as much during the second OD trial. The OD leadership was strongly pro-monarchy and mainly wanted to prevent socialist and communist influence in post-war politics. Many of these leaders were professional military men, usually officers.

Given the loose organisational structure, the politics of the leadership are irrelevant to the purposes of groups vaguely allied to the OD. The OD wasn't exactly a circle in which one would expect to find Nico Richter; his aims in opposing the enemy were a lot clearer. A witness statement by his friend Lex van Delden, written after the war for Stichting 40-45, founded to help former resistance fighters and victims of persecution, states that Nico acted as liason between the Mulder group and a socialist resistance unit. Hardly what the OD leadership had in mind. Mulder too, according to his wife, was specifically anti-nazi. This is what we know for certain, from a statement made by the ex-SDer F.C. Viebahn: two policemen from the Nieuwe

Doelenstraat station, H.E. de Gruyter and G.J. Beekman, told him they had detained two men with a large German army pistol early in April of 1942. The two men had been arrested at the house of a dentist called De Jonge-Cohen on the Johannes Vermeerplein in Amsterdam. The arrest had been possible because De Jonge-Cohen's wife, Regina Windsant Vermeulen, had told De Gruyter that the men had come to visit her husband the day before, but he happened to be out. She didn't trust them and asked them to come back the next day when her husband would be there and she had notified De Gruyter. That is why he and Beekman were present to arrest them. [Note in passing the matter-of-course collaboration of Dutch policemen still on the force in 1942.]

De Jonge-Cohen, half Jewish, had been a member of the NSB since 1934 and his file at the Dutch Department of Justice says that he was an agent of the Gestapo. He pumped his patients and told the Gestapo whatever was of interest, according to the file. Post-war investigation shows that his neighbors and the neighborhood store-keepers were well aware of his treacherous activities from early on and his widow stated that he regularly received threatening phone calls. She had been able to warn De Gruyter personally because he was a friend of De Jonge-Cohen's. The two men who were arrested talked after interrogation, confessing that they had planned to shoot the dentist and they implicated Cor van Rijn, the professional cyclist and resistance member from Utrecht, who was already being sought by the SD and had been hiding at the Mulders' for the previous seven months. The men also said where they had agreed to meet him, namely at café Het Zwarte Schaap (= black sheep) in the Spuistraat. Cor van Rijn was arrested there and, still according to Viebahn's statement, confessed to having received weapons from Willem Mulder. Mulder's house was searched and a pistol and ammunition were found, several issues of the "illegal" Vrij Nederland newspaper and a book by Van Kleffens (the Dutch minister of foreign affairs, in exile in London) presumably *The Rape of The Netherlands*, written in 1940, which Mulder, his wife said after the war, was translating into Dutch. A mimeograph machine was found too.

Younger readers may need an explanation about "illegal" papers. They were of course only illegal judged by nazi standards adopted by Dutch institutions. Those sympathising with the resistance could read them and pass them along, which was very

dangerous, or copy them, which was risking one's life. The most efficient way of copying anything was by a mimeograph machine, which was run by turning a handle. Typewriters could only produce a very few copies at a time, the bottom carbon copies being hard to read.

The Germans found chemicals too - hardly surprising at a school for laboratory analysts - and pieces of metal piping which they decided were for making pipe bombs. All these finds were more than enough to arrest the Mulders. Mulder was taken straight to the Euterpestraat, his wife was detained at home until the children had come back from school. They were then all taken to the Euterpestraat, with two students of Mulder's and a friend who happened to drop by just then. Mrs. Mulder and her younger son Coen were taken to the Amstelveenseweg jail that night, where they were held for twelve days before being released. After the war Mrs. Mulder said she had heard later that her husband belonged to the OD section under Schimmelpenninck.

To finish the De Jonge-Cohen narrative, he was shot to death in his house precisely one week before Mulder and the others were murdered on the Leusderheide. The two men responsible escaped. His wife was taken to the hospital, badly wounded, but recovered. During her trial as an NSBer after the war, she said she had had no idea of her husband's activities. She also said she had left the NSB in 1943 because she was disappointed in it (!) and afterwards helped a young Dutchman who had absconded from the German army by hiding him. Others testified that she had also forged IDs and passports for the resistance, but the court didn't believe them. She was arrested and spent six months in prison in Amsterdam and camp Bakkum.

## NICO'S ARREST

Nico was arrested in the Helmersstraat at the crack of dawn, probably on April 18<sup>th</sup>. Exactly how his name had come up is unknown and given the circumstances not important. Maybe he was on a list or in an address book. The day before, his friend Jopie Fahrenfort had come to warn him that the Mulders had been arrested and that he should make his escape. He knew, of course, that he

was in danger and preparations were being made for him to go into hiding. J.A.J. van Ginhoven from Surhuisterveen had been assigned to forge an identity card for him. Van Ginhoven, who was skilled at his resistance work, was arrested before he could finish the papers, but managed to destroy the passport photographs of Nico before he was seized.

Why Nico didn't go into hiding immediately after Fahrenfort's warning, is uncertain. He didn't have forged papers yet, which was probably part of the reason, but the fact that Hetta had no idea of what he was doing must also have played a part. In April 1942 the Jewish husband of a non-Jewish woman was not in any great danger, at least officially, unless of course he was in the resistance. So Nico was arrested and Hetta was not only frightened and angry, but also furious at him - feelings that stayed with her all her life. However necessary it may have been for security's sake, there is no doubt that the shocked families of members of the resistance who were arrested felt abandoned by their loved ones too.

What was Nico charged with? Aside from the German documentation and the few things Nico told Hetta afterwards, we know that he spoke about his resistance work to Jaap Fahrenfort, Joop's brother, whom he met again in concentration camp Amersfoort. At his home in Baarn, Jaap Fahrenfort told me that the Mulder group handled communications between Vrij Nederland and a socialist group. Nico spied for them, collected photographic material relating to German reinforcements and may have been involved in printing and distributing the Vrij Nederland paper.

Rijkent van Klinken, another member of the group, heard from Mulder himself that Nico was a participant. After the war, Van Klinken said that he and Mulder had made a substance that might be useful in having people rejected for forced labor in Germany. Presumably Nico was the physician who was to test it.

In 1955 the RIOD (NIOD since 2000 = Dutch institute for war documentation) found files in Vught with an original German list stating why the Jews who had been incarcerated in Block 15 of the Schutzhaftlager were being held. Nico's entry says that he had read forbidden pamphlets, so nobody had betrayed his real activities.

## SARA AND IZAAK

Nico spent six weeks in jail on the Amstelveenseweg and during that time nothing was heard from him. From May 3<sup>rd</sup>, in the meantime, the Richters, like all Jews, were forced to wear the star of David. The distribution points (organised by the Jewish council) for people in the Beethovenstraat was the synagogue on the corner of the Jacob Obrechtplein. In order to buy(!) the stars for four cents a piece with a maximum of four, one had to show an identity card marked with a **J** and hand in a textile coupon, as textiles were rationed. Saar, Ies and Karla bought the yellow squares, cut the stars out along the dotted lines and sewed them onto their clothes, in accordance with the rules published in the daily papers. In the middle of the month, seventy-two ODeers were executed. The family still had no word from Nico.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> the second LIRO regulation came into force: all art collections, jewels and pearls, all objects made of gold, silver (except one set of cutlery per person), or platinum, all cash, cheques and shares worth over 250 guilders were to be handed in before June 30<sup>th</sup>. After that date one was allowed to take out 250 guilders a month from Lippmann-Rosenthal, if one had that much. Financial insurance policies were to be terminated. On May 29<sup>th</sup> Jews were forbidden to travel.

## ORANJEHOTEL

On the night of May 29<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> 1942 Willem Mulder Jr., aged seventeen, was taken from the jail on the Amstelveenseweg to the so-called Orange hotel, the prison in Scheveningen, on the sea near The Hague. His father, Nico and sixteen other members of the group were also moved there. The card index, which has been preserved, shows that they had been arrested at the instigation of section IV C2 of the Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei and the SD Sachbearbeiter, the SSer Bartels. The function of that section was to combat "illegal" organisations.

Young Willem was held in Scheveningen until early November. His father, Cor van Rijn and Nico's friend Rudolf Hartogs went through the agony of various camps before being shot in 1943.

Political prisoners were treated very badly at the Oranjehotel, as is stated in many accounts. They got little food, were intimidated,

humiliated and horribly tortured. Rijkent van Klinken, a member of the Mulder group aged twenty-three, was “encouraged” to confess: the Germans dragged Cor van Rijn (who had been hiding at the Mulder’s) into Van Klinken’s cell after brutal interrogation to show him what happened to people who wouldn’t talk.

During one session Willem Mulder Sr. was left alone for a short time in an interrogation room where Nico’s dossier had accidentally been left on the table. He managed not only to read Nico’s statement, but also to remember it and he “confirmed” at his next interrogation that Nico’s connection with him was only a professional one and had nothing to do with the resistance group. So Nico was dissociated from the “Mulder case”, by which act Mulder very probably saved Nico’s life. Of course that didn’t mean that he was set free, just that he was locked up without a trial. He remained in Scheveningen, where he contracted a serious bladder infection in October. He had already had pyelitis before his arrest and suffered from chronic bronchitis. All this was in his medical dossier found in camp Vught.

However badly most prisoners fared, Jewish political prisoners (Nico wore the red triangle that went with that classification plus the star of David) were even worse off. The doors of their cells had cardboard signs attached to them saying “I am a Jew. Isolation. Strict Isolation. Cold Food. No Favors.”

Towards the end of June, it was announced that all the Jews were to be deported from The Netherland “to the East”, which would turn out to be a euphemism for the gas chambers. The Germans prepared to send them all to camp Westerbork for investigation and medical examination. Westerbork lies between Assen and Hogeveen and from there the Jews might be sent to Germany “to work”. In the meantime, Jews were no longer allowed to have bicycles. They could only buy vegetables at Jewish stores and when there were shortages those were the last to be provisioned. They were not allowed to make use of public or private transport or of public telephones. They were becoming more and more isolated, forbidden to visit non-Jews unless in a “mixed” marriage and had to remain inside their own homes from eight p.m. till six a.m.

The governments of Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union had recently announced that opening a second front in

Europe was a priority and optimists were convinced that the allies would come and liberate them before the autumn.

While Nico was in Scheveningen, his wife, his parents and his sister were experiencing the first notifications, the first efforts not to comply, the July 14<sup>th</sup> razzia and the round-up of Jews in the Euterpestraat, which was around the corner from them. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the first Jews were deported. The 18<sup>th</sup> was Karla's twenty-fifth birthday; she went into hiding. At the end of the month her parents received a formal letter from the Algemeen Nederlandsch Beheer van Onroerende Goederen, the office that dealt with real estate. Izaak Richter had been forced to register all his property in August 1941. Now he was asked politely to hand in all relevant documents within three days. The ANBO was going to "manage" his real estate. They reminded him that he was to pay all the bills due for repairs and so on, as he had reaped the benefit of his property until then. For practical purposes the houses belonged to the Germans, but five percent "management costs" were to be paid to LIRO. The proceeds would be available in a hundred installments (twenty-five years). As was recorded later, that was a farce.

On November 2<sup>nd</sup> Rommel began to retreat at El Alamein. A week later the Americans and the British landed in Morocco and Tunis and within two weeks the Russian offensive against the German Sixth Army began at Stalingrad. If they heard about those events, the Richters must have been heartened.

## AMERSFOORT

On November 6<sup>th</sup> Nico was transported to camp Amersfoort, a Dutch concentration camp under German rule. There he met Jaap Fahrenfort, his friend Joop's brother, to whom he spoke about his work for the resistance, something prisoners seldom did, for fear of inadvertently betraying someone. But Jaap was an old friend. Nico didn't say much about his work and he named no names. What he did tell Jaap about pamphlets and papers made it clear that he had not been picked up accidentally.

Jaap had been in the Oranjehotel prison too and found it "bearable". He was even allowed library books. He described Amersfoort as a nasty camp. The notorious SSer Kotalla worked there, the one who enjoyed kicking prisoners between the legs, killing them if

he could. He was condemned to death in 1948, his sentence later commuted to life imprisonment. Arrival at camp Amersfoort has been described by the Dutch author Bakels as an effort to dehumanise the prisoners within the first few hours. All property was confiscated, body hair was removed with blunt clippers. Prisoners were given a number and dressed in used Dutch army uniforms, some still having bloodstains and/or bullet holes. Nico, being Jewish, was given a yellow triangle to make identification easy. The prisoners were given puttees, socks and wooden shoes. Camp rules had to be learned by heart: how to attend roll-call, how to salute. All this was accompanied by shouting, beatings and kicks. The straw mattresses and two thin blankets had to be positioned very precisely, so that the beds, seen from one side of the room, were evenly spaced. If anything was done wrong, punishment followed. The prisoners were made to stand at attention for hours on end. Food was scarce, heating non-existent. Nico was there from November 6<sup>th</sup> 1942 until January 18<sup>th</sup> 1943. He was made to haul peat. Jaap Fahrenfort remembered the gruelling work, the arbitrary murders: the prisoners in wooden shoes commanded to push a roller loaded with rocks up a steep hill and then pull it down again. They had to hurry to stay ahead of the roller or it would run them down, which sometimes happened. The Jews were even worse off than others. Every day Jews were beaten to death in the bushes. They were not permitted to correspond and therefore did not receive the twenty guilders from home some others were allowed and which made it possible for them to buy things in the canteen. The Jews were assigned the hardest work.

## VUGHT

In December Nico's back trouble became so serious that he was very weak. In January he was sent on to the new concentration camp Vught, built with money stolen from the Dutch Jews. About three thousand prisoners from Amersfoort were moved there in the early months of 1943. Loe de Jong [op.cit. part 8 p.586] describes how they were herded to the Amersfoort train station at a run, wearing wooden shoes. They circled around the inner town so as not to shock the population, but according to witnesses the people there had gotten used to seeing unpleasant sights. Reactions in Vught were quite different: the camp was some three-quarters of an hour's

march from the station and the people who saw the weakened prisoners passing were furious. There were even small riots.

Nico was not sent to the Judenlager, but to the Schützhafterlager, Block 15, the punishment barracks where political prisoners were housed. His "identity" was Jew no. 1982. According to his forms there, his profession was physician and his religion Evangelical. A week after arriving he was taken to the infirmary with stomach pains. He promptly contracted another renal infection too. At the time he weighed 45 kilograms and was 1 meter 74 tall.

The infirmary was a relatively safe place to be. There was even a clandestine radio, which told him that the Red Army had won the battle of Stalingrad on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and that the Germans had been devastatingly defeated. Nico was hospitalised from late January until early March and taken such good care of that he gained some weight, partly because he was allowed to receive a few packages from home. Hetta, whose mother had died and who was hiding several people in her home, somehow managed to send him extra food. At his release from the hospital he weighed 52 kilos.

## MUSIC

A prisoner named Klaas Bokma, a physician from Rotterdam, and a German guard called Heinz Wons ran the infirmary. Wons was an enthusiastic amateur musician; he played the accordion. They did their very best for the sick and saved many lives. Dr. Frits Steiner, a prisoner from Amsterdam, said after the war that it had been possible to prevent Nico's being sent on to another camp by keeping him in the infirmary.

At the same time that Nico was sent to Vught, Pieter Dolk, a trumpet player in the Residentieorkest (The Hague) was moved there and, a little later, Piet van den Hurk, solo flautist in the Utrecht municipal orchestra and conductor of the NCRV (radio) orchestra. The Amsterdam flautist Everard van Royen was in Vught during the same period. Pieter Dolk told me that the guard, Heinz Wons, had had the idea of starting a camp orchestra and developed it with Van den Hurk and Van Royen. One day at roll call the prisoners were asked who was a musician and those who were, were told to assemble because there was going to be an orchestra. They were told to instruct their families to send their instruments to Vught.

Hetta sent a cheap viola and a batch of music. She decided not to send Nico's expensive Cuijpers, which they had bought from Max Möller with Hetta's inheritance, to a concentration camp. Pieter Dolk wrote later that both Heinz Wons and the camp commandant Hauptsturmführer Chmielewski considered the orchestra "theirs". There was also an Oberscharführer called Ullman or Uhlman, who was officially responsible and was supposed to arrange things. "But he didn't do anything", said Pieter Dolk, "he didn't have to, we did it all ourselves."

The orchestra had some twenty to twenty-five members, both amateurs and professionals. It existed for about four months. Most of the players were Jewish, all from the punishment barracks. There were a couple of professional string players, but for a while there was a real amateur from a brass band too. He was the only trombone player, but the combination proved unworkable. There were violins and violas but no bass or cello. The members Johan Sinaasappel and Max Karpe had arrived at the same time as Nico. The latter died in Auschwitz in 1944. There was Ben Duis and a guitar player called Max Groen, who survived the war, and Gomez de Mesquita, a recorder player, but those two didn't really fit into the orchestra. They just played along and Van den Hurk protected them from being transported by saying he needed them. There was a drummer and an amateur clarinet player, a second trumpet player and of course Heinz Wons, who played his accordion.

The repertoire was popular classical and salon music. The Oberscharführer, Pier Dolk said, hadn't a clue. He went on leave one time and told them that when he got back, they were to know the Unvollendete... Rehearsals were in the infirmary, every morning. They performed weekly in the music barracks and played in the courtyard two or three times for the SS Kommandatur. Sometimes SSers came to the music barracks to listen. Once they had to play in the rain, Dolk remembered, even the strings. Most performances were well attended and the musicians were happy to be less at risk than other prisoners. "Of course we played well", said Dolk, "musicians can't really do anything else." But then a new camp commandant arrived, Obersturmführer Grünewald. He thought the orchestra was too "schön" for a concentration camp so it was disbanded. [for the originals of sources quoted here and following, see

*Muziek in Theresienstadt*, Joza Karas, Panta Rhei, 1955, supplement II by Th. van Houten, pp. 224, 230-232 and 233-35.]

Everard van Royen has described how orchestra members could be taken into the infirmary because the Lagerarzt, the camp doctor, supported the plan for an orchestra. According to him, any concentration camp “worth its salt” had an orchestra, the most important being the one at Auschwitz, but the group at Vucht was under the jurisdiction of the Lagerarzt himself, who said proudly: “This is my orchestra”.

Aside from instrumental music, choral works were occasionally performed. Several evenings a week and sometimes on Sunday afternoons there was music in the barracks. “I have seen grown men with tears in their eyes while singing nationalistic songs. Luckily no SSers ever came in while that was going on, but I think someone was standing guard by the door too, he wrote. It was very courageous of Van den Hurk to try to mold all those people into an orchestra. I didn’t really realise at the time what a joy the music must have been to the other prisoners” wrote van Royen.

Van Royen also described later chamber music evenings with the composer Marius Flothuis. Flothuis and Nico knew one another, but not at Vught, where Flothuis arrived a week after Nico had been sent on. Van Royen wrote about a bizarre event involving the “camp eldest”: a prisoner regarded as a gross bully, who was conned into thinking he would enjoy an evening of classical music. The men he worked with in the fire prevention group installed him in a rocking chair in an empty barracks - to show how important he was. In the middle of the night, Max Karpe (violin), Nico (viola) and Everard (flute) were to play a Haydn divertimento for him, “easily digested music for undeveloped ears. We were taken secretly to the barrack in question through barbed wire barriers and in total darkness. The camp was asleep, except for the SS guards in the watchtowers. We played our music for the fellow, who was dead drunk (compliments of the pharmacist) and kept nodding that he thought it was beautiful. This was the typical weird world of prison, with a prominent prince and his court...”

Van Royen managed to preserve a typed program from a chamber concert in one of the other barracks, announcing Sunday morning August 1<sup>st</sup> 1943 at 10:30 in Block 22: *Sonata in F major* by A. Scarlatti, *Divertimento in C major* by Haydn and *Quartet in D*

*major* by Mozart KV 285. Everard van Royen, flute, Max Karpe, violin, Nico Richter, viola. The cellist is unknown.

In the meantime, wrote Van Royen, the transports continued with discouraging regularity and an appalling number of Jewish prisoners vanished. Nico Richter, who was a close friend, was taken away and so were other Jewish friends from the orchestra. They, being Jewish “criminals” were pessimistic about their future and they were right. “There was a big transport to Auschwitz and I will never forget the sight of all those people herded together in the snow on a cold, windy day at the mustering place, waiting.”

## SERENADE

Between March and July of 1943 Nico played in the orchestra at camp Vught and seems also to have worked on his final composition, the *Serenade for flute, violin and viola* published in 1945.

At the end of March, the resistance attack on the Amsterdam registry office, to destroy the files, took place and the prisoners heard about it. At that time it was occasionally possible to communicate with the outside world. Nico sometimes received letters and packages from home. Towards the end of his time in Vught his fellow-prisoner Cor Dommelhuizen was released and managed to smuggle a few uncensored letters and documents of Nico's out to his family. They were lost in the course of the war.

Early in May Nico went back into the infirmary with stomach trouble. He was given norit, a patent charcoal medicine. By then his weight was back up to 59 kilos and ten days later even 60.

## WESTERBORK

Nico's parents were picked up during the razzia of September 29<sup>th</sup> and sent to Westerbork. That was the last raid. There were no more Jews left.

There are postcards from Westerbork, now in the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, addressed to Hetta and “friends”, meaning Karla, who was hiding in the Helmersstraat:

Dear Children, thank you very much for the packages. The contents were good. Don't send any more for a while, we don't need anything. We are fine and have enough to eat. Please give our regards to [many friends]. Keep your chin up, Hetty, and so will we. Did you clean the hall and will you fetch the laundry. Greet anyone we may have forgotten...be assured that we are always thinking of you. With all our love, Father and Mother

Most of the cards concern friends and family, food received and reassurances that all is "well". Negotiations were going on to keep them in Westerbork instead of "moving on" that is, to Auschwitz. "We live in hopes of seeing you again" they wrote. Several of the postcards refer to "Mr. O.", an agent entrusted with the negotiations. On November 14<sup>th</sup>, Saar wrote that "the P. business", meaning Poland, wasn't sorted out yet. "Although we just managed to avoid the worst [= deportation] last time, we are having the same trouble again tomorrow. We will write a few words if we stay here. We thank you for the many sacrifices you have made and hope to recompense you some day...Tell Sallie (their go-between) to hurry as it may be too late at any moment."

The postcards always say thank you for packages received and respond to Hetta's positive information about Nico. There was no way the Richters could communicate with their son, nor could they mention their daughter openly. The Germans were not to know that Karla was hiding at Hetta's. They referred to Hetta's birthday, sending congratulations and saying that she must have had a busy day with "her big family".

The first letters show that the Richters were trying to get onto a list of "gesperren", that is, people who were not sent on to Auschwitz in the weekly transport by overcrowded cattle car, operated on schedule by the Dutch railroads. Karla gave 66.000 guilders worth of diamonds to a notary called Puttkammer in the Van Eeghenstraat (I have a photocopy of the receipt) so that they would be put on the list, which was said to keep them safe. Puttkammer was not prosecuted after the war, as he was one of the few who actually did what he was being paid for, namely negotiate with the nazis and pay them. But no list guaranteed safety. Seyss-Inquart in The Hague decided each week

how many Jews were to be deported and if there weren't enough, a list would "platsz" - explode. That happened regularly. The process is described minutely elsewhere.

## AUSCHWITZ

Nico's last medical records from Vught are dated November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1943, just when his parents were writing the postcards that have survived. His x-rays showed spots on his lungs. The x-ray machine was a gift from the important Dutch electronics industry Philips (then Norelco in the United States), which aided the prisoners in Vught and elsewhere in many ways. Nico's card says that he was on a strict diet, but his condition remained unchanged. He was discharged from the infirmary on November 15<sup>th</sup> and sent to Auschwitz the same day, along with other musicians mentioned earlier: Johan Sinaasappel, Ben Duis and Max Karpe, the only one to survive the war. When he heard where he was going, Nico expressed his feelings in the clearest way he could: he smashed his viola.

The transport went via Westerbork, where the prisoners were registered and probably not even allowed to leave the train. Sadly, his parents found out what had happened. They wrote to friends in the middle of December:

...Have you heard anything about Nico's move on the 15<sup>th</sup>?  
We don't understand. How is Hetty coping? Please give her  
some support at this difficult time...

They also said thank you for food packages at Sinterklaas from various friends, including the aforementioned Sallie van der Hal, who had tried to buy the Richters' freedom. Sallie was the husband of Rosa Prins, the daughter of Izaak's sister Liesbeth. He had had a fairly important job with the city but he did not succeed in using his influence for the Richters or for himself. He died in Bergen-Belsen in 1944.

In Auschwitz Nico was given the number 163363. He was a political prisoner, so not destined for "selection" for the gas chamber. He will therefore have stood in line for hours after arriving around midnight, waiting for the number to be tattooed on his left forearm and written on his identity card. He had to hand in everything including his

clothes, was shaved again, sent to the showers and then walked to another barracks, wet and naked, to be given rags to wear. All this was accompanied by shouts and probably blows. In the quarantine barracks he indicated that he was a doctor (which was of course already known) and was eventually taken to be interrogated on his medical knowledge, probably by the head of the "Krankenbau" the infirmary. He was put to work in the area for sick prisoners, hospital block 20. That block was in the main camp, Auschwitz I, across from blocks 6 and 7, about which the psychiatrist E. de Wind later wrote in "Eindstation Auschwitz" [1946]. Dr. E. A. Cohen also wrote about it ["Het Duitse Concentratiekamp", Amsterdam 1952] stating that it was medically excellent, although there were regular selections of those to be "sent on". For the doctors and nurses working there, Auschwitz I was in some ways like a vacation spot. There were films and Sunday afternoon concerts (with lots of forbidden music, including Mendelssohn, as the SS couldn't hear the difference anyway). They were given goulash at Christmastime and New Year's and (mediocre) alcoholic drinks. Cohen wrote that they had plenty of light, "the SS (may they drop dead) drank with us and we were nice and warm, with plenty of coal - if not we'd steal some - while the rest of Europe was in the cold and the dark." In the evenings they were able to read newspapers and were pretty well informed about the war.

Nico was put to work there in spite of his bad health. According to him, that was because he had specialised in tropical medicine. Data in the Auschwitz state museum on the subject of "pseudo-medizinische" experiments at the camp show that the SS doctors Entress and Vetter worked in Block 20. Entress "investigated" the effects of fatal phenol injections. He and Vetter also injected healthy people with the blood of prisoners with spotted fever, which was classified as a tropical disease. They wanted to find out at which stage of the disease contaminated blood was most contagious. What Nico went through there, is left to the imagination. The historian Jacques Presser wrote that many of the Jewish doctors in Auschwitz did "all that was possible and not seldom that which wasn't. Nobody can praise their work sufficiently and this book honors the Dutch-Jewish physicians who did their duty in that hell." [Jacques Presser, *Ondergang*, Nijhoff, Den Haag, 1965, part II, p.447]

## BERGEN-BELSEN

There was no word from Nico in Auschwitz. No communication was possible. He probably didn't find out that his parents had been transported from Westerbork to Bergen-Belsen, near Celle in Germany, in February 1944. Belsen was an exchange camp, housing Jews who could be exchanged for Nazi prisoners and other people with important relations in unoccupied countries, who might prove profitable for the Germans. It was not an extermination camp and the Richters were sent there because they had been able to pay the Nazis a fortune via Puttkammer.

In Westerbork they lived in a barrack divided into a men's section and a women's section. They were able to move around at will until nine-thirty at night. Each section had twelve beds, in four tiers of three. There was no area for eating, no cupboard, and each section had only one washbasin and one toilet, or sometimes two. There was no privacy, the toilets stank. People cooked on little portable stoves, which weren't really allowed. The Richters were in the Sternlager, the regular part of the camp. They stayed together, were allowed to keep their own clothes and blankets and did not have their hair shaved off. A barracks measuring 40x8.5 meters held a hundred and fifty people until July 1944, when the numbers doubled. The beds were double-deckers. It would have been just bearable, if there had been enough to eat and if they hadn't had to work so hard. All the men between fifteen and sixty-five and all the women between fifteen and fifty-five were divided up into work "commandos". Izaak Richter was unlucky in that he was sixty-four. The eleven-hour working days, standing endless hours during the obligatory roll-calls and the scarcity of food wrecked his health.

## DEATH WITHIN SIGHT OF LIBERATION

On March 31<sup>st</sup> 1945, just before the camp was liberated, Izaak died. Sara was transported shortly afterwards in the most horrible circumstances, on the so-called ghost train. The train was sent to Tröbitz (between Leipzig and Dresden) early in April 1945 and left there on the 23<sup>rd</sup> by the retreating Germans. They were trying to eradicate all traces of the camps and the original plan seems to have been to

blow up the train on a bridge across the Elbe river. But the Russians were too fast for them. They came in time to save some of the sick, many of whom had spotted fever. The soldiers did what they could for the survivors, but of those some three hundred died in the two months during which they were nursed there, awaiting a situation in which they could be sent home. Sara Richter-Manheim died on May 6<sup>th</sup> 1945, one day after the liberation of The Netherlands.

## DACHAU

In the fall of 1944, the Russians had fought their way to within two hundred kilometers of Auschwitz. On October 16<sup>th</sup> Nico was transported to Dachau: three days and nights in a cattle car with only a hunk of bread and a little margarine. On arrival all his clothes and everything else he had was confiscated. In return he was given rags: worn, often bloody clothing that had belonged to people murdered in Auschwitz and rough boards as a substitute for wooden shoes. He was sent to work outside Dachau, at Aussenkommando Kaufering, where three immense underground bunkers were being built for Project Ringeltaube, an aircraft factory for the Messerschmit Me 262. Kaufering, in the forest east of Munich, consisted of eleven camps. The war crimes commission of the American Seventh Army which liberated them, reported that in terms of inhumane treatment they were the worst in Germany. Almost thirty thousand Jewish political prisoners from all over Europe were taken there between June 1944 and March 1945. The last drops of energy were to be forced out of them at hard labor and they were meant to be worked to death. About half of them were.

The huts in the camp were partly underground and the roofs were covered with earth, with the only grass in the camp growing on them. It got eaten. The huts were about twelve meters long and three meters broad, with wooden sleeping shelves in tiers along the long walls. It was only possible to stand upright in the middle. There was also a stove in the middle, which could have been lit if there had been any wood or matches. Occasionally cold water came out of the one faucet. There was no soap, but there were plenty of lice. The huts were supposed to hold fifty men, but sometimes there were a hundred and twenty.

The camp was doubly fenced with electrified barbed wire and watch towers; searchlights stood at small intervals along the fence. There was a roll-call lasting an hour and a half every morning at three-thirty. At work, in day and night shifts, Mollsuppe was served: three cups of water with a few dried vegetables. If you wanted some, you had to find something to put it in: a rusty tin can, if you were lucky. There were four hundred mugs for three thousand prisoners in the camp. At first the inmates had been given four hundred grams of bread daily but this was gradually reduced to two slices. By that time the bread was always mouldy. Occasional extra rations consisted of a piece of synthetic sausage or bit of cheese or even a spoonful of synthetic honey. As already mentioned, people ate grass and cannibalism was not unknown. [de Jong, op.cit. part 10b p.812ff and 856ff; [www.buergervereinigung-landsberg.org/english/history/kz-kommando](http://www.buergervereinigung-landsberg.org/english/history/kz-kommando)]

The impossibly hard labor in those final six months, quarrying rocks under the circumstances described above, did for Nico, as he said himself. Somehow he still worked there on two movements of his unfinished *Serenade*. He must have retained the music in his mind. It wasn't written down for him until he was on his deathbed.

## LIBERATION

Nico Richter was liberated by the American Seventh Army and repatriated, more dead than alive. In July, Hetta brought him home from Eindhoven by ambulance. He was nursed there by Hetta, his sister Karla and his friend and physician Hans Muller. He had time to see his niece Saskia, Karla's daughter, born in April, and to finish the *Allegretto giocoso* and *Presto* movements of his *Serenade*. He asked friends to come and say goodbye; among them Marius Flothuis and his old classmate Max Möller Jr., who came with his father to play the violin for him. Everard van Royen and his wife Gusta Goldschmidt came too. As Van Royen wrote in his memoirs, he and Gusta played the Bach *Sonata in c minor* for him but, being afraid that such complicated music would be too tiring, they then played Loeillet's *Sonata in F major*. Nico said that that was a useless waste of time so close to the end of his life, wrote Van Royen later, proving that his sharp, critical spirit remained unbroken.

Lex van Delden wrote his family on August 13<sup>th</sup> that "Nico has come back! Deathly ill. I don't think he is going to make it. Serious

open pulmonary tuberculosis, heart destroyed, everything destroyed except the spirit and the urge to compose!...”

Nico died in the night of August 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>. On the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, his friend from the camp orchestra Pieter Dolk was to visit him, but came too late. Nico was buried on the 18<sup>th</sup> at the Nieuwe Ooster-begraafplaats in Amsterdam. Aside from Hetta and Karla, there were a few other surviving family members: Rosa van der Hal-Prins, the widow of Sallie van der Hal who had tried to buy Nico's parents' freedom, and who had survived the Tröbitz train, her sister Ada and their mother Lies Prins-Richter, Izaak's sister. Friends from childhood were there: Hans Muller, Joop and Jaap Fahrenfort and musician friends Lex van Delden, Everard and Gusta van Royen, Wim Gaffel, Karel Mengelberg, Nap de Klijn, Sonja Prins and Hans Snoek.

Hetta was penniless because of the war and having taken care of all the people she had hidden, including her sister-in-law and the baby, and finally Nico. She had to petition the authorities for money to pay for his funeral.

Almost two years later, on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1947 (Liberation Day) Pieter Dolk received a letter signed by Everard van Royen, Cor Fels and Jan de Vries. It asked for a contribution to a headstone for “our old friend and fellow-prisoner, Nico Richter”.

The headstone was placed a year later. It gives Nico's date of birth, December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1915 and reads:

*Died August 16<sup>th</sup> 1945 as the result of having been in German concentration camps from Feb. 1942 until May 1945.*

An indistinct wind instrument has been carved at the bottom.

The day following Nico's death, August 16<sup>th</sup> 1945, was declared a national holiday: Japan had capitulated. No newspapers appeared that day, but on the 17<sup>th</sup> Marius Flothuis wrote in *Het Vrije Volk*:

*Nico Richter Deceased  
...Richter...went through all the misery of the concentrations camps...his endurance and will power were an example to*

*dozens of others and will continue to be so for the many who are still suffering the effects of five years of terrorisation. Always in fragile health, he came home a few weeks ago mortally ill and a physical wreck. Now death has preserved him from further suffering - but at the same time ripped a young, talented man from our midst.*

*Like many of his contemporaries – he was born in 1915 – Richter has not yet received the recognition as a composer that he deserved. ...Even in those final weeks he was working enthusiastically on a trio in five movements for flute, violin and piano.*

*We hope that funds and opportunities will soon be available to allow the public to be introduced to his work. M.F.*

On the same day, the journal De Vrije Katheder, volume V no. 19 appeared. De Vrije Katheder, subtitled "Bulletin in defence of the Universities" had been launched around the end of 1940 in Amsterdam as a stencilled pamphlet, written by left-wing students. Immediately after the war it became a weekly, edited by Mijk de Swaan and retaining its left-wing views.

In that issue of August 17<sup>th</sup> the cultural committee, consisting of De Swaan, Dick Elffers, W. Ph. Pos, Bertus van Lier and Marius Flothuis, announced the start of a Vrije Katheder club. It had already been started on July 7<sup>th</sup> and August 4<sup>th</sup> with two cultural afternoons in the Kleine Zaal, the small concert hall of the Concertgebouw, at which those present were told that cultural events would be organised regularly if the Vrije Katheder public wanted them. Interest had been overwhelming, which was why there was now a plan:

*As for music, the idea is to perform compositions insufficiently known to the public for whatever reason. We also plan to invite young musicians or ensembles of particular importance to the contemporary music world to the V.K. As should be clear, we are of the opinion that the highest priority should be given to creative music making, while the reproductive will be considered as a supporting factor, which we think must be called the correct estimation...*

The previous issue of August 10<sup>th</sup> had already announced the third cultural manifestation in the Kleine Zaal to be held on Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> and at which Ré Koster was to sing Debussy and Ernest Bloch's *Psaume 47*, with Arnold Juda at the piano. When Nico's death became known, that concert was also turned into a memorial for him. His *Two Pieces for violin and Piano* were played by Nap de Klijn and Alice Heksch. The review in *Het Parool* both praised the Vrije Katheder initiative and commemorated Nico Richter.

On September 1<sup>st</sup> the communist daily *De Waarheid* contained a noteworthy anonymous necrology:

*Nico Richter Deceased*

*The young composer and physician Nico Richter died in Amsterdam on August 15<sup>th</sup>. Richter was picked up in the summer of 1943 [April 1942, actually]. I had spoken to him only a few days earlier and he had emphatically and precisely explained why he distanced himself completely from anything political. There was therefore not the slightest reason for his arrest. It was caused by an extremely unlucky coincidence. A fellow physician had some professional notes of Richter's and the latter went to his colleague's home to fetch back his notebook. There were a number of Gestapo "gentlemen" present and they immediately arrested him. In spite of the immense efforts undertaken on his behalf, in spite of his wife's unending exertions, it proved impossible to have him freed. A few weeks ago he returned from the hell of the concentration camps: Amersfoort, Vught, Birkenau, Auschwitz, Dachau. However he was so weak, he had lived only on sheer willpower for the final months, that there was no possibility of saving him.*

*As a composer, Richter was still contending with the torpor with which the works of young Dutch composers are received. He left several works of chamber music, among which a trio for flute, violin and guitar, a serenade for strings and winds, and a concertino for cello and chamber orchestra. He also wrote music for the synagogue and in his final weeks he was working on a trio for flute, violin and viola.*

*Now that there is such a demand for general renewal, in the field of cultur as well as others, it is our duty to have Richter's works performed, although it is greatly to be deplored that this was not done regularly during his lifetime.*

The newspaper De Waarheid had originated during the resistance and it became the official organ of the Communist Party of The Netherlands (CPN). There is a blank line in the article, a caesura, dividing the musical from the political content in the same way that the lives of Dutch communists were divided after 1945. On the one hand, one had a profession, knowledge, a field of competence, on the other hand there was a political stamp on everything. The communists were increasingly mistrusted and thwarted and at the same time they were increasingly appropriating the heroic feats of the second world war and the preceding Spanish civil war. It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that they were indeed always in the front lines.

This painful process, culminating in the witch hunts of the nineteen fifties, had already begun in August of 1945, as is chrystal clear from the article, which is full of errors. Nico had spoken to the author about politics and had expressed his repugnance for the estrangement between various groups of citizens already becoming visible, by saying that he *distanced himself completely from anything political*. He wasn't discussing what we now see as a political decision in 1941/2, i.e. becoming a member of the resistance. He was talking about the mutual recriminations between the various **party**-political groups. Like his mentor, Willem Mulder, he couldn't care less what the umbrella organisation looked like. As it happens, he probably had no idea. But like his mentor, he just wanted to sabotage a murderous enemy.

This single-mindedness, with no thought to party politics was totally incomprehensible to hard-line communists. According to them, anybody not acting from strong political conviction, supported by a theory, was acting more or less at random. From there it is only a small step to the falsification of history as perpetrated in the newspaper article above.

Interestingly, the author's summing up of Nico's music includes non-existent works for the synagogue. This must be an inaccurate

reference to his orchestration of Ernest Bloch's *Baal Shem*. Perhaps it was put in to indicate that Nico Richter was a Jew?

Nico's student society also wrote about him. The book published on the occasion of Unitas' fortieth anniversary honors the society's dead:

*"Among them were many members of MUSA who had made it so successful. Others came back, but were physically unable to recover from their wounds. Nico Richter was one of them. We commemorate them all, but him in particular. He employed all his gifts to enliven MUSA, he was the foundation supporting all. He led the orchestra, organised, composed for MUSA and all this while the wider world of music was beginning to make demands on his time. Nevertheless he remained loyal to MUSA. There have been memorials to him in several music journals, in which the great expectations regarding his work have been expressed. He had to leave it all undone."*  
[Gedenkboek 40 Jaren U.S.A. 1911-1951, Amsterdam, 1951]

In the years that followed, there was not much time for the music of a recently dead young composer. A wartorn country had to be reconstructed. After their harrowing experiences, poverty-stricken musicians like Hetta had to rebuild their lives and they had their hands full.

Nevertheless, in the autumn of 1951 Hetta and her future second husband Peter Rester, a pianist and bassoon player originally from Austria, rearranged the livingroom of the Helmersstraat house so that chamber music could be performed there. They were thinking back to the only pleasant memories of the war years, the enthusiasm engendered by the clandestine house concerts. They bought the neighbors' old Bösendorfer piano, borrowed chairs from their friend and physician Hans Muller, who lived on their street, and made a start.

On Friday evening, November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1951, the first concert took place in De Suite, the Amsterdam venue for chamber music, with its accent on Dutch and contemporary works, which was to become so famous.

The first program, performed by the violinist Nap de Klijn and pianist Alice Heksch, included Stravinski's *Duo Concertante* and *Two*

*Pieces for violin and piano* by Nico Richter, which the duo had also played at his memorial in 1945.

A few months earlier I had returned from New York with my father and was invited to come and listen. I was just fourteen, enjoying the phenomenon of ‘family’ (what was left of it) and was hugely impressed by the evening’s events. Not only was there beautiful music, but some of it had actually been composed by the brother of my mother, who had died in New York in 1944. The heritage was inspiring, but I didn’t have the remotest idea that a little over thirty years later, my husband and I were, to Hetta’s delight, to launch our own series of Amsterdam house concerts. [Aemstelrande Concerts, from December 1984]

Early in 1954, after a concert featuring his music, Nico Richter was the subject of a long article in the *Nieuw Israëlich Weekblad* by the well-known music critic Leo Hoost. It was headed **Nico Richter (1915-1945) must not be forgotten!** The long biographical piece ends with a paragraph stating that Nico’s “unhappily limited oeuvre deserves a better fate than to be forgotten. A number of musicians have already endorsed this statement, in connection with a recent concert devoted to Nico Richter. We hope the matter will not end there.” [NIW, March 12<sup>th</sup> 1954]

It didn’t. De Suite continued to have his music performed and in the course of time other venues followed. To mention only a few concerts: De Suite premiered the two existing movements of his final *Serenade* on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1961 and glowing reviews by Lex van Delden and Karel Mengelberg followed. On May 4<sup>th</sup> 1965, Dutch memorial day for the second world war in Europe, the Dutch international broadcasting company and organisations promoting Dutch contemporary music held a memorial concert at the Muziekcentrum in the Amsterdam Jacob Obrechtstraat. Works by Jan van Gilse, Leo Smit and Nico Richter, none of whom had survived, were performed with an introduction by Marius Flothuis. The reviews in the nationals were excellent, as they were for more of Nico’s music, performed later that year. In September 1966 the premiere of his chamber opera *Amorys* took place in the Tingel-Tangel theater, again followed by a good review of the music, although the staging came in for some criticism.

During the sixties, seventies and eighties the music of the prematurely dead composers of world war two (full reviews of

Richter's music from this period can be found in the Dutch version of this book) was occasionally performed, always eliciting encouraging reviews and requests for more. By this time Hetta and Peter were getting old and organising fewer and fewer concerts in De Suite, which had moved with them to the Willemsparkweg.

In the autumn of 1994 the flute-player Eleonore Pameijer and pianist Frans van Ruth gave a concert in the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam. Van Ruth had suggested music by Leo Smit (1900-1943) and Rosy Wertheim (1888-1949). They reflected on the fact that the music of the dead Jewish composers of the period was almost forgotten. They talked about Ignace Lilien and "also Nico Richter... He left a small oeuvre of extremely sophisticated music in a completely individual style." [Eleonore Pameijer with Marijke Faber, in *Fluit*, 1998-2, pp.11-13]

As a result of these considerations, the Leo Smit Foundation came into being in January 1996, the year in which Peter Rester died.

*"In cooperation with the Jewish Historical Museum and Channel Classics and with the support of the VSB fund, we decided to do something to make this music better known. In April 1995, just before the big manifestations of the fiftieth commemoration of the end of world war two, we launched the cd Modern Times, with music by Leo Smit, Rosy Wertheim and Ignace Lilien [CCS 7995]."*

*While working on this project I came into contact with Leo Smit's sister, a woman also called Eleonore" wrote Eleonore Pameijer in Flute. "... Her lively stories and her photographs quickly gave us a lot more information about Leo Smit and she was the person with whom I first discussed the possibility of setting up a Leo Smit Foundation... In the same period the old Uilenburger Synagoge in my neighborhood (Amsterdam between the Waterlooplein and the Nieuwmarkt, the old Jewish quarter) was being restored; the ideal place for a concert hall and luckily having good acoustics [Nieuwe Uilenburgerstraat 51]. The Leo Smit Foundation started to organise the monthly Uilenburger Concerts there in October 1996 with the motto: 'tradition and renewal in the 20<sup>th</sup> century'."*

The Leo Smit Ensemble performed Nico Richter's music at least once every year while I was doing the research for the original Dutch version of this book, which went on line in 2003. Full details can be found there, including program notes by Huib Ramaer. It also lists the Dutch works of reference in which his oeuvre is discussed, up to that time.

In 2003 the Leo Smit Ensemble recorded seven of Nico Richter's pieces for Tatlin Records [TA005], with a shortened version of my biography and numerous illustrations. The small book with the cd inside the front cover, produced and introduced by Huib Ramaer and printed and laid out by Jan de Jong, received a prize for the two most beautifully made cds of the year.

After Hetta's death in 2006, I became responsible for both her and Nico's musical heritage. I have since turned over both his and her (De Suite) papers to the Netherlands Music Institute in The Hague. The Prince Bernhard Cultural Fund includes a fund in their name, dedicated to the furtherance of chamber music. Hetta's 1690 Rogieri violin went to the national musical instrument fund, for the use of a deserving violinist.

In the summer of 2015, seventy years after liberation, the Amsterdam city archives, in cooperation with the Leo Smit Stichting which was celebrating its twentieth birthday, put on an exhibition about twenty composers persecuted by the nazis. At the opening of the exhibition on June 4<sup>th</sup>, the book "Vervolgde Componisten in Nederland", edited by Carine Alders and Eleonore Pameijer of the Leo Smit Foundation was also launched (Amsterdam University Press, 2015). It contains an introductory chapter and thirty-four short essays on the composers, including Nico Richter. From early June until the end of August, concerts of their music organised by the Leo Smit Foundation were held on alternate Sunday mornings in the hall of the archives, with cds on sale in the archives shop (and elsewhere). The enterprise was a huge success. After the first, reasonably well attended concert on June 4<sup>th</sup>, the word went around and at following concerts more and more chairs had to be brought in. The director of the archives was delighted and this year Leo Smit Foundation concerts on Sunday mornings began on May 1<sup>st</sup>. The book too generated great interest and at the time of writing (summer 2016) the essays were being translated into English for publication.

## Chronological List of Nico Richter's Surviving Compositions

Violconcert, 1933

Serenade sinfonietta, Summer 1934, for Irene Heyting

Concertino voor cello en 6 instrumenten, January 1935 for Marcel Lonon

Trio voor fluit, altviool en gitaar, August 1935, for Bertus van Lier

Strijkkwartet I, January 1936, for Karel van Campen

Lied (de klokken), text Wim Kriste, 20 December, 1936

Amorys, chamber opera, text Hendrik Lindt, November 1937

Sinfonia divertimenta, first performance 23 July 1938

Het lyk, lied, text Wim Kriste, 2 March 1940, for Hendrik Lindt

Orchestration of Baal Shem, Ernest Bloch, Summer 1941

Twee Stukken voor viool en piano, January 1942, for Max Möller Sr en Jr

Serenade voor fluit, viool en altviool, 1943 - August 1945

### MANY THANKS:

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### OTHER SOURCES :

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[www.kampamersfoort.nl](http://www.kampamersfoort.nl)

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