



Margreet Prinsen

Language

English

Nationality

Dutch

Country of Residence

Netherlands

Year of birth

1936

Website Address

<https://www.margreetprinsen.nl>

Year(s) in which you received lessons from Gustav Leonhardt

1964-1967

The lessons were

Within a diploma course at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam (Amsterdamsch Conservatorium, Sweelinck Conservatorium)

Individual private lessons

How did you first come into contact with Gustav Leonhardt, and how did you get the opportunity to study with him? Did you have to wait before you could become his student?

During my final year of organ studies at the Conservatory of Amsterdam, my professor Anthon van der Horst advised me to follow lessons in basso continuo and harpsichord with Gustav Leonhardt. They had already known each other for many years: Van der Horst told me that the young Gustav [12-13 years old] and his sister Trudelies received music theory lessons from him at his home, and that at an early age Leonhardt went with his father to concerts of the Netherlands Bach Society in Naarden, conducted by van der Horst. It fascinated me how subtle and poetic Leonhardt's approach to early music was, and how the sound of the harpsichord came to life through his way of playing. Inspired by this, after completing my diploma in solo organ playing, I followed a second major in harpsichord with Leonhardt, who was sometimes replaced by Anneke Uittenbosch when he was absent due to concerts abroad. I had to wait two years after completing my organ diploma in order to earn enough money to buy a harpsichord before beginning the course of study with Leonhardt. After my harpsichord diploma with Leonhardt, I received some individual private lessons from him on the organ.

Briefly describe your level of musical education when you started lessons with Gustav Leonhardt. How many years had you studied an early keyboard instrument? What academic qualifications did you have, if any?

As mentioned above, I held a soloist's diploma in organ from the Amsterdam Conservatory, where I studied with Anthon van der Horst [1899-1965], who began teaching organ there in 1935 and choral and orchestral conducting in 1936. In his time he was well aware of the practice of early music, and he immersed himself in the styles and backgrounds of compositions. For example, when performing Bach's Passions, he conducted from photographic reproductions of original manuscripts. The recorders, viols and harpsichords used in those years were, in his opinion, incorrect copies, and in his view more attention should have been devoted to real historic instruments. Leonhardt appreciated him for his efforts.

What repertoire did you study with Gustav Leonhardt? You may answer along general lines or give a list.

Amongst others, compositions by Sweelinck, Merula, Frescobaldi, Louis and François Couperin, Rameau, Scarlatti and Bach, with the Goldberg Variations as the obligatory work for the final diploma exam.

Did you present each piece of music only once, or more often? Was this your own choice?

Especially at the beginning of my studies, each piece of music was looked at again in the following lesson.

Please describe a typical lesson or various types of lessons you received. For example: the frequency, length and location of the lessons, the specific instruments used, the number of pieces you typically presented, how much discussion there was, how much Leonhardt played and at what point during the lesson, etc.

Most of the lessons I received were given in the Conservatory but sometimes at his home on the Nieuwstraat, afterwards in "Huis Bartolotti". I received my organ lessons in de Waalse Kerk in Amsterdam. Leonhardt played during the lessons, after giving very detailed instructions.

Did Gustav Leonhardt discuss and/or demonstrate keyboard technique, fingerings, hand and arm position, etc.? If so, did he relate these aspects to different periods, traditions and/or national styles of early keyboard music?

In his lessons, technical matters such as using wrist and arm movements, "toucher", legatissimo and articulation were touched upon. This was, however, always related to the expression of a composition. He gave very detailed instructions about how to articulate, and why. He also encouraged me to read a lot, amongst other things about fingerings, although early fingerings were not explicitly discussed. When a certain articulation was hard to get right at first, his advice was to try a more difficult fingering, for instance using a fourth finger twice to accentuate a certain note.

Did you notice that he commented at greater length or with more enthusiasm on particular pieces, composers, or types of repertoire? If so, which ones?

Louis Couperin and Froberger were recommended with enthusiasm. Handel was not his favorite composer.

Did he ask you to defend your interpretive choices? More generally, did he approach questions of personal autonomy and individuality as a performer during your studies? In what way?

He repeatedly pointed out that there are no unambiguous answers in the interpretation of early music.

What did you hope or expect to achieve from your lessons with Gustav Leonhardt?

To absorb his respect for the composers' intentions.

After your period of study, did you have further contacts with Gustav Leonhardt that contributed to your development as a musician?

Yes, in some individual organ lessons. He was also willing to advise me about a harpsichord

purchase. Concerning buying an instrument, Leonhardt always advised that one should be informed by several builders. For my first instrument he called Rainer Schütze in Heidelberg, who made me a spinet in 1962. I next acquired a harpsichord from Wilhelmus Jiskoot in 1964-65, a copy of a Frank Hubbard instrument based on an original by Taskin. Leonhardt probably also mentioned Martin Skowronek, but such an instrument was outside my price range. The harpsichord I used for my Duphy recording was a Ruckers copy by Joel Katzmen, a builder also mentioned by Leonhardt. Other further contacts I had with Leonhardt were after my concerts, when he was always willing to give an evaluation.

Has your perspective on your lessons with Gustav Leonhardt changed over the years? In what way?

I remember from my studies with Anthon van der Horst that organ music should be played with clear registrations and rich contrasts (register dynamics), sparing rubato, and a variety of articulations from staccato, to leggiero, to legato. Van den Horst's own "toucher" was beautiful. But the way Gustav Leonhardt used rubato, and his attention to details and dynamic differences even within the bar, were completely new and fascinating to me. The things I learned from him are still valuable to me, and I am very grateful.

Curriculum Vitae

Margreet Prinsen holds soloist's diplomas in organ and harpsichord from the Conservatory of Amsterdam, where she studied with Anthon van der Horst and Gustav Leonhardt. She has performed regularly as a soloist on both instruments and has made multiple radio recordings. She appears as one of the players on various CD anthologies devoted to historical organs: 'The Historic Organ in the Netherlands' [Midwolde], 'Organs of the Netherlands' [Midwolde, Westerbork], 'Organ Culture in Groningen' [Eenum, Kantens, Midwolde]. This last received an Edison award. As a continuo player she participates in various ensembles, including the Barlheze Consort. She has performed with, among others, baritone Jasper Schweppe and gambist Jan Goorissen of Trio Zuylekom, and with cellist Lucia Swarts and gambist Sarah Walder. Margreet Prinsen taught for many years at the Groningen Conservatory. In 2016 she performed 'Die Kunst der Fuge' by Bach on harpsichord, together with Leonore Lub on organ, in various locations throughout North Holland. She recently made a solo recording on the historical Hinsz organ in the beautiful church of Zandweer.