

Program notes (long version)

A few things inspired me for writing the *prelude to a YouOpera* for the *Music11* Festival.

First of all, I've been interested in writing an opera that is not about a classic hero, but about you – the listener himself. I have the feeling that people today are not as much interested in historical figures like Don Giovanni anymore as they are interested in themselves. Part of this is driven by new technologies, that make it possible to carefully design your own profile on the Web and live your life in a community that you have created by yourself by selecting your friends on Facebook, following your idols on Twitter and subscribe to the blogs of your interests. Instead of creating a global melting pot, the Internet seems to have created the opposite: a local village from where strangers can be easily excluded.

One idea I had to make this idea to a piece of music was to create our own *Music11* community on Facebook, then read all status updates and other posts and finally set those lines to music. I must admit it felt very voyeuristic to invite all yet-strangers as a friend and even more clandestine to scrutinize in their personal writings for good lyrics. Also, many Facebook updates are quite silly – or even incomprehensible – to be set to music. I will confess that I only realized after I already had set Ben Wallace's *I really wish I had some fiesta dip right about now* to music, that he was talking about a dip sauce and not about the need for a party.

But I discovered one category that was very powerful: those tiny messages about love. Maybe it's because I am living abroad and I see most of my friends and family through email and Facebook, or maybe it's because I fell in love with my girl friend at a music festival comparable to *Music11*, or, and I love that possibility most myself, it is just *because* of the bunch of silly other Facebook messages that the ones about love sound so genuine. It's not the 19th century German love that is only really fulfilled by death – no, it's about the genuine love for small things, the things that make life worth living.

Musically, I used harmonies that I know from the 90s dance 'house' music that has been very big in the Netherlands. It is characterized by a steady pulse, a heavy bass with syncopation (called a *break beat* back then), seemingly random major and minor chords in dotted eighths and, last but not least, a overwhelming happy feeling – probably back in those days heavily influenced by the introduction of the love drugs XTC and MDMA. As I was born 1981, I was a bit too young for those drugs in the nineties, but that decade represents for me my teenage discovery of parties, love, and music.

Program notes (short version)

Inspired by the ever increasing interest we have gained in ourselves and our own community, the piece *Fill the Present Day with Joy [prelude to a YouOpera]* is an attempt to make a piece of music that is about the listeners themselves, rather than a historical hero. The lyrics were all taken from Facebook status updates from people that would be members of the audience, reaching from a quotation of Wordsworth, via loving wall posts, to automatically generated texts by Facebook itself. In particular, the piece deals with the love we share online.

– Ruben Naeff, April 27th, 2011