

## SPECIAL FEATURE on BERTRUS VAN LIER

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Date of birth: 10th September 1906, Utrecht, Holland

Date of death: 14th February 1972

Nationality: Netherlands

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Bertus van Lier studied the violoncello with Max Orobio da Castro at the Amsterdam Conservatory. Later on he also studied composition with Willem Pijper and direction with Hermann Scherchen. Bertus van Lier's talents manifested themselves in many fields, and the cello was not of his primary concern as an adult.

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In 1938 Van Lier was appointed a teacher at the Utrecht Conservatory, then in 1945 at the Rotterdam Conservatory and later on in 1953 at the Amsterdam Music Lyceum. He was conductor at home and abroad of many performances, such as Bach's Matthew Passion at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1950, for which he received a personal invitation from Benjamin Britten. In 1949 he conducted his own composition *Het Hooglied* (Holy Song) in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam (Holland Festival).

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During the 1950s he was very active as a conductor. In the season 1954-55 he was the principal conductor of the Residentie Orkest in The Hague, and during the Holland Festival 1956 of the Nederlands Kamerorkest. In 1955 Bertus van Lier received the Nijhoff Prize for his translation of *Antigone* and in 1961 '*Het Hooglied*' (The Holy Song) was awarded the Sem Dresden Prize.

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From the 1960s he was more in academic fields. In 1960 he became a senior lecturer (subject: art history) at the University of Groningen and in 1966 he was appointed professor. At the occasion of the 350th anniversary of this university he was granted a honorary doctorate.

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Bertus van Lier wrote music for orchestra (some 3 Symphonies, the Ballet *Katharsis*, a Concerto for Bassoon, a Sinfonia, and a Divertimento Facile), chamber music, vocal music (*Het Hooglied* (The Holy Song) for soloists, choir and chamber orchestra (English and Dutch version), Cantata for Christmas, for choir, soloists and orchestra) and incidental music to *Aias* and *Antigone* by Sophocles - both being his own translations.

His compositional style was, in the first period, strongly influenced by the polytonal structures of Pijper, though he did go on to employ tonal centres, as in the Third Symphony (1939). Textures built out of the superimposition of a number of melodic lines remain characteristic throughout his output of the later years. However, with his at times dense orchestration, the results can be a little overloaded, for example in the Bassoon Concerto (1950) and the Sinfonia (1954).

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Hear the “Divertimento Facile”, but it’s far from easy I can assure you, haha!:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFAb8kzb-GY>

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and his ‘The Holy Song’ of almost symphonic proportions (lasts nearly an hour!) for three solo-voices, chamber-choir and chamber-orchestra (1949):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQSJwE-DcRM>



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‘documenting the cello’