

## Carmen before the storm



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Over the past decade Carmen Cobos - Spanish by birth, trained in Britain, Dutch by residency - has carved out an enviable niche producing the documentaries of some of the Netherlands' most luminous filmmakers, such as Heddy Honigmann, John Appel and the husband and wife pairing of Peter Lataster/Petra Lataster-Czisch.

Now Cobos has turned to directing, and in April 2014 she will premiere her directorial debut *IMPERFECT HARMONY* which deals with the return of former enfant terrible Louis Andriessen, the internationally acclaimed composer, to the sumptuous Amsterdam Concertgebouw auditorium whose concerts he audibly disrupted four decades before for their lack of modernist content.

To commemorate the concert hall's 125th anniversary in 2013, Andriessen was invited to write an orchestral piece that would be performed by the Concertgebouw Orchestra led by the world-renowned conductor Mariss Janssons.

Cobos' film covers the period through rehearsals to performance, detailing the increasing personal and professional conflicts between the towering protagonists.

"We wanted to do something between tradition and modernity," explains Cobos, referring to a theme that has always been evident within her work. She was production manager on Niek Koppen's *THE HUNT* (1997) about the ongoing British (and very bourgeois) predilection for fox hunting before she produced John Appel's *THE LAST VICTORY* (2004) about the annual horse race ran on the cobbled Palio in Siena, Tuscany.

"I wanted to direct a film and I thought it was now or never," she continues. "So I tried to find a subject with that theme but also close to me, because they always say that you should make your first film close to you. So I was kind of sniffing around the Concertgebouw for two years trying to make a film about how to keep the concert hall going, and through that we

found out about Louis and this commission, and we thought it would be a beautiful subject for a film.”

Conductor Janssons’ intense privacy is very well documented but he was happy nevertheless for Cobos to film during rehearsals and the performance. This arrangement suited the director perfectly as it was always her intention anyway to place major the emphasis on composer Andriessen.

“I have worked with many first time directors and they would begin to make a film about a lion and end up making a film about a tiger. So I did not want to interview Marris Jansons - not only because I knew he was by far too busy but also because the focus of the story was always from Louis’ viewpoint,” she stresses.

Even then, Cobos didn’t get it all her own way, at least at first. Andriessen was also unwilling to co-operate, unsure as to whether or not this was really a good idea, but the producer-turned-director can be very persuasive and eventually he relented. “He said ‘let’s do it, but I have very very little time’, but I told him I can work very well within restrictions. I love restrictions. I think it is very beautiful to work within restrictions.”

These restrictions were both temporal and spatial. The orchestral rehearsals took place in the week prior to the world premiere over a 5-day period, and all the footage was shot over a 10-day period either in the Concertgebouw or within its immediate environs.

What’s more, Cobos was confident that her story had enough innate drama to drive the film forward. “Knowing Louis, knowing Mariss, knowing the orchestra and knowing the building, at the end the reality was that they gave us a beautiful film and we didn’t need anything else, no other devices to tell the story.”

To which can be added conflict, which any producer/script consultant/director or discerning viewer will tell you lies at the root of good story-telling, and Cobos was determined to capture conflict in abundance.

“Louis has his past with the Concertgebouw,” she points out. “He said forty years ago that he would never go back there. Together with a Dutch group of modernists back in the 1960s they wouldn’t allow an important concert to start, making frog noises to complain about the lack of modern music in this building, and then after all these years he decides to go back and write for a symphony orchestra, conducted by this legendary figure Mariss. I was very aware that there were going to be a lot of conflicts between the two gentlemen.”

“Aggravation was my dream in the film, and it came true,” she continues. “Of course in terms of the music, for me it is different. When Louis said yes to the film he said ‘now you go and study my music’, but I said to him, I am not going to become an expert in music. That is not what I want to do. I just want to tell a story.”