

Fascinated by Genevan melodies

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image: Marijke Gussenhouven

Jan Karman (78) from Middelburg (Netherlands) has returned to the psalms of his youth. In the Reformed Church of Colijnsplaat, where he used to guide the singing, while he now works as a composer on a project to write a fugue with all Genevan melodies.

In the family in which Karman grew up there was an abundance of music and singing. His older brother was organist at the church and Jan succeeded him.

Lessons - organ, piano. theory of harmony - he got from the church musician Adriaan Kousemaker, a very strict teacher.

Karman, however, switched to the flute. Meanwhile, he went to work as Manager of Systems & Information at the Pension Fund of the Netherlands Broadcast. As a hobby Karman gave as flutist occasionally a performance.

Jan wrote during his working life occasionally a piece of music, while since 2008 he is serious active as a composer. Sometimes some larger works came from his pen, like a cantata at Psalm 23 and a Sonata for flute, alto flute and organ.

The first "substantial" work that Karman wrote was a four-piece suite on the Zeeland national anthem, that also contains a fugue.

That form intrigued the Middelburger so that he wanted to continue with it. But where to get the themes from? Then he came back to the Genevan Psalter.

According to Karman - who only sees the innerside of the church at concerts - the psalm melodies are perfect for the fugue form. "They are very compact, there is a great variety of tonalities and rhythm is very important."

If he writes such a fugue, it is not so much about the content of a psalm. "Obviously I look at the atmosphere only in second instance, whether it is subdued or exuberant. But I just use the melodies purely as abstract material."

In addition, it were mainly the first lines that formed the themes.

That each piece has the same form did not bother. "Some see the fugue form as the pinnacle of European music history. This form is never dull or boring, it's too complicated for being boring. It's like mathematics, where you can be doing it your entire life."

In the past six years Karman wrote forty fugal pieces. The first thirty psalms he has put on the market (own management. 72 pp. € 22.50).

It is intended that part 2 (with the psalms 31 to 60) is planned to be released next year.

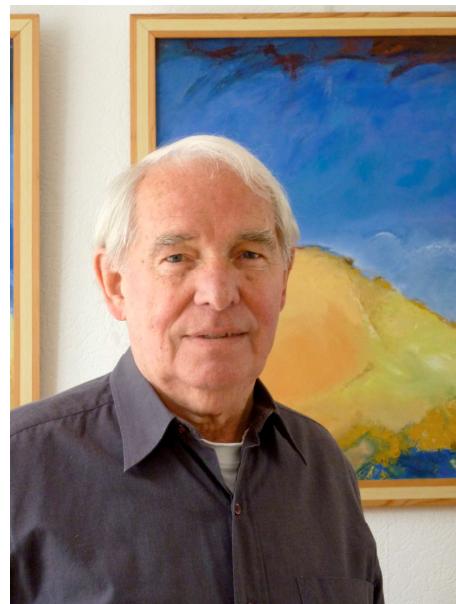
About after five years Karman hopes to have completed the project.

In addition, he feels inspired by the Flemish Renaissance composers, Bach and his predecessors, but also by someone like the Belgian Flor Peeters.

Karman is self-taught as a composer.

"Composing is due to three things: talent, craftsmanship and passion. That's what you need to your disposal. I tried to master the theory from excellent books."

"I'm not the person to write large orchestral works. I have a fondness for three, four or sometimes five-part polyphonic music."



Translation from Dutch: Jan Karman