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Sounding identity

Music-making in eighteenth-century Dutch noble homes*

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How can a sensible man be satisfied with a wife who thinks about music, singers and string players the whole day? And thus for the whole day dolls up, sits in front of the keyboard and forgets her housekeeping, husband and children?¹

This normative statement by the moralist writer Cornelius van Engelen (1726-1793) gives insight into ideas about music and women in eighteenth-century Dutch domestic culture. Seeing housekeeping and raising children as the primary duties of married women, he portrays music as a diverting but unproductive pastime. Does this imply that little music sounded in Dutch homes of the period, or that it was the sole province of men? On the contrary, the opposite is more likely. Precisely because music-making was a widespread leisure activity among women, Van Engelen felt the need to warn his readers against the dangers of being absorbed by it.

* In 2019 the Society for Nobility Studies presented the second Virtus thesis award to the author for his thesis 'Studying music at home: eighteenth-century dutch domestic music-making', (unpublished master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2018). As part of this award, the present article discusses several aspects of this thesis.

1 'Hoe kan een verstandig man genoeg hebben in eene vrouw, die den geheelen dag aan muzyk, zangeressen, en Snaarspeelers denkt? en derhalven den geheelen dag zig opschikt, voor het Clavier zit, en haar huishouden, man, en kinderen vergeet?'. C. van Engelen, *De Denker*, 140 (1765) 279; https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_denoo1denko3_01/_denoo1denko3_01_0035.php (accessed 15 Feb. 2020).

From the 1980s, music-making in eighteenth-century Dutch homes has received increasing scholarly attention, particularly in studies on noble families.² While these studies shed light on the role of music in noble homes, they do not venture much beyond establishing a factual historical narrative. In contrast, recent studies on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English domestic musical culture demonstrate a more interpretive approach by focusing on class, gender and national identity.³ This raises the question what role these issues play in the Dutch context. Taking a similar approach, this article revisits case studies on music-making in the homes of the Van Reede family and Belle van Zuylen (1740-1805), of the Van Tuyll family, to illuminate how music related to different aspects of their identity.

The Van Reede case mainly concerns music-making in the familial context at Amerongen Castle. Belle's case, on the other hand, focuses on musical endeavours of a more individual nature at Zuylen Castle and – after her marriage in 1771 – Le Pontet, Switzerland. While the two cases deal to some extent with different aspects of domestic musical culture, they are in fact related. Belle maintained a warm friendship and an active correspondence with her cousin Annebet van Reede née van Tuyll (1745-1819), a driving force behind musical activity at Amerongen. Before discussing these cases in detail, this article reviews and compares scholarship on elite music-making in the Dutch and English contexts.

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- 2 On the Van Reede family, see M. Knuijt and C. Romijn, eds, *De muziekschat van Kasteel Amerongen: aspecten van het muziekleven op een adellijk huis* (Amerongen, 2001). On Belle van Zuylen, see M. Flothuis, 'An unexpected source of musical information: the correspondence of Belle Van Zuylen (1740-1805)', *Fontes Artis Musicae* 27 (1980), 33-36; M. Flothuis, 'Een zondagscomponiste in de achttiende eeuw', *Mens & Melodie* 35 (1980), 344-346; M. Flothuis, 'De muziek in de brieven van Belle van Zuylen', *Mens & Melodie* 37 (1982), 156-160; W. Hijse, 'Was Belle van Zuylen inderdaad een zondagscomponiste?', *Mens & Melodie* 39 (1984), 474-478; J. Letzter and R. Adelson, 'The career manqué of Isabelle de Charrière: a case study', in *Women writing opera: creativity and controversy in the age of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 2001), 137-211; J. Letzter, 'The historical significance of Isabelle de Charrière's operatic ambitions', in: S. van Dijk, V. Cossy, M. Moser-Verrey, and M. van Strien-Chardonneau, eds, *Belle de Zuylen / Isabelle de Charrière: education, creation, reception* (Amsterdam, 2006), 207-220; H. Metzelaar, 'The musical careers of Isabelle de Charrière and Jean-Jacques Rousseau', in: S. van Dijk, V. Cossy, M. Moser-Verrey, and M. van Strien-Chardonneau, eds, *Belle de Zuylen / Isabelle de Charrière: education, creation, reception* (Amsterdam, 2006), 221-236; H. Metzelaar, '"Les basses ne sont pas de moi": Belle de Zuylen and music education in upper-class Dutch circles', *Cahiers Isabelle de Charrière / Belle de Zuylen Papers* 6 (2011), 29-47. On the Van Wassenaer family, see R. Rasch, 'Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer', in: idem and K. Vlaardingerbroek, eds, *Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer 1692-1766: componist en staatsman* (Zutphen, 1993), 51-86. On Josina van Boetzelaaer, see H. Metzelaar, 'An unknown 18th-century Dutch woman composer: Josina Boetzelaaer (1733-1797)', *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 40 (1990), 3-56; H. Metzelaar, 'Josina van Boetzelaaer née van Aerssen (1733-1797)', in: *From private to public spheres exploring women's role in Dutch musical life from c. 1700 to c. 1880 and three case studies* (Utrecht, 1999), 105-158.
- 3 J. Brooks, 'Musical monuments for the country house: music, collection, and display at Tatton Park', *Music and Letters* 91 (2010), 513-535; L. Rana, 'Music and elite identity in the English country house, c.1790-1840' (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2012); P. Cave, 'Piano lessons in the English country house, 1785-1845' (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2013); K. Faulds, '"Invitation pour la danse": social dance, dance music and feminine identity in the English country house c.1770-1860' (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2015).

Historiography of the Dutch context

Studies on music-making in eighteenth-century Dutch homes have attended to the Van Reedes, Isabelle de Charrière née van Tuyll (alias Belle van Zuylen), Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer (1692-1766), and Josina van Boetzelaer née van Aerssen (1733-1797). Most of the studies present exploratory research, constituting some of the first publications on the topic. A common denominator is that they aim to paint a picture of the role of music in the lives of these nobles.

The main publication on music-making at Amerongen is a ninety-six-page volume, representing contributions to a study day on the topic in 2001.⁴ Seven of its nine contributions concern the case of Amerongen, discussing various musical aspects: its music collection and instruments, the musical upbringing and interests of the Van Reedes in the context of Dutch elite culture, and the musical relations between the family and the Dutch stadtholder's court in The Hague. In doing so, the volume focuses on who was involved in various kinds of musical activities, which instruments they used, and what sorts of music they played. Yet it does not venture much beyond ascertaining such facts or proposing hypotheses about them.

The musical activities of Belle van Zuylen first came to the fore in several short articles by Marius Flothuis in the 1980s.⁵ While he sheds light on valuable information in her letters, Flothuis's writing rarely moves past dry year-by-year enumeration of what Belle writes, without proper citation of his sources. Jacqueline Letzter and Robert Adelson, as well as Helen Metzelaar, on the other hand, take a more interpretive approach by reflecting on the social boundaries in Belle's opera writing pursuits from her mid forties.⁶ Especially Letzter and Adelson touch upon gender and nationality, though without elaborating on this in terms of identity construction. In contrast to scholarship on the Van Reede family, the focus is more on Belle's compositional endeavours than on practical music-making.

The focus on composition is also evident in studies on Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer and Josina van Boetzelaer. In the most comprehensive book on Unico Wilhelm's life and musical output, the attribution and analysis of his compositions dominate the chapters on his musical interests.⁷ Likewise, the emphasis in Metzelaar's work on Josina van Boetzelaer is on her compositions rather than musicianship.⁸ Rudolf Rasch and Metzelaar do give some attention to Unico Wilhelm and Josina's music education and musical networks, and Metzelaar sheds light on the position of women compos-

4 Knuijt and Romijn, eds, *De muziekschat van Kasteel Amerongen*.

5 Flothuis, 'An unexpected source'; Flothuis, 'Een zondagscomponiste'; Flothuis, 'De muziek in de brieven'.

6 Letzter and Adelson, 'The career manqué'; H. Metzelaar, 'The musical careers'. See also Letzter, 'The historical significance' and, on Belle's music education, Metzelaar, 'Belle de Zuylen'.

7 R. Rasch and K. Vlaardingebroek, eds, *Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer 1692-1766*.

8 Metzelaar, 'An unknown 18th-century Dutch woman composer'; Metzelaar, 'Josina van Boetzelaer née van Aerssen (1733-1797)'.

ers. Predominantly, however, their contributions demonstrate a positivist approach. Moreover, the information on domestic music-making is too sparse to discuss the two composers as separate case studies in this article.

Historiography of the English context

Music-making in English country houses has become a burgeoning area of research over the last decade. Representative of this development are four studies on the Egertons of Tatton Park and the Aclands of Killerton House from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. In a pioneering article on Tatton Park, Jeanice Brooks relates the music collection of the Egerton women to a broader culture of book collection and display.⁹ She shows how their musical activities tie into emerging notions of elite domesticity and English musical heritage. Katrina Faulds examines another aspect of the Tatton collection: the women's dance music, demonstrating how its performance contributed to the negotiation of elite feminine identity.¹⁰

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Besides studying the Tatton collection, Penelope Cave goes into the collection of Killerton House.¹¹ Her focus is on the keyboard instruments and material for keyboard lessons of the Egerton and Acland girls and women, painting a vivid picture of early piano pedagogy. While Cave touches upon issues of gender and class, Rana deals with identity more explicitly.¹² She shows how songs from the Tatton and Killerton collections facilitated identity construction for both families in terms of gender, class, national identity and religion. Important to note is that the studies of Faulds, Cave and Rana are PhD dissertations, all three supervised by Brooks. This has resulted in a shared approach, focusing on common issues of identity construction.

Class is a central issue among the families under study. Rana alludes to class in the concept of landed elite identity, which she studies in relation to the collection of vocal music.¹³ She illuminates, for instance, how the performance of passionate songs could engender sympathy for suffering people – in her words, 'landed elite responsibility for the distressed'.¹⁴ In a similar vein, Cave argues that piano lessons identified women as being part of 'the educated and accomplished elite'.¹⁵ Focusing on the behavioural verbalisation of class, Faulds mentions the role of dancing masters employed by the aristocracy in facilitating 'the performance of gentility'.¹⁶ This points to a performative approach to the embodiment of class.

9 Brooks, 'Musical monuments'.

10 Faulds, 'Social dance'.

11 Cave, 'Piano lessons'.

12 Rana, 'Music and elite identity'.

13 *Ibidem*, 20.

14 *Ibidem*, 1.

15 Cave, 'Piano lessons', 286.

16 Faulds, 'Social dance', 9.

A much-discussed aspect of class is the notion of status. Status, we could say, serves to define someone as a member of a social class and contributes to their position within that class. Faulds foregrounds women's expression of elite status through social dance in the ballroom, particularly through the quadrille.¹⁷ In a comparable manner, Brooks puts forward that women's cultivation of early music at home promoted strong associations between older music and elite status.¹⁸ Rana, on the other hand, explains how the music education of girls contributed to their father's social status.¹⁹ Similarly, Cave notes that keyboard instruments were status-enhancing goods for aristocratic men, although it was often their wives and daughters who played them.²⁰

Gender is likewise an important issue in the English studies here under consideration. Rana emphasises that music-making was a gendered activity, drawing on conduct and educational literature to describe ideal characteristics of men and women, and boys and girls.²¹ Yet these expectations, she points out, do not necessarily tell us how people behaved in reality. As touched upon before, Cave sheds light on the gendered nature of keyboard instruments, which were a means for displaying mental and physical accomplishment for women, as much as they underscored men's status.²² In a similar way, Brooks speaks of 'gendered patterns in the production and use of musical material' in the context of women's contributions to country-house life.²³

The focus on women's musical endeavours means that femininity is a recurring concept. Rana argues that playing music for friends and family at home demonstrated a girl's domesticity, femininity, docility and patience, in short, the characteristics of an eligible wife.²⁴ In Fauld's study, femininity is in fact the most central issue.²⁵ She refers to it in various terms: female identity, feminine ideals, genteel femininity, genteel womanhood, and genteel girlhood. In addition to femininity, Rana devotes an entire chapter to how men's involvement in musical activities contributed to the presentation of masculine identity instead of jeopardizing it.²⁶ Likewise, Faulds argues that dancing in country houses was strongly related to concepts of patriarchy and primogeniture, despite its feminine associations.²⁷

Besides class and gender, national identity is another pivotal issue in the four studies. Faulds notes that many dancing masters in English country houses were

17 Ibidem, 225.

18 Brooks, 'Musical monuments', 533.

19 Rana, 'Music and elite identity', 124-125.

20 Cave, 'Piano lessons', 68.

21 Rana, 'Music and elite identity', 8-9.

22 Cave, 'Piano lessons', 68.

23 Brooks, 'Musical monuments', 515.

24 Rana, 'Music and elite identity', 5-6.

25 Faulds, 'Social dance'.

26 Rana, 'Music and elite identity', 20-21.

27 Faulds, 'Social dance', 313.



Annebet van Reede née van Tuyll (1745-1819) (portrait by Jean-Etienne Liotard, circa 1750-1774; photo Francien van Daalen, collection Amerongen Castle)

French immigrants, which entailed tensions of nationality.²⁸ As the English elite had to rely on French expertise, she proposes, the dancing masters jeopardized notions of English masculinity and social class. In a similar vein, Cave points out England's cultural dependence on foreign-born composers.²⁹ The Tatton and Killerton music collections, she notes, reflect the lack of dominant British composers around 1800. Yet much of this internationalism hailed from the thriving and influential musical culture of London and, we might add, was a defining feature of Britain at the time.

Rana looks at issues of national identity in the musical travels of young women of the Egerton and Acland families.³⁰ She argues, for instance, that Lydia Hoare Acland (1786-1856) brought 'home' to a foreign country by bringing a music book from her collection to Vienna. Brooks draws attention to the ties between the acquisition of

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 11.

²⁹ Cave, 'Piano lessons', 3-4.

³⁰ Rana, 'Music and elite identity', 20.

Italian music and aristocratic status in eighteenth-century England.³¹ Rather than seeing this Italian orientation as antithetical to English identity, she proposes that it contributed to ‘notions of England as a place where artistic achievement was more properly appreciated than in its country of origin’.³² England’s cultural dependency, then, was perceived as both a blessing and a curse.

On the whole, it is difficult to separate between the notions of identity that come to the fore in the four English studies. There is, in fact, a myriad of intersections between the concepts. Class is further structured among gender divisions, as the idea of genteel femininity suggests. Likewise, the notion of English masculinity – as opposed to stereotypes of French effeminacy – indicates that gender plays an important role in perceptions of national identity. Nationality also ties into notions of class, which is evident in the aristocratic alignment with Italian music. This close-knit web of intersections makes identity construction a fruitful framework for revisiting earlier studies on the Van Reede family and Belle van Zuylen.

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The Van Reede family

When the Van Reedes moved into the rebuilt Amerongen Castle in the late seventeenth century, they not only furnished the house with a lavish interior but also filled it with musical sounds.³³ Music-making was a beloved pastime of the family for generations for well over a century. After the marriage of Frederik Christiaan Reinhard (hereafter FCR) (1743-1808), 5th Earl of Athlone, and Anna Elisabeth (Annebet) van Tuyll in late 1765, the castle witnessed its musical heydays. A substantial part of its sizeable music collection dates from this period, as do its harpsichord (1766) and cabinet organ (1813). It is this half century that constitutes the focus of this paragraph.

Music lessons were part of the usual education for upper-class boys and girls at the time, and this was no different for FCR and Annebet’s children. At least five of nine learned to play an instrument: all four of their daughters received harpsichord lessons, two of the daughters learned to play the guitar, and one son, Reinhard Diederik (1773-1823) seems to have been taught the oboe.³⁴ The importance that their parents attached to musical proficiency also shows from their own ongoing education. Annebet received lessons in accompaniment on the harpsichord from Francesco Pasquale Ricci (1732-1817) sometime between 1764 and 1780, and FCR appears to have taken up the flute at the age of thirty.³⁵

³¹ Brooks, ‘Musical monuments’, 533-534.

³² *Ibidem*, 534.

³³ For a history of Amerongen Castle, see A.W.J. Mulder, *Kasteel Amerongen en zijn bewoners*, rev. ed., R.M. Heethaar, red. (1949; repr., Amerongen, 2015).

³⁴ R. Rasch, ‘Muzikale adel in de Nederlandse Republiek en op kasteel Amerongen’, in: Knuijt and Romijn, eds, *De muziekschat van Kasteel Amerongen*, 15.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 13-14.

The musical accomplishment of the young Van Reedes served as a status symbol for their family. Significant is that the types of instruments they took up were clearly gendered: whereas the women focused on the harpsichord and guitar, the men played the flute and oboe. This confirms ideals of elite femininity, which prescribed that keyboard and plucked-string instruments displayed the women in an elegant posture and prevented unwanted associations. Wind and string instruments, on the other hand, were only reserved for the men of the family. In addition to the flute, FCR seems to have played the violin.³⁶ At the same time, however, men enjoyed the freedom to take up keyboard and plucked-string instruments if they wished.

Besides music lessons and instruments, the music collection of Amerongen Castle provided the Van Reedes with abundant means for music-making at home. Striking is that a large quantity of the sheet music from the time of FCR and Annebet was published in London.³⁷ A notable example is a print of *Six sonates pour le clavecin ou piano forte* Op. 5 (1766) by Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782), the youngest son of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750).³⁸ This copy contains a label 'La Comtesse d'Athlone', suggesting that it belonged to Annebet. She had a well-suited instrument at her disposal for the sonatas: a two-manual harpsichord from 1766 by Jacob Kirckman (1710-1792), still located at the castle today.

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Jacob Kirckman was one of the leading British harpsichord builders of his time, counting queen Charlotte (1744-1818) and the later American president Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) among his clientele.³⁹ The Amerongen harpsichord is the most elaborate type of Kirckman's three standard models.⁴⁰ It has four main stops and a lute stop, which can also be operated by one of the two pedals – the so-called machine stop. The other pedal involves a Venetian Swell, enabling the player to open and close an inner lid to facilitate gradual changes in dynamics. Considering that Kirckman started implementing these novelties around 1766, the Van Reedes' instrument must have been among the first of its type.⁴¹

The Amerongen harpsichord may well have been a wedding present for Annebet and, in any case, must have been the result of one of the family's regular trips to London.⁴² Important is that the Van Reedes were in fact part of the British nobility by the title of Earl of Athlone. This is also how they must have perceived themselves, as they

36 C. Romijn, 'De muziekbibliotheek van kasteel Amerongen: De musicerende adel op het spoor', in: Knuijt and idem, eds, *De muziekschat van Kasteel Amerongen*, 29.

37 For an inventory of the Amerongen music collection, see C. Romijn, *De muziekbibliotheek van kasteel Amerongen: Inventaris en rapport sporenonderzoek* (Amerongen, 2001).

38 Ibidem, 12.

39 D.H. Boalch, *Makers of the harpsichord and clavichord, 1440 to 1840* (London, 1956), 63.

40 W. Vermeulen, 'De muziekinstrumenten op kasteel Amerongen', in: Knuijt and Romijn, eds, *De muziekschat van Kasteel Amerongen*, 80-81.

41 D.H. Boalch, 'Kirckman', in: P. Williams, and C. Mould, rev., *Grove music online*; <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.15050> (accessed 25 March 2020).

42 Vermeulen, 'De muziekinstrumenten', 80; Romijn, 'De musicerende adel op het spoor', 28.



Two-manual harpsichord (Jacob Kirckman, 1766; photo Toos van Eck, collection Amerongen Castle)

laid claim to annuities based on their British titles during their exile in England.⁴³ Given that Kirckman's keyboard instruments enjoyed a wide distribution among the British aristocracy, the state-of-the-art harpsichord and London-bought music allowed the family to rekindle their British noble identity over half a century after they joined the peerage of Great Britain.

Annebet was not the only player of the Kirckman; her daughter Maria Wilhelmina (1769-1852) seems to have been an avid keyboardist. The Amerongen collection contains several keyboard concertos with her signature, including *Deux concerts pour le clavecin* Op. 6 by Johann Andreas Kauchlitz Colizzi (c 1740-1790) and *Concerto pour le clavecin* Op. 10 by Johann August Just (c 1750-1791).⁴⁴ Both Colizzi and Just worked as keyboard teachers and musicians at the court of stadtholder William V (1748-1806).⁴⁵ Maria Wilhelmina, in turn, became lady-in-waiting to his wife, Wil-

⁴³ Mulder, *Kasteel Amerongen*, 120-121.

⁴⁴ Romijn, *Inventaris en rapport sporenonderzoek*, 21, 41.

⁴⁵ 'Colizzi [Collizzi], Johann(es) Andreas', in: *Grove music online*; <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.06097> (accessed 25 March 2020); R.R. Kidd, 'Just, Johann August', in: *Grove music online*; <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.14562> (accessed 25 March 2020).

helmina of Prussia (1751-1820), in the early 1790s.⁴⁶ The ties between their families must have grown in preceding years, giving Maria Wilhelmina opportunity to get to know the composers and their concertos.

Interesting is that only the solo parts of Maria Wilhelmina's concertos have survived, and the title page contains a hand-written note 'I have to learn this concerto'.⁴⁷ This could mean that she played the pieces herself, and the string parts remained in the hands of the musicians who accompanied her. Performing the harpsichord parts would have required a considerable degree of virtuosity, placing her musical prowess at the centre of attention. According to feminine social conventions, however, women were supposed to limit themselves to more modest solo repertoire and accompaniment. While accomplishment at the keyboard was to some extent encouraged, the technical demands of the concerto solos would have been at odds with elite feminine ideals – especially if Maria Wilhelmina performed them in the midst of her fellow courtiers.

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Collizi and Just's concertos are part of a larger share of music by composers associated with the court of William V, which includes trio sonatas by the above-mentioned Ricci and quartets by the Amsterdam-born violinist Friedrich Schwindl (1737-1786).⁴⁸ Playing music by these then-popular composers, the Van Reedes aligned their tastes with the musical centre of the Dutch Republic at the time. The family, in fact, maintained close ties with the court through the administrative positions of the Earls of Athlone, as well as their involvement in the Hague social circuit over the years. Through the collection of stadtholder-endorsed music, the Van Reedes could thus allude to their political and social capital, and their Dutch noble, Orangist identity.

Another way in which the Van Reedes musically related to their Dutch background becomes clear from how they used the Amerongen organ. Since they were devout Calvinists, the communal singing of psalms and hymns must have been one of the cornerstones of worship for the family. In 1813, the renowned Utrecht organ builder, Gideon Thomas Bätz (1751-1820) installed a well-suited instrument for this purpose at the castle: a single-manual cabinet organ.⁴⁹ To this day, the instrument can be found at the centre of the grand gallery on the second floor. While Amerongen lacked a chapel as that of the stadtholder's palaces, the gallery arguably resembles one with its high cloister vault and purpose-built organ.

House organs in the Dutch Republic served primarily for the accompaniment of domestic religious practice.⁵⁰ This seems to have been no less true for the Van Reedes'

⁴⁶ Romijn, 'De musicerende adel op het spoor', 32-33.

⁴⁷ 'Il faut que j'apprenne ce concert'. Romijn, *Inventaris en rapport sporenonderzoek*, 41.

⁴⁸ C. Romijn, 'De muziekbibliotheek van kasteel Amerongen: Verfetste modes en vergeten liefdes', *Tijdschrift Oude Muziek* 16 (2001), 10.

⁴⁹ On the building process of the Amerongen organ, see G. Oost, 'Het Bätz-orgel van kasteel Amerongen', in: Knuijt and Romijn, eds, *De muziekschat van Kasteel Amerongen*, 86-90.

⁵⁰ Vermeulen, 'De muziekinstrumenten', 83.

Single-manual cabinet organ (*Gideon Thomas Bätz, 1813; photo Toos van Eck, collection Amerongen Castle*)



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organ. The Amerongen collection contains a series of four printed volumes with Annebet's signature, each consisting of about twenty embellished psalm melodies with figured bass accompaniment.⁵¹ It is not hard to imagine that the family assembled for domestic worship and psalm singing around the organ on a regular basis, while Annebet or Maria Wilhelmina played its keyboard. The organ, then, facilitated the Van Reedes in the performance of their Dutch Calvinist identity and also served as a status symbol for the family with its central position in the castle.

⁵¹ Romijn, *Inventaris en rapport sporenonderzoek*, 5.

The driving role of the Van Reede women in music-making does not mean that the men of the family cultivated no musical interests of their own. In 1766, FCR became a member of the Utrecht collegium musicum, a musical society for well-to-do men, together with his younger brother Adriaan Willem (1744-1815).⁵² The two brothers followed in the footsteps of their grandfather, Frederik Christiaan (1668-1719), 2nd Earl of Athlone, who joined in 1695. Soon after FCR's enrolment, three cousins of Annebet followed suit: Vincent Maximiliaan (1747-1794), Diederik Jacob (Ditie) (1744-1773), and Willem René van Tuyll (1743-1839).⁵³ FCR became vice-chair of the society in 1774, taking up the position of chairman a year later.

FCR's active role in the collegium musicum could explain the presence of music in the Amerongen collection for a more elaborate instrumentation with his signature.⁵⁴ For instance, *Ouverture de l'opera Julie* by Nicolas Dezède (*b* 1740-1745; *d* 1792) requires at least eleven instruments, including two horns and two oboes.⁵⁵ The collection also contains a range of instrumental parts of symphonies by composers such as Johann Baptiste Vanhal (1739-1813).⁵⁶ Relevant is that this music predominantly involves string and wind instruments, facilitating the male exclusiveness of the society and resonating with ideals of elite masculinity. In that sense, FCR's leadership in the Utrecht collegium constituted the male counterpart of Annebet's influence on music-making at Amerongen Castle.

In addition to the collegium musicum, the Van Reedes were part of a close-knit group of musical Dutch noble families that frequented each other and married among their own ranks. This included the Van Tuylls, the Bentincks, the Van Wassenaers, and the Orange-Nassaus. Music was a common interest of Annebet and her dear friend and cousin Belle van Zuylen. In a letter written between 2 and 6 January 1791, for instance, Annebet writes to her cousin how her daughter Christina Henriette Maria Isabella (1770-1800) could sing one of Belle's vocal airs.⁵⁷ Another daughter of Annebet, Jacoba Helena (1765-1833), married her cousin Jean-Charles Bentinck (1763-1833) in 1785. Jean-Charles was musical, too, joining his father-in-law in the collegium musicum in 1789.⁵⁸

Jean Charles's grandfather Willem Bentinck (1704-1774) was part of a music group in The Hague around 1725 that included nobleman-composer Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer.⁵⁹ Unico Wilhelm's sons Jacob Jan (1724-1779) and Carel George (1733-

⁵² Rasch, 'Muzikale adel', 12.

⁵³ While Rasch refers to Vincent Maximiliaan, Diederik Jacob and Willem René as brothers of Annebet, they were actually brothers of Belle van Zuylen.

⁵⁴ Romijn, 'De musicerende adel op het spoor', 31.

⁵⁵ Romijn, *Inventaris en rapport sporenonderzoek*, 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 33.

⁵⁷ Letter 750, in: B. van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes* (10 vols; Amsterdam, 1979-1984), IV, 259. The air that Annebet mentions is *L'amour est un enfant trompeur* from Belle's *Airs et Romances*.

⁵⁸ Rasch, 'Muzikale adel', 16.

⁵⁹ Rudolf Rasch, *Muziek in de Republiek: Muziek en maatschappij in de Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden 1572-1795* (Utrecht, 2018), 197-198.

1800) received a musical upbringing, and, given their age, were surely acquainted with FCR and Annebet.⁶⁰ FCR was in fact related to the Van Wassenaer family by his mother, Louise van Wassenaer Duivenvoorde (1719-1756). Likewise, the stadtholder's family should not go unmentioned, considering their numerous and long-lasting ties with the Van Reedes. While these ties may have been more hierarchical, William V and Wilhelmina were indeed avid music patrons and dilettante musicians, and also stimulated the musical talents of their children.⁶¹

The picture emerging is that the Van Reedes were part of a dense network of noble families with the stadtholder's family at the centre. When these families visited each other, music-making was an obvious choice for domestic entertainment, facilitating social interaction and elite match-making. At the same time, the families could impress their guests with their fashionable musical tastes, luxurious musical instruments, and an appropriate degree of musical accomplishment. So, while music was part of the Van Reedes noble identity and brought different families together, it also served as a marker of their status and a means for social distinction – among their noble peers as well as with respect to the regent patriciate and the bourgeoisie.

45

All things considered, it is clear how the musical interests of the Van Reedes tied into their various identities. Whether at home, on a visit or at court, music-making was part of their noble identity and upbringing. The instruments played by men and women of the family, respectively, confirmed ideals of elite masculinity and elite femininity. Maria Wilhelmina's performance of harpsichord concertos, however, would have challenged the very same ideals. With music from London as well as The Hague, the Van Reedes' musical tastes traversed between their British and Dutch noble identities. The English harpsichord and Dutch organ of Amerongen Castle are tangible monuments to this international orientation, acting as status symbols for the family.

Belle van Zuylen

Like the Van Reedes, Belle van Zuylen developed a keen interest in music during her youth. Unlike Amerongen Castle, though, Zuylen Castle has no surviving instruments from the eighteenth century, nor a music collection. But what we do have in Belle's case is a large body of letters that give a highly personal insight into her musical and compositional endeavours. Flothuis estimates that about 200 letters written by and to Belle contain references to music.⁶² What has also survived is some of

⁶⁰ On Jacob Jan and Carel George van Wassenaer, see Rasch, 'Unico Wilhelm', 70-72.

⁶¹ For a history of music at the court of William V, see Monique de Smet, *La musique à la cour de Guillaume V, Prince d'Orange (1748-1806) d'après les archives de la Maison Royale des Pays-Bas* (Utrecht, 1973).

⁶² Flothuis, 'De muziek in de brieven', 157. This seems to be a realistic estimate. Using 'musique' as a search query in the digital edition of Belle's correspondence already yields 166 search results. Adding another music-related search query such as 'clavecin' increases the number of search results – in this

Belle's musical output: six string quartets, nine keyboard sonatas, ten vocal airs and romances, and the libretti of two of her operas. The focus here, however, is on Belle's musical experiences, rather than on her works.

Some of the earliest evidence of Belle's musical activities is a letter of 3 April 1756, addressed to Belle by her former governess, Jeanne-Louise Prévost. The governess writes that she sees the fifteen-year-old as a '[p]ainter, musician, seamstress (...) and (...) philosopher'.⁶³ Belle thus cultivated several skills that were part of the usual education for upper-class girls: music-making, painting and drawing, needlework, and – quite unusually – philosophising. Significant here is that Belle's musicianship is just one of various accomplishments that her governess refers to. This could suggest that music was not particularly Belle's most serious pursuit in her teens. In any case, the letter confirms that she must have studied music as a child.

46 As befitted her class and gender, Belle indeed had ample opportunity to get acquainted with musical instruments in her early years. In a letter written between 25 February and 5 March 1764, Belle writes about going to a harpsichord teacher, without mentioning his name.⁶⁴ She also seems to have played the harp, mentioning her neglect of this instrument in a letter written between 13 and 18 September 1764.⁶⁵ While the harp and harpsichord were common instruments at the time, Belle also expresses a desire to learn to play the lute in the same year.⁶⁶ This instrument had already been out of fashion for a long time, and Belle's interest in it may be an indication of her early musical aspirations.

A letter of 12 June 1764 referring to Belle's lute-playing suggests that she indeed went out of her way to take up the instrument.⁶⁷ Another sign of ambition is that Belle seems to have given informal harpsichord lessons to her cousin Isabella Agneta van Lockhorst (1732-1764).⁶⁸ In a letter of mid-May 1755, Isabella Agneta writes that she will keep working on the minuet the fourteen-year-old Belle taught her.⁶⁹ A decade later, Belle appeals to her brother Vincent 'to speak to Pignetti and to ask him (...) if he plays harpsichord, [and] if he could teach me to accompany the voice (...)'.⁷⁰ It seems, then, that Belle's musical endeavours started to become increasingly serious.

case to 194. Correspondance d'Isabelle de Charrière; <https://www.elaborate.huygens.knaw.nl/projects/charriere> (accessed 12 June 2020).

63 'Pintresse, musicienne, couturiere (...) et (...) filosofe'. Letter 50, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 163.

64 Letter 87 to Constant d'Hermenches (1722-1785), in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 174.

65 Letter 145 to D'Hermenches, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 307.

66 Letter 87, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 174.

67 Letter 95 from D'Hermenches, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 188.

68 Metzelaar, 'Belle de Zuylen', 33.

69 Letter 35X02 from Isabella Agneta van Lockhorst, in: K. van Strien, ed., *Isabelle de Charrière (Belle de Zuylen): early writings. New material from Dutch archives* (Leuven, 2005), 64.

70 'Je vous prie mon cher Vincent de parler a Pignetti (...) s'il joue du clavessin, s'il pourroit m'apprendre a acompagner la voix (...)'. Letter 215, 8 November 1765, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 440; translation by Letzter and Adelson, 'The career manqué', 154.

Belle van Zuylen (1740-1805) (portrait by Jens Juel, circa 1778; photo Trudelines de Graaf, collection Zuylen Castle)



47

Important to note is that Belle did not develop her initial musical interests in isolation. In the same letter to Vincent, Belle mentions that she is willing to share the costs of Pignetti's lessons with her cousin Annebet. As mentioned above, three of Belle's brothers played in the Utrecht collegium musicum, and we know in fact that at least Willem René played the violin.⁷¹ Belle in all likelihood played music with some of them, too, such as the trios and quartets of the Italian composers Gaetano Pugnani (1731-1798) and Carlo Antonio Campioni (1720-1788) that she was looking for in 1764.⁷² For that matter, her musical activities before her marriage were not so different from those of Annebet.

During her early years, Belle thus laid a solid foundation for the rest of her musical life. Just as many other upper-class girls at the time, she learned to play the harpsichord

⁷¹ On Willem René, see Metzelaar, 'Belle de Zuylen', 38.

⁷² Letter 101 to D'Hermenches, 9-10 July 1764, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes* I, 205.

and the harp, and, in that sense, conformed to ideals of elite girlhood. Yet Belle's strong desire to shape her own music education and that of her cousin shows glimmers of greater musical hopes and dreams. Her ideas of improving her accompaniment and taking up the lute, as well as her role as a keyboard teacher for her cousin, indeed point to a more serious pursuit of music, reaching the limits of modest feminine accomplishment. In those early years, Belle also established her lifelong predilection for Italian music.

Before Belle married Charles-Emmanuel de Charrière (1735-1808) in 1771, she seems to have been worried about the amount of time a married woman would have for music-making. In a letter of 10 January 1764, she writes that '[i]f I were to be married, I would not spend so many hours on the harpsichord or mathematics'.⁷³ These expectations might have changed when Charles-Emmanuel came into the picture as a marriage candidate six years later: Belle implies that, if she were to have children, she would still be making music – though not opera.⁷⁴ Belle, in other words, wished to retain the freedom to spend time on music as part of her longing for agency in life more generally.

48

Striking is that Belle's correspondence reveals little about her musical activities in the early years of her marriage, between 1771 and 1785.⁷⁵ This coincides with a similar gap in her fictional writings and an apparent decrease of her correspondence, considering how few letters have survived from this period.⁷⁶ Whether Belle indeed gave up music, remains an open question, but it could mean that it was at least less on her mind. We do know that the 1770s was a turbulent time in her life, in which she had to deal with settling into her husband's Swiss family home, as well as the deaths of both her father Diederik Jacob (1707-1776) and her brother Ditie.⁷⁷

By 1786, in any case, Belle's musical interests were reinvigorated, when she writes about spending '(...) every day six or eight or ten hours at my harpsichord' and how music is '(...) not a hobby, it is an obsession'.⁷⁸ Three years later, Belle states in a similar vein that music is still 'the most interesting of my activities' – a striking statement, given that she is nowadays much better known as a writer than as a musician or composer.⁷⁹ Looking back on her life in 1800, she confesses 'to tell the truth, I have never studied anything seriously but music'.⁸⁰ Even if we do not take these remarks at face value, they do suggest that Belle was particularly passionate about music.

73 'Si j'étois mariée, je ne donnerois pas tant d'heures au clavessin ni aux mathematiques (...)'. Letter 85 to D'Hermenches, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 163.

74 Letter 361 to her brother Ditie, 19 April 1770, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, II, 181.

75 Flothuis, 'De muziek in de brieven', 157.

76 Dubois and Dubois, *Zonder vaandel*, 345, 439.

77 Ibidem, 346-348, 373, 386.

78 '(...) tous les jours six ou huit ou dix heures à mon clavecin; ce n'est pas un gout, c'est une fureur'. Letter 586 to her brother Vincent, 9 September 1786, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, II, 499-500; translation by Letzter and Adelson, 'The Career Manqué', 155.

79 '(...) la plus interessante de mes occupations'. Letter 748 to Jean-Pierre de Chambrier d'Oleyres (1753-1822), 27 December 1790, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, 257.

80 'A dire le vrai je n'ai jamais rien étudié bien serieusement si ce n'est la musique'. Letter 2113 to her nephew Willem René van Tuyl (1781-1852), 3-5 March 1800, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, VI, 30.

So, whereas music was one interest among a range of intellectual and artistic pursuits during her early years, Belle seems to have regarded it as something of a vocation from her mid-forties. This challenged, if not virtually mocked, ideals of elite femininity. In that sense, we can see Belle's devotion to music as much part of her protofeminist rebellion as her literary endeavours. After a seemingly silent hiatus in her musical activities, Belle's late and childless marriage to Charles-Emmanuel ultimately enabled her to really pursue the musical dreams of her youth. While it was one thing for a noblewoman to spend many hours on music-making, it was quite another to do so by composing music herself.

The earliest sign of Belle's compositional ambitions dates from 3 August 1764. Fantasizing about visiting Paris, she writes 'I would pay dearly for lessons with Rameau'.⁸¹ Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764), however, passed away on 12 September of the same year. Still, Belle's dream to study with France's leading composer of the time, reveals something of an early interest in composition. Despite her predominant orientation towards Italian music, there was much that she could have learned from Rameau. Perhaps Belle was interested in receiving training in harmony, which resonates with her interest in mathematics at the time.⁸² She may have also wished to learn to write music for opera and, in particular, set French text to music.

Yet it would not be until 1784 that Belle wrote her first complete libretto, *L'incognito*. At first, Belle considered some of the most renowned opera composers of her time to provide the music, such as Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816) and Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801).⁸³ Soon, however, Belle worried that the composers would be unable to translate her ideas for the French text to music.⁸⁴ She then went on to try her hand at composing the music herself, as a letter by her of 28 May 1785 reveals:

Out of despair I sat down eight or ten days ago in front of my untuned harpsichord – we do not have a tuner in these parts – and composed the music. (...) Since this first attempt, I have dreamt only of music. It is a shame that so much enthusiasm should be accompanied by so little talent.⁸⁵

Here Belle appears to be equally frustrated with the limited musical infrastructure of Colombier – where her Swiss house was located – and her self-perceived incompetence in composition. In the same letter, she writes that she enlisted the help of the

⁸¹ '[J]e payerois bien cher les leçons de Rameau'. Letter 112 to D'Hermenches, 3-4 August 1764, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes* I, 230.

⁸² Metzelaar, 'Belle de Zuylen', 34-36.

⁸³ Letzter and Adelson, 'The career manqué', 150.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, 153.

⁸⁵ 'De desespoir je me mis il y a 8 ou dix jours devant un Clavessin tout desaccordé, nous n'avons point d'accordeur dans ce pays, & je fis de la musique & la nottai. (...) Depuis ce premier essay je n'ai revé que musique. C'est dommage que tant d'ardeur soit accompagnée de si peu de talent'. Letter 555 to De Chambrier d'Oleyres, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes* II, 465; translation by Letzter and Adelson, 'The career manqué', 151.



Portrait of Niccolò Antonio Zingarelli (engraving, Francesco Pisante after Constanzo Angelini, circa 1795-1825; collection gallica.bnf.fr /Bibliothèque nationale de France)

Neuchâtel violinist André Galliard, but he was unable to relieve Belle's lack of confidence.⁸⁶

The limitations of Swiss musical culture of the time were evidently at odds with Belle's compositional aspirations. Composing the music for an opera called for a formal

⁸⁶ Letter 555 to De Chambrier d'Oleyres, 28 May 1785, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, II, 465.

education that was extremely difficult to get for a noblewoman like Belle.⁸⁷ She therefore resolved to travel elsewhere, residing in Paris from January 1786 to September 1787, though it may have been considered improper for a woman to travel alone for the sole purpose of her own education.⁸⁸ In the French capital Belle could indulge in a thriving opera scene. Moreover, she took the liberty of devoting much time to composition: '[e]ach day I write a minuet, an allegro, or an andante', as she informs her brother Vincent.⁸⁹

When she came back from her Parisian sojourn, Belle continued composing at home. In a letter of 7 March 1791, she relates her struggles with recitatives, 'which I can sing perfectly well in my bed but which I do not know how to notate, or at least which I notate most painfully (...)'.⁹⁰ To alleviate such difficulties, Belle received help from several composers in Paris, most notably Niccolò Antonio Zingarelli (1752-1837). One of the leading *opera seria* composers of his time, Zingarelli stayed at Le Pontet from September to November 1790 and then came again in the summer of 1791. Thus again, Belle made a considerable investment in her own music education.

It was not unusual, though, for nobles to enlist the help of professional composers.⁹¹ In a letter of 9 November 1786, Belle describes a harmonious work relationship with a teacher in Paris, admitting that 'I've been helped and corrected, and the bass lines aren't mine (...)'.⁹²

She paints a rather different picture in a letter of 29 September 1792: 'Zingarelli thinks I am too bold to pretend that I can compose anything but simple *romances*. (...) Then, as if jealous of my art, (...) he gets very angry with me'.⁹³ While outranked by Belle in terms of social class, Zingarelli appears to have had no reservations in judging the abilities of his ambitious pupil.

In the same letter, Belle relates that her working process with Zingarelli transpired through much tug-of-war, writing how '(...) each note has been fought over and weighed on all kinds of balances; it was only through crying and muttering that we finished this piece'.⁹⁴ Belle herself, however, saw no problem in receiving assis-

87 Letzter and Adelson, 'The career manqué', 153.

88 Ibidem, 154-155.

89 'Tous les jours je fais un menuet un allegro ou un andante'. Letter 586, 9 November 1786, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, II, 500; translation by Letzter and Adelson, 'The career manqué', 155.

90 '[Q]ue je chante bien dans mon lit mais que je ne sais pas notter ou du moins que je notte fort peniblement (...)'. Letter 767 to her brother Vincent, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, 286.

91 Metzelaar, 'The musical careers', 226.

92 'On m'a aidée & corrigée & les basses ne sont pas de moi (...)'. Letter 586 to her brother Vincent, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, II, 500; translation by Metzelaar, 'The musical careers', 226.

93 'Zingarelli me trouvoit trop hardie de prétendre a faire jamais autre chose que des romances (...) et jaloux pour ainsi dire pour son art (...), il se mettoit de très mauvaise humeur contre moi'. Letter 854 to De Chambrier d'Oleyres, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, 419; translation by Letzter and Adelson, 'The career manqué', 161.

94 '(...) chaque note en a été contéstée et pesée a toutes sortes de balances; c'est en pleurant et en grondant que nous avons achevé ce morceau'. Letter 854 to De Chambrier d'Oleyres, 29 September 1792, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, 419; translation by Letzter and Adelson, 'The career manqué', 171.

tance from a professional composer. In a letter of 7 November 1788, she compares collaboration in music and visual art:

If two musicians were very good friends, I would like to see them work together, one writing the pieces for ensembles, the other the recitatives and the songs, in the same way as the painter (I cannot remember his name) who did the people and the animals in the landscapes of Van de Velde.⁹⁵

Belle's self-perceived lack of class differences, though, was obviously an ideal. In reality, Zingarelli collaborated with her as part of the lessons she paid for – not on an equal footing as professionals with complementary specializations.

52 If spending much time on music was part of Belle's rebellious attitude, her obsessive preoccupation with writing opera was her greatest musical mockery of elite feminine identity. As a Dutch woman of noble birth, she was an outsider to the male-dominated field of opera. Belle therefore had to go to great lengths in her ultimately unsuccessful efforts to bring one of her operas to the stage – not in the least place because she had fewer opportunities to receive formal training in opera composition than non-aristocratic, male composers. It was only when Belle went to Paris that she could begin to receive some of the instruction she was looking for, and pursue her long-nurtured musical ambitions.

Conclusion

This article has illuminated aspects of class, gender and national identity in the context of music-making in eighteenth-century Dutch noble homes. In the homes of Belle van Zuylen and the Van Reede family, music-making to a certain extent endorsed elite gender conventions – especially in the feminine cultivation of keyboard playing from an early age. Yet the potential virtuosity of keyboard concertos from the Amerongen collection and the obsessive devotion to opera composition in Belle's case, respectively, challenged and mocked elite feminine ideals. The Van Reedes' musical orientation resonated with their Dutch and British noble identities. Belle, on the other hand, transcended performances of national identity as a Dutch noblewoman writing French-language opera in an Italian musical style.

Whether we examine the eighteenth or nineteenth-century Dutch or British context, identity construction proves to be a useful framework for studying elite music-making. In both contexts, musical practices undermined as well as reinforced ideals of class and gender – recall Belle's disregard for normative notions about music for married women. The interplay between these practices and ideals gives insight into

95 'Si deux musiciens pouvoient être très bons amis j'aimerois à les voir travailler de concert, l'un faire les morceaux d'ensemble, l'autre le recitatif & le chant, comme je ne sai qui faisoit les figures & les animaux dans les paysages de Van de Velden'. Letter 635 to De Chambrier d'Oleyres, in: Van Zuylen, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, 113; translation by Letzter and Adelson, 'The career manqué', 163.

the workings of structure and agency – individual freedom and societal constraint – in elite culture, and helps us understand what music might have meant for those involved. There is, after all, only so much that music, instruments and letters can tell us. It is up to scholars and musicians today to make them speak again in meaningful ways.

Joris van Son

Sounding identity

Music-making in eighteenth-century Dutch noble homes

From the 1980s, music-making in eighteenth-century Dutch homes has received increasing scholarly attention, particularly in studies on noble families. While these studies shed light on the role of music in noble homes, they do not venture much beyond establishing a factual historical narrative. In contrast, recent studies on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English domestic musical culture demonstrate a more interpretive approach by focusing on class, gender and national identity. This raises the question what role these issues play in the Dutch context. Taking a similar approach, this article revisits case studies on music-making in the homes of the Van Reede family and Belle van Zuylen (1740-1805), of the Van Tuyll family, to illuminate how music related to different aspects of their identity. This study shows how their musical practices confirmed and challenged elite gender conventions, as well as resonated with and transcended their various national identities. These findings suggest that identity construction is a useful framework for studying elite music-making, helping us understand what music might have meant for those involved.

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