



**Every way of pronunciation  
has it's own charm...**

A dialog with **Franck van der Heijden**  
about Crossover, the definition of good  
music and the actual music market.

**V.B.:** Dear Franck, thank you very much for taking the time to make this interview.

**Franck van der Heijden:** My pleasure.

**V.B.:** Let's talk a bit about crossover music, the actual music market and music in general. What exactly was the first crossover project in music history?

**Franck van der Heijden:** Crossover goes way back to the 60ies already. In the 70ies Emerson, Lake and Palmer were very famous. I guess it came from jazz musicians that took a classical theme and improvised on it. That you could already call crossover, however the name has a broader meaning. Crossover can also mean a blend of different styles. Could be pop mixed with classical, but also symphonic sounds with African or ethnic sounds. Maybe Tchaikovsky already experimented with his canons in the 1812 overture. *(laughs)* But definitively Stravinsky and Bartok adapted a lot of folk music into their compositions. So basically that is a sort of crossover too. In other words: it's hard to say what was the first crossover project. The fact is though that through blends and experiments with styles new music evolved. And that would never ever happened if the conservative critics had their way in the past ...

**V.B.:** In this context... George Gershwin's „Rhapsody in Blue“, which is normally played by classical pianists, is also crossover music, isn't it?

**Franck van der Heijden:** Yes, it is. Gershwin wasn't really a classical composer. He got famous for his countless songs and musicals. „Rhapsody in Blue“ was not really meant as a classical composition but found its way to the concert halls. His piano concerto was more of a serious classical composition, but of course in his own particular style with jazz influences.

**V.B.:** So... crossover music is a big term about combining different music styles and making some new music of it?

**Franck van der Heijden:** Indeed, there are more styles within this genre. The way Pat Metheny integrates other genres in his jazz fusion is completely different than the Adiemus project, for example.

**V.B.:** When and what was your first impulse to crossover music ?

**Franck van der Heijden:** There's not a specific moment of course. I gradually went in that direction. As a kid I already listened to all sorts of crossover, Emerson Lake and Palmer, Ekseption, Rick Wakeman but at that time I didn't play music yet. I grew up with many styles, from classic, jazz and pop. When I studied I mainly did jazz. Writing mainly for big band and jazz/pop ensembles. But I already had many ideas in the late 80s about combining symphony orchestra with band and ethnic drums. Actually before Hans Zimmer established that sound with his first film scores. In 1995 I started doing arrangements for the Night of the Proms. That was probably the moment I started writing actual crossover arrangements. From there it evolved to what I'm doing now almost every day.

**V.B.:** In the classical music scene I often sensed a lot of critics about crossover music. There are people who mean, crossover is only an "elevator music". As you know, I am also playing crossover music for 2 years already and I know it is not like that. It is absolutely possible to make good music on a high musical level in this field, like my last producer David Garrett or 2Cellos for example. They come both from classical music and are absolutely excellent in my opinion. I am interested, how it is on the other side of the music business. Are there pop, rock, or jazz musicians who have the same aversion to crossover music as this conservative people from classical music?

**Franck van der Heijden:** Absolutely not. Although in the jazz scene I sensed a lot of conservatism when I studied, I can only say that in pop there is maybe a different creativity. They don't narrow themselves down to a style. Look also at the great composers in the past. Especially in the last century a lot of them were influenced by jazz. If they would have conformed to the conservative opinions there would never have been progress. It's all about taste, you like it or you don't. I don't see the boundaries of musical styles. Especially film composers have to be able to move between a lot of styles and pick the mood they need for the images. Crossover is a broad term anyway. It can be classical music in a modern arrangement but also the other way around. It doesn't have to be a classical melody anyway. It's probably human nature wanting to put everything in boxes and categories. Overall I believe it's the lesser musicians and the critics in particular that are against any form of change and therefore hate crossover, maybe a sort of elite thing.

**V.B.:** Indeed, they exist. This „purists“ in classical music, who are already critical with artists, even before they play the first note of a concert. They make a bad atmosphere and for me this „pseudo-intellectuality“ has in fact less to

do with a real musical knowledge, but more with a stupid boast they want to show to other people...

**Franck van der Heijden:** This kind of elite art is everywhere, not only in music. Good example is Joshua Bell playing incognito in the subway station. Nobody really took notice of him, probably including so-called connoisseurs. If he would have played exactly the same thing in a concert hall the very same people that ignored him would be delighted, because they are now listening to 'art' and paid a lot of money for it.

**V.B.:** You are not only the composer, arranger and producer of David Garrett, probably the most famous crossover violinist of our time. You worked also for lot of other very famous artists in your life, for example Michael Jackson, Andrea Bocelli, Bonnie Tyler or David Guetta. You are also a great guitar player, conductor and musical director of many big shows and concerts all over the world. How does the audience react to crossover music? And how do young people react to this music genre? Which prospects has crossover music, in your opinion, on the future music market ?

**Franck van der Heijden:** I think there is a big audience for crossover. Especially in South America, Asia and eastern Europe. Maybe over there they are less influenced by the European tradition of classical music and therefore more open to it. But overall I think it doesn't really matter what style of music is played as long as it's done with the right intention and passion. Then there will be appreciation by an audience whether big or small. In general crossover is more appreciated by an older audience. Depends on the artist of course because the same rules as in pop music apply to any other style. If the artist is good looking with a certain charisma he or she will get a bigger audience. Obviously the way of playing is just as important. It's a combination of factors. Degree of virtuosity, looks and choice of repertoire.

**V.B.:** Many times people say, crossover music is only a music for commercial purposes. I can say - if it is like that - it is mostly more the fault of the record industry and the actors around the artist, because they only want a bulk sale on the market. In many cases the artist does not have enough time for the right progress good music needs and often he/she gets a wrong and forced image from the industry around them. This makes it even worse. I think an artist can only be successful over a long time if he/she feels completely clear with that he/she does. In my opinion, music should be first of all „authentically" and the artist should be able to tell his own story ... What do you think of that?

**Franck van der Heijden:** It is a general problem of the music industry nowadays. I don't think it just applies to crossover. The business is faster than ever with shows like „The Voice“ it is even worse. The audience has no time to actual listen to a whole song and is now used to hear a maximum of 1,5 minutes of a piece. Then they are distracted and need to listen to something else. Regarding image it is important for an artist to reflect the style he or she is doing. This helps the audience to get an idea about the genre but also to make a statement and not be forgotten after 5 minutes. So the more extravagant or clear you can come across the better it will be from a commercial point of view. Actually there was a research amongst music listeners some years ago. They concluded that most people listen with their eyes. Even during big classical contests, the jury was influenced by the visual performance of a competitor. So this says more than enough about how important looks are.

**V.B.:** I believe, it's possible to open the mind of many people - they normally don't hear classical music - to composers like Bach, Beethoven, Mozart e.t.c. with good crossover projects. Do you think that crossover really makes classical music more popular?

**Franck van der Heijden:** I think that is the case yes. For example David, who got a lot of young fans over the years who would never ever go to a classical concert. But after they watched a crossover show they also often visit his classical shows. At least a start to draw people to the classical venues. I doubt though that they will ever be able to watch and listen to a 4-5 hour Wagner opera...but any person needs a lot of patience for that anyway.

**V.B.:** In my case, the crossover project gave me a lot of new creative incentives, - also as interpreter of classical music. Do you think crossover music inspires classical musicians to improvise more on their instruments?

**Franck van der Heijden:** I think that is a fact. By looking differently at the music and improvising/experimenting you can get whole new ideas about how to perform a piece. In the end one must not forget that much of the classical music used to be improvised as well. Van Beethoven started to write out cadenzas simply he found that most of the performers were not good enough to improvise. Then this became like a doctrine, one has to play exactly what's written otherwise it is blasphemy... almost like religion saying that what is written in the bible must be true even though people forgot how and when it was written. All in all I believe that the more you experiment with music you will improve, also the performance you already know. Simply because you get more insight in the matter. A good melody can be played in many ways and also be arranged in many styles. The way Mozart wrote was because he lived

in that style era. I'm sure, if he lived now, he would maybe still write similar melodies but in a different style. In short, yes improvising and out of the box thinking helps, to be a better musician, or at least more creative. Even if it is about interpretation of the exact written notes.

**V.B.:** The legendary pianist Edwin Fischer says one time: „Look at Mozart’s piano music completely open-minded. Don’t try to imitate a cembalo or an orchestra. Feel the music with your fantasy and your heart. Give every note an own sound and be free - bound in law, which lives unwritten in every real musician!“ ... What do to think about this statement?

**Franck van der Heijden:** I can’t agree more. Personally I don’t see why a classical piece should sound a certain way that is decided by a dogmatic culture. If you want it to sound really authentic, the musicians should play it on old instruments with all their imperfections. There are of course exceptions, especially with the old string instruments. But I don’t see the point. It’s like using an old slow Atari computer, while there are lightning fast systems nowadays. And most important: The performer should play the music how he or she feels it and not how a teacher says how it should be played. Only then there is the possibility to get more variety in the way a musical piece is played.

**V.B.:** Did you have some moments in your life where you were bored to hear classical music?

**Franck van der Heijden:** If it was the case, that I got bored, it wasn’t only with classical performances. It has nothing to do with style. I’ve also seen and heard many pop, jazz and crossover performances that were utterly boring.

**V.B.:** Of course professionalism is an important attribute of good music, but in the end it is the individuality and a real experiencing of music what attracts people most. Doesn’t matter which music genre we are talking about...

**Franck van der Heijden:** All true. Sometimes that specific performance with wrong notes works better. It’s a matter of the right energy and the right feel.

**V.B.:** Have you ever sensed a difference in working with classical musicians and artists from other music genres in your career?

**Franck van der Heijden:** Not particularly. Both worlds have their own specific characteristics. A pop artist often doesn't have the same knowledge about expression as a classical performer and the other way, classical players often have more problems with timing. I can just say that often classical conductors don't take crossover or pop very serious and always say it's so easy to play. Which is not true. Because it is just as with classical music, very important to pay attention to every detail. There is no difference. I do feel that in the pop/jazz world mostly the atmosphere is less tense. Maybe that is just in my head, don't know if it actually is the case.

**V.B.:** What are your next projects?

**Franck van der Heijden:** Many projects coming up at the moment. The new album of David Garrett, a trailer for a movie, producing/arranging a song for a Dutch singer. I think it could be a hit.

Writing a tune for a big project that I can't tell about yet, because it is supposed to be kept secret.

Writing music for horse dressage, and in the end of April I will be on tour again with David.

**V.B.:** At the end a nice quote of Sergej Rachmaninov:

"Music have to come from the heart and should go to hearts."

Do you have your own quote, which expresses your passion for music best?

**Franck van der Heijden:** Music is like a language with many dialects. Every way of pronunciation can have it's own charm.

(This interview was conducted by pianist Valentina Babor on March 2th, 2017)