

## The Scheurleer Museum of the History of Music (1)

At the corner of two streets in what was then a developing area of The Hague, the Laan van Meerdervoort and the Carnegielaan, an impressive mansion was built in 1905 for the banker Daniël François Scheurleer. The neoclassical façade, reminiscent of the famous 'Mauritshuis' in the same city, reflected the owner's predilection for Dutch culture of the 17th Century. Somewhat concealed behind the house, and later completely hidden by the adjoining premises, stood a low building consisting of four rooms, connected to the house by a long corridor. In this Scheurleer had accommodated his musical instruments collection and part of his library.

The proud proprietor and collector liked to present his accomplishments in print; the third edition of his library catalogue comprises three heavy volumes. In 1913 he published a book entitled *Eene Wooninge in de welcke ghesien worden veelderhande Gheschriften Boecken Printen ende musicaale Instrumenten* ('A dwelling in which may be seen sundry writings, prints and musical instruments'). Just like the façade of his house, this baroque title and the appropriate engraving express his nostalgic predilection for the Dutch 'Golden Age'. Its contents consist of photographs of his house and the museum, with for each image an edifying (and sometimes humorous) quotation.



The four rooms and 130 m<sup>2</sup> of this museum building soon proved too small for Scheurleer's fast growing collection. The closing-down in 1916 of the steam tram line which bordered on his garden provided an opportunity to enlarge his terrain. He added five rooms to the museum building, parallel to the existing four. Like these, the new rooms were provided with skylights. The corridor which previously had given access from a corner of the house was replaced with a corridor in T-shape, which connected to the centre; one short leg led to the new construction, the other to the garden. The new situation was documented in a second, enlarged edition of *Eene wooninge* which appeared in 1920.

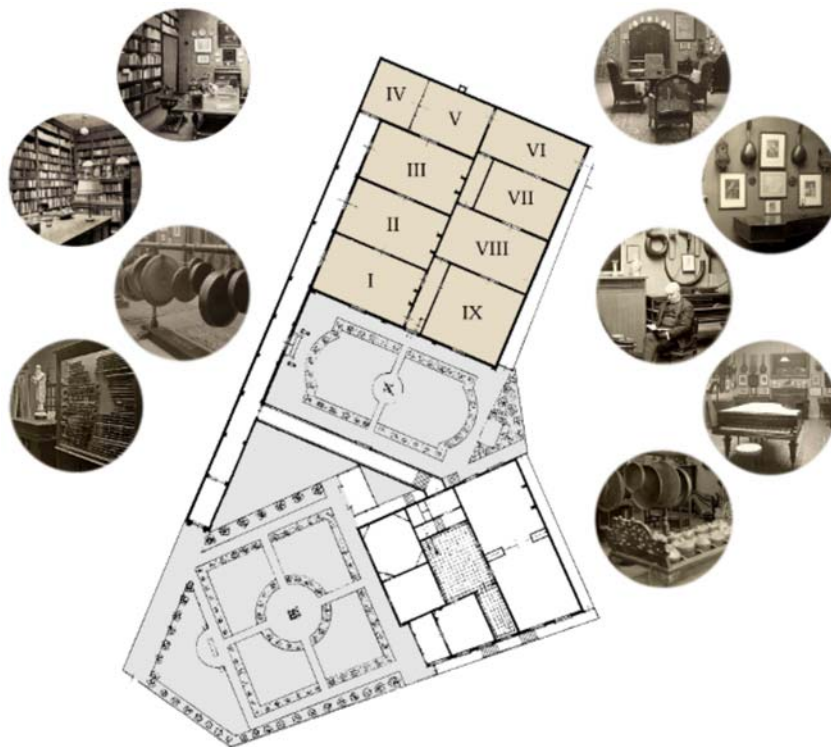
### The interior of the museum

The name 'museum', which Scheurleer gave to his creation, implies that this was more than a collection displayed for his private pleasure. It was his intention to make a contribution to musical life, and he provided opportunities for researchers to profit from what he had collected. Those who were interested had access by appointment and were usually given a tour by the owner.

As the full title of *Eene wooninge* indicates, the collection contained written and printed sources, iconography and instruments. All of this was displayed in an arrangement which may be seen as a compromise between systematics and decorative aesthetics. The 1917 extension allowed for a far more balanced and orderly presentation than before. Instruments from non-western cultures, in those days often treated with little discrimination as 'exotic', had been packed into one very full room in 1913. In 1917 a selection was made, divided over a Japanese and an Indonesian room. The extant photographs can only give an imperfect idea; the images of rooms VI-IX in the second edition of *Eene wooninge* are the same as those for the identical rooms IV-I (in that order) of 1913, though the arrangement had been modified (some objects are therefore found in two rooms).

[A tour of the museum »](#)

## The Scheurleer Museum of the History of Music (2)



Click one of the images for a tour.

### A tour of the museum

From inside the house (at the bottom of the plan) or through a small monumental gate in the garden we enter the long corridor. (Scheurleer here quotes Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen*: "Nur eines will ich noch: das Ende!") Through this corridor we enter **Room I**. This contains European wind instruments. Woodwinds are stored in two freestanding showcases. The Greek flute layer in between has in the later of two photographs (image I-1) been placed on a harmonium (Alexandre Père et Fils, Paris ca. 1885). On the walls are brass instruments.

**Room II** displays instruments from Japan. Entering the room, we see on the wall in front of us percussion instruments; next to the entrance is a stand with tamtams, in front of which hangs the highly recognizable tsuridaiko, a drum used in Kabuki theatre, which is decorated with the 'tomoe' motive (image II-3). The wall which connects with Room I is decked out with plucked instruments, among them a number of pear-shaped biwas (lutes).

**Rooms III and IV** contain part of the library.

**Room V** is dedicated to the dance, as is visible mainly by the graphics on the walls. This room seems to have been conceived as a lounge rather than as an exposition room.

Rooms VI-IX correspond to rooms IV-I of the building before 1917.

Entering **Room VI**, we see on our left, on both sides of the fireplace, a highly decorated harpsichord by Giovanni Celestini (Venice 1605), and a harpsichord by Burkat Shudi (London 1744). The Celestini is flanked by a glass harmonica. Eye catcher is the clavicytherium (vertical harpsichord) by Albert Delin (ca. 1760) with its white-and-gold decorations in rococo style, acquired by Scheurleer in 1913. Opposite the fireplace a bust of J.S. Bach is flanked by showcases with manuscripts. The display on the wall includes lutes and hurdy-gurdies.

In **Room VII** against the opposite wall stand two showcases with bowed string instruments. The short wall on our right is decked out with serpents and cornets. Furthermore we find several keyboard instruments in peculiar cases: a giraffe piano by Joannes van Raaij (Amsterdam, ca 1825); next to this a sewing-box piano (ca 1830), below the death mask of Franz Liszt. On both sides of the fireplace at the wall on the left: a bureau organ by H.H. Hess (Gouda, 1776) and a trapezium shaped spinet -XXX?. On the wall zithers and other popular instruments are hung; on the floor stand two copies of the 'trumpet marine' (also known as 'Nonnengeige'), a bowed monochord.

**Room VIII** is dominated by a Bechstein concert grand. The portières are flanked by four harps. Plucked instruments are also covering the walls: on the right guitars and related instruments, on the left lutes. On this side we find two square pianos: one anonymous (ca. 1795), opposite an instrument by J.H.H. Traut (The Hague ca. 1855). On the side of the guitars stands in a corner a small, transposing ('quint')-harpsichord by Andreas Ruckers the Elder (Antwerp 1627), next to it a spinet ascribed to J.H. Silbermann (ca. 1770).

**Room IX** is since 1917 dedicated to instruments from Indonesia; the image however shows the pre-1917 situation. Instruments from several regions of East-Asia have been brought together. One will recognize the tsuridaiko and tamtams from Room I, directly behind the Javanese bonang, a gamelan instrument.

[A collector's vision](#) »

« [The Scheurleer Museum of the History of Music](#)

## The Scheurleer Museum of the History of Music (3)

### A collector's vision

With his museum Scheurleer created much more than a private collection of curiosities. His collector's passion was subservient to a wider aim of keeping aspects of the past alive or reviving them, in dialogue and collaboration with fellow music historians and musical organisations. Scheurleer was aware of the fragility and perishable nature of historical instruments, and of the large distance separating contemporary music practice from that of past eras. He weighed the conflicting interests of conservation and use against each other; instruments and source materials were sometimes given on loan to musicians, researchers and expositions (London 1885, Pulchri Studio in The Hague 1893).

In an introduction to the exposition in 'Pulchri' Scheurleer wrote:

*And yet it is of the utmost importance that these old instruments should be preserved as much as possible. The composer always had the peculiarities of the instrument for which he composed in mind. [...] If we want to form a true conception of early instrumental music, we will have to try to perform these works on the original instruments. It needs no arguing that this is exceedingly difficult. Even when one has the old instruments at one's disposal, it is doubtful whether they can be restored to the condition required for performance [...].*[1]

And on the occasion of a visit to the Arts and Crafts Museum in Copenhagen:

*Anyone who has ever tried to play an instrument which has fallen into disuse, knows which obstacles arise, and how important it is to be able to consult a manual. This is the way of collecting which I have called 'productive and reviving', as against the mere display of curiosities. [...] The many important and valuable things we possess impose on us an obligation to keep them from being buried in musty closets and cabinets, out of reach for those who might profit from them in the service of art and science.*[2]

### The end of two museums

It may be remarkable that a Hague banker erected in his back garden a museum of international standing; still more remarkable is it, that his son and successor in the firm outdid the ambitions of his father. Constant Willem Lunsingh Scheurleer has been a member of the firm since 1912, and took over the directorship from his father in 1920. His main interest was Greek and Roman Antiquity, and in 1922 he built a museum for his collection on the Carnegieaan, bordering on his father's museum. Unlike the latter, the new museum was open to the public, and housed in a modern building.

D.F. Scheurleer died in 1927, two years before the Wall Street Crash. After his death Constant Lunsingh Scheurleer appointed Dirk Balfoort, who had been his father's museum assistant, curator; Balfoort was charged him with the rearrangement of the collection for public display. In 1928 the museum was re-opened. Soon afterwards the bank got into financial difficulties, which led to bankruptcy in 1932. Since the owners' private property was also involved, the continued existence of both Scheurleer collections was at risk. A 'Committee for the Preservation of the Scheurleer Museums' attempted to prevent the breaking up of the collections by organising publicity, lectures and an exposition in the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum. Result of these efforts was the acquisition of the music collection in 1933 by the Municipality of The Hague. Part of the library went to the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (National Library).

Since 1935 the Scheurleer collection has found a home in the newly built Gemeentemuseum. Most of the archeological collection has gone to the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam. C.W. Lunsingh Scheurleer was able to continue his career in archeology; he became professor at Leiden University and curator of the State Museum of Antiquities. His sudden death in 1941 prevented his taking up the latter function.

After the music collection had been transferred to the Gemeentemuseum in 1935, both the house and the music museum building were demolished. The location was occupied from 1936 till 2006 by cinema Metropole; nowadays there is an apartment block. The building of the archeological museum has till 1975 served as head office of the Dutch State Mines, and has since been replaced by a new office building.

Housing problems within the Gemeentemuseum are the reason why library and archives of the Music Historical Department have since 2000 been in the keeping of the Netherlands Music Institute, situated in the building of the National Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek). The instruments collection, which as part of the Music Historical Department has expanded and also reflects developments of the 20th Century, is nowadays stored in depot. Proposals to create a National Museum of Music on the basis of various existing, partly inaccessible collections have till now found insufficient support.

« [A tour of the museum](#)

« [The Scheurleer Museum of the History of Music](#)

[1] Quoted after Von Gleich, *Haags Gemeentemuseum*, p. 15 (transl.)

[2] Scheurleer, *Een navolgenswaardig voorbeeld*, p.87

Text by Lodewijk Muns, 2010

### References

- Archief D.F. Scheurleer, Nederlands Muziek Instituut ([List of archives](#))
- Gleich, Clemens von: *A checklist of harpsichords, clavichords, organs, harmoniums* (Den Haag: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1989)
- Gleich, Clemens von: *A checklist of pianos* (Den Haag: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1986)
- Gleich, Clemens von: *Haags Gemeentemuseum: over het ontstaan van de Muziekafdeling: portret van de verzameling-Scheurleer* (Den Haag: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1985)
- Mensink, Onno: *De verdwenen gebouwen van de 'Museum Scheurleer'*, in: Jaarboek 2002 Geschiedkundige Vereniging Die Haghe, pag. 74-95
- Wolff, Paul: *A checklist of traditional Japanese musical instruments* (Den Haag: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1988)
- Scheurleer, Daniël François: *Een navolgenswaardig voorbeeld*, in: Tijdschrift der Vereeniging voor Noord-Nederland's Muziekgeschiedenis, Dl. 7, 2de Stuk (1902), pp. 84-88



*The façade of the Music Museum in 1913, with in the background the 'Peace Palace', completed in that year.*