

Square sentiments: The moving presence of religious heritage in André Rieu's musical performances

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Abstract

This paper investigates the revaluation of the Christian past as heritage in settings that are generally regarded as secular and entertaining. Empirically, my focus will be on the roles given to the Saint Servatius Basilica in Maastricht and the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris in the musical performances of the world's "King of the Waltz", André Rieu. By incorporating religious heritage in his concerts, Rieu taps into the nowadays well-established conviction that such heritage is relevant for society as a whole. "Moving presence" is intended in both senses. The churches move along with the orchestra through the transnational space of the André Rieu performances, which is, as I argue, an affective space: the churches tend to move people in one way or another, generating affective or emotional involvement. Asking how the emotive potential of religious heritage is mobilised, and by virtue of what means Rieu succeeds in making the iconicity of the local and transnational heritage act in concert, the paper shows how Rieu's "techniques of magnification" work in tandem with the maestro's affective recollections of his religious past, to create a performance that is both spectacular and persuasive.

KEYWORDS: affective space, emotions, magnification, iconic

Introduction

In his study on abandoned churches in the Netherlands, Daan Beekers notes that although the buildings have been given new purposes, a widely shared sense exists that something sacred has remained. For this “something”, Beekers suggests the notion “sacred residue”, which he describes as ‘that quality of a religious site, or of specific things within that site, that—in the perception or feeling of beholders—persists after the site has lost its original religious function’ (2016, p. 1). In other words, ‘[t]he earlier uses of the buildings continue to have an effect, albeit one that tends to be difficult to grasp’ (ibid., p. 2). Importantly, such may affect not only believers but also people who consider themselves secular. The attribution of a sacred quality to previously religious buildings, places, or objects may partly explain why, even in a de-churched country like the Netherlands, the preservation of church buildings is widely acknowledged as socially relevant. Despite the latter, large numbers of churches are closed down and depilated, in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe. Remarkably, the physical destruction or repurposing of religious buildings coincides with an increasing revaluation of “the Christian past” as heritage. The secular appreciation of churches as cultural or religious heritage is but one instance of a more general process that can be denoted as the “heritagisation of religion”, and is not a process of “either/or”. Religious buildings, places, and objects may combine religious functions with a formal status as a local, national, or global heritage site, a museum or part of a museum collection. Increasingly, the religious past is used in shaping present-day local or national identities, a process that is not straightforward either. The ongoing contestations of ownership, use, and authority shed light on the paradoxes and tensions that emerge when religious sites, objects, and practices become heritage (Beekers, 2017; Meyer, 2019; Isnart & Cerezales, 2020; Salemink et al., 2015; Salemink et al., forthcoming).

I am interested in the use of religious architectural heritage outside or beyond religiously confined circles, taking settings that are generally regarded as secular, entertaining, and belonging to “the domain of popular culture” as my topic of investigation.¹ Empirically, the focus will be on the performative presence of certain churches in the annual musical summer performances of André Rieu and his Johann Strauss Orchestra in the Dutch city of Maastricht. Apparently, these buildings, located at the city’s central square, the Vrijthof, are considered to contain a captivating or even charismatic quality that may add value to the summer concerts, a quality that accounts for, or might be comparable to, Beekers’ “difficult to grasp effect”.

¹ For the HERILIGION project, this interest was formulated in the Dutch subproject *The Dutch Passion for the Passion* (Salemink et al., 2015).

My use of “moving presence” in the title of this chapter is intended in both senses. First, the material presented will demonstrate that the presence of the churches in the performances is not merely to be understood as a literal, material presence at a single site, but instead as a presence that moves along with the orchestra through the transnational space of André Rieu’s musical performances. Second, the mobilisation of the churches tends to move people in one way or another: it generates affective or emotional involvement.² We may ask how the emotive potential of religious heritage is mobilised, and by virtue of what means Rieu succeeds in making the iconicity of the local and transnational heritage act in concert.

Overall, this specific endeavour results from my broader anthropological research on “the phenomenon André Rieu”, a project that aims to shed light on the popularisation of culture, the role of ritual, and the mobilisation of heritage in a plural, global context. What makes Rieu such an excellent topic of investigation is that he, as a phenomenon—that is, the accumulated combination of the person, the music, the performances, the audiences (aficionados and critics) in all its mediations—constitutes, so to speak, a condensation point where cultural contestations are played out globally. The specific interest for the role of churches was evoked in 2019, when Rieu included a tribute to Paris’ disaster-struck Notre Dame Cathedral in his Maastricht summer concerts.

Thus far, my research on André Rieu included fieldwork during concerts in Maastricht (2013, 2014), Bucharest (2015) and Ljubljana (2018), interviews with fans and critics, analyses of DVDs, YouTube Videos, Rieu’s writings, news clippings, television series, fan sites, fan footage, and other media for which “André Rieu” is the topic. With the visual dimensions equally important as the aural, André Rieu concerts are predominantly for sale on DVDs (instead of primarily on CDs). Although the DVDs are usually straightforwardly promoted as recordings of specific concerts, they are in fact carefully edited compilations of the best moments of a series of concerts, aimed to create an optimal “André Rieu Concert Experience” for the viewer. Within these compilations, what happened on stage is mixed with shots of people in the audience, in particular, close-ups of people showing confirming emotions and behaviour, guiding or even priming the viewer for the right experience: laughing (at a joke), listening attentively (to a serious passage or message), touched (by melancholic music); romantic couples (at romantic music), et cetera. In addition, the editors take care to present a diverse audience in terms of age and gender, so as to convey the message that anybody could be part of the audi-

² Following Reckwitz (2012) and Scheer (2012), I use both terms interchangeably.

ence.³ As empirical material, therefore, the DVDs differ from the live performances. However, for an understanding of the André Rieu phenomenon, they are equally important, if only because most of the aficionados around the globe know Rieu and his Johann Strauss Orchestra (JSO) from his recordings (see also Stengs 2017). Moreover, in my conversations with people who had attended a Vrijthof summer concert, I was told quite a few times that watching a DVD was more compelling because of the immediate connections shown between what happened on stage and the responses of the audience.

In many ways, the André Rieu performances fit Guy Debord's concept of the spectacle, which, as Debord's argues, is not to be taken as 'a mere visual deception produced by mass-media technologies' (2002, p. 7), but as a specific historical and cultural phenomenon, aiming at and made possible by a specific mode of production that foregrounds commodification and consumption. I do not follow Debord's pessimistic perception of "the society of the spectacle"—the world's present-day condition—s predicated on a deceitful separation between "reality" and "image", between "genuine" and "false", and in which the spectator has become alienated from his true desires. Nevertheless, Debord's understanding of the self-referential qualities inherent of spectacles captured as 'What appears is good; what is good appears' (ibid.) may be of help in understanding the appearance of religious heritage in the André Rieu performances.

The value of feeling

The entanglement of religious heritage, spatiality and emotions is reminiscent of Andreas Reckwitz' (2012) praxeological approach to the study of affects and space. Reckwitz speaks of *affective spaces*, spatial constellations encompassing the architectural built environment, other objects (light, sound, smell) and specific arrangements of moving bodies. The notion of affective space captures well, as I will demonstrate, the phenomenon of the André Rieu performance: 'a complex of social practices, comprising of artefacts and bodies' producing its own spatiality, in which affections are likely to emerge' (ibid.: 252). Connecting with a recent article of Katja Rakow (2020) on the intentional production of an "affective atmosphere" in the dramaturgical context of an American evangelic megachurch, this does not imply that the individual members of, in this case, Rieu's audiences will experience the same affections or will be affected as intended by Rieu. Rakow proposes to think of 'atmosphere as a communicative offer to which

³ Worldwide, André Rieu concert-goers belong to the middle classes: they can afford to pay for the tickets and the journey to the concert. The Vrijthof concerts, although attended by an international audience, are not diverse in that respect that most people are "white" and middle-aged or older.

worship attendees might respond in various ways and intensities of immersion or not respond at all' (2020, p. 102). Indeed, in steering "the affective", quite an overlap will exist between the aesthetical techniques employed by André Rieu Productions, his production company, and by those organising religious mega-services.

The capacity to generate affections is, I suggest, key to any André Rieu performance. The role assigned to the churches is but one element of a well-thought-out policy of emotion management, aimed at evoking an assemblage of feelings, sentiments and experiences. To achieve this aim, Rieu applies what I suggest calling an encompassing "technique of magnification". This raises the question of whether it makes sense to analytically distinguish the "magnified" usage of religious heritage from that of other forms of heritage, monumental buildings in particular. I will return to this question when presenting some empirical examples of the latter in order to place the usage of the churches in a comparative perspective.

The spectacular emotionality of the André Rieu performances is precisely what attracts so many millions around the globe. As a phenomenon, the André Rieu performances exemplify what Eva Illouz has called 'a new culture of emotionality', the rise of which goes hand in hand with the rise of capitalism (2007, p. 4). Emotions have become commodified cultural practices, located, produced and scripted in the realms of popular culture in particular. In this regard, Illouz speaks of the rise of *homo sentimental*, a figure derived from the work *Immortality* of Milan Kundera. In the words of Kundera:

Homo sentimental cannot be defined as man with feelings (for we all have feelings), but as a man who has raised feelings to a category of *value* [italics added]. As soon as feelings are seen as value we all want to feel. And because we all like to pride ourselves on our values, we have a tendency to show off our feelings. (1991, p. 218)

Approaching feelings as a category of value, which in neo-liberalism implies something people are willing to pay for, contributes to an understanding of the success of André Rieu, possibly the *homo sentimental* par excellence. By incorporating religious heritage into his concerts, Rieu taps into the currently well-established conviction of the relevance of this heritage for society as a whole. He adds, I propose, a particular set of feelings and sentiments that invites people to join in a shared sense of a common religious past, which experience in its turn adds to the overall value of the performance.

My objective is to further an understanding the value religious heritage apparently contributes to the "André Rieu affective space". Obviously, the potential to add value is not

the prerogative of *religious* heritage; anything heritage may affect people, objects or practices. Following a more general development in the social sciences and humanities, the emotive power of heritage has also become an acknowledged focus in heritage studies. Moving beyond an approach that emphasises representation, many authors now attend to the bodily, the visceral and the sensual dimensions of heritage formation (Jethro, 2019; Meyer & Port, 2018; Smith & Campbell, 2015; Tolia-Kelly et al., 2017). Not surprisingly, Rieu mobilises quite a variety of heritage. Mixing music with elaborate lighting, castles, palaces, villages, costumes and landscapes, the “André Rieu affective space” emerges from well-composed assemblages. Religious heritage may add a special touch to this affective space, I suggest, because it is “heritage plus”: heritage that, although not sacred in a transcendental sense or predicated on a “religious reading”, carries an aura of sacredness precisely because of its rootedness in a religious (in the Western world Christian) past. In recent decades, the Christian past, and hence the related heritage, has been gaining new currency as a cultural marker of identity (Meyer 2019; Van den Hemel 2018). Here, I also connect with a line of thought developed by Knott et al. on the relevance of “the iconic” in material traces of the Christian past.⁴ Such traces, they argue, are vested with an iconic quality, which refers to ‘a particular human-object relation in which a building, site or other item has the capacity to enshrine and convey a sense of a special, sacrosanct presence to beholders whose acts and attitudes resonate with and reproduce this presence’ (2016, p. 129).

Narrowing the issue down to the case presented, we may ask more specifically how and when religious heritage is mobilised in the André Rieu performances. To provide an answer to this question, my exposé will focus on two instances of religious architectural heritage being pivotal in co-constituting the André Rieu affective space: performances mobilising the presence of the Saint Servatius Basilica in Maastricht and performances mobilising the presence of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. In order to understand why the André Rieu affective space is a transnational space, André Rieu, being a transnational phenomenon himself, needs an introduction.

Setting the scene

André Rieu is the founder, director and musical leader of the Johann Strauss Orchestra (JSO), which is the largest privately owned orchestra in the world. The number of musicians in the orchestra may range between fifty and sixty people, depending on the size of the stage. Altogether a mere hundred-twenty people are employed by André Rieu

⁴Which, to me, is not specifically related to urban space (cf. Knott et al., 2016).

Productions. Rieu's musical fame builds, in particular, on his interpretations of Viennese Waltz music and related compositions, which earned him the epithet "King of the Waltz". However, although the general appreciation emphasises the music, André Rieu performances are "all-round spectacles", and include humorist acts, narrations, screen effects, light shows, fireworks and surprises, always with Rieu as the magic centre. In the maestro's own words: 'My concerts are an ensemble piece of not only my orchestra, the location, the stage and the music. They all come together to create something beautiful' (Rieu & Wisemann, 2018).



Image 1: The Vrijthof Square, just before the opening of the 20 July 2014 summer concert Love in Venice. Because of the theme, Rieu had extended his décor with the Doge's Palace and Rialto Bridge adjacent to the Saint Servatius Basilica.

Combining the roles of presenter, conductor and first violinist of the JSO, Rieu follows the so-called *Stehgeiger* tradition, following in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessors, *Stehgeiger* Johann Strauss Sr. (1804–1844) and Johann Strauss Jr. (1825–1899). Consequently, Rieu's narrations about himself, the orchestra members and his music are crucial elements of each performance, and indispensable in generating and steering

emotions. A central role should also be attributed to Rieu's self-understanding and self-presentation as an emotional person himself, so as to ensure that all that the audience experiences is "authentic". From a 2019 interview in the Limburgian *Chapeau Magazine* with André and Marjorie Rieu (his wife):

'[André] is just what he is. That is his strength. He wants to succeed in every evening. He is not acting, this is how he is.' André adds: 'I would not be able to do it otherwise. The people feel that too, whether it is real or not. That is why my public is always so emotional, because I am so, too.' (Cortenraedt, 2019)



Image 2: André Rieu Maastricht summer concert Love in Venice, July 20, 2014

Moreover, a multiplicity of aesthetic technologies is mobilised to induce a cheerful, sentimental, colourful and playful ambience in order to seduce the audiences into bodily engagements beyond listening: singing along, waltzing, shouting, laughing, and shedding a tear. André Rieu Productions takes care to record all such visible emotional en-

gements. At each Vrijthof concert, thirty cameras are in operation, one half directed at the stage and the other at the public 'to assure that every single emotion is recorded.'⁵

Throughout the year, Rieu and the JSO are on the move, giving over a hundred performances in many countries across the world.⁶ What makes the summer performances in Maastricht of particular relevance for the topic of investigation here are Rieu's evocations of "the Vrijthof", the city's central square and location of Rieu's summer performances. Verbally, musically, and visually, the Vrijthof appears as a distinct, monumental part of the medieval city of Maastricht, and as a place of great personal meaning to André Rieu himself. In its entirety, the square is surrounded by listed architectural heritage,⁷ but only the churches are given a role in the performances. However, as my ethnography will show, they do not appear—so to speak—"on their own", but always in relation to Rieu's personal, emotional bond with them. Apparently, this combination carries a persuasive power for an international audience. However, contrary to popular opinion and in opposition with other scholars working on Rieu (cf. Meijer et al., 2015), such engagement is not restricted to the audiences present at the concerts but extends to those elsewhere in the world, of which many only know Rieu through his DVDs and "real-life" television series about tours and "the-making-of".

Going global

Over twenty years ago, André Rieu made the transition from a local musician to a violinist and performer of global renown. To give a brief impression of the magnitude of his continuing success: in 2010, he beat Bruce Springsteen as the most most-in-demand male artist in the world (André Rieu, 2009). On the 2011 list of the world's best-earning artists, Rieu ranked number fifteen, just below Lady Gaga, and number twenty on the 2014 ranking (Viner, 2012). In 2018, no other international classical music artist earned more than Rieu's \$550 million; for several consecutive years, Rieu ranked in the top ten of the Netherland's most successful cultural export products.

⁵ According to the voice over in a 2019 Dutch television broadcast showing 2018 Vrijthof concert material (Rieu, 2018a).

⁶ This article was written as the corona pandemic unfolded. The figures presented thus date from pre-corona times. The pandemic put an end to all André Rieu performances as of March 2020, leaving the world with the question whether the orchestra will survive the crisis.

⁷ See the interactive map listing the architectural heritage in Maastricht: https://rce.webgispublisher.nl/?map=Monumentenregister_grote_kaart&bbox=175173%2c316832%2c177173%2c318832&marker=176173%2c317832&profileName=viewer

Rieu rose to fame as “the King of the Waltz” in the Netherlands and Belgium with his interpretation of the *Second Waltz* by Russian composer Dmitri Shostakowitz (1906–1975), in August 1994. The *Second Waltz* became a national hit from the onset to stay in the top 10 Hit Parade for an entire year, which is the more remarkable as it was the first piece of classical music ever to enter the list. In September 1994, Rieu released his success album *Strauss & Co*, under the slogan: “Not House but Strauss” (*Geen House maar Strauss*), which sold over 250,000 copies by the end of that year. Of a different calibre within Rieu’s international take-off was his brilliant idea to buy the half time of the 1994–1995 UEFA Champions-League Ajax-Bayern Munich semi-final, to perform the *Second Waltz* on the centre spot.⁸ With Ajax having the upper hand, the atmosphere in the stadium during the break was of vibrant effervescence. The orchestrated dissonance between the suit-and-tie dressed violinist and the average stadium visitor furthered the appreciation and reception of this “out-of-place” piece of music, resulting in the whole stadium swaying from side to side, waving paper flags. All of a sudden, entire football-watching Europe knew André Rieu and the *Second Waltz*.

In 1996, under the maxim “I will make the whole world waltz”, Rieu took off to the USA, and Canada, to continue his “musical military campaign” (*muzikaleveldtocht*) in Great Britain, France, Australia, Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Mexico), South Africa, and Japan in the decades to follow. In 2013, Rieu gave his first performance in Istanbul (Turkey), adding China’ (Shanghai, Singapore and Taipei), the Baltic States, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to his “record of nations” in 2014. Romania was listed in 2015.

Rieu’s international success not only takes place “abroad”, but also materialises during his “local” summer performances in Maastricht. Since 2005, he annually returns “home” in summer, to give a series of performances on the Vrijthof square during a sequence of weekends in June/July. His international audience comes to Maastricht, in increasing numbers over the years. In 2019, almost 150,000 visitors attended the Vrijthof performances, more than half coming from abroad; according to the Rieu website ‘99 nationalities’ altogether, Britain in particular. Rieu gave his hundredth Vrijthof concert on 21 July 2019, and that same summer he welcomed his millionth Maastricht concert visitor. The international or, maybe better, transnational dimension of the Vrijthof performances carries a symbolic meaning for Rieu, as well as for his fans, and will therefore always be highlighted. Many of the foreign visitors make their national or, occasionally, regional

⁸ The match took place in Ajax’s hometown Amsterdam, in the Olympic Stadium. Very well aware of the impact of “mood” on the reception of his performance, Rieu would only perform if the Dutch team was leading. If this were not the case, the broadcast time would be filled with ads or another act.

background clear by carrying paper flags, some visitors even going dressed in a “flag outfit”. Mentioning nationalities has evolved into a specific, ritualised form of interaction between Rieu and his audiences to become part of the repetitive repertoire that constitutes any André Rieu performance at the Vrijthof square. The transnational spatiality of the Vrijthof performances will be shown to be relevant for understanding how religious architectural heritage moves and may affect people, irrespective of their national background.



Image 3: Fan in alternative New Zealand flag outfit at the Vrijthof, July 19, 2014

Wherever Rieu performs, each concert will start with a Grande Entrée, usually the JSO with the maestro in the lead walking to the stage through the welcoming audience, often with the cheering sounds of *Seventy-Six Trombones* (composer Meredith Willson) coming from the loudspeakers. The orchestra members will ascend the stage—Rieu always first—and join in with the music as soon as seated until finally the music from the recording is replaced by live music from the orchestra. After the piece ends, and the applause has faded away, Rieu will welcome his audiences. Rieu’s opening phrase usually is as follows, or very close to:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Fantastic that you came here for a whole evening filled with music. We came here from all over the world to play for you tonight. Only in my orchestra, we have already more than ten nationalities. The soloists tonight, they come really from all over the world.⁹

Thereafter, also a recurring topic in each concert, Rieu will mention the nationalities of the orchestra members. When abroad, the audience will (briefly) respond with applause after each nationality. However, at the Vrijthof, the response from the audience will be different: after the mentioning of a nationality, people in the audience from that country will respond by applauding, cheering and waving their country’s paper flags. Rieu will usually then add his own “nationality/locality” at the end with “and I am from Maastricht”, which will evoke laughter. In addition, every opening will entail another moment of “localisation”, when Rieu asks: ‘And where, ladies and gentlemen, have we all come together tonight?’ The audience then usually responds with calling the name of the city or country where the concert takes place, at which point Rieu will provide the correct answer himself with the exclamation: ‘Exactly at the centre of the universe!!!’ to be followed by ‘With the best audience of the world.’¹⁰

However, when in Maastricht, Rieu will always spotlight that the concert takes place at the Vrijthof Square, with: ‘In Europe, we have been in all countries. But tonight, we are home again. In our own city, at the most beautiful square in the Netherlands: the Vrijthof in Maastricht!!!.’¹¹ Rieu emphasises his belonging to Maastricht through his affective framing of the Vrijthof square as home and as “the most beautiful square of the Nether-

⁹ Rieu’s opening words at the 2015 concert in Prague (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYdFwjDd3N4>, video no longer accessible).

¹⁰ Phrases taken from the June 6, 2015 concert in Bucharest (fieldnote).

¹¹ Example taken from a recorded opening of the 2011 Vrijthof summer concerts now no longer available on YouTube.

lands". For André Rieu aficionados all over the world, the idea of the maestro performing in his hometown will carry the promise of an André Rieu concert experience that is more genuine and authentic than any performance elsewhere in the world can be: the local ambience of the medieval city, the romantic idea of having a chance to have a glimpse of Rieu's private castle, and most importantly, the real-life experience of the maestro performing at the iconic Vrijthof square.



Image 4: American Rieu fan at the annual International André Rieu Fan Picnic, July 19, 2014 in Maastricht

Vrijthof religious heritage

Rieu's talent for "setting the stage" and the techniques used to transform the Vrijthof into the principal place for him to perform may be illustrated by the incorporation of the Vrijthof's religious architectural heritage in the performances. This heritage specifically concerns the two churches of the Gothic Sint Janskerk (Saint John's Church) and the Roman Sint Servaas Basiliiek (Basilica of Saint Servatius), which dominate the square. As the ethnography presented below will demonstrate, the churches appear in the André Rieu performances in multiple ways: as an architectural environment, as a narrative, as bell sounds and as digital visuals. On the one hand, each church has its history, both as a religious building and as a heritage site. On the other, they could be considered one single site, as the buildings are temporally and spatially intertwined. Saint John's Church was originally built to serve as a baptistery and parish church for the collegiate Saint Servatius Church. That is why the churches are built only a few metres apart, and tend to form one iconic visual presence. They also share a history of confiscation by the Dutch Reformed Church after Prince Frederik Hendrik of Orange occupied Maastricht in 1632.

Moreover, both churches were officially assigned the status of national monuments by the Dutch governmental agency responsible for the conservation of monuments (*Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg*), in 1966. In his narrations, André Rieu does not pay much attention to Saint John's, but the church is part of the religious-architectural-heritage-scape appearing in his performances. To provide the reader with a sense of what this religious-architectural-heritage-scape looks like, this section briefly presents the Saint John's Church and the Basilica of Saint Servatius as religious-cum-heritage sites.

Saint John's Church, built in the fourteenth century, was originally dedicated to Saint John the Baptist but became a Dutch Reformed Church in 1633. What makes this church stand out is its 79-metre-tall red tower, which dates back to 1479. At present, Saint John's Church is used on Sunday mornings for the religious services of a local Protestant community but mainly functions as a conference and event centre, for hire for concerts, theatre performances, dinners, weddings, funerals, events which—as the website explicitly states—may also carry a religious (*kerkelijk*) character. As so many churches in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe (see Beekers, 2016; Kroesen, 2008; Isnart & Cerezales 2020; Marín & Alavedra 2007), Saint John's thus has been repurposed for mainly secular activities. Nevertheless, as a church building Saint John's still maintains a "religious reading", carrying some of that difficult-to-grasp "sacred residue".

At the right of Saint John's Church, only some ten metres apart, stands Saint Servatius Basilica, which is named after Saint Servatius of Tongeren (Belgium), the city's patron saint, who is venerated as the first bishop of Maastricht.



*Image 5: Saint Johns and Saint Servatius at the Vrijthof Square
(photo by Edgar El, 2010, copyright creative commons)*

Servatius is said to have died on 13 May 384, upon which his remains were buried in a chapel on the spot of the present basilica's crypt. The basilica is the oldest existing church in the Netherlands. On 14 May 1985, Pope John Paul II visited Saint Servatius, elevating the church's status to that of a basilica. Excavations conducted in the 1980s revealed that the present church is built on a late-Roman, sixth-century church structure, including a tomb that supposedly contains the remains of Saint Servatius. In the Middle Ages, the number of holy relics and other religious treasures kept at the Saint Servatius Church expanded, attracting increasing numbers of pilgrims to Maastricht, until the reformation put an end to public Catholicism in the city (1633). Traditionally, the pilgrimage centred upon two periods: an annual pilgrimage period during the saint's holy week in May, and a septennial "pilgrimage to the relics" (*Heiligdomsvaart*) in July. The

high point of the traditional *Heiligdomsvaart* was the showing of the main relics to the pilgrims gathering *en masse* at the Vrijthof. Upon the so-called “emancipation of the Catholics” in the nineteenth century, the *Heiligdomsvaart* tradition was revived in 1874.¹² The present-day “pilgrimage to the relics”, however, differs from its medieval predecessor: instead of a “showing of the relics”, the relics are now put at display first in Maastricht’s other basilica, the Church of Our Lady, and thereafter in the Saint Servatius Basilica, all together for eleven days in the last week of May and early June. The climaxes are the two processions of the relics through the city, which, as almost any procession, are a blend of religious celebration and entertainment, attracting large numbers of tourists. Otherwise, the relics are kept at the Saint Servatius Treasury, which is open to the public as a museum of religious art and objects throughout the year.¹³

In 1985, the interior and a selection of the treasures of Saint Servatius were formally inscribed as national cultural heritage under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The treasures include the so-called *Noodkist* containing relics of Saint Servatius,¹⁴ the bust of Saint Servatius (another reliquary), and a key, a chest-cross and a Roman silver cup said to have belonged to the saint, and an extraordinary collection of Byzantine textiles. The treasures do not play a role in the André Rieu performances, but when performing in Maastricht, anecdotes about Rieu’s involvement in the *Heiligdomsvaart* as a young acolyte at Saint Servatius or of him as a member of the basilica’s boys choir, feature regularly. Such narrations allow Rieu to better articulate the church’s presence as a distinct element in the overall stage-setting, and to designate it a specific role as part of Rieu’s Catholic/Christian past. Within the secular format of Rieu’s performances, both churches—irrespective the extent to which the buildings are presently used for religious purposes—appear as religious architectural heritage.

¹² In 1848, the new Dutch constitution that replaced the absolute monarchy by a constitutional monarchy also put an end to official discrimination of Catholics, at the time a large minority of 1.2 million people out of three million Dutch. This transition is generally known as “the Catholic emancipation”.

¹³ Apparently, many André Rieu concert goers do pay a visit to the basilica and burn a candle as, according to a 2019 research on the economic impact of the Vrijthof concerts on the city, the sale of candles increases during these periods (Thewissen, 2019).

¹⁴ In case of emergencies (*nood*), such as outbreaks of epidemics, the chest (*kist*) was carried in procession through the city.

Welcome to his World¹⁵

Affections, Reckwitz suggests, are 'likely to emerge within comprehensive three-dimensional settings comprising extensive arrangements of artefacts within which human bodies move' (2012, p. 252). Understanding the affective, three-dimensional settings of the André Rieu performances indeed requires a specific focus on the aesthetics and all-embracing qualities of Rieu's arrangements of artefacts, the "built environment" in particular. Again, as will be demonstrated, this built environment is not bound to place or to the display on screens, but moves along with Rieu globally, as part of the affective space it co-constitutes.

Wherever Rieu and his JSO perform, whether outdoors or in a stadium or concert hall, Rieu will always bring his own stage: a Greek temple front in "universal" concert hall style, with large screens at each side. The entire background of the temple stage is one giant screen, providing a décor that changes with the pieces performed. Meanwhile, the side screens will mainly show close-ups of André Rieu, the soloists, and the orchestra, every now and then interlaced with a shot of people in the audience. Close-ups of the performers are crucial, because otherwise the concert would be virtually out of view for the greater part of the audience. The main difference between indoor and open-air concerts is that in the first case the built environment—usually a standard stadium in an anonymous outskirts of the city—must be forgotten or "overruled", while in the latter case the built environment is a conscious part of the stage setting. I came to fully realise the importance of this difference for the establishment of an affective space when I attended an indoor concert in Ljubljana. On the way to the stadium, but even after having entered the building, there was no indication or whatsoever of what kind of event was going to take place: this only was revealed when I saw, in the distance, while reaching my seat, the temple front waiting on stage. In selecting his open-air locations, usually a setting in the city centre, Rieu has a preference for "the iconic". We may return here to Knott et al. (2016) who—following Jeffrey Alexander and Dominik Bartmański—emphasise the importance of an "iconic consciousness", that is when actors 'experience material objects, not only understanding them cognitively or evaluating them morally, but also feeling their sensual, aesthetic force' (2016, p. 128).

A good example of the incorporation of iconic architecture in the André Rieu performances is the Bucharest concerts. These concerts took place on the Piața Constituției

¹⁵ Following a word play by the BBC (Rees, 2018), the section title rephrases the successful Sky Channel Series "Welcome to my world" (ten episodes in 2015, in 2017 and 2019). This series follows Rieu and the JSO on tour, alternating back stage features, the musicians visiting and commenting on touristic hot spots, short interviews, commentary of Rieu, with some selections of the numbers performed. The entire series is for sale on DVD (<https://shop.andrerieu.com/product/welcome-to-my-world-ii/>).

(Constitution Square) in front of the gigantic Palace of the Parliament from the Ceausescu era, with the sumptuous apartment buildings at the other end of the square that formerly housed top communist state officials towering behind Rieu's Greek's temple stage. The audience, consequently, was positioned with their backs to the palace.



Image 6: André Rieu's concert in Bucharest on June 6, 2015 is about to begin, the Palace of the Parliament behind the public

Undoubtedly, irrespective of the fact that these buildings are materialisations of Rumania's violent socialist past and Ceausescu's megalomania, the grandness of the setting had motivated Rieu to perform at this location. At the time, I experienced that this larger-than-large environment unintentionally had a dwarfing effect on Rieu's stage, reducing the 12,000 people attending almost to a modest audience. However, as I learned later from the DVD compilation of the Bucharest performances, the palace worked wonderfully well as a scenic background in the recordings of an enthusiastic audience as seen from the stage side.¹⁶ Such extraordinary locations allow for the creation of attractive

¹⁶ See for instance Rieu & Wisemann, 2018.

DVDs, interesting to watch for a transnational audience. As a “technique of magnification”, the inclination to “think big” is a recurrent thread and important for understanding the Andre Rieu performative space, as further demonstrated by the following example.

Almost a decade earlier, in 2006, Rieu realised an old dream: an outdoor concert in front of the iconic Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, the “place of origin”, so to speak, of the Strausses and the Waltz. The concert inspired Rieu to make the Schönbrunn Palace his new stage setting, to offer his audiences around the world the authentic experience of a romantic musical evening at the castle. As formulated at the time on the André Rieu website:

In 2006, we played at the actual Schönbrunn in Vienna, the castle of Empress Sissi and Emperor Franz Joseph. The concert was a huge success, and the castle was the perfect background for the music we brought. However, not everyone has the opportunity to come to Vienna to see us play. For this reason, we developed the idea to bring Vienna to the rest of the world. (André Rieu, 2007)

In 2008, Rieu started his World Stadium Tour “Romantic Night in Vienna”, during which he travelled the “stadiums of the world” with “the world’s largest mobile stage”, a full-size reproduction of the façade of the Schönbrunn palace: 125 metres long, 30 metres deep and 35 metres high. With a real ice-skating floor for the skating waltz performers, a gilded coach drawn by six white horses, and even a ballroom floor being an exact copy of the original, the sky seemed to be the limit.

In order to make the World Stadium Tour logistically feasible, Rieu had three reproductions of the palace made, as transporting a single stage from continent to continent and its subsequent rebuilding would have taken too long. Thus while “A Romantic Night in Vienna” was, for instance, performed in Toronto, a container ship with another replica would be heading to Australia, while a third—slightly smaller—version would be used for performances in Europe. In one of the series on his work and life and that of the JSO, Rieu recounts:

I remember I really, really fell very small and tiny on this huge thing. But building a stage like that gave me the idea of filling it. Not only with my orchestra, but also with 120 dancers and a ballet. I think that was the largest number of artists I ever performed with on stage. That was the World Stadium Tour: 250 artists on stage. The sphere was really like..., everybody was amazed, nobody saw something like that before. (ibid.)

The Schönbrunn enterprise brought André Rieu to the edge of bankruptcy, yet at the same time took his fame to dazzling heights.¹⁷ Rieu broke record after record in numbers of tickets sold and sales of CDs and DVDs, to become 2008's best-selling artist (which was not sufficient yet to solve his financial problems, however). Even more importantly, Rieu earned the reputation of being a man who dares to live his dreams, irrespective any risks. The Schönbrunn stage exemplifies the entanglement of space, materiality, and mobility in the Andre Rieu performances, and, equally important, of the magnification technique in raising expectations among his audiences about what they are about to experience.



Image 7: Schönbrunn on the centre screen, Vrijthof summer concert, July 19, 2014

These dynamics are also crucial for my analyses of the affects generated by religious heritage in the Vrijthof concerts, which are also outdoor performances. On the Vrijthof, the stage is always situated with the towering and massive presence of Saint John's Church and Saint Servatius Basilica at the right-hand side. As a consequence, the churches have

¹⁷ The stages are now stored in Maastricht, a storage full of decoration pieces plus altogether 2,000 tons of steel. Rieu in 2018 "I am the second largest owner of steel in Europe" (Rieu & Wisemann, 2018).

become an indispensable part of the stage setting, whether live in Maastricht or as a digital screen projection when performing abroad (and consequently feature on many DVDs). As Rieu gives “Maastricht” a central place in his outreach to global audiences,¹⁸ virtually none of his aficionados will be unfamiliar with the image of the Vrijthof square filled with people and the stage and lined with churches. However, as will be empirically demonstrated, the churches are not just fixed presences adjacent to the Greek temple stage, but associatively appear in different, three-dimensional, affective settings, moving beyond the confined space of the Vrijthof. Subsequently, my argument is that this associative, moving potential allows for new arrangements of artefacts, as well as for a recharging of the affective space, in particular when Rieu mediates his sentiments and emotions. Here, the Vrijthof religious architectural heritage plays a role other than as architectural heritage in other stage-settings. The material presented below will show how Rieu’s recollections and sentiments related to the Vrijthof religious architectural heritage allowed Notre-Dame to move into the affective space of the 2019 Vrijthof summer concerts.

Moving space

Maastricht, Saturday 13 July 2013

The weather is beautiful and the city is full of André Rieu concertgoers, strolling through the narrow streets, squares and parks. Around 2 PM, I realise that I hear a carillon playing Shostakowitz’ Second Waltz. A whistling trader at the antique market joins in. Arguably, Frank Steijns, violinist in the JSO and city carillonneur of Maastricht is playing the bells.¹⁹

Steijns usually plays the city hall’s carillon, but on special occasions, he may play the carillon of Saint Servatius Basilica as a prelude to an upcoming performance. In 2005, Rieu’s first year of summer concerts at the Vrijthof square, the Saint Servatius carillon was incorporated into the programme. That year, Rieu had included an elaborate role for the carillon and its carillonneur: a performance that in an edited version can be viewed by the DVD compilation of the 2005 summer concerts, and from which much of the description to follow is derived.

¹⁸ A good example of the iconicity of the Maastricht concerts is the movie *Magical Maastricht: together in music* (produced in the context of the Corona crisis and released 20 August 2020), consisting of a compilation of high points of fifteen years of Maastricht summer concerts plus an interview with Rieu. The movie will be broadcast in cinemas around the world, see for instance <https://wtam.uk/event/andre-rieu-magical-maastricht/>.

¹⁹ Fieldwork Maastricht, July 13, 2014.

The carillon act opens with the orchestra playing the first notes of the Adagio of the *Concierto De Aranjuez* (Composer Joaquín Rodrigo). As soon as the carillon joins in, the side-screens show pre-recorded—but as if in real time—the carillonneur behind the keyboard, supposedly sitting high in the bell-tower. During the piece, the main screen shows panoramic views of the roofs and towers of both Saint John’s and Saint Servatius “dramatised” as silhouettes against a large red setting sun. The close-ups of Steijns playing the carillon are interlaced with close-ups of Rieu, other soloists of the JSO, or the faces of visibly moved individuals among the audience. A compilation of shots of Saint Servatius Basilica with the audiences seated at its feet against a purple-blue sky and the windows of the bell tower, warm yellow light articulating their typical church-shaped design present an atmosphere that may be captured as tender-romantic-sentimental. When the last tones have faded away, Rieu playfully summons the carillonneur to the stage, who thereupon is shown, in a laughter-evoking fast-playback, rushing down the bell tower’s narrow medieval stairs, jumping on his bike, racing to the concert, to arrive running onto the stage less than thirty seconds later, to receive his applause.

Subsequently, Rieu asks the audience jokingly whether they would like Steijns to play another carillon piece, which—of course—evokes a loud, enthusiastic confirmation. After Rieu’s “Right, hurry up the stairs!” (*Hup naar boven*), Steijns leaves the stage running, and while the audience sees him, again pre-recorded, hurriedly biking back, parking his bike against the basilica’s wall, entering the building, and rushing up the steep stairs—spending one moment pausing clinging to the handrail to catch his breath to arrive just in time—the JSO starts with the more cheerful but also nostalgic tones of *Esläuten die Glocken von Limburg* (Swinging Bells of Limburg). During the refrain, when Rieu and the audience join the choir in singing ding-dong-ding-dong (in Dutch *bim-bam-bim-bam*) swinging their arms from left to right above their heads, Steijns is shown leaving the carillon keyboard, grasping the bell-rope to ring the basilica’s bell, which inspires parts of the audience to start jumping up and down along with the carillonneur pulling the heavy rope.²⁰ The episode shows how in eight-and-a-half minutes the audience is steered along a quick sequence of feelings and sentiments: fun, captivation by the extraordinariness of the instrument and its location, touched by the music and the imagery, excitement in singing-along, moving, and laughing.

The carillon sounds follow the André Rieu performances abroad as well, independent of the physical presence of the Basilica of Saint Servatius. In 2006, Rieu had a mobile, 41-bell, 2,000-kilogram, electrically controlled carillon made, to be taken on tour. The

²⁰ DVD *Songs from my Heart*, live performances in Maastricht (CDA, n.d.).

Concierto De Aranjuez-with-carillon version was part of Rieu's "world tours" of 2006, 2009, 2013, and 2018, albeit with a new, lighter (1,400-kilogram) carillon after 2009, as that year the instrument was stolen. During these and other, mostly indoor, performances, Steijns would play the keyboard centre stage in front of the JSO, with the carillon set in a miniature replica of the Saint Servatius bell tower at the side—light radiating from its "tower windows" shining upon the bells—while the screen would display the previously described panoramic view of the Vrijthof's roofs and towers of Saint John's and Saint Servatius.²¹ In these touring settings, the melancholic *Concierto De Aranjuez*-with-carillon is generally followed by the cheerful *Circus Renz* (composer Gustav Peter), a galop with Steijns on the carillon and Marcel Falize on xylophone, performing a competition in speed playing.²²

The church-panorama-carillon-carillonneur assembly exemplifies how religious heritage may (re)appear and perform in various modalities to co-constitute the affective space of an André Rieu performance, whether physically or virtually present. The alternation of moods and sentiments demonstrates how religious heritage may be used to connect with the solemnness usually associated with churches, as well as to evoke laughter. In the latter case, exaggeration, a relative of magnification, does the job.

The way in which Notre-Dame of Paris—iconic religious architectural heritage *par excellence*—makes its appearance in André Rieu performances through Rieu's recollections further substantiates my argument on the evocative power of such heritage. Notre-Dame was incorporated in the 2019 Vrijthof summer concerts in response to the catastrophic fire that destroyed the roof and tower of the cathedral, on 15 April 2019. The sympathy evoked by the disaster, in France and around the globe, found expression in numerous offerings of material or financial support for its restoration. One supportive gesture came from André Rieu, who immediately upon learning about the fire sent the following tweet (Image 8):

Deeply shocked by the dramatic images from Paris. We would like to provide our 700 tons of steel, used for the set of Schönbrunn Castle, to help erect the scaffold for the restauration [sic] of beautiful Notre-Dame.

The French were apparently not interested in the offer as Rieu received no response ("Parijs wil 700 ton staal van André Rieu niet", 2019).

²¹ See, for instance, the following official André Rieu recording of the private concert in Bangkok on April 1, 2016 (Rieu, 2018).

²² In 2019, the carillon—as an instrument—became "cultural heritage", as Steijns donated it to the Dutch Bell Museum in Asten (Klok & Peel Museum).

The Vrijthof summer concerts offered a new opportunity to express his commitment with the cathedral’s fate, this time with a musical tribute. Rieu introduced his considerations with the following story, alternating—as he always does when performing at the Vrijthof—Dutch and English (the latter below in italics), to address his international audience:²³

Altijd als ik hier op het Vrijthof sta naast die prachtige Servaaskerk dan moet ik aan mijn jeugd denken. *Every time when I stay on stage here next to this beautiful Servaas church, I have to think of my youth. When I was five years old my parents sent me to the church choir of this church.*

At that moment, the screen displays a photograph of some boys posing in their choir outfits, to zoom in on an endearing young Rieu, which evokes loud “oooohhhh” sounds from the audience.



Explore

⚙ Settings



Image 8: Screenshot of Tweet from April 16, 2019, André Rieu posing in front of his stored Schönbrunn-stage steel (Rieu, 2019a)

Toen ik 5 jaar oud was—ja dat ben ik daar²⁴—stuurde mijn ouders mij hier naar ’t kerkkoor. Ik was daarmijn hele jeugd. *I was there my whole youth, [continuing in a high pitched voice]: I was the highest soprano [laughter].* Dus u kunt zich voorstellen dat ik een heel speciale band heb met deze kerk. *You can imagine I that have a very*

²³ As are the readers of this article. For Rieu’s language policy, see Stengs, 2018.

²⁴ This addition, only made in Dutch—“Yes, that is me”, referring to the boy choir portrait, evoked laughter from the Dutch-speaking part of the audience.

special relationship with this church. En toen ik zes jaar oud was, toen gebeurde er iets verschrikkelijks. When I was six years old something terrible happened. De Servaaskerk was on fire. De Servaaskerk stond in brand. De hele stad was in shock. Overall brandweer, Firemen, police, all the people in the city went to the Vrijthof to look to the fire. Iedereen in Maastricht kwam naar het plein om naar de brand te kijken, Also my parents and me. En toen gebeurde het: de brandende toren viel op het dak. The burning tower fell on the roof of the Servaas. A terrible memory. Dus U kunt zich voorstellen dat toen de Notre Dame in brand stond, toen kwam het allemaal terug bij mij. You can imagine when Notre-Dame de Paris was on fire it came all back to me. In fact the whole world was in shock. My orchestra and me and the Platin Tenors, we would like to bring a musical tribute to this magnificent church in Paris, this symbol of Paris, Notre-Dame. We are going to play for you I think one of the most beautiful arias from a French opera composed by George Bizet, from his opera Les Pecheurs de Perles, and I can tell you, the way these three fantastic tenors sing this aria is really very very emotional. Give them an enormous applause—the Platin Tenors.



Image 9: *Notre-Dame on fire, note the Saint Servatius Basilica at the right. Screenshot footage of Vrijthof summer concert, July 11, 2019*

In the meantime, when the JSO plays the first notes, an image of Notre-Dame, seen from the rear, fills the main screen, towering high above the orchestra. The picture shows the

cathedral in full glory before disaster struck. The side-screens display close-ups from the Platin Tenors, other JSO soloists, and André Rieu, until the burning Notre-Dame appears. Dramatic images of its roof and tower, veiled by clouds of black smoke and high flames fade into each other, the aria reaching its dramatic high-point. All ingredients work in tandem to establish an intense, affective experience never to be forgotten. Along the lines of the André Rieu formula, the 2019 summer concert DVD *Shall We Dance?* shows close-ups of people with tearful eyes alternating with close-ups of Rieu, the tenors and the burning cathedral.

As a popularised piece of classical music, *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* has been regularly performed by the JSO, always with the Platin Tenors as the soloists. The 2019 performance, however, demonstrates well how magnification, as an emotion-adding technique, may work. In the 2015 version of the aria, for instance, the central screen displayed a rather non-descript landscape of green hills and water.



Image 10: Notre-Dame on fire, note the carillon bells between the pillars.
Screenshot footage of Vrijthof summer concert, July 11, 2019

The fire anecdote authenticates Rieu as a local who is strongly attached to the Vrijthof and its churches. Who would not understand how the gripping images of the burning Notre-Dame, images that had touched so many around the globe, revived Rieu's traumatic childhood memory of Saint Servatius on fire? Apart from authenticating his trib-

ute as a self-evident gesture of commitment, the account and the accompanying images steer the public's perception of this *really very very emotional* performance.²⁵

Conclusion

One central feature of the Andre Rieu performances is the role reserved for “the monumental” in setting the stage, iconic buildings in particular. In addition to Rieu's Greek temple stage, castles, towers, ruins, churches, cityscapes and palaces may appear as co-constitutive elements in establishing an affective space. Although primarily aesthetic, their emotional potential unfolds when Rieu connects them with his recollections and sentiments. In the case of the Bucharest Parliament Palace, such personal bonds were absent, and thus no specific anecdote was made to the building. The emotive potential of Schönbrunn Palace, in contrast, is great because of the joint evocation of “the waltz”, the Strausses and romantic Vienna. The stage palace evoked a nostalgic European past, a particular blend of musical, royal, and architectural heritage. Nevertheless, the enormous investment in three real-size replicas demonstrates that (initially) a mere image of the building on the stage screen apparently was not considered sufficient to testify of Rieu's total commitment to—almost identification with—“Vienna”.

Herewith, the moving presence of the Schönbrunn Palace differs fundamentally from that of the Vrijthof churches, Saint Servatius in particular. The basilica's appearance is brought in naturally through Rieu's affectionate recollections of his religious upbringing. In this way, Rieu's past becomes as much part of a shared heritagised Christian past as the churches are: in the secular, entertaining settings of the André Rieu performances, both religious architecture and past experiences are transformed into religious heritage. Authenticated by the material presence of the Saint Servatius Basilica, Rieu's emotional account allows for naturally bringing in the evocative images of not just Notre-Dame, but Notre-Dame on fire. With this climax, he revives the worldwide shock of the moment, magnifying, so to say, the emotional impact of the appearance of the famous cathedral.

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²⁵ For a recording of the tribute and some comments on the emotions the tribute evoked, see Rieu, 2019b.

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Povzetek

Prispevek raziskuje prevrednotenje krščanske preteklosti kot dediščine v okoljih, ki jih na splošno pojmuje kot posvetne in zabavne. Empirično se osredotočam na vlogo bazilike sv. Servatija v Maastrichtu in katedrale Notre Dame v Parizu v glasbenih predstavah svetovnega "kralja valčka" Andréja Rieuja. Z vključevanjem verske dediščine v svoje koncerte Rieu izkorišča danes uveljavljeno prepričanje, da je taka dediščina pomembna za družbo kot celoto. "Premična prisotnost" je mišljena v obeh pogledih. Cerkve se skupaj z orkestrom premikajo po nadnacionalnem prostoru predstav Andréja Rieuja, kar je, kot trdim, afektivni prostor: cerkve ponavadi ljudi tako ali drugače premikajo in ustvarjajo afektivno ali čustveno vpletenost. Vprašanje, kako se mobilizira čustveni potencial verske dediščine in in kakšni so načini, s katerimi Rieu uspe usklajeno ustvariti ikono lokalne in nadnacionalne dediščine, prispevek prikazuje, kako Rieujeve "tehnike povečevanja" delujejo skupaj z maistrovim afektivnim spominjanjem lastne verske preteklosti, da bi ustvaril predstavo, ki je spektakularna in prepričljiva.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: afektivni prostor, čustva, povečava, ikoničnost

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