

# Teaching and thinking *Early Music* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: an interview with Walter Reiter

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**Abstract:** In this interview granted to Marcus Held, Walter Reiter discourses on his ideas regarding the field of knowledge known as *Early Music*. Having witnessed and actively participated in the consolidation of this movement in the 1960's and the 1970's, the violinist, chamber musician, teacher and director talks about the challenges and the successes of teaching and thinking music from previous times in the contemporary world. Furthermore, he presents his recently published book, *The Baroque Violin & Viola: a fifty-lesson course* (Oxford University Press, 2020) and, in the end, narrates his experience of teaching *Early Music* in Cuba.

**Keywords:** Walter Reiter, Early Music, Historical Instruments, Violin Teaching, Early Music in Cuba.

## Ensinar e pensar *Música Antiga* no século XXI: entrevista com Walter Reiter

**Resumo:** Nesta entrevista concedida a Marcus Held, Walter Reiter discorre sobre suas ideias a respeito do campo de saber conhecido como *Música Antiga*. Tendo testemunhado e participado ativamente na consolidação desse movimento nas décadas de 1960 e 1970, o violinista, camerista, professor e diretor nos conta sobre os desafios e os êxitos de ensinar e pensar música de períodos progressos com instrumentos de época no mundo contemporâneo. Além disso, nos apresenta seu livro recém-publicado, *The Baroque Violin & Viola: a fifty-lesson course*, (Oxford University Press, 2020) e, por fim, narra sua experiência com o ensino da *Música Antiga* em Cuba.

**Palavras-chave:** Walter Reiter, Música Antiga, Instrumentos Históricos, Ensino do Violino, Música Antiga em Cuba.

## Presentation

Walter Reiter graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in London, obtaining his further education towards a Master's Degree in Violin Pedagogy in the Jerusalem Academy of Music. He worked with the Menuhin Festival Orchestra, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra and with many contemporary music groups in Paris. He was also a teacher at the Rubin Conservatory in Jerusalem. Currently, he is Professor of Baroque Violin and Viola in Royal Conservatory of The Hague and at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London. For some twenty years, he has been teaching and directing projects in the city of Havana, Cuba<sup>1</sup>.

*Early Music* has occupied a central part of his career for about four decades. He has travelled and toured extensively around the world playing with, leading and directing groups

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<sup>1</sup> Information retrieved from Walter Reiter's website. Data in the References.

from the United Kingdom and abroad, such as the leader of The Orchestra of the Sixteen, for ten years, and as a Principal of The English Concert, for almost thirty years. As he says in his own *office in the sky*:

Playing the violin has been the core of my life since I was a youngster, growing up in a little village on the wild Atlantic coast of Ireland. I explored many different paths, playing in symphony and chamber orchestras, contemporary music groups in Paris, where I also played in an exclusive cabaret, *Au Pigall's!* But for some forty years now I have been enchanted by the historical violin and by the infinite variety of music composed for it... (REITER, 2022).

In the following interview, Reiter, recollecting his own experience as a musician and writer, talked about his ideas regarding *Early Music*. He was actively involved in the consolidation of its movement in the last century and, today, is internationally recognised as one of the representative figures of the field. Besides playing and recording, teaching covers an important segment of his career, and he reflects on the challenges and the successes of this craft in Europe and Cuba. As an author, Reiter presents his recently published book, *The Baroque Violin & Viola: a fifty-lesson course* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

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**Marcus Held:** Since the generations of Arnold Dolmetsch and Wanda Landowska, we have seen many stages and approaches to the field known as *Early Music*. How would you define *Early Music* today?

**Walter Reiter:** That is a really tough question to begin with, because I really don't know the answer to it. I think much more important than talking about *Early Music* as such, we should talk about *Historical Performance*.

When I was growing up, in the London of the 1960's, it was a time when early music was really being discovered. Most concerts had music of the Classical time and Romantic time, and occasionally some contemporary music. But, in the 1960's, so many things changed in the world, as you know. It was just after the Cuban Revolution, but it was also a time of reevaluating society in the United States, in Europe and elsewhere - in Latin America too, of course.

With that reappraisal came all sorts of ideas about repertoire, because the standard repertoire was getting a little bit stale. So, people started to look to the Mediaeval period and the Renaissance, and it became tremendously popular in London, there were so many groups. People like David Munrow, of course, was one of the leading lights of that: to have this kind of almost anti-music.

It became quite a cool thing along with *The Beatles* and *The Rolling Stones*... Mediaeval music and Renaissance music became a really cool activity, and certainly in London. I remember going to the concerts of those groups and there were thousands of people there, it was completely packed out!

When I say anti-music, I mean, for example, the singers. They didn't "know" how to sing: they just sang. So, they weren't trained operatic voices. They were completely natural. Sometimes quite raucous, a sharp kind of voice.

That was seen as part of a kind of a revolution in musical taste, in the 60's. But of course with that also went the fringe groups such as (I don't know if you know them) *The Swingle Singers*...

**MH:** Yes, of course!

**WR:** They are wonderful! And Jacques Loussier, the pianist, who played jazz-Bach. That was quite disturbing for some members of the musical community. You felt that it was being almost kind of like a blasphemy to take the music of Bach and make light of it. But actually what they were doing was making light of something which was light, instead of making it really heavy.

I remember going to concerts in London of one of the big orchestras... They played Brandenburg 3 with I can't remember how many per part, but that certainly wasn't one to a part - it was like six or seven to a part. Necessarily, therefore, the tempo was really quite slow and the whole thing was very heavy and turgid. You could hear they didn't know what reference, from the point of view of the sound world, to go to. Their reference was, I guess, Bruckner and Wagner, really, and that is kind of how it sounded.

If you listen to recordings - it is really fun to do, actually - of Furtwangler conducting Bach and Handel for a while you think: "What is this piece? It reminds me of something!". Then you realise it is a piece that you played 150 times, but just don't recognize because the sound world is so different.

People don't realise the Dolmetsch family were actually an amazing group of pioneers. They did all sorts of extraordinary things, including playing old pianos and even fortepianos. They knew more about pedalling on fortepianos than most pianists do today (I mean, with the conventions of the historical time).

So, "what is *Early Music*?" I don't know, actually. I would rather talk about it, or describe it if you like, as a historical performance, when one is trying to find how that music was performed. It doesn't necessarily relate to its period, whether it is Baroque, Classical, or Romantic. In Europe, and certainly in London, now there are orchestras playing Bruckner and Mahler on period instruments, or even Stravinsky.

**MH:** Is it still a movement?

**WR:** Hum... much less than it was. There was a time when people who played on historical instruments... First of all, a lot of them, actually, couldn't really play very well, because that was all so new and they didn't quite know what to do (I am talking about not only string instruments, but the wind instruments as well).

At that time, it was very much controversial, whether it was worth going back to old instruments. The making of instruments could be considered a process of progress. Therefore, the later the instrument, the more high-tech and better it was. There was quite a huge polemic about that. There were all sorts of people in the modern instrument world who really condemned *Early Music*. I heard Isaac Stern talking about *Early Music* as a crime, because that was so much against the way he felt music to be.

But it is interesting, Marcus, because I remember the very first time I heard any major piece of Bach. It was the St. John Passion, and it was played by the local amateur orchestra in the town where I lived in England, and the local amateur choir. They knew nothing about historical performance, but I couldn't speak for two weeks after that! It had such a major

impact... So, we have to be careful that we don't condemn that way of playing in the way that some of them condemn our way of playing, especially with Bach.

Bach is the great survivor. You can't kill Bach's message. You could play Bach on a jazz piano or, like we talked, as *The Swingle Singers* or you can play on an old instrument. You can't actually kill Bach. You can kill other baroque composers, but you can't kill Bach. There was that huge division within the musical world. I remember someone coming up to me in the street with a really great pianist. We played the Dvorak Piano Quintet together and then I played, on the baroque violin, some Bach's sonatas. He wasn't even there, but he had heard about it and came to me and said: "What are you doing playing this?!". He just hated it.

But that time has passed, and there is a tremendous cross-over. You can hear so-called modern orchestras playing, sometimes with the baroque bow sometimes not, and you think: "Hum, that is really stylistically great!". It is not how they used to play. You get great conductors, like Simon Rattle, conducting period instrument groups. And you have wonderful violinists, like Isabelle Faust, for example. She is not a baroque violinist, but she plays Bach beautifully on gut strings, on a baroque violin. There are lots of others too, even people who you might consider to be at the heart of the traditional musical establishment. András Schiff, for example: an amazing - amazing! - musician, an incredible brain. He recorded Schubert's piano music on a modern piano, and he was quite dismissive of the old piano. But then, he actually got to realise that most of Schubert's piano music is *piano* or *pianissimo*, or quite a lot of the other way! He started playing around on old pianos and realised he was wrong, and had understood that playing Schubert on Schubert's piano gave it a completely different dimension. He actually recorded another double-CD of Schubert's music on an old appropriate Schubert piano. Even Daniel Barenboim has got this strange instrument that he got Steinway to build for him, which isn't exactly a massive great big black machine. It is smaller and its design is slightly different, so it has a slightly lighter touch and a lighter sound.

So, this division between those who were in the historical performance and those who weren't is really crossed over now. It is true - and it is important to say - in conservatories as well. I remember teachers who were completely dismissive of what I did, teaching the baroque violin, and would never let their students come to me, and others who thought: "Yes, it should be part of their training, number 1; and number 2: you learn music in a completely different way". So, actually, learning *Early Music* is good for later repertoire as well, and it is good for a healthy way of playing the instrument: much more free, much less pedantic.

At the conservatories I work in, here in London and in The Hague, the division between the two departments is gradually disappearing. The other day I did a class in The Hague for only modern viola players (they were all playing Bach, of course!), and the teachers just asked me to do that, because they wanted to give their students, who are in the modern department, a taste of what we do and why we do it. I am doing the same next week in London (again... Bach classes! They don't play other repertoires, which is a shame). They have to play some sort of baroque piece as part of their course now, and I am the one who comes to help them, to give some sort of ideas.

So, I think the boundaries are not as tightly drawn as they used to be.

**MH:** How do you feel about teaching non-conservatory music at a conservatory?

**WR:** I love it. I absolutely adore doing that. It is so nice to see the students questioning things that they have accepted. The students are almost always as open minded as their teachers, or more. I love working with modern instruments. My generation, we all started by playing on the modern violin - there wasn't anything else, really. So we came to it gradually. I, personally, used to play in a group where we played Bach cantatas every weekend. They were forcing me to play in a way that I really didn't want to play: lots of vibrato, lots of intensity even when it was something much more joyful. Older generations musicians actually don't do joy in music. They think that joy is superficial. Bach definitely wouldn't agree with that.

So I got a baroque bow and started playing on my modern violin with it, and eventually I came to the conclusion that I wanted to go a bit further than that. I got myself a baroque violin and played it pretty much like a modern violin and then gradually... etc. So it was an "evolution". Nowadays, you can make a decision: if you want to study, then you get to a conservatory and you study. But that "evolution" is something that I was very keen on. Look, 90%... no, 99% of what I talk about when I work with modern players is just the music. It is just about music. Really! I might bring in a couple of quotations or I might say "someone says about this etc.", but most of it is just how to make the music sound convincing.

I guess you could say, very generally speaking, the difference between the 18th century way of learning the violin and the 20th or the 19th even way of learning the violin (I talk about the violin because it is my instrument) is this. But, in the 18th century, the technical details

come from the expression desired. If you read any of the treatises about how to play the violin, they actually don't talk much about how to do it! None of that gives you much information about specific things to do, and that is because they weren't into these specific things! You played the music and made it sound in the most interesting way and the most expressive way. At a certain point, when they were trying to make a method out of playing, that was after the French Revolution, when they made their first *methode* with Viotti, Baillot, Kreutzer and all these guys sitting around the table saying "let's make a method out of it".

That was tremendously useful in some ways and extremely destructive in other ways, because the modern way of learning the violin is to learn those technical skills and then in some way to come from that to the music. Actually it is an impossibility. The sound has got to come from the imagination, and not imposed by some kind of technical thing.

We learn certain things like... *detaché*. I mean, what the hell is *detaché*? It is just a bow going up and down, and yet we spend so much time practising it in an abstract way. Then, we discover that actually it is not possible to play rhetorical music like that, because the physical body is dictating the music instead of the other way around.

This turning point when you learn so-called technique and then you plaster all that on to the music is completely ridiculous. I don't even know to what musical period it can successfully be applied. I was doing a project in Rotterdam two years ago, and there was a girl practising, in the interval, the Prokofiev solo sonata. Every note was absolutely perfect and beautifully vibrated... and that is an example of how to kill the piece of music: to make all the notes the same! So, I don't think it is really applicable to any music. Somehow, it kind of works for the modern ear playing in the modern way. That is not so controversial, but it simply doesn't work, because the music of the past - of the 17th and the 18th centuries - simply wasn't written that way. I can't remember what the question was, Marcus!

**MH:** Walter, thank you for your answer! About your book: it reminds me of a very long British tradition of instrumental tutors, or companions (such as Playford's *An Introduction to the Skill of Music* and *Apollo's Banquet*. Also, we must remember Francesco Geminiani's treatise, *The Art of Playing on the Violin* (1751) - which is the first of the epigraphs contained in your book . Would it be a contemporary approach to this tradition?

**WR:** Inevitably, because I was not born in the 1700's. The pioneers, if you like, of the early violin movement or *Early Music* movement were seeking to distance themselves from what they heard around them. That was a really difficult thing to do. So, they got into a certain mindset and made certain research conclusions which were very historically based, for sure, but still partly influenced by that feeling that they had to break away from the Romantic tradition.

We don't have to do that anymore. In a sense, they established a certain way of playing - which is their way of playing - and isn't necessarily (and isn't definitely!) the only way of playing, but it was perceived to be, for a long time. So, baroque violin had to sound in a certain way, otherwise it wasn't really "baroque" violin. It is, of course, completely in itself unhistorical. First of all, because we don't know how people played. We have to be honest - we don't know how people played. We only know how a few people - a very few people! - thought it should be played and, even then, there is very, very little information.

What we are really talking about is an oral tradition. How many people actually read Geminiani or Leopold Mozart? Very few. We are talking about musical traditions, a whole set of traditions in different places and different times, which were influenced by specific masters who taught pupils, and they passed on their knowledge like everybody does: transmuted in some way and made their own. So, there is a huge diversity of styles of playing music throughout that 150, maybe even 200 years, if we would say going to the Classical period. To say that there is such a thing as the baroque violin can't be true today. We say there were lots of people experimenting with bringing that sort of information into their way of playing.

You mentioned a couple of the very early treatises. There is absolutely nothing in them about playing the violin: about the technical side of it, very little about expression, something in terms of bowings. That information varied from performer to performer, and therefore from teacher to teacher. It was part of the oral tradition. Tartini, for example, wrote books, but never wrote one about really how to play the violin from A to Z. For example, how to change positions he said "some people do like this, some people do like that - do what works, basically". That is what I tell my students: "do what works", showing them the different ways. The only person who says anything about it at all, really, is Geminiani (how to shift). Leopold Mozart wrote a whole chapter about positions, and even about fingerings between the different positions, but he didn't actually tell you how to do it. Either they didn't care, or they simply had their own



way of doing things. They didn't divulge and, after a while, gradually, that information disappeared.

It is up to us, especially as teachers, to find ways of integrating what information we have with what it seems to work for each individual student. I never imposed things upon students. I always try to get them to do things in different ways and then decide for themselves which way things work. Hands are different, training is different... Some people have very long necks, which means they can't hold, and some people have very short necks, which mean they can. So, why would somebody who has a short neck not hold if it is so easy to do so?

On that subject, there is nobody that actually says, as far as I am aware, nobody actually writes in a treatise "you must not touch it with your chin". Nobody says that. A few people say "you should", and most people don't mention it. Some people are slightly ambiguous about it, but nobody says "don't touch it with your chin", which is one of the rules that some people held and still holds - and the tradition of pupils often still insist that the violin is never touched with the chin. But this is not historical.

Somehow, in the book, I bring as much historical information as possible, but I try to fill in the gaps through my own experience not only of playing, of course, but of teaching, as well. And of course a lot of it is deeply personal, as I say right in the beginning. The book is not called "How to play the violin". It is called "50 lessons in". So, if you want to study with me, you can come to The Hague and pay sums of money over the period of 5 or 6 years, or you can learn from that book, or a combination of the two. Basically, it is a series of violin lessons. There isn't anything quite like that (that has ever been written). I don't think anyone would be quite as crazy as me...

**MH:** [Laughs...] Walter, in both volumes, you are always mentioning vocal music. Your course even begins with it. What should a modern player expect about this "not-so-obvious" approach?

**WR:** Marcus, it should be absolutely obvious. It is the most basic and obvious thing! You know, we developed a science out of what it already is. One of my favourite tricks was students who asked how to do things. I say: "Look, just walk around your music stand". They might think I am a bit crazy... so they walk around their music stand, and I say: "That is amazing! How did

you do that?". Think about: if you have two feet and they are going like that [demonstrates], logically one foot - in this case, the left foot - has to go further than the right foot. How do you do that? How do you control where your feet are going in? The muscles in the feet and all the features are an incredibly complicated thing if you saw the map of the feet. It is an incredible technical achievement!

That is, of course, ridiculous! But, a lot of modern pedagogy is based on the idea that you have to know how you do things, that you have to know exactly what movements and how the brain is communicating with the feet or whatever to do that simple movement. Actually, you don't have to do that. You can just go straight to the sound, and the way I teach is a really baby's way. Number 1: you have to look at the text and decide in your mind what you want (when I say "in your mind", I don't mean intellectually, but I mean the sound that you want), because music is sound. That is all it is. It isn't anything else. We make up abstractions from intellectual constructs. We say "this is a phrase, this is a *crescendo*, this is a *diminuendo*", but they are all descriptions of what sound actually does.

You have to have, from your imagination, an idea of how the music goes from this point. If you don't, you can practice all your life and it will never get you anywhere. If you don't know where you are going, you are completely stuck. The point is: people do know! They just want to accept that they know. They are tricked into the idea that there must be a way of doing things, and I don't believe that. Of course there are basics, obviously. If you have a really bad hand position, you can't play and so on. There are barriers that teachers have to deal with.

The "how?" is not nearly as important as the "where does it come from?", and it comes from your imagination. My students know 99% of the things that they want me to tell them. They already know. They already know that this phrase goes like this or like that. That is how it goes, but they say "how do we do that?". You find it! You find the sound! And, if you found the sound, you must have found the technique. You don't have to know what it is, but you must have found it, just like you don't have to know how you go round in a circle. You just found that sound. That is true for modern violin or anything else.

To a large extent, what we do is: we see how things go, we see how the movements make that sound work and then we study the movements. Does that make sense? I don't think it does. If you find the sound, then you must have found the technique. You don't have to say: "well, if the bow goes this way, at this speed, and then it accelerates by this much and with that

much pressure...". You get crazy. That is why you hear a lot of people who play in a very technical way and can't actually play a simple melody the way they wanted.

One of my favourite tricks: you get someone to sing it to themselves, to imagine it, and then they play it and you ask: "How near to your intention was the execution?". You learn a lot of the psychology of the person, because, for example, I remember an Italian guy who said "0,0001" and another one, from Venezuela, "hum... 9, maybe 9,5" out of 10. So, you learn a lot about the person. Point is: if it is not pretty much 10, then you simply haven't done the work. You have to find that sound. It is quite hard to find it, but you get used to looking for it and working towards that sound. Then you know what is naturally musical!

All the students I have helped are naturally musical, but they don't trust themselves, because they have been "indoctrinated" in thinking that there must be a why to everything, and that learning involves learning the whys and how to do things.

That is very important: just find the sound that you want and you will find the way to play it. Then, you develop confidence in yourself, which a lot of people don't have because they are not doing things right, especially in *Early Music*. Like if there is some magic formula of "you must do this, you mustn't do that". There are lots of rules... "Am I allowed to do this?", people say to me.

**MH:** Normally, I see, with my own students, that their practising and playing are all about rights and wrongs. It is very sad to see this, actually.

**WR:** Yes, they are kind of victimised. Everything that you study, when you practice, it has to have an artistic aim. If you practice something, you get to do it. That is the theory, anyway. If you practice playing like a robot, you become a robot. For example, if you practice Schradiek (which is a very good exercise for the hand) with all notes the same, like a robot, then you land up playing like a robot. You don't have to do that. You can even play absolutely in rhythm, but play with different touches of the fingers that come down and go up. They actually express a musical phrase, and then you can use that. You have got to use a little extra information in your palette of skills which you can actually use. That applies to all the scales, arpeggios, *etudes* and everything you play. If you play them because you want to get the technique right, you are

simply going in the wrong way. You are losing touch with your own voice. A massive catastrophe.

You hear people, even incredible people, playing Paganini and all these sorts of things, and it sounds completely robotic. Then, you think "oh, this is not a very musical person"... I don't believe that is true. You can't play that if you are "not musical", plus I don't know what "not musical" means. But they can be played too drilled to become technical robots. That is very easy, and they lose contact with their inner voice and, then, they are completely stuck.

**MH:** You have been collaborating with many modern-instrument ensembles, symphony orchestras and, most importantly, young and student orchestras. Could you tell us about this experience, especially in Cuba?

**WR:** I was playing in a festival in Slovakia (a beautiful country, by the way). I didn't know any Cubans nor had already met any Cubans, but then a group of Renaissance instruments (well, they were mostly singers) from Cuba arrived and they immediately started hugging everyone, the way that Cubans do, which I particularly love in Latin Americans.

**MH:** We also do that!

**WR:** Yes, you have never met anyone before and the first thing you do is hug. I love that, but it is very dangerous nowadays. If you do that in the US, they lock you up. Anyway, they were a group called *Ars Longa*, founded maybe 25 years ago specifically to gather at it and perform and record Cuban music from the 17th and the 18th centuries, mostly from the Cathedral of Santiago, where it became. Then it spread out: they went to all sorts of other places, like Mexico City, Guatemala... A very, very good group. Wonderful singers. They had a few instrumentalists too, a couple of violinists, playing on gut strings. One of the violinists came to me and said: "Oh, could you give us a lesson?".

I had very little time to do that, because the schedule didn't permit it, but I gave them an hour-long lesson and they said: "You have got to come to Cuba!". Yes, Ok, I can come to Cuba - who would say no? My wife is a Soprano, and was also in that concert, and the singers came

and asked her for a lesson. She had the same amount of time as me and they said the same thing to her. We never thought anything becoming of it, but it did: we got invited to come and teach in Cuba, and had no idea of what to expect. I didn't really know anything about Cuba. I knew about Hemingway and Che Guevarra. That was all I got like everybody who lived in the 60's did. We didn't know what to expect...

They actually have a festival - *Musica Antigua* - every year, so we went to that. I just had a week there, and decided I was going to come with a program of music that they couldn't possibly have heard of, such as Biber, Schmelzer and stuff like that (there were some Bach). They got together, maybe 10 musicians, who had absolutely no idea of anything. We did this little course and concert, and they were completely thrilled. I was incredibly impressed: how easily they adapted, how quickly they learned! Within a week, it sounded pretty damn good.

So I thought: "Well, maybe it would be interesting to come and try to do something again!". It was difficult to find people to sponsor me. I didn't make any money out of it, but at least it got my expenses, and that is pretty considerable. The second time it was a university in Spain that has a Latin American music program that sponsored me. Then we did another concert and the French Ambassador came along and asked "how can I help?" and so I said "sponsor me" and they said "Ok".

After the second time (maybe after the first time) I was really having an idea: wouldn't it be great to start a baroque orchestra in Cuba? And why not? They have wonderfully trained instrumentalists. For sure the instrumental standard is very high, and they also have this very, very flexible mind. I think that comes from the fact they don't have any distinction between genres. Someone who is a classical pianist can still play in a bar at night; or someone who is a classical violinist can still play jazz. I was shocked, actually, because I know that Cuba is a centre of Jazz - Wynton Marsalis went there and said that, after New York, it is Havana. So I wanted to find where the Jazz department was at the conservatory and they told me: "We don't have one!".

**MH:** Maybe they don't need one.

**WR:** Exactly! They don't need one. They just do it. I found it amazing, and I think that is why they were much more flexible: if you get them to play in the baroque way, then they play in the

baroque way. 20 minutes is usually enough to get someone playing from a recording of Rostropovich to something different, and it sticks.

We began to have quite a lot of interest. In Cuba (it can sound paradoxical, ironic or even cruel), they don't have any money. They have nothing. When I say they have nothing, I say they didn't have enough to eat. They live in dreadful housing conditions. What they do have is time. And they have music. That is their whole lives.

After this first time I went there, the second project was actually in cooperation with the conservatory. We did a real baroque program. There was another orchestra that asked me to come, so the project gradually got longer. Instead of one week usually, it was two weeks (a project per week). This orchestra got larger and larger until we decided "well, let's try doing some Classical music too". So we did all Mozart's symphonies and we did Beethoven just once, and Schubert.

I used to teach in the mornings and then did the orchestra in the afternoons. It was all very intense, and it was all in Spanish, which I didn't speak in the beginning, hardly any. I had to learn. Plus, it was incredibly hot, the air conditioning usually didn't work. It was a huge amount of work, but incredibly satisfying, because they are unbelievably good musicians.

I managed to get a couple to come to study in The Hague. It was really difficult, because, as I said, they had no money. You have to try to find scholarships and things, and have to convince people that they are outstandingly talented. Which they are, but there are a lot of other people, too.

It is a place where I grew to really, really love. I have lots of really good friends there. Many of them are not there anymore: they are in all sorts of places... in Germany, in Spain or the US, of course. It was an amazing adventure. I never quite got round to forming *the* Cuban baroque orchestra, but there are lots of people, there are lots of groups that play baroque music in Cuba.

**MH:** Thank you for the interview!

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