



Jacob ter Veldhuis

## Jacob ter Veldhuis (b. 1951)

*premiere recording*

### Paradiso

A video oratorio for soprano, tenor, sampler, female choir and orchestra

Text by Dante Alighieri and Jacob ter Veldhuis  
First performed on 12 September 2001 at the Helpman Centrale, Groningen, The Netherlands

1	I To Ignition	3:26
2	II Aurora	6:11
3	III Cielo del Sole	2:36
4	IV Cielo della Luna	1:55
5	V Heaven on Earth	10:54
6	VI A Sound from Heaven!	3:50
7	VII Garden of Eden	6:42
8	VIII Heaven of Love	3:53
9	IX Heaven of Lust	3:10
10	X Cielo di Saturno	1:40
11	XI Heaven of Religion	4:47

12	XII	Nirvana	2:43
13	XIII	Luce Divina	5:30
14	XIV	Heaven of Narcotics	2:28
15	XV	Primo Mobile	8:54
16	XVI	Empireo	4:19

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**Claron McFadden** soprano – Beatrice  
**Tom Allen** tenor – Dante  
**Karel Gerritsma** sampler  
**Pulsatu** video  
**North Netherlands Concert Choir**  
**Leendert Runia** chief director  
**North Netherlands Orchestra**  
**Alexander Liebreich**

## Jacob ter Veldhuis: Paradiso

12, 13 and 14 September 2001: the North Netherlands Orchestra and the North Netherlands Concert Choir, under the direction of Alexander Liebreich, performed the premiere of the video oratorio *Paradiso* for soprano, tenor, sampler, female choir and orchestra, composed by Jacob ter Veldhuis with videos by Pulsatu. The soloists were the soprano Claron McFadden as Beatrice, the tenor Tom Allen as Dante and Karel Gerritsma on the sampler.

*Paradiso* is a journey in search of beauty and harmony, of ecstasy and bliss, in which music and images are 'heavenly' in the literal sense of the word: a full-length audiovisual performance based on Dante's *Divina Commedia*.

Jacob ter Veldhuis was fed up with the 'doom and damnation' that he saw in so much contemporary art:

I decided really to dig in my heels against this trend. Since the second half of the twentieth century, art has become consistently more conceptual and hostile. Modern artists sometimes remind me of orthodox preachers, whose sole desire is to hammer into us how depraved the world is. Art is supposedly able to transform suffering into beauty. But what is beauty? The lust for dissonance in contemporary music is hardly what I would call 'aesthetically pleasing';

dissonance has, in my opinion, been totally devalued as a manner of expression.

It is partly due to this aversion that I have been composing more and more melodiously in recent years. I developed my colour palette of light blue, pink and orange because of the limitless potential for expression that this combination offers. I spice my music with sugar.

I am moved by the tragedy of human shortcomings and the suffering this can bring about. But instead of commenting on it with tormented, cynical sounds, I prefer to sublimate that suffering by striving for crystal-clear, unearthly and perfect musical beauty that can arouse passion and ecstasy. To quote Rilke: 'beauty is the terrifying beginning, that we can only just manage to bear, and that we admire so much because it stoically refuses to abandon us.'

The idea arose to write a large-scale multimedia work along these lines, not only as a statement with regard to modernism, but primarily from a primitive need for Utopian beauty and harmony. 'Paradise' means literally 'enclosed space' in ancient Greek. The human spirit strives to 'feel good' and to avoid pain. Paradise is an age-old human invention, an imaginary world where death and pain do not exist. It is a permanent state of ecstasy.

The third book of the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, 'Paradiso', was an ideal source of inspiration for me.

On their journey to paradise, in the vision of ter Veldhuis, Dante and his beloved, Beatrice, visit the Earthly Paradise, the Garden of Eden, the Heavens of Love and Lust, the Heaven of Religion and the Heavens of Drugs, Nirvana and more. Among those they meet along the way are thunderstruck Apollo astronauts, passionate American television evangelists and the heavily drugged-out trumpet player Chet Baker. Finally they enter the ultimate, the Imperium, the Heaven of Light, where thousands of angels sing for eternity around the Throne of God...

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\*Rainer Maria Rilke, *Erste Duineser Elegie*

### The Making of 'Paradiso'

The idea for *Paradiso* originated as far back as 1988, during a visit to Florence. It came to me, if I remember correctly, as I stood admiring Ghiberti's famous doors of the Baptistery of the Duomo, the 'Gate of Paradise'. I was so inspired by that impression of paradise that I decided then and there to read 'Paradiso', the third book of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. In the years that followed I selected what I considered the most beautiful

passages, those in which Dante describes the beauty of paradise and the heavenly light. Then I composed a number of preliminary studies for choir a *cappella* (*Paradiso I* and *Sempre l'Amor*) and for baritone and chamber orchestra (*Paradiso II*), all of which were performed a number of times. I grew increasingly confident in my ability to compose music that did justice to the heavenly harmony which Dante describes: mellifluous, 'ultra-tonal' music, almost entirely free of dissonances.

At the end of the 1990s the time seemed ripe really to get down to work; it was to become an audio-visual spectacle, an oratorio (because of the spiritual nature of the text) that should focus on the heavenly light. I sought contact with a number of visual artists, and managed to interest one of my favourite Dutch video artists, Jaap Drupsteen (he and his son Floris form the VJ duo Pulsatu), in my project. The oratorio had acquired a clear conceptual outline, but now we had to secure a commission and organise performances. The composition of *Paradiso* would 'keep me off the streets' for at least a year, so it would only make sense to begin composing in earnest if there was an orchestra prepared to take on the production. The North Netherlands Orchestra agreed to perform *Paradiso* as part of an architectural festival in Groningen. The Groningen City Council commissioned Pulsatu to produce the videos, and in the meantime I

had secured a composition commission from the Fund for the Creation of Music. A gigantic power plant called Helpman Centrale, which had fallen into disuse, was to be converted into a concert hall for the production of the oratorio. The acoustics of this venue – with a reverberation time of eleven seconds! – were thoroughly unsuitable, however, but I was afforded a luxury usually unthinkable for a composer: the hall's acoustics were adapted to conform to my requirements. The reverberation time was brought down to five seconds, perfect for *Paradiso*.

The music was completed in 2000 and the videos at the beginning of 2001. Rehearsals for the production began in early September 2001, under sometimes disagreeable conditions due to the thoroughly incompetent festival organisation. The pretentious projection screen was completely unsatisfactory, the stage was far too small for the 125 musicians, and there was not a puff of heat in the hall. The orchestra, reasonably, refused to play. But in the end the enthusiasm and determination of all those involved, on stage as well as behind the scenes (thanks also to a set of hastily installed forced-air heaters), raised everyone's hopes for a successful premiere.

And then came 11 September.

We were shocked to hear of the terrorist attacks in the United States. I was sure this

would mean the end of *Paradiso*. Like many others I could barely concentrate on anything except the hell that had broken loose in America. Who, indeed, could focus his thoughts on the beauty of paradise under these bizarre circumstances? Moreover, both soloists were Americans. But Claron McFadden and Tom Allen insisted on singing. On the morning of 12 September – a sober dress rehearsal indeed – I received a telephone call from a city councillor who asked, on behalf of the mayor of Groningen, if it was appropriate to go ahead with the performance of *Paradiso*, particularly as several governmental VIPs were to be in the audience. Officials wanted more details of the content and tone of my oratorio. Moved as I was by the situation, I explained that an essential aspect of *Paradiso* was 'mankind's inability to reach paradise'. We realised that the oratorio would, under these new circumstances, be experienced in an entirely different light, and that it could perhaps offer some solace in these dark and confusing days. It was decided that the premiere should take place as planned, that we would remember the victims of the recent attacks with a minute's silence before the performance and, if possible, avoid applause after it. The last objective was in vain, for before the final chord – which I had so hoped would induce a 'heavenly silence' – had died away, the audience was on its feet, applauding

heartily. For three evenings, performances of *Paradiso* were nearly sold out.

Audio and video recordings were made of the work, resulting in this CD/DVD and making it possible for the wider public to enjoy a fine rendering of the video oratorio *Paradiso*, performed under extraordinary circumstances and with unparalleled enthusiasm.

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#### Paradiso: Contents in brief

##### I. To Ignition

Dante's long journey through Hell has come to an end. He is allowed to ascend further. Free from the earth he rises to the heavenly spheres and is thus a witness to the Apollo 12 expedition to the moon.

##### II. Aurora

The journey begins at night on a beach at the foot of Mt Purgatory, a fiery mountain which must be climbed to cleanse the soul. Two suns begin their trek through the firmament. Dante climbs the mountain, drawn on by his beloved, Beatrice, who sings to him from higher spheres.

##### III. Cielo del Sole

As the astronauts land on the moon, Dante arrives in the Heaven of the Sun. In the

blistering heat he holds his lost beloved Beatrice in his arms once again.

##### IV. Cielo della Luna

Dante and Beatrice continue their journey together, heading for the Heaven of the Moon, where they and the Apollo crew enjoy the thrilling sights of the lunar landscape.

##### V. Heaven on Earth

The couple now arrive in the Heaven of Materialism, our modern consumer society, where earthly wishes are fulfilled. Beatrice's eyes reflect the opulence and glitter. Every soul can partake of the riches and abundance. Occasionally they hear another voice, the voice of an evangelist speaking of an earthly Vale of Tears. Dante and Beatrice sing a duet, an invocation to the Threefold Light that shines on the earthly storms.

##### VI. A Sound from Heaven!

They enter a cathedral where a young evangelist tells of a Heavenly Sound:

If you could see into the port of the glory, into the spirit world, and it was open to you right now and you could see what was going on in the heaven, let me tell you: they're shoutin', they're runnin' in the aisles, they're leapin', they're jumpin', they're riotin', they're sayin' Glory to God, Hallelujah!

##### VII. Garden of Eden

Strengthened by this message, the couple reach the Garden of Eden at the top of Mt Purgatory. Eternal peace, tranquillity and innocence reign here: 'There is no suffering, sadness, thirst or hunger, everything here is determined by an eternal law.' In the distance they can make out the presence of God, and they attempt to enter the glow of His light. There, angels are enveloped in the light of the elements: fire and lightning. Dante is struck blind, not only by the light but by Beatrice's beauty. This, however, is the Light of Love, which clarifies and deepens his understanding.

##### VIII. Heaven of Love

In the Heaven of Love, Dante and Beatrice proclaim their love for each other. 'As long as Paradise endures, so long shall our love surround us with these gowns of radiance.'

##### IX. Heaven of Lust

In the Paradise of Sensuality, Beatrice abandons herself to physical pleasures with gusto. The chaste and modest Dante turns away in embarrassment. Beatrice, feeling purified by a great transport of rapture, experiences the Heavenly Light.

##### X. Cielo di Saturno

Eternal spring and human innocence are among the delights of the Heaven of Saturn.

It reveals itself to Dante in huge crystal shapes within which a ladder ascends to the following Heaven.

##### XI. Heaven of Religion

In the imposing Heaven of Religion, the souls of the church congregations drift upward. They are encouraged by a preaching 'sinner', who declares Nirvana unreachable for ordinary mortals. Human beings, he claims, are a 'poisoned seed from a corrupt tree'. Yet the Triumph of Christ can rescue man from sin. Angels sing the all-encompassing Glory of God.

##### XII. Nirvana

Images of the previous Heavens shimmer in the endless Nirvana. The concrete scenes melt into abstract Mandalas. Dante is so hypnotised that he loses consciousness.

##### XIII. Luce Divina

In the Heaven of Divine Light we approach the Throne of God. Here the soul is welcomed by angels dancing in eternal joy.

##### XIV. Heaven of Narcotics

The Heaven of Narcotics is for the souls given over to the high. Here, too, is the considerably stoned trumpet player Chet Baker, who sings the praises of narcotics:

kinda put myself in a trance... I guess they call it

a speed bowl... it was a dream, you know... things like that don't happen... there's pain in my heart... every memory I'll keep... may this bliss never end...

#### XV. Primo Mobile

Beatrice rejoins the Saints of the Canopy of Heaven. In the guise of an angel she leads Dante to the heart of the never-fading Rose of Heaven. Dante sings:

Oh radiance of God, by which I saw the exalted triumph of the Realm of Truth, lend me the power to express in words what I have beheld...

#### XVI. Empireo

The Gate of Heaven opens... How can any other sound be heard than the most beautiful Amen in the history of Western music? We hear the final bars of the Credo from Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* accompanying the last verses of the *Divina Commedia*:

Had not a flash darted athwart my mind, and in the spleen unfolded what it sought. Here vigour failed the towering fantasy: but yet the will rolled onward, like a wheel in even motion, by the Love impelled that moves the sun in heaven and all the stars.

There is only Light and finally: silence.

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Born in 1951, **Jacob ter Veldhuis** began his career in rock music and studied composition and electronic music at the Groningen Conservatory, where in 1980 he was awarded the Composition Prize. His compositions represent a colourful mix of musical cultures, making innovative use of electronics and incorporating audio samples from the Gulf War, Chet Baker or the Jerry Springer Show. The four-day Jacob ter Veldhuis Festival in Rotterdam in 2001 attracted large audiences, and many choreographers have been inspired by his compositions; the Dutch choreographer Hans van Manen alone has produced three ballets to his music. Still a controversial figure in certain circles, Jacob ter Veldhuis strives to liberate new music from its isolation by avoiding the techniques of the 'washed-out avant-garde' and employing instead a direct, at times provocative, idiom that spurns 'the dissonant' and gratifies the ear. Among his popular works are *Goldrush* and the *Goldrush Concerto*, recorded for Chandos, as well as string quartets, and various works for instruments in combination with a ghetto blaster, such as *Grab it!*, *Tatatata* and *Heartbreakers*, in which human speech from everyday life is reproduced. Jacob ter Veldhuis has written for James Galway, the Safri Duo, Aurelia Saxophone Quartet, Houdinis, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Netherlands Winds Ensemble and many others.

The soprano **Claron McFadden** studied voice at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York and has made important appearances at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, The Netherlands Opera, and at the Salzburg Festival. Her operatic repertoire includes *Susanna (Le nozze di Figaro)*, the Queen of the Night (*Die Zauberflöte*), *Musetta (La bohème)*, *Zerbinetta (Ariadne auf Naxos)*, the coloratura roles in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, the title role of *Lulu*, *Constance (Dialogues des Carmélites)*, *Tytania (A Midsummer Night's Dream)* and the Controller (Jonathan Dove's *Flight*). Active on the concert stage throughout Europe, she has performed Mozart's Requiem, *Pierrot lunaire*, *Carmina Burana* and, at the opening of the 1999 BBC Proms under Sir Andrew Davis, Tippett's *The Mask of Time*. She is closely associated with the music of Dirk Brossé and Sir Harrison Birtwistle, and recently appeared in the world premiere of *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* by Kris Defoort.

The Chicago-born tenor **Tom Allen** studied English and American literature at Davidson College in North Carolina, then voice with Mignon Dunn at the Manhattan School of Music. He performed with the New York Philharmonic under Kurt Masur in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and soon after won first

prize in the Musica Sacra Bach Competition. He made his operatic debut in 1994 as Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*) with New Israeli Opera in Tel Aviv and, following his German operatic debut in Darmstadt, won top prize for male singers at the Salzburg Mozart Competition. Guest engagements followed in Germany, Austria and Switzerland in operas by Rameau, Haydn, Rossini and Bellini. As a concert soloist Tom Allen performs with orchestras such as the Gewandhausorchester in Leipzig, Dresdner Philharmonie, Akademie für Alte Musik in Berlin and Toronto Symphony Orchestra. His concert repertoire includes all the major oratorios of Bach, Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn.

Born in the Hague in 1954, **Karel Gerritsma** studied piano at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague and at the conservatories of Groningen and Paris. He has performed concerts and solo recitals in The Netherlands and abroad, and accompanied master-classes given by Elly Ameling and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Having become a specialist in electronic music, he joined the team at Joop van den Ende Theatre Productions in 1990, performing the piano and keyboard parts in the musicals *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, *Blood Brothers*, *Elisabeth* and Sir Elton John's *Aida*. Karel Gerritsma has accompanied international artists such as

Lionel Richie, Lara Fabian, Alessandro Safina and Geri Halliwell in Dutch television broadcasts.

**Pulsatu** is a company committed to creating visuals for all kinds of music. Co-founder Floris Drupsteen held various jobs in the multimedia field before working in the studio of his father, Jaap Drupsteen, where he was able to realise his ambition of becoming a VJ, combining the know-how and skills gained as a youth and entrepreneur with the use of well-designed material and the best possible technical facilities. His father, a video and television presenter, had directed a number of innovative music programmes for television, as well as designing the current Dutch passport and former banknotes. Together they amassed a wealth of experience executing huge video projections before audiences numbering in the thousands, in Amsterdam clubs, Hemkade in Zaanstad, Heineken Music Hall and Thialf Stadium. Pulsatu has also accompanied music by De Volharding and collaborated with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra at the Holland Festival.

Since 1990 the North Netherlands Orchestra has had its own choir, the **North Netherlands Concert Choir** (Noord Nederlands Concert Koor), whose current Chief Director is Leendert Runia. Made up of approximately

one hundred amateur vocalists from Friesland, Drenthe and Groningen, the Choir has built up a broad repertoire, ranging from baroque to contemporary music, and collaborations with renowned conductors and international soloists have resulted in productions that have inspired Choir, Orchestra and audiences alike. The Choir's very first concert, led by Jacek Kasprzyk, was an immediate success, and performances of works such as Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*, Brahms's *Nänie* and *Gesang der Parzen*, Mahler's *Symphony No. 2*, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, Mozart's *Litaniae laetanae*, Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater* and Stravinsky's *Perséphone* have contributed to the artistic growth of the Choir.

The **North Netherlands Orchestra** (Noord Nederlands Orkest) was founded in 1989 following the merger of the Frysk Orkest with the Noordelijk Filharmonisch Orkest. With roots leading back to 1862, the Orchestra is the oldest in The Netherlands today and has hosted soloists such as David Oistrach, Siegfried Palm, Heinz Holliger and Jaap van Zweden, with Alain Lombard, Jean Fournet, Sergiu Commissiona, Marcello Viotti and Roberto Benzi among its many guest conductors. In succession to Jacek Kasprzyk, Hans Drewanz and Viktor Liberman, Alexander Vedernikov has held the post of Permanent

Conductor since August 2001. Each season the Orchestra highlights a prominent contemporary composer, and has thus presented festivals of the music of Wolfgang Rihm, Terry Riley and Hans Werner Henze in Groningen. It has performed many world premieres, including Jacob ter Veldhuis's *Paradiso* in 2001, and recently gave the Dutch premieres of Glass's *Violin Concerto*, Hornemann's *Gurre Suite*, Rihm's cello concerto *Styx und Lethe*, Penderecki's *Third Symphony* and Lili Boulanger's *D'un matin de printemps*. For further information please see [www.noordnederlandsorkest.nl](http://www.noordnederlandsorkest.nl), or contact the Orchestra at 00 31 50 3695800.

**Alexander Liebreich**, born in 1968 in Regensburg, Bavaria, graduated with honours from the Munich Hochschule für Musik in voice and conducting. He gained recognition as an assistant to Sir Colin Davis and Roberto

Abbado at the Bayerische Staatsoper, and in 1996 was awarded first prize at the Kyrill Kondrashin Conducting Competition in Amsterdam. As Assistant Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra he attracted critical acclaim by stepping in at the last minute to conduct a series of performances of Bruckner's *Symphony No. 5*. Alexander Liebreich was appointed Co-Principal Music Director of the Brabant Orchestra in 2001, and is a regular guest conductor with orchestras throughout The Netherlands, performing a repertoire that ranges from Haydn and Mozart to Zemlinsky, Schnittke and John Adams. Recent conducting engagements have included appearances with the BBC Symphony Orchestra as well as his debut with the Ulster Orchestra, Vienna Chamber Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra and Musikkollegium Winterthur.