

# BOOK REVIEW

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**Title:** *A Passage of Nostalgia: The Life and Work of Jacobus Kloppers*

**Editor:** Martina Viljoen

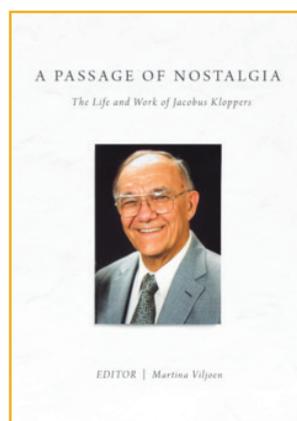
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Apart from a few outdated biographical monographs, published literature on South African composers who paved the way for the current scene in serious music and musicology is scarce. *A Passage of Nostalgia* on the life and work of South African born composer, Jacobus Kloppers - excellently edited by Martina Viljoen, Associate Professor in Musicology at the Odeion School of Music of the University of the Free State - is thus a remarkable addition to literature.

I have always been up to date with the work of Kloppers due to his close connection with the Southern African Church and Concert and Concert Organists Society (SACOS) that often endorses and promotes his music. Several of his liturgical compositions were also published in the organ anthologies of SACOS. I first became aware of academic research on Kloppers at the 2019 conference of the South African Society for Research in Music (SASRIM) with Viljoen's presentation, entitled *A passage of nostalgia: the compositional oeuvre of Jacobus Kloppers*.

Viljoen clarifies early on that this book is a life-and-work publication, rather than a disciple-friends-and-colleagues Festschrift.

Performing organist, Eljee du Plooy, started a biographical study on Kloppers in 2013. Together with Viljoen, Du Plooy presents a biographical documentation of the personal and professional life of Kloppers. They go far beyond the conventional biography, including aspects of his inward, artistic and intellectual journey. The life of Kloppers, that was shaped by his Reformed Christian Afrikaner upbringing, is delineated in the various cycles of Kloppers's life.

Kloppers was born in 1937 in Redora, close to Randfontein, to a musical family. He started lessons with the Dutch-born organist, conductor, music pedagogue and composer, Willem Mathlener. His mother was unenthusiastic about his exposure to organ music, saying that "since Kobie started with organ, he has terribly been neglecting his music". However, his music prospered to the extent where he went to study music at tertiary level at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (now the North-West University). He had lessons with Maarten Roode in Potchefstroom. It was also during this time that he met his wife, Miensie.

He continued his studies in Germany as a student in the class of the celebrated German organist, harpsichordist and composer, Helmut Walcha. He also served as organist at the Dreikönigskirche in Frankfurt am Main. The influence of Walcha, who is known for his recordings of the complete organ works of JS Bach, likely influenced Kloppers who decided to write his doctoral thesis on the interpretation and realisation of Bach's organ works.

Du Plooy and Viljoen focus on the influence of the Deutsche Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche and Kloppers's confrontations with German acquaintances' reaction to South African racial policies. This had a significant influence in Kloppers's life and the inputs of the post-war and post-Nazi Germans allowed him to make meaningful connections with what was developing in his home country.

On Kloppers's return to South Africa, he had many conflicts at various levels that diverged from his Christian understanding of justice for an oppressed and suffering people. The implications of apartheid for his moral conscience are central to the biographical study presented in this book. He and his wife subsequently emigrated to Canada where they settled in Edmonton, Alberta. He took an organ position at St John's Anglican Church and was later appointed as Associate Professor at the newly founded King's College. A specific task of his appointment was to establish a music department.

The remainder of the biographical chapter deals with Kloppers's compositions,

commissions and musical ties with South Africa. Shorter segments are also devoted to report on his performance work as well as his memberships and awards. The last notable achievement is an honorary membership from SACOS in 2015. The first chapter, taking up almost a third of the entire book, serves as a substantial foundation for the chapters that follow.

In the second chapter, Charles Stolte focuses on the academic side of Kloppers's life, specifically his contributions at The King's University where he taught Music Appreciation, Music History, Systematic Musicology and Organ Studies. Stolte's contribution makes the interdisciplinary approach and the use of the modified Dooyeweerdian model in music clear, constructed from a Christian philosophical perspective. Stolte writes of Kloppers as mentor and colleague from his own personal interactions. His link to the Dooyeweerdian mode of thinking – a model in which all academic disciplines are linked in a coherent way – creates a striking prolegomenon to the third chapter.

Danie Strauss, international expert on Dooyeweerd's theory of modal aspects, starts aptly with an essay by Kloppers that was translated by Corrie Geldenhuys. The original Afrikaans essay was published in a Festschrift, dedicated to Prof Herman Strauss who was the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy in Bloemfontein. Danie Strauss is the son of Herman Strauss, and there is thus an interesting link between Strauss as author and Kloppers as contributor to the Festschrift.

Kloppers's essay puts much emphasis on Christian philosophy. He describes music as an aesthetic phenomenon that is interwoven with the following aspects: numerical, spatial, kinematic, energetic, biotic, psychological, logical-analytical, historical, symbolic, social, economic, juristic, ethical, and religious. According to Kloppers, "a Christian philosophy bridges [the] confrontational views by the insight that music cannot create itself or develop by itself but is a human endeavour. The development of music therefore forms part of the divine cultural incentive, though the artist is restricted."

Strauss's contribution is rich in arguments and literature, delving far beyond Kloppers's own views into topics of aesthetics and nomenclature in music. He manages, however, to clearly link it to the work of Kloppers without deviating from a clear argument on how Kloppers's philosophies shaped his (Dooyeweerdian) academic approach, career as teacher and lecturer, and influenced his students.

The chapter by Martina Viljoen, Nicol Viljoen and Jan Beukes is the first part that is

more focussed on Kloppers's oeuvre, more specifically the stylistic influences on his organ oeuvre. Kloppers's compositional oeuvre is dominated by works for solo organ, mostly liturgical works. The works that are discussed in this chapter are according to their importance and significance with regard to his compositional practice and the distinctive influences reflected by events that shaped the composer's life narrative.

The authors of this chapter display a thorough understanding of Kloppers's organ oeuvre from the perspective of performing academics. Beukes is also an organ lecturer at the Odeion School of Music whilst fulfilling the role of Head of Department as well. Their contribution commences with an organ chorale prelude, *Der Tag hat sich geneiget* that Kloppers composed in 1964 and dedicated to Walcha when he substituted for Walcha at the Dreikönigskirche in Frankfurt am Main.

The influences of Walcha, Bach, and Dupré on his early works are discussed in broad detail. The chapter unfolds in a parallel way to the events that took place in Kloppers's life, with comprehensive discussions on transitional aspects that are found in his organ works after he had moved to Canada. Although the influences of Bach and Walcha remain, the authors identified further influences of Belgian and French-Canadian schools on organ composition that denotes a more sober approach to harmonisation and colouration. Specific mention is made of the Belgian composer, Flor Peeters, and neo-classical influences of Stravinsky.

Other works, such as *Three Plainsong Settings*, allude to influences by Messiaen, Langlais, Guilmant, and Dupré with detailed discussions of Kloppers's compositional technique. The French harmonic colouration and suggested influences of Britten and Fauré in Kloppers's later compositions are also discussed through august interpretations and analyses with supporting examples. The authors of this chapter are of the opinion that stylistic influences on Kloppers's compositions for organ can be ascribed to two factors: "the dialectic aspect emanating from an incorporation of various contrasting geographic, cultural, artistic and religious influences as imaginatively and productively reflected in these compositions" and how "these took shape as 'an active and determinate part of the subject's life history'."

Although it might appear, at first, that this chapter moves in a new direction, the authors made intelligible links to the life events - and specifically Kloppers's Protestant exposures - of the composer. Through these analyses, the impact of these events on his artistic work is elucidated.

Matildie Wium and Luzanne Eigelaar provide an insightful chapter on the application

of dialectics and the utilisation of the concept as shaped by Kloppers's Christian faith, with a specific focus on Kloppers's treatment of sonata form. The title of Kloppers's *Dialectic Fantasy* probably steered the authors into this philosophical domain. However, there is a contrast between the idea of a fantasy, indicated to be performed as a free-style fantasia, and sonata form. A brief discussion on German dialectics is followed by a comprehensive analysis of the *Dialectic Fantasy* with regard to its twelve-tone row and sonata form structure.

The music-theoretical work of the authors and their interpretation of the work are brought in relation with Kloppers's Christian point of view and similarities with the models of Hegel and Dooyeweerd.

The last chapter is Izak Grové's account where he describes his contribution as "personal and professional memories as student, and later colleague of Kloppers" as well as a discussion of Kloppers's *Reflections* for piano. *Reflections* was commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1997 and completed in 1998. It had its first performance by Colleen Athparia at The King's University in Edmonton. Grové provides the reader with a thorough understanding of Kloppers's resistance to the Afrikaner socio-political independence, English imperialism and the rise of democracy in South Africa.

Grové's text is an interesting interpretation of the work that will guide listeners to a deeper understanding of the work, folk tunes used and its message. Grové discusses each variation individually, first briefly and then in more detail. The reader will be very tempted to listen to Kloppers's lengthy piano work whilst reading Grové's chapter. A link to a performance by Anneke Lamont is provided below - the different segments are labelled on the video. Through his writings, Grové points out how Kloppers translated objective political history and subjective personal reminiscence into music.

The last part of the book is a list of Kloppers's compositions.

As promised by Viljoen in the introduction, the authors of *A Passage of Nostalgia* alluded to various viewpoints derived from the broader field of music analysis, domains of philosophy, psychology, anthropology and divinity studies. These enabled authors to use the construct of nostalgia as a tool for critical interrogation.

The South African authors are all affiliated with the University of the Free State, and it is worth mentioning that the master's dissertation of Carstens (1995), *Die orrelwerke van Jacobus Kloppers (1937): 'n Stylstudie*, as well as various interviews and correspondence with Kloppers formed important parts of the literature cited in

this book.

This book was launched on 17 May 2021 with an overview by Martina Viljoen, an interview with Kloppers by Matildie Wium and a performance of some important works by Kloppers:

- *Festive Anthem "A Mighty Fortress is our God"* (1985/2019/2021) by the UFS Odeion School of Music Camerata (conductor: Elsabé Raath; artistic director: Marius Coetzee)
- *Dialectic Fantasy for Organ* (1993) by Luzanne Eigelaar
- *Reflections: Prologue, Variations and Epilogue on an Afrikaans Folk Song* (1998) by Anneke Lamont
- "Verdwyn is nou die daglig" from the song cycle *Celebration of Faith, A Hymn-based Song Cycle for Tenor and Organ* (2017) by Albertus Engelbrecht (tenor) and Jan Beukes (organ)

A recording of the launch is available on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjdYF4PA80M>

*A Passage of Nostalgia* is a very carefully curated exhibition of Jacobus Kloppers's life and music, dealing with deep philosophical matters in detail and aiming to include as much as possible without becoming excessive. The deep philosophical approaches, attention to detail, analyses and use of nostalgia as a tool for critical interrogation are invaluable. I believe that all musicians and musicologists will benefit from reading this book and I highly recommend it. The editor and authors are to be commended on an excellent publication.