

## IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS by Daniel Hunt (KS)

Prior to a recent trip, most of what I knew about Amsterdam came from Quentin Tarantino's film "Pulp Fiction." Of course I knew about the Dutch East Indies trade routes and the Red Light District, and learned in art history courses that Holland was home to many phenomenal artists like Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Vermeer, but I had little factual information about the culture.

While I was there I did not eat french fries with mayonnaise or have a glass of beer in a movie theatre, but can verify the accuracy of John Travolta's character in "Pulp Fiction" when he said "It's the little things that make it special." Getting a cup of coffee was not grabbing 32 ounces at the quickie mart, hopping back in the car and racing off, it was more of an event. Time had little relevance when I stepped into any cafe. There was nothing to do but enjoy the decor and take a break from the energy outside. Europeans know how to relax. No one seemed to be in a hurry.

Amsterdam is a city that is steeped in history but maintains a very liberal and progressive attitude towards just about everything. It is a beautiful place. Much of the architecture, particularly in the downtown area, is hundreds of years old made from wood with cast iron or stone embellishments while the new construction features a considerable amount of structural steel and glass work. The attention to detail in both approaches is exquisite, giving the city a striking identity.

Everyone I met appeared young, fit and handsome. I suspect that some of it is genetic, but am sure a great deal is diet and exercise. Most people walk, ride bicycles or use public transportation to get around because driving and parking are difficult at best. Since this was my first trip to Amsterdam, everything was a bit overwhelming, but what most impressed me about the city was how effective the infrastructure of sidewalks, streets, trains and canals operated. Americans should take a few lessons.

I teach sculpture at Kansas State University and will be leading a study abroad course to the Netherlands in the summer of 2006, so the emphasis of my visit was to learn the mass transit system and become familiar with the museums. Unlike the U.S., the visual arts are embraced and seen as a necessary part of living. There are traditional venues like galleries and museums showing everything from the Dutch Masters to Language-based work and non-traditional venues like store fronts providing exhibition opportunity for emerging artists. Public sculpture is abundant and not just memorials to fallen heroes but an array of ideas presented in abstract and site specific formats. Even the light poles are more like sculpture than light poles.

My mother is a member of the Cental Illinois Four Freshmen Singers, and after attending the 2004 convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan, she was so excited that she talked to me for at least an hour about the music and people she had met, in particular two gentlemen from Holland who were planning the Four Freshmen Convention scheduled for August 2005 in Amsterdam. I did not know anyone in the city so I contacted them to inquire about lodging and see about the possibility of

sharing a meal.

Hennie Grote and Jan Smeding were kind enough to meet with me, to share their vision for August and were very thoughtful in arranging for a friend of theirs, Mrs. Jeanette ten Kroode, to give me a "tourist" crash course. Hennie, Jan and Jeanette went above and beyond the call, but the pervasive attitude of the Dutch people that I came in contact with was friendly, interested and supportive of America, with the possible exception of President Bush. I was there a week before the 2005 election, so that was a recurring topic of discussion.

The language is not a barrier. English is required course work in school. They may not always be confident with sentence structure but it is fairly easy to communicate. At times I did feel very American and a little inconsiderate not understanding any Flemish. In retrospect, I wish I had at least learned to say "I apologize for not speaking your language. Do you speak English?"

I stayed in the Holiday Inn on DeBoolevan which will be the host hotel for the convention. The hotel staff were very helpful and patient answering my questions, and you can exchange currency right at the front desk. Although it is located south of the city center, the trams and metro run until midnight with stops very close to the hotel, or you may prefer a taxi. Regardless, getting around is painless. The Holiday Inn was comfortable with all of the expected amenities and an excellent breakfast bar, included in the cost, that will satisfy vegetarians and carnivores alike. There are fantastic restaurants and cafes throughout the city, but if you prefer quality and convenience do not rule out the hotel restaurant. I enjoyed one of my most memorable evening meals there which was a rack of lamb that still causes me to salivate when I think about it.

The main concert on Saturday night is scheduled for the Concertgebouw located very close to the Rijks and Van Gogh Museums. If for no other reason, you should all make the trip just to hear the music that you love in the Concertgebouw. It is an incredibly ornate structure with a pleasingly grand Neoclassical facade built in 1888 after the German composer Brahms made scathing remarks about the local's lack of culture, and in particular, a suitable venue for his music. The Concertgebouw is renowned by musicians and patrons worldwide due to its marvelous acoustics and is one of two venues of its kind in the Netherlands. The night that I poked my head in to check out the beauty of the building the Dave Brubeck Quartet was playing. It will be a very special evening.

If you have not yet decided, I want to encourage you to make your reservations. For those of you that have not been out of the United States the trip will, I trust, as it was for me, be a cultural awakening. For those of you that have, you already know about the surprising similarities and wonderful differences to be experienced. When is the next time that you will have the opportunity to share your musical interests with like-minded people in a prestigious city like Amstedom? If that is not reason enough, do not forget that England, France, Germany and the rest of Europe are only a couple of hours away. So, send in your registration fee, purchase a guide book or two, and get on the plane....UP - UP and AWAY!