

It was a report on ADE, my first assignment in my newly adopted home of Amsterdam, that brought started it all. After some weeks of planning, the opening day still crept up on me somewhat unexpectedly. The anticipation, and trepidation, of spending the following 5 days in the nocturnal embrace of such a debauched town, was a reality that only dawned on me the morning of that first event. It was going to be an exciting endeavour, but a conference on the environmental impact of festivals soon drained me of any exuberance I might have had at the start. Festival promoters and organizations weighing in on the *profitability* of sustainable festivals while unenthused businessmen and -woman pawed at goodie bags, was a scene straight from one of Dr. Hunter S Thompson's lucid dreams. It left me annoyed, tired and in need of some serious musical gratification... or a stiff drink. The drink would have to wait though because **Colors** at Trouw was my next stop. I had to get there before they opened and conclude the interviews early on, because that drink, and a line-up I had been looking forward to all week, was waiting on the other side. I managed to sneak my way into a personal tour, guided by **Olaf Boswijk**, in a group that consisted of none other than **Julio Bashmore**, **Kowton** and **Funkineven**, and it soon became apparent there was more to Trouw than just a disused printing press and a Funktion One system. It was in the way Olaf took personal pride in showing these world-class DJ's – and a suspicious looking journalist – around his creation with the same care a joiner would his house. In all honesty it left me taken a back. Never in my years of working within various aspects of the music industry has an owner shown this much personal investment in a venue and for Trouw's size and dominance at the time, this was completely unique. It immediately became clear that something special was at the heart of Trouw and judging from the other faces in the group, the feeling was mutual. As Olaf stooped to say hi to **Mark Fell**, who was busy setting up an installation project downstairs, I was not only assured of this idea, but also conscious that the serious innovative side of music and art played a pivotal role in Trouw's existence too. (This has been re-enforced constantly since that day, but we will get into more of that later.)

The tour over and the DJ's sent to their hotel, it was then time to interview the guys behind **Colors**, and **Olaf**. Using some leading questions to coax a critical response out of them about ADE and the clubbing scene in Amsterdam, I was not prepared for the word 'family' to make an appearance in the context of this line of inquiry, and yet it did. At no point was I anticipating a response to that effect and I certainly wasn't expecting the promoters around **Colors** to corroborate it either. But there it was, lying in amongst the licentiousness of the music industry I'd witnessed earlier, and in the context of a fiscally responsible global event. I was sceptical and intrigued, but didn't want to dwell on it too much since my attention was desperately required for the line-up that was to follow shortly. As Funkineven started his set, I noticed the diminutive stature of **San Proper** oozing up to the 6 foot tall Scandinavian photographer, with a line that went something like: "Hey baby, wanna have some fun?" She also happened to be my wife, but the enigmatic character of San Proper fascinated me to such an extent that the amusing encounter was nothing more than just that. An invitation followed to Trouw's Concertgebouw take-over later that ADE week, and as I sat through orchestral arrangements of **Henrik Schwartz'** creations, Trouw's reputation as a benchmark for a world-class establishment became a certainty for me.

Trouw, the people I interviewed and the music they proliferated during their ADE residency made a lasting first impression on me. One that I couldn't shake for some time after that first encounter and while in the process of looking for some more writing assignments, I was inspired to contact Kyara and Frans (the PR team behind Trouw) again. A DJ I've admired for some time was playing at Trouw soon, and it neatly coincided with some friends visiting Amsterdam. I proposed that I would offer my services to Trouw in the hope that they would compensate with a few tickets for the event. An interview with **DJ Hell** followed, and I was inducted as part of the team, an adopted member of the Trouw family. A week or so later and I am standing on the stage of the main room witnessing the **Hell** spectacle unfolding before me. A bucket of champagne and a booth overflowing with attractive woman brought a bit of the stalwart's flavour to Trouw, showing off some of that style he brings

to his music – it's now wonder he lists **Sean Combs** as a friend. Meanwhile my friends were engaged in a conversation with, from what I was able to deduce, a borderline obsessive fan. Inspired by my somewhat intoxicated state, I considered sharing the story of my small role in the event with the screaming **Hell** fan as she shouted her amorous intentions at the German DJ, but immediately reconsidered for the sake of everyone's safety.

The sense of personal gratification that I felt then didn't help me much the next day either when I was supposed to interview **Sadar Bahar**, a House legend that's been there since dance music's inception, at another of Amsterdam's institutions and regular Trouw co-hort, **Rush Hour** – a record label and shop in the heart of Amsterdam that's acquired an international status amongst many house enthusiasts and who's artists regularly features in Trouw's line-ups. I was fortunate enough though that the Chicago DJ only comes out after the sun goes down, and it gave me the opportunity to adjust myself accordingly. As a bizarre coincidence **DJ Hell** made an unexpected appearance with one of those pretty woman from the previous night around his arm, as I waited for **Mr. Bahar**. It gave me an opportunity to extend our interview a little and get a deeper insight into his vast musical knowledge as he dug through some of the latest releases. He left with a Jeff Mills album I recall, but it was **Sadar** I was there for though and to this day, it still remains as one of my favourite interviews ever. Watching Sadar pick through new arrivals at **Rush Hour** (**Antal** had literally just opened a stack of newly delivered boxes from the states) while he reminisced over the early development of House, was something of a surreal experience and will stay with me for some time to come.

The interviews followed on rapidly from those first two and ranged from internationally acclaimed artists like **Jimmy Edgar** and **Daniel Avery** to rising stars like **Dense and Pika** and **Jon Hester**. It was, however always the Trouw regulars that proved to be some of the most entertaining and interesting to interview, the first of which was **Patrice Bäumel**. As a fundamental part of the Trouw family, he also personifies its innovative and progressive side. Our

interview had to take place at the venue, his artistic home, and when I arrived he was already there, talking to some of the technicians with his pet dog in tow. I was completely mesmerized by his performance at the Concertgebouw the previous month when he opened up for **Henrik Schwartz** with an arrangement for Marimba and Electronics and couldn't wait to get into his ideas on music. Our conversation incorporated music from both the classical and electronic canon and I found it a complete joy to speak to the man and tap into his vast musical knowledge. One thing that stuck with me however was his admiration for Trouw's audience. I recall his words; *"I am often amazed about how much more they know about music than many DJs."* For me, they too were the crux of what made the venue and organization's innovative side work so well. They were at the heart of the Trouw's ticking clock and it always reciprocated with bringing innovative nights like **Bäumel's** own **Black Magic** and **Yellow Lounge** to the venue. But there was one event that will always encapsulate this aspect of Trouw for me. Well actually, it was two events. One after the other in what was one hell of a heat wave. The month of May 2014 in Amsterdam was a particular bastard, bringing scorching weather to the city in what is usually a spring climate. It gave **Andy Butler** from **Hercules and Love Affair** a reason to take off his shirt – not that he really needed a reason – when encouraged by the intimate crowd made up of trendy gays, and the girls that love them. They effortlessly glided on the deep vocal house that **Butler** and his band has developed over the years, but it was a small crowd and it was a complete contrast to the packed house that filled the stuffy main room of Trouw the preceding night for **Ben Frost**. As an artist that epitomises the marginal aspects of electronic music his show that night, was nothing short of difficult. The abrasive sound pushed through the club's system at about a 110dB even had some revellers complaining about the levels the next day on Trouw's Facebook page. Regardless of **Ben Frost's** oratory assault the contrasting events highlighted the liberal attitude towards music and its culture that Trouw's audience value above all else, and how the marginal often supersedes the accessible. It came as no surprise when I encountered a beaming **Patrice Bäumel** crossing the muggy room for **Ben Frost**.

Even the territory of the visual arts wasn't left untouched as Trouw often featured installations in their many cavernous spaces. They were an integral part of the experience when they were around and they often worked as conversation pieces within the contrasting context of a heady club night. Whether it was **Elizabeth Price's** Turner Prize winning *Woolworths choir 1979* or the ever-changing light display that adorned the main room, visual stimulants were as much of a part of Trouw as the music. At this point I should probably mention that although I had visited the venue before the chronological point at which this article begins it was not necessarily my first visit. I had been a punter on a previous visit to Amsterdam, but for the most part, it is a complete blur. I've tried to piece together the scattered memories of an inebriated recollection, but have come up blank as to what actually transpired through most parts of this visit. There is however a hazy memory of the coloured lights adorning the ceiling, which haunts me from time to time as I passed over the threshold towards the main stage. I can't be sure if it's exactly a memory of a previous instance or just an amalgamation of different events that come together so vividly under those lights, but I can confirm that they've made a lasting impression. The Dutch have a natural affinity for stage and show lighting, and Trouw might be the pinnacle of this talent incarnate. The minimalist approach is perfect for the environment and more than once I've found my jaw agape at the luminous spectacle that can unfold during a night. **Children of the Light** need a special mention here. When I first encountered the duo lighting up a stage it was not at Trouw, but at their invasion of the Concertgebouw's stage for the aforementioned ADE event. Their inventive lighting display during **Darkside's** performance was something that perfectly juxtaposed the main hall of the classic institution and will remain a point of fond reminiscence for me.

They were also responsible for most of the **Audio Culture** nights, and whenever they illuminated the murky basement of De Verdieping, I enjoyed just standing back and drinking in the atmosphere. The music emanating out

of the darkest regions of **Audio Culture's** catalogue stimulated my particular tastes in music while the **Children of the Light** provided the visual incentive to dwell down there. As a result, I've always enjoyed an affinity with De Verdieping at Trouw. It speaks to my inner goth, and you are always ensured a more diverse programming from the DJ as they explored the boundaries of what was possible on a dance floor – not something that's easily done in the main room, as **A Made up Sound** illustrated during one **Psychedelic Romance** night when half the crowd dissipated. I always enjoyed lurking towards one of the darker corners to survey the divergent crowd, something you couldn't really do in the main room. Always looking for that bit of colour to add to a future piece or for a character I could escape into. It was down in the depths where I first encountered the **Rabbit Dance** and where I was mesmerized by Canadian duo's **Graze** set. **San Proper's** sets during his Proper Cult nights were always an particular eye opener as they fused music from disparate corners of the dance sphere in one continuously entertaining affair down in the suitable depths of De Verdieping. I always admired it from a distance, never getting too close to the projected light from the DJ booth. Looking back on it, and considering my general appearance (glasses, a beard and a button down print shirt) I might have been mistaken for some sort of sexual predator lurking in the shadowy pits of De Verdieping. It would certainly explain some of the looks I got. Then again the numerous requests coming from English tourists as to the approximation of euphoria inducing narcotics might justify those dubious stares.

It was a nightclub after all and we were all in search of a good time, any way you'd like to define it. Whether this was through experiencing interesting music or just grinding the night away to your favourite DJ with some of your closest friends. Each to their own was always my philosophy. Friendships were made on that dance floor and some were even solidified in the toilet. You can lower your eyebrows; I wasn't referring to a sexual encounter. One of my favourite moments was before I even got to into the venue proper. Trouw's sound was lethal as **Mr. Frost** proved earlier, but thanks to some incredible insulation by the previous tenants it never escaped the main room. There

would be a quiet before every storm as you entered past the ablutions on the lower floor except on this particular night. A couple of inferior computer speakers were being rinsed to their limit and there, just outside of the cubicles, next to the basins, a small group of young woman were having the time of their lives dancing to whatever generic Trap-infused R&B track was distorting at the time. That particular night, **Colors** was at helm and this little scene perfectly captured the ethos of what their night means to me today. Earlier that evening as I was watching Yuri, Lucas and Volcmar getting stuck into some White Russians during a Ten Pin Bowling game at Trouw's temporary Lebouwski Lanes installation, it struck me that these three friends are more than just business partners. Their individual involvement in Amsterdam's music scene by day, suggested to me that **Colors** was the release from the business side of it for this particular group. Trouw became the place where they could be free to express themselves to the soundtrack of the latest dance innovations as supplied by **Cinnaman** and the DJs that really made an impression on them. And boy, did the crowd reciprocate. Every **Colors** night was always packed to the rafters with a crowd that invariably represented the latest generation of music enthusiasts. More than once I found myself at the edge of a group only to notice my advanced years on my younger neighbours and having to back away in order to avoid those suspicious looks again.

But **Colors** was merely one part of a gang of influential artists, DJs, labels and organisations that centred on Trouw. Amsterdam has definitely encouraged a vast network of people involved in music due to its size but a big portion of it has established itself around Trouw. It wasn't some impenetrable clique though and even an outsider like me, would be welcomed to discuss an artists latest creation or a label's musical philosophy. It introduced me to the likes of **Presk** and **Aroy Dee**, but it also brought names like **Jean Pierre Enfant** and **Clairvoyance** (These Guys) to the fore as artists to watch. Artists that will certainly make a big impression on a lot of people in the future and artists that continually hone their craft and their sound to perfection. Most of these artists and DJs would have had their start at Trouw

and it is obvious why somebody like **Makam** would regularly make an appearance at the venue. *"It really shaped me and I've grown a lot because of it, something I'm really grateful for."* The list of artists that made an impression on me during my term at Trouw is not only a formidable list on Amsterdam's stage, but also on the world's stage. Trouw's reputation has always preceded itself all over the world and it becomes abundantly clear why in countless interviews with Trouw's regular contributors they've unabashedly shared their love for the venue. From **Breach** to **LET**, DJs, artists and organisations have all declared their dedication to the venue and together they make up what I came to know as the Trouw family. It becomes more than just an interesting space for music and art. Trouw comes across as an idea or a philosophy rather than venue, a feeling that you are part for something special, even if it is just for one night. You can see it on the faces of the people in the crowd, the DJs and even the people behind the curtain pulling the strings. Would it be possible to displace all those people and all the individuals that make up Trouw and capture the same feeling in a different venue? I can merely speculate, but I would like to hope not. Part of me doesn't want it to go on, because the memories and the stories that formed part of Trouw are distinct to me, and if it were to go on, I wouldn't be able to cherish them forever and this book that adorns your coffee table will be nothing more than a frivolous curiosity. It needs to end, just like this article.

So, as I transcribe my most recent interview, and I hear the **Audio Culture** guys declare their love for Trouw as so many have done before them, it's somewhat of a bittersweet goodbye. I am glad I have these memories to look back on, but I also wish there was just one more. Maybe it will be Olaf playing the last track on the last night of Trouw, but as I am typing this even that is an uncertainty and it will merely delay the inevitable after all. At the very least I'll have these, the ones I have shared with you the reader, and when those neon lights fade down for the last time it will be **Ben Westbeeck's** words and not my own, that will resonate through those industrial spaces for the last time; *"What is the future of Amsterdam's clubbing scene after Trouw?"*

