

# Golden Clouds

A composition for carillon composed by  
Mathieu Daniël Polak

*In exchange for a painting by Joost de Jonge*



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### **Biography Mathieu Daniël Polak**

Mathieu Daniël Polak attended the Dutch Carillon School in Amersfoort. He obtained his Master in 2000 with a specialization in carillon education. Since the graduation in 2000, he is a lecturer at the Netherlands Carillon Center in Amersfoort. Polak won prizes for carillon playing at international carillon competitions in Hamburg (Germany) and Enkhuizen (the Netherlands). He gave recitals in Japan, Denmark, Portugal, France, Belgium, Germany and the U.S.A. Since 2008, he is the carillonneur of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Moreover, since 2003 Mathieu Polak is carillonneur of Spakenburg. Mathieu Daniel Polak holds two Master Degrees in composition namely from the Lemmens Institute Leuven (2013) and from the Utrecht School of the Arts (2010). Mathieu studied piano with Alwin Bar and Ton Hartsuiker at the Conservatory of Utrecht. Since graduating in 1997, he is a pianist at various ballet schools and is a private teacher piano.

### **Biography Joost de Jonge**

Joost de Jonge is a widely exhibited Dutch artist with work in a wide range of international collections. He was educated at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague and 's-Hertogenbosch, and at the Universitat de Barcelona, and earned his BFA in painting with honors at the School of the Arts in Utrecht, followed by an artist residency at the Fundació Cultural Knecht-Drenth in Callosa d'en Sarrià, Spain. In 2008 he began publishing catalogues of his work. In 2011 he initiated the Ekphrasis Project with his book *The Ekphrasis Project: Oceanen van Kleur*, inviting art critics, art historians, and poets to respond to his paintings with original writings. In 2014 the series became an online publication, and in 2015 he produced his first e-book with its own domain at [www.paintedpoetry.org](http://www.paintedpoetry.org): *Painted Poetry & Painterly Poetics*—an ekphrastic notion. The collaborative project flourished with contributions from across Europe as well as from important American poets and writers. This is de Jonge's seventh book. In 2014 the art critic and curator Peter Frank interviewed him for a YouTube video titled "Joost de Jonge: A Life of Art," directed by Juri Koll and produced by the Venice Institute of Contemporary Art: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS687YvhEtk>.

*In exchange for a painting by Joost de Jonge*

# Golden Clouds

Mathieu Daniël Polak  
2016

**Comodo** (♩ = 120)

Carillon

*mp legato, cantabile*

*f p mp*

*f p rit.*

*a tempo*

*mf*

*mf*

## Golden Clouds

16

*f*

19

3 3 3 3

22

8va

*mp* *p* *mp*

25

*mf*

28

1. 2.

Gentile, rubato ( $\text{♩} = 90$ )

31

*f*

35

*rit.*

Comodo ( $\text{♩} = 120$ )

38

*mf* *sf*

41

*sf*

44

*sf*

47

*sf*

50

*second time ritenuto*

*sf*

## Golden Clouds

*a tempo*

53

*f*

56

*f*

59

*mf*

62

*mf*

65

*f*

*rit.*

Gentile, rubato ( $\text{♩} = 90$ )

68 *mp*

71 *f*

74 *mp*

76 *f*

80 *mp* *p subito*



## Golden Clouds

83

*rit.* - - - - -

8va

*pp*

**Comodo** (♩ = 120)

85

*mp legato*

*mf*

*mp*

8va

88

*rit.* - - - - -

*a tempo*

8va

*f*

*p*

*mf*

91

*mp*

*p*

94

*rit.* - - - - -

*pp*

*mp*

## The Golden Clouds

By Mathieu Daniel Polak

### Introduction

Due to the folkloric image of the carillon, one might assume that composing a carillon work would be easier, and less appealing, to composers than would creating a piece for piano. In the nineteenth century, in particular, composers of serious music regarded the carillon as an instrument for ordinary people.

In the beginning of the twentieth century this view changed. A “Carillon Renaissance” began in Belgium, spread to the Netherlands, and soon moved throughout the world. Since then, although carillon players themselves have composed and arranged a great deal of music, relatively few professional composers compose for carillon.

It is not possible to move a carillon from one place to another. So in order to hear a carillon, you have to go to it yourself. That could be one reason composers have not written much music for the instrument. It is a pity especially that composers such as Einaudi (1955) and Glass (1937) have not composed for carillon; in my opinion, Minimal Music sounds very good on bells. (Einaudi once visited the carillon of the Laurens Tower in Rotterdam; I assume he was asked at the time if he was thinking about composing a piece for carillon. Perhaps we may enjoy a carillon work of his in the future...) On the other hand, a number of well-known Dutch composers -- Louis Andriessen (1939), Daan Manneke (1939), Henk Badings (1907-1987) – have composed for carillon.

Recently, painter Joost de Jonge came to my carillon concert in the Petrus Church in Woerden. He was impressed by my piece *Dandelion Field*. and saw clouds of gold while listening. Joost came up with a great idea. He would give me one of his paintings and asked for a new carillon piece by me in return.

On Monday October 10, 2016, my girlfriend Ruth Sonco Tello and I visited de Jonge’s studio in Vianen. Joost gave us a wonderful work of art in which golden clouds play a prominent role. I will soon compose a carillon piece for him.

Joost asked me how composing for carillon distinguishes itself from composing for piano. That is a good question to ponder. Considering the distinction between piano and carillon invites me to go deeper into the sounds and sound progressions of the latter instrument.

My intention is to apply the findings of this article toward the creation of a new carillon piece.

## Transparency

Depending on the size of the bell, the sounding time of a carillon bell can last half a minute or even longer. Meanwhile, the sound of the bell diminishes in volume but remains in the ear of the listener until the sound is fully 'extinguished'.

In Minimal Music, as a rule, the sounds evolve very gradually. All tones are part of a sound-wholeness that continues only when absorbed by the soul of the listener. Also as a rule, Minimal Music is quite consonant, which makes it suitable for performance on the carillon.

The pentatonic scale sounds very good on the carillon. The tones C/D/E/G/A, even when sounded all at the same time, share a consistently bright quality. I regularly play Chinese and Japanese music on carillon – music generally based on the pentatonic scale or related keys – and I always get the feeling this music was devised originally for carillon.

Henk Badings composed some octotonic pieces for carillon. As with the pentatonic scale, composing with a selection of eight tones is very good. After a few bars, the ear is set to these eight tones and their permutations.

I once tried to arrange music of Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951) for carillon. As a lover of his piano music, I thought it a good idea to arrange something to try on the carillon. This was not a success. Chromatic music such as Schönberg wrote is too complicated to be heard well on the carillon. It leads to chaos. Without doubt the sounding time of the bells plays an important role in this problem.

On piano, you hardly ever hear unaccompanied melodies. On the carillon you hear them all the time. As the bells keep on sounding for several seconds, an accompaniment appears naturally. I call that Horizontal = Vertical. In my carillon concerts I try to present one or two unaccompanied melodies.

Summarizing the above examples: consonant sound blocks, pentatonic and octotonic modes, the sounding time of the bells as self-generating harmony, careful treatment of chromatism. All these considerations point in the direction of *transparency*. Can you “look through the image”? Carillon music should sound like the Aegean Sea: you can see the water, the soil in it, and, in its reflection, the sky.

## Original works versus arrangements

A carillon concert comprises original pieces and arrangements. Moreover, carillon players improvise on folk tunes and sometimes compose new music for bells. In arranging the music for carillon there are a few problems.

If a melody is located above the accompaniment, as for example in songs, the melody on the small bells (high notes) sounds much softer than the accompanying tones in the big bells. The arranger must therefore make the accompaniment thinner by leaving out notes.

If the melody contains long sustained tones while the accompaniment goes on with a lot of notes, the listener may not hear which notes belong to the melody and which belong to the accompaniment. That is of course an undesirable situation. Sometimes it is possible to create a tremolo on the long melody note so that it keeps its strength.

After my carillon concerts I usually hear from the audience they liked the original pieces the most. Even so, arranging piano works for carillon gives a good insight in the difference between the two instruments. For instance, the Alberti bass, as found in Mozart's piano sonatas, sounds too loud on carillon. But thinning the Alberti bass does not do justice to the composer. It's not always possible, but playing the Alberti bass above the melody can sometimes work. In the carillon preludes by Matthias Van den De Gheyn (1721-1785) one finds Alberti motives in the manual with melodic motives in the pedal. Thus, the Alberti 'bass' is carefully composed into the work.

The above example would perhaps suggest that composing effective works for piano and carillon results from the application of structural rules. In that case a list of compositional rules could be derived through the study of piano and carillon scores. However, do's and don'ts do not lead to beautiful works. Pieces I have composed on the computer, according to the music notation program, should be great to play. Indeed, the Sibelius program plays them faultlessly and the music usually sounds fine. But when I bring the computer-composed piece to the carillon, nine times out of ten it sounds hugely disappointing.

Below you will find an analysis of one of my most successful works, *Dandelion Field*. I hope that my notes on that composition lead to a clear idea of what I personally hope to hear and to experience in a carillon piece.

## Dandelion Field

The title *Dandelion Field* comes from a visit to the Chattanooga National Cemetery in Tennessee (USA). After an illness of a few months my sister died in June 2016 from lung cancer. She had lived in the neighbouring town of Cleveland. Because her husband serves in the military, she has been given a place in a military cemetery. The endless rows of anonymous white stones in this cemetery reminded me of a field of dandelions.

In *Dandelion Field* I employed a motif based on the swinging bells motif Gloria Te Deum. The title came later, becoming a guide in the composition process at a later stage. Previously I would have started with an idea or a sentence from a poem and I would try to find the right music for expressing this idea or sentence. Lately, however, I think a lot more about the sound of music itself and search at a later stage for a reminiscent association.

I used to find it strange that the great composers simply called their pieces “sonata” or “prelude.” Most likely, it seemed to me, they were not philosophical and they had no other intention with their compositions than to create beautiful music. But I came to realize that the advantage of these “anonymous” titles is that the listener is not forced to listen in a certain way to the music.

In *Dandelion Field* I started with a repeating note. The repeated note stays important throughout the entire piece. I call this note Neir Tamid, a Hebrew term meaning Eternal Light, specifically the light that burns eternally in the synagogue. Such a tone that sounds continuously should be sounded softly so it will not become disturbing. That is why I have written *pp* in bar 1 (the accompanying tone) and has the theme in measure 3 accents. The 5/8 time signature is irregular and, because it is less customary, will hopefully be experienced as unanticipated and refreshing.

The motif CDFG is derived from the Gloria Te Deum swinging bells. I found this selection of tones attractive, and to go from swinging bells to carillon (fixed bells) is not a big step. I came to the idea of a swinging-bell motif in Ooltewah, outside Chattanooga (and ten miles from my sister’s home in Cleveland), where I gave a carillon concert. Ooltewah’s carillon is small carillon (23 bells). Prior to the concert in Ooltewah a set of three swinging bells sounded.

All the above notes show that *Dandelion Field* is a very personal piece, full of association and emotion. It seems to me that all who have heard *Dandelion Field* have been very impressed with the piece. As mentioned, painter Joost de Jonge experienced golden clouds while listening to the music. My carillon student Etienne Weeda thought that the work was written by a pianist; he and several other students want to play the piece.

## The golden clouds

Although compliments are nice, I think it is more important that this piece, for the sake of emotion with which it is written, is regarded as a strong work. *Dandelion Field* does not contain a specific melody, yet it feels melodious.

In the previous chapter I already indicated that melody has a different relationship to the carillon than it does with most instruments. You might compare a carillon composition with a macaroni dish. In such a dish you find cheese, peppers, onions, garlic, macaroni, and a few other ingredients. The overall taste is good or bad, but the individual ingredients do not stand out one against the other. This is also the case with a carillon piece. It is the fusion of melody, rhythm, harmony, and timbre, not the prominence of any particular feature, that makes the carillon piece sound good (or not). Indeed, I do not think I have ever heard a listener say that the melody in a carillon piece was beautiful or the chords were nice. The whole is observed, not the elements.



*Painting of Joost de Jonge in exchange  
of a carillon composition by  
Mathieu Daniël Polak*

### **Points of reference painting and new carillon piece**

Above you see a photo of the painting Joost de Jonge gave me. He subsequently sent me an email with notes about the work. To Joost, the blue in the painting functions as counterpoint. In the composition I plan to write, counterpoint will play a role of significance as well. This could be realized for example by a loud chord in a soft environment or the introduction of a dissonant tone that does not resolve. Joost spoke about his blue as a 'non resolving dissonant.' He also said that the brown could be the root of a plant. Bringing colours alive is something I also do as a composer. Melodies, chords and even clusters can be colours to me.

Unlike Joost I am not so concerned with philosophy and literature. Yet it cannot do harm to think about the place of the new composition in the totality of my works and to think about the overarching ideas connecting all my compositions. Joost de Jonge makes sketches before he eventually makes his paintings. I work in exactly the same way. It occurs to me that new compositions resulting from improvising on the piano or by singing are much purer than works composed at the computer or at a table.

### **Conclusions**

A carillon work is transparent. Heavy chromatics or late-Romantic harmonies sound muddy on the carillon. It is much better to compose within a mode like the pentatonic or diatonic scale.

The whole is more important than the sum of its parts. Of course it is fine when a carillon piece is especially melodic or rhythmic, but what the listener hears is an entirety, a complex that works or not.

An irregular type of measurement could refer to the sound of swinging bells.

The carillon, a bell keyboard, offers a host of associations, ecclesiastical, historical, folkloric, and even connected to timekeeping.

The Carillon work that I will compose takes 'golden clouds' as a starting point. But first I must refer again to the painting Joost de Jonge has given to Ruth and me so as to gain extra inspiration before composing.

# Interaction painting & composition Golden Clouds

*Article for the Somextro lecture in The Hague by Mathieu Daniel Polak, May 28, 2017*

## Introduction

The idea by painter Joost de Jonge to transcribe a painting into a composition made me look at art in a different way. Normally, I would observe a painting as a complete object. For the composition commission, I made a selection of just three elements of the painting. In this article, you can read how I translated these three elements into music.

## 1. The Lake

To me, the blue area looks like a lake. I think it's a quiet field in the painting. The left bank seems to be higher. In the composition you will find long-sounding chords in the Gentile rubato part (bars 68-84) that refer to the calmness of the lake. That peacefulness is not only created with long-sounding chords, but is also due to the tremolo-like movement in the pedals in the preceding bars (bars 53-64).

## 2. The Bridge

The beam, seen at the bottom of the painting, reminds me of a score in an odd meter. In carillon works, choosing odd meters is one of my signature moves. In Golden Clouds the 5/4 meter is made up of groups of 2+3. In the melody, the repeated notes fall on different beats. The F-F in bar 1 appears on the second and third beat, in bar 2 the E-E falls on beats three and four and in bar 3 the G-G comes on the first and second beat. This irregularity I observe in the painting in the red bridge, nine blocks of which five are dark and four light of color.

## 3. The Wall

In the painting I see from the top down a thick line that can be seen as a shore of the lake on the one hand and as a road to the bridge on the other hand. This line holds the golden flow back which comes in from the left and appears to act like a dam. Here, I see a melody (fed from the golden stream from the left). This melody line also creates a balance (the outflow to the right).

## Conclusion

In order to come from a painting to a piece of music, it seems to me that an artificial description of the painting is necessary. This device to describe a piece of art is called ekphrasis. From the description, new compositional ideas emerge. The idea is to offer the concept to potential customers, who specify a theme that Joost and I expand through various works of art. We may involve other artists like poets or dancers in the future.



# Golden Clouds

*Evenement naar aanleiding van het samenwerkingsproject tussen  
kunstschilder Joost de Jonge en componist/beiaardier Mathieu Polak*

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Datums:          | Woensdag 17 mei 2017<br>Donderdag 18 mei 2017   |
| Tijden:          | 17 mei: 11.00 – 13.00<br>18 mei: 11.30 – 13.00  |
| Locaties:        | 17 mei: Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam<br>Brug tussen A en H Gebouw: carillonruimte<br>18 mei: Laurenskerk Rotterdam  |
| Programma:       | 17 mei: lezingen door Mathieu Polak<br>Peter Frank en Joost de Jonge,<br>bespeling oefencarillon door<br>beiaardleerlingen EUR<br>voorpremière Golden Clouds op carillon<br>EUR door Mathieu Polak<br><br>18 mei: wereldpremière Golden Clouds op<br>Carillon Laurenskerk Rotterdam door<br>stadsbeiaardier Richard de Waardt |
| Sprekers/Musici: | Joost de Jonge (kunstschilder),<br>Mathieu Polak (componist/beiaardier<br>Erasmus Universiteit), Peter Frank (art<br>critic), Beiaardleerlingen Erasmus<br>Universiteit Richard de Waardt<br>(stadsbeiaardier Rotterdam)  |
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