

ARTICLE



Musical media in Dutch crematoria, 1914-present

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Abstract

This article examines music during funeral rituals in the Netherlands in the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Throughout this period not only music, but also socio-cultural attitudes towards death have changed. Using the concept of mediatization, this article explores interrelated changes between musical media in crematoria and changes in cremation rituals.

In the first half of the article the history of music during cremation rituals is explored through literature study and diachronic research of newspapers, revealing how, at the beginning of the 20th century, the musical repertoire reflected the strong influence of social groups on funeral rituals in the Netherlands. Although the advent of recorded (mechanical) music in the second half of the 20th century could have easily broadened the musical repertoire, the opposite happened: the repertoire became fixed in standard combinations of three musical pieces. This reflects how, related to the process of professionalization, funerals became standardized within the context of the socio-cultural avoidance of death.

The second half of the article, using the results of a survey and interviews, shows how from the end of the 20th century music has become an increasingly important element of the 'personal funeral', as music during funerals has become one of the most common vehicles for the expression of personal meaning. Zooming in on the contemporary highly advanced audio-visual systems in Dutch crematoria the article concludes with the thesis that funerals in the Netherlands are not only facilitated by but also increasingly shaped through musical media.

Introduction

In 2017, the first author of this article visited a crematorium in the south of the Netherlands where she was, outside of the actual performance of a funeral ritual, introduced to the wide range of audio-visual possibilities. As she was about to listen to a recording of the popular funeral pop song *Breng me naar het water* (Bring me to the water) by Marco Borsato and Matt Simons, the curtains of the ceremony room closed “because we want people to be focussed on the song, not on the beautiful view from the ceremony room”.¹ When the lyrics of the song “It was in the early morning” sounded, the lights in the ceremony room turned to a warm orange colour, evoking the feeling of sunset. The video clip, which employees had made for use during funerals, contained a visualization of the song text. For example, during the text “I’m ready to close my eyes” pencil drawings of closing eyes were shown. So, lights and visuals were directed towards the music that, as such, affected the entire ceremony room.

This example shows some possibilities of the highly advanced audio-visual system in a crematorium in the Netherlands. In the more than 100 years of cremation rituals in the Netherlands, the situation regarding musical repertoires and music facilities in crematoria has changed considerably. At the beginning of the 20th century funeral music consisted mainly of classical and religious music, played on an organ or sung by a choir. Pop songs, the music genre that emerged in the US in the 1950s and that attracts a broad audience, did not yet exist and the possibilities with regard to recorded music – if any – were not as advanced as nowadays. In this article we will explore how changing musical repertoire and music facilities relate to changes in cremation rituals and socio-cultural attitudes towards death in the Netherlands. We explore these relationships diachronically from the first cremation in 1914 up to the present.² We were inspired in this diachronic approach by an article by Brian Parsons, who studied,

¹ Personal communication with an employee of a crematorium, May 12, 2017.

² The first crematorium opened in 1913. The first cremation was performed in 1914.

to cite the title of his article, “the progress of cremation and its influence on music at funerals in England, 1874–2010” (Parsons 2012).

This article is part of a PhD research on music during cremation rituals. Therefore, the focus is on cremation rituals and not on funeral rituals in general. As the cremation rate in the Netherlands has risen from 4% in 1960 up to almost 64% in 2017, this focus covers most of the funerals in contemporary society.³ The crematorium is a more or less neutral place; it is not linked to one specific religion, denomination or group. Although the crematorium does not exclude groups, some groups or religions might avoid or forbid cremation.⁴ Still, we focus on music during cremation rituals.

Due to the differences in available sources, we have split the article into two parts. In the first part, the history of funeral music and music facilities in crematoria from 1913 until about 1990 will be described and related to changes in funeral rituals in that period of time.⁵ The sources from the first part of this period are scarce. From 1913 to 1954 there was only one crematorium in the Netherlands, located in Westerveld. Unfortunately, the archive of this crematorium is not accessible to researchers. Therefore the first part of the article will be based on a literature study of the limited amount of available literature and the analysis of newspaper reports regarding cremation rituals. Newspapers were accessed via the online database Delpher, which is a database of digitalized newspaper reports, books and magazines.⁶ We accessed the database with keywords such as ‘cremation’, ‘Westerveld’, ‘organ’, ‘music’ et cetera. The newspaper reports often concern funerals of former directors, chairmen, teachers and other ‘public figures’. Although the entrance via newspapers is therefore selective and limited, this entrance at least partly enables us to examine funeral music in the first

³ <http://www.lvc-online.nl/aantallen>, accessed on May 8, 2018.

⁴ If we had included churches in our focus, this might have uncovered different musical developments, as audio-visual systems in churches are presumably less used and less advanced than contemporary audio-visual systems in crematoria, and organs are presumably more frequently used in churches than in crematoria.

⁵ Because we study long-term changes, it is hard to mention specific years as a turning point. We use 1990 because interviewees indicate that from 90s onwards people increasingly brought their own music on CDs.

⁶ <https://www.delpher.nl/>

decades of cremation rituals in the Netherlands. After a first look through the newspaper reports we selected 40 newspaper reports in the timespan 1914–1960 for analysis. After 1960 the number of newspaper reports on cremation rituals decreased. Via interviews with employees of crematoria and documentation from various crematoria in the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards, we were able to find out more about music during cremation rituals from the sixties to the nineties.

In the second part of the article, which deals with music during cremation rituals from the nineties until the present, we use data gathered via an online survey, interviews and site visits. We will elaborate on this later.

Mediatization

In 2013, a special issue of *Thanatos* on ‘Media & Death’ provided fruitful insights into the complex interplay of media and death by focussing on the presence of death in various media contexts (Sumiala and Hakola 2013). We shift this perspective by examining the role of media in death, and more specifically music during funeral rituals. The focus on funeral music in this article provides a new perspective on the interplay between media and death.

The conceptual framework that provides the basis for this research was found in the concept of mediatization, which “tries to capture long-term interrelation processes between media change on the one hand and social and cultural change on the other” (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby 2010, 223). This does not imply that we examine media change separately from social and cultural change. Instead, we zoom in on funeral music in the socio-cultural context of funerals, and examine if and how changes interrelate. Although contributions from the field of sound studies and music studies could also have provided fruitful insights into the topic of funeral music, we chose to

stick to the concept of mediatization as it emphasises the *long term* and the *interrelation* between media change and social and cultural change.⁷

Earlier research has placed mediatization in the context of, for example, politics (Strömback and Esser 2014), secularization (Lundby 2016) and recently emotion and digital affect cultures (Döveling, Harju and Sommer 2018). Mediatization is not the same as mediation, that “stands as the more general term, denoting regular communication processes that do not alter the largescale relationship between media, culture and society” (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby 2015, 318). With regard to rituals it can be stated that rituals are always mediated, “but in the process of mediatization, media does much more. It also transforms and shapes the objects and practices about which it is communicating” (Sumiala 2014, 943).

In most of the mediatization research, ‘media’ refers to radio, television and internet. In this article, the focus is on ‘musical media’, which refers first and foremost to music facilities. Throughout a century of cremation rituals in the Netherlands, music facilities in crematoria have changed. At the beginning of the 20th century musicians and musical instruments were needed to play music; at the beginning of the 21st century online streaming services and a variety of recorded music facilities have made it possible to listen to music at any place and time.⁸ Not only the facilities changed, but also the musical repertoire, as various genres and styles, such as jazz and pop, entered the European music culture in the 20th century (see Tschmuck 2009). Together, ‘musical media’ not only refers to music facilities but also to musical repertoire. In this article, the main focus is on the ways these musical media in crematoria have changed and how this relates to changes in funeral rituals. As the focus is on this interrelatedness, changes in the general music culture will remain (only) in the background.

⁷ For fruitful insights in sound studies, see Sterne (2003) and, related to memory and cultural practices, Bijsterveld and Van Dijck (2009).

⁸ For an overview of the changes in the general music market, see Tschmuck (2006).

Musical media from 1914 up to 1990

The history of musical media during cremation rituals will be described in two parts. In the first part, covering the period from the first cremation in 1914 until 1960, funeral music consists of live music played on an organ. In the second part, covering the period from 1960 until 1990, funeral music consists of recorded music derived from reel-to-reel tapes and cassette tapes.

1914-1960

In 1914, Dr. Christiaan Johannes Vaillant was the first person to be cremated in the first crematorium in the Netherlands, which had been opened a year before. During his funeral, music was played on an organ and sung by a choir. Organ and choir music remained common until the 1960s. Although there is little literature about music during the first decades of cremation rituals in the Netherlands, some of the cremation rituals were reported in newspapers. These small reports mentioned who spoke during the funeral, what music was played, and sometimes even which well-known people attended the funeral. A general impression of the funeral could also be part of the reports, stating that the funeral made a ‘solemn impression’ or that the ‘people were impressed by the funeral’.

The analysis of these reports showed that in addition to a classical and religious repertoire that was common in the (formerly) mainly Christian society, a socialist repertoire was also played during cremation rituals. In 8 of the 40 selected newspaper reports, socialist songs were found. For example, during the cremation of the chairman of the Labour Association for Body Burning (*Arbeidersvereniging voor Lijkverbranding*),⁹ the famous socialist song *Aan de strijders* (To the combatants) was played. During the cremation ritual various speeches were held by representatives of several associations, among others a socialistic association. “The organist played

⁹ The term ‘body burning’ was used. Later on, ‘body burning’ was changed to ‘cremation’.

Morgenrood [Dayspring]..., *Aan de strijders* [To the combatants] ... and when the coffin went down *Ruh'n in Frieden, alle Seelen*, by Schubert.”¹⁰

The advent of the socialist funeral repertoire is interesting because it reflects not only how the Netherlands was divided into social groups, but also how these groups influenced cremation rituals. At the beginning of the 20th century, Dutch society was divided into social groups, the so-called ‘pillars’: “Orthodox Protestants, Catholics and Socialists [had] created their own organisational worlds” (van Rooden 2003, 117). Linked to the socialist pillar, in 1919 the *Arbeiders Vereniging voor Lijkverbranding* (Labour Association for Body Burning) that aimed to introduce affordable cremation was established (Cappers 1999, 169–170). Through the efforts of this association, which had many members, cremation became accessible to its members. Via this Labour Association for Body Burning, the socialist pillar had claimed its own voice in the crematorium. The analysis of the newspaper reports revealed that this also became visible in the musical repertoire. As the pillars had a strong influence on speeches and music during funerals (van Erp, Keizer and de Natris 2013, 102–103; Cappers 2012, 584), the socialist repertoire in Dutch cremation rituals reflects how, within the pillarized society, socialist groups claimed their own voice in the crematorium (Cappers 1999, 169–170).

1960–1990

Although a 1938 brochure from the first crematorium already indicated the presence of a gramophone (van Erp, Keizer and de Natris 2013, 102), it was not until the 1960s that recorded music was really adapted and that it increasingly replaced live organ music (Cappers 2012, 612–613; Bot 1998, 247). From that time onwards, the organ was almost exclusively used during Christian funerals to accompany hymn singing. Even though the advent of recorded music could have easily broadened the musical

¹⁰ *Haagsche Courant*, November 10, 1939.

repertoire in the crematorium, the repertoire hardly changed. Instead, the musical repertoire became fixed in standard combinations of three pieces of music that were played during the funeral. These standard combinations were preselected by the crematorium. A list containing standard combinations notes in the foreword: “To make it easier to choose, a number of music combinations are preselected, consisting of three pieces of music that are in tune with each other.”¹¹ For example, the 5th standard combination of the list of the crematorium in Rotterdam consisted of three socialist songs, the 9th combination of two Gregorian chants and the *Ave Maria* by Bach/Gounod, and the 17th combination of music composed by Edvard Grieg. Similar standard combinations can be found on lists of other crematoria, e.g. the list of the crematorium in Tilburg on which the third combination consisted of Gregorian chant and the 16th of music composed by Edvard Grieg.¹²

Whenever a funeral leader visited the homes of next of kin to arrange a funeral, he/she brought the list containing the standard combinations of music of the crematorium where the funeral would take place. Until far into the 1980s these standard sets were common. “When the family asked for battle songs, the combination containing for example *Aan de strijders* [To the combatants] was played. If the family liked classical music, often the combination with three parts of the Four Seasons of [Antonio] Vivaldi was played” (Crematorium 6).¹³

Initially, the individual musical pieces that were part of the standard combinations had to be derived from several gramophone recordings or reel-to-reel tapes. A crematorium needed various devices, as there was only little time to prepare music in the busy schedule of the crematorium.¹⁴ In an interview, a crematorium employee remarked:

¹¹ Cited from the list of standard combinations of crematorium and cemetery Hofwijk, Rotterdam.

¹² Derived from the list of standard combinations of the crematorium in Tilburg.

¹³ This code refers to an interview with an employee of a crematorium, see the paragraph on methodology.

¹⁴ Unfortunately, exact numbers about the amount of cremations in separate crematoria are not available. Still, interviewees mentioned the busy schedule several times.

[There were] more reel-to-reel devices that could be used. So you could switch between devices. But you also had to prepare [the music] for the next ceremony [...]. And searching for the right songs was a hell of a job. (Crematorium 6)

In the 1980s, the large and heavy reel-to-reel tapes were replaced by the smaller cassette tapes.¹⁵ Employees of the crematoria had recorded the standard combinations on cassette tapes: combination 1 on tape 1, combination 2 on tape 2, et cetera. The use of the cassette tapes with the standard sets of music considerably reduced the work load for crematorium employees:

There were a lot of cassette tapes, but it was easier to prepare the music. You didn't have to search for the right number somewhere. Yeah, it was quicker. You could work faster... It really made a difference that we took it from the gramophone record or reel-to-reel tape and put it on a cassette tape: those heavy reel-to-reel tapes also took up a lot of space, you see. (Crematorium 6)

The standard combinations were used during funerals from the sixties until the nineties. Funerals of that period can be characterized as fixed and sober (Cappers 2012, 612). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to extensively elaborate on all the socio-cultural factors that have contributed to the sober and fixed format of funerals in that period of time, we will describe four of these factors: the process of depillarization, the process of professionalization of the funeral branch, the rising cremation rate, and the avoidance of death.¹⁶ As these factors *together* have contributed to the use of standard combinations of music, we will first briefly describe each single

¹⁵ Philips already introduced the cassette tape in the early 1960s, but it took two decades before its use was common in crematoria. For the history of the cassette tape, see: <http://vintagecassettes.com/philips/philips.htm> (accessed February 8, 2018).

¹⁶ For research on the history of funerary culture in the Netherlands, see Cappers, 2012.

factor, after which we will show how these are related to the use of standard combinations.

The first factor is the process of depillarization. As described, at the beginning of the 20th century the pillars influenced speeches and music during the funeral. However, in the second half of the 20th century a process of depillarization started. In this process the traditional ‘pillars’ (Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Socialism) lost their influence on their members (van Rooden 2003, 123). As a result, in the 1960s the collective funeral rituals of these social groups started to lose their meaning and people had to search for other ways of designing the funeral.

The second factor is the professionalization of the funeral sector. From the second half of the 20th century funeral professionals took over the care for the deceased and the arrangement of the funeral from neighbours and family members (Cappers 2012, 474). These professionals increasingly standardized their offer by using services and material objects offered by other professionals. For example, after the Second World War a coffin was no longer made by the local carpenter, but multiple coffins were ordered at then existing coffin factories (Cappers 2012, 600). This resulted in uniformity, which also became visible in the functional architecture of crematoria (Klaassens and Groote 2012) and the uniforms of the employees of funeral undertakers: “[This] uniformity of the funeral transformed into soberness” (Cappers 2012, 606).

The third factor that contributed to sober and fixed character of funerals is the rising cremation rate, rising from 4% in 1960 to 44% in 1990.¹⁷ This rise might be explained by the approval of cremation by both the Dutch government in 1954, who until then only tolerated cremation, and the Roman Catholic Church in 1963 (Roman Catholic Church 1963). Although there was a growing number of crematoria in the Netherlands - in 1988 there were 32 - the rising cremation rate resulted in tight time schedules in

¹⁷ <http://www.lvc-online.nl/aantallen>, accessed February 12, 2018.

the crematoria to cope with the high number of cremations.¹⁸ A rather impersonal and business-like cremation ceremony with speeches – if any – a standard number of three pieces of music and the usual ‘coffee and cake’ afterwards in the coffee room of the crematorium, had to fit within a maximum of 60 minutes (de Leeuw 2009, 72; Cappers 2012, 612–613).

The fourth factor that contributed to the sober and fixed cremation ritual is the socio-cultural invisible and avoided death (May, as cited in Wojtkowiak 2012, 49). People no longer died in their homes accompanied by their relatives, but in the medicalized context of the hospital, not surrounded by any relatives (Ariès 1974, 85–88). The custom of wearing mourning attire also disappeared, and other signs and announcements of death and grief were restricted to the minimum. If there was any grief, it was hidden grief, invisible for others (Cappers 2012, 746–747; Ariès 1974, 90). So, in various ways death was avoided. With regard to the funeral, it was tried “to reduce to a decent minimum the inevitable operations necessary to dispose of the body.... If a few formalities are maintained, and if a ceremony still marks the departure, it must remain discreet and must avoid emotion” (Ariès 1974, 90).

Altogether, the depillarization, professionalization, rising cremation rate and death avoidance in the second half of the 20th century went hand in hand with the sober and fixed funeral rituals that emerged in that time. In other words, in the process of depillarization the quest for new death rituals in the context of death avoidance and the professionalization of the funeral branch, was, at least for the time being, answered by fixed and sober funerals. Then, how does this relate to the use of standard combinations of music?

The preselected three pieces of music were both a part and a result of the standardization that emerged from the professionalization of funerals. Related to that, the standard combinations recorded on more convenient cassette tapes contributed to

¹⁸ <http://www.lvc-online.nl/cremeren-nederland>, accessed February 12, 2018.

the possibility to perform these rituals under time constraints. From the perspective of next of kin, the standard combinations of music released them from thinking about single pieces of music for the cremation ritual: once one of the sets had been chosen, the music for the entire cremation ritual was determined. As such, the standard combinations provided the possibility to avoid thinking about the musical part of the funeral: referring to Ariès, music was a formality that was needed to mark the departure, but remained discreet and avoided emotions.

So far, the retrospective view on the 20th century's relation between musical repertoire and music facilities on the one hand, and funeral rituals on the other, has revealed the complexity of this interrelatedness. Without searching for causal relations, it has become clear that changes in musical media are interrelated with changes in cremation rituals. In the next part of this article the focus is on changes from the end of the 20th century onwards and on current availability and use of musical media during cremation rituals.

Musical media from 1990 until present

To study recent changes with regard to musical media in crematoria, a survey and interviews were conducted. In March 2016 an online survey was distributed among all crematoria (N=81) that were then members of the National Association of Crematoria (*Landelijke Vereniging van Crematoria*). 38 crematoria responded to this survey, which is a response of 47%.¹⁹ Next to background information about the crematoria, the main topics concerned the musical instruments and recorded music facilities in the crematoria and the availability of (online) playlists. From the respondents, considering geographical, urban/rural spread, the age of the crematorium, the availability of instruments, the used recorded music facilities and spread among various funeral

¹⁹ One respondent did not finish the survey. Still, the information provided in the partial response was considered sufficiently useful to take into account.

organisations, we selected crematoria for semi-structured interviews with directors, location managers, and (other) employees of the crematorium.²⁰ Next to the interviewees that were connected to crematoria, we also interviewed employees of two system integrator companies. These companies build contemporary recorded music facilities for crematoria. In total, the first author of this article interviewed 10 people: 8 interviewees were connected to crematoria and 2 interviewees were employees of system integrator companies.²¹ We refer to the interviews by using codes, for example Crematorium 4 and System integrator 2.

The analysis of the interviews is centred around categories that are related to the concept of mediatization. Key terms in the analysis are: ‘musical instruments’, ‘musical devices’, ‘musical repertoire’, ‘cremation ritual’, ‘attitudes towards death’ and related terms.

The results of the survey informed the interview questions about the use of the musical instruments, the recorded music facilities (also called audio-visual systems) and the online playlists. In the following section, the results of the survey and interviews are used to map the contemporary musical repertoire and music facilities in crematoria.

Musical instruments in crematoria

In the survey, people were asked about the availability of musical instruments. Of the 38 respondents, 22 crematoria have one ceremony room and 16 have two or more ceremony rooms. As by far most of the musical instruments are found in the main ceremony room, we will focus on the availability of musical instruments in this room.

²⁰ In the Netherlands, there are three large funeral organizations: Yarden, DELA and Monuta. Together they have over 50 crematoria, which is over 50% of all crematoria in the Netherlands. There are also many other, small organizations with one or more crematoria.

²¹ All interviews were semi-structured interviews focusing on the history and developments of music during funeral rituals, and took 50–75 minutes. The interviews were conducted in crematoria (employees of the crematoria) and at the office of the system integrator companies.

Spread over the 38 crematoria that responded to the survey, there are 15 grand pianos, 14 electronic organs, 7 pianos and 2 pipe organs. Only three crematoria do not have any musical instruments. There are twelve crematoria that have two instruments in the first ceremony room. The most popular combination, found in 7 crematoria, is the combination of an electronic organ and a grand piano. Only one crematorium had removed an instrument, an electronic organ. Pipe organs were placed between 1936 and 1939, electronic organs between 1966 and 2012, grand pianos between 1970 and 2015, and pianos between 1990 and 2015.

Interviews about the use of the musical instruments reveal that the presence of musical instruments in crematoria does not imply a frequent use of the instruments, as by far most of the funeral music consists of recorded music. Still, in a minority of the cases there is live music, for example when (grand)children sing a song or play the piano. The frequency of family making music during a ceremony varies from “2 a day, 4, 6 a week, and then nothing for weeks” (Crematorium 4). Furthermore, choirs sometimes sing during cremation rituals, especially when the deceased or his or her partner used to be a choir member. Also in a minority of cases, but with a growing frequency, funeral musicians are hired to perform during the cremation ritual.²²

Then, why do crematoria invest in the availability of musical instruments if the instruments are only used in a minority of cases? A site visit to a crematorium that had indicated having no instruments showed why most crematoria possess instruments and have invested a lot of money in buying a musical instrument, even though they are not frequently used:

From today on, we have a piano! It's still in the hall, but it will be placed in the ceremony room later today. Often, next of kin called and asked whether there was a piano in the ceremony room. So, they had to take

²² Unfortunately, precise numbers are not available. Employees of crematoria, when asked about this phenomenon, all indicate that it *does* happen, but less frequently than live music performed by next of kin (e.g. a grandson).

care of an instrument. Now, we have taken care of that, so next of kin don't have to worry about that. (Crematorium 4)

That crematoria want to facilitate the musical wishes of the deceased is also visible in the number of organs in crematoria. The high number of organs is surprising, as they are almost exclusively used for hymn singing during the decreasing number of Christian funerals. Even though these instruments are even less frequently used than (grand) pianos, crematoria still invest in these instruments. Employees of crematoria explained the availability of musical instruments as a need to fulfil the wishes of next of kin:

Yeah, you need to be able to facilitate it when people ask about it. I think it just belongs there [in the ceremony room], it's common that you have them. Yeah, if you want to fulfil the wishes of next of kin, you have to go along. You want to facilitate it, provide the possibility, give them some options. (Crematorium 3)

However, as most of the musical repertoire nowadays consists of recorded music, the focus in the remaining part of this section will be on recorded music facilities.

Musical repertoire

At the end of the 20th century, the sober and fixed funeral rituals started to disappear (Enklaar 1995; Venbrux, Heessels and Bolt 2008). This is often explained by, amongst other things, ongoing processes of secularization and the influx of migrants, which led to diverse mortuary practices. Changes are also partly attributed to “the gay community, which (confronted with deaths from AIDS/HIV from the 1980s onwards) organized extravagant funerals and memorial services” (Venbrux, Peelen and Altena 2009, 97). Moreover, processes of individualization have influenced contemporary funerals: “the

emphasis in late modernity on individualization and self-fulfilment is reflected in today's funerals centering around identity, celebration of the life, and personal choice" (Adamson and Holloway 2012, 34). Contemporary funerals are centred around the identity of the deceased and the identity of next of kin in relation to the deceased. In other words, the funeral is one of the ways in which next of kin continue bonds with the deceased (Klass and Steffen 2018).

The redesign of funeral practices already indicates that it can be challenged whether death is still avoided at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. The Danish sociologist Michael Hviid Jacobsen suggests that in Western society death avoidance is replaced by a spectacular death, "in which death, dying and mourning have increasingly become spectacles" (Jacobsen 2016). As it is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on this, for now we suffice by mentioning changes in the ways death is dealt with, and that within contemporary funerals, the focus on identity is key.

Music is one of the ways to express identity, in other words: to personalize the funeral. Although music can also be used to deal with religion, to regulate emotions, to cover time or to follow tradition (Caswell 2011, Adamson and Holloway 2012; Garrido and Davidson 2016), within the 'personal funeral' music that reminds of the deceased plays an important role. One of the interviewees remarked the importance of this 'personal music' as follows: "Music is an important part of life. Maybe that's the biggest change! Music is a really important part of life. There are funerals where music is just part of the ceremony. But there are also funerals where music is part of life." (Crematorium 2).

Because of this personalization, from the end of the 20th century, people increasingly brought their own musical repertoire to the crematorium. As a result, the use of standard combinations disappeared and the repertoire broadened. Next to classical music, such as the *Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi, *Air* by Johann Sebastian Bach and *Adagio* by Tomaso Albinoni, nowadays pop songs are frequently heard during

cremation rituals. In contemporary Dutch society, pop music is a popular musical genre. According to Douglas Davies, the use of popular songs “is an appropriate way of recalling the deceased person’s life and of bidding farewell” (Davies 2017, 233).

Popular songs are for example *Time to say goodbye* by Andrea Bocelli and Sarah Brightman, *Mag ik dan bij jou* (Can I be with you) by Claudia de Breij and *Afscheid nemen bestaat niet* (Saying farewell does not exist) by Marco Borsato.²³

Next to pop music and classical music, other genres are heard too:

We also have hard-core music, live music, house, and all kinds of choirs, from gospel to eh... male choirs.[...] In the past [...] sometimes ceremonies all had the same music. That’s gone nowadays, fortunately I would say: it’s all customized. (Crematorium 5)

In addition to the broadening of the musical repertoire, the amount of music that was played during funeral rituals increased. At the end of the 20th century, the demand for more speeches and music (Cappers 2012, 624–625) contributed to the extension of the available time in the crematorium (Crematorium 6). In addition, the increasing number of crematoria in the Netherlands contributed to the extension of the time. For example, in 1988 there were 32 crematoria in the Netherlands, covering a cremation percentage of 40%. In 2017 there are over 90 crematoria, covering a cremation rate of almost 65%. Remarks should be made on these numbers, as crematoria might have multiple ceremony rooms, ceremonies can be performed outside the crematorium, and ceremonies performed in the crematoria do not necessarily lead to the cremation of the deceased, as the deceased can also be buried afterwards.

²³ It is not known why this specific repertoire is popular during funerals. We assume that, in addition to the popularity of pop songs in general and copy-paste behaviour of next of kin, words in the song titles that refer to bidding farewell play an important role.

As a consequence of the broadened repertoire, the standard combinations of three pieces of music became replaced by the so called *muziekboek* (music book). This was a list containing all the pieces of music that were available in a crematorium, including the songs that were taken from the former standard combinations. When employees of the crematorium thought that a specific piece of music that was brought by next of kin might be played during future funerals, they added the piece to the music book of the crematorium. In this way, next of kin were not forced to bring their own music, as the music book provided a growing number of musical pieces that were available in the crematorium.

At the end of the 20th century, recorded music was no longer played from cassette tapes, but from Compact Discs (CDs). For employees of the crematorium, the CD had not only made it easier to prepare the music for the next funeral, but also to play the music that was brought by the next of kin.

It all became easier. You could select number 6 and it played number 6. You didn't have to search, as you had to do with the cassette tape or those large reel to reel tapes. The CDs were also smaller.... People also began to bring their own music to the crematorium. So if you were a fan of Marco Borsato, you had CDs of that artist at home. Then you brought some of them to the crematorium and said: 'you have to play number X of this CD and number X of that CD'. That was a lot easier. (Crematorium 6)

Nowadays, in addition to CDs and music files on USB sticks, the internet is also often used to select and transfer digital music files, for example via services such as WeTransfer. The previously mentioned music books are often available as online playlists on the websites of the crematoria. As the results of the survey already showed, 28 of the 38 respondents had an online playlist on their website. Of these 28

crematoria, 15 introduced the playlist on their website in the period between 2014 and 2016.

Next of kin can choose music from the online playlist or refer to online ‘funeral playlists’ on YouTube, Spotify or websites of large funeral organisations. These easily accessible online playlists might have a directing function in the selection of musical repertoire. For example: next of kin might never have thought of the song *Tears in Heaven* (Eric Clapton), but the presence of this song on the online playlists might inspire them to choose this music for use in the cremation ritual.

In choosing music, the ‘right performance’ is often an important criterion. The music to be played during a cremation ritual might be part of the online playlist, yet next of kin bring their own music files, because they want to hear a specific recording, for example “because that recording has a characteristic scratch [as in: damaging scratch in the physical record, for example caused by a sharp object]” (Crematorium 2).

Audio-visual system

The survey showed that all crematoria have recorded music facilities. However, most crematoria (32 of the 38) make use of facilities that have many more applications than only ‘playing music’. The music facilities have become part of audio-visual systems. These audio-visual systems are designed by system integrator companies specifically for use in crematoria and make it possible to deal with many different types of music files (WAF, FLAC, MP3 et cetera) that are brought to the crematorium by next of kin (System Integrator 2).

The music system is integrated in an audio-visual system that supports a major part of the crematorium’s services. The system contains inter alia subsystems for routing at the car park and through the crematorium, for dealing with audio and visual files, and for

recordings and livestreams of the funeral ritual. It is designed in such a way that it is easy to handle for the crematorium employees:

What's behind it is very complex, but the company has made it easy for us [employees of crematoria] to control it. We have a touchscreen in the ceremony room that has a very simple program, with an overview, a playlist.... You can also adjust the volume of the microphone with it, control the doors of the ceremony room and tell the kitchen how many people there are. (Crematorium 2)

The integrated music subsystem has a built-in music quality scan and provides the possibility to edit music (for example to cut off applause). In this way, crematoria are still able to control the quality of the recordings that are brought by the next of kin.

The audio-visual system needs to be updated regularly for various reasons. According to employees of system integrator companies the updates

are based on both the consumer and our continuing contact with the crematoria where we say that it's time to improve the system, because the system is far behind the newest technological developments. (System integrator 2)

For crematoria, it is important that they can fully rely on this system, “because at a funeral, there is high pressure: everything must go well, because you can say farewell only once” (Crematorium 2). Therefore, system integrator companies build the entire system redundantly: if a part of the system fails, another part takes over.

So, system integrator companies want to meet the demands of the crematoria, while crematoria, in their turn, want to meet the wishes of the bereaved:

We [employees of crematoria] really try to develop the system. But it's actually that people ask for increasingly more. They know what they want. Yeah, you have to go along. So, our system needs to be improved. [...] Four years ago, it was not possible for the next of kin to upload the music directly into our system. They had to bring CDs or USB sticks. Now the next of kin can also send the music via the internet. So the technology really changes... First, you could only send music, but now you can also send pictures. And time will definitely tell that movies can be sent too. (Crematorium 3)

In the last quote, it already becomes clear that the development of audio-visual systems benefit both the next of kin and the employees of the crematoria. Next of kin can now easily send their music files via the internet instead of bringing CDs or USB sticks to the crematorium, which had to be done at least 24 hours before the funeral so employees could check the quality of the recording. As music can nowadays be uploaded directly into the system of the crematorium, employees of crematoria don't have to do this themselves.

Altogether, technological developments, demands of the crematoria and wishes of the next of kin have become intertwined in the development of the audio-visual system.

Music and the funeral ritual in the 21st century

Having illustrated the broadening of the musical repertoire and mapped the contemporary music facilities in crematoria, we will now explore how these relate to contemporary funerals.

Contemporary audio-visual systems provide an invisible infrastructure in the ceremony room, facilitating not only the music, but also visual media, microphone and lights in the crematorium. As crematoria are dependent on this system and heavily rely on it, the system integrator companies build the system redundantly to prevent any failure in the system. Media and technology are thus highly, but often invisibly, interwoven with

funeral practices: without the audio-visual system the cremation ritual cannot take place. This especially goes for the personalization of the funeral, as digital music (and other media such as pictures) is nowadays vital to the personalization of the funeral.

Funeral music, selected by next of kin, is an important personal element of contemporary personalized funeral rituals. The focus on identity (the personal) might even overrule the criterion of quality of a recording and justify scratches and other 'noises' as part of a specific performance. So, although the audio-visual system is designed to guarantee quality, quality is not always the most important criterion. Especially funeral music that held meaning for the deceased or reminds next of kin of the deceased plays a significant role in the personalization of the personal funeral. The personal meaning attributed to a specific recording of a piece of music can overrule the aim of funeral professionals to provide high quality music recordings. In the previously mentioned example of the characteristic scratch on a recording, personalization overrules professionalization.

Conclusion

In this article, we draw attention to the relation between musical media and cremation rituals in the Netherlands. Socio-cultural attitudes towards death and, more specifically, the ways people deal with death, are in the background of the funeral rituals. Rituals both express and produce these attitudes towards death and music is an important part of these rituals. During the 20th century, the musical repertoire was an ongoing reflection of how people dealt with death. At the beginning of the 20th century, the advent of socialist songs reflected how socialist groups, one of the pillars in Dutch society, claimed their voice in cremation rituals. From the sixties onwards, in the period of fixed and sober rituals, the standard combinations of three pieces of music reflected how death was avoided. Nowadays, music is no longer connected to pillars or preselected in standard combinations, but has become one of the constitutive elements

of the personal funeral, as funeral music is often related to the deceased. So, throughout a century of cremation rituals in the Netherlands, the funeral repertoire not only reflected socio-cultural attitudes towards death during funeral rituals, but also became an indispensable part of it.

The recorded music facilities in crematoria were not only used to reproduce music, but also became increasingly focused on the demands of crematoria. This becomes visible in the use of the cassette tape that facilitated the reproduction of standard combinations of music in the tight time schedule in crematoria from the sixties until the end of the 20th century. Nowadays, music facilities have become part of a highly advanced audio-visual system. The development of this system is not only based on technological developments and demands of the crematoria, but also on the wishes of the next of kin. Moreover, the system functions as an invisible infrastructure in the crematorium in which media and media technologies deeply infiltrate funeral practices.

To conclude, throughout a century of cremation rituals in the Netherlands, these rituals are not only facilitated by but also increasingly shaped through musical media.

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