

***Fifty Years Freetime is a translation of the original article 'Vijftig jaar Freetime', that was published in DJM 257 – summer 2022.***



*In 1971, the Freetime began making jazz music. Inspired on traditional jazz, the the band their own "Freetime" sound.*

It was on a Friday, the weekly old-style night at the Haarlem Jazz Club. The Freetime Old Dixie Jass Band (FODJB) provided a real spectacle. The man with the sousaphone, Jaap de Wit, swung his heavy instrument from left to right and back again during the songs. Fortunately for his corpus, he regularly swapped that immense colossus for a double bass or a bass saxophone and on the last song, the Tiger Rag, Jaap and his sousaphone were responsible for the 'roar' that is normally in the trombonist's job description. The band was swinging like crazy and no doubt must have been listening to the Chris Barber Jazz Band a lot. In short, the energy was splashing off the stage. That perhaps explains the success of the Freetime ODJB, the



*Jaap de Wit*

orchestra that has been touring town and country since its inception - apart from corona time, of course.

In the band, two brothers, sharing 50 years of life's joys and sorrows on stage and on the road. How do they do it? "That's the good vibe," believes banjoist Piet De Wit. "Of course we differ from time to time but we respect each other. You can have a lot from each other if you trust each other. And also our wives are befriended. It clicked immediately between them. In the past, they joined us often and now they are occasionally there when we go abroad." Apart from the two brothers, trombonist Rob Vlam was also on hand during the formation. He writes the arrangements, divides the sets and does the presentation on stage. Rob was not present for this interview due to time constraints.

"It was the era of skifflerage. Around 1956. Our parents had a record shop. So we

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were the first to listen to all the music that came out. In the 1950s, for instance, it was Ice Cream by the Dutch Swing College Band and Chris Barber with Petite Fleur. That was just in the charts. And Papa Bue's Viking Jazz Band, not to forget. For us, that has always been the ultimate dixieland." "Some 15 years later, the Mississippi Stompers with Jan Jaap Kroep on clarinet and Ruud Peerdeman on trumpet were Enkhuizen's local heroes, but Jan Jaap and Ruud stepped out. They were looking for 'a new challenge' and approached us and Rob Vlam about forming a new band. The style of Chris Barber and the Dutch Swing College Band, that seemed like a direction. Ruud Peerdeman was also conductor of a wind band and was soon making arrangements for the Freetime ODJB."

The band has its own sound; the typical Freetime sound. This is partly formed by the rhythm section. Piet: "It has to do with timing, which of course the whole band contributes to. We are lucky that the drums are now played by Pieter, Jaap's son. He grew up with the sound of our first drummer Cor van der Horst; Pieter knows all the records of the Freetime ODJB by heart."

"In July 1972, the Freetime ODJB competed in the Loosdrecht Jazz Competition. You could play for ten minutes. We had rehearsed ourselves senseless on three songs, including the Tiger Rag. The competition had six preliminary rounds and one of them we won. But we only had three songs and we didn't want to play the same ones. But we did it anyway and were in the finals with six other orchestras. That turned out to be a shared fifth place. The jury consisted of people who were not all very fond of our music: the famous American bassist

Charles Mingus and big band leader Boy Edgar (he said: 'I think your music is terrible'). Mingus played with his own group at the festival."



*Rob Vlam*

"In 1973 or 1974, we entered the Jazz Festival Breda competition. The jury included a director of the academy of music and the duo Jack van Glabbeek and Jan Taris, and they couldn't agree with the other jury members. They arguments."

"Incidentally, the British/Australian band Max Collie Rhythm Aces also played at the competition in Breda. That whole tent was upside down. What a sensation that was! Over the years, we built up a friendly relationship with the members of the Max Collie band. Some orchestra members regularly played as guests during a performance of the Freetime ODJB. Only banjoist Jim McIntosh is still alive."

The first LP, Live In Enkhuizen, from 1975, was a hit. As soon as the needle sank into the groove, the living room became a jazz club. The atmosphere of the music came across very well. "The applause during the pieces was a thingy, though. You still had those tape recorders back then. The applause was put on a loop after one time; a piece of tape spinning incessantly. When the record was edited, that loop was started after many solos. However, the 'enthusiastic' audience had only clapped once."

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"The Freetime ODJB consists of a solid core of the four musicians already mentioned, plus a close-knit musicians-friends team, which we can do great with."

"We have seen in recent years that wanting to make music ourselves is under pressure. In the past, the range of musicians playing in our style was greater. But we are very happy with the way we can run the band at the moment. We used to rehearse twice a week, which was no problem. Nowadays, it's not."

### **An audience of four hundred**

"The band had several line-ups, some of whom have sadly passed away: the trumpeter Hans Peter Pluim, who arranged and also led several brass bands. And Cor van der Horst, drummer on most of the records." Of the most memorable gigs, Piet and Jaap pick out a few. "We played a lot in Germany. The gigs at the festival in Dresden were great. We also often played at the legendary 100 Club on Oxford Street in London, together with Jack Gilbert (kl/as) and Jim McIntosh (bj) of Max Collie. Four hundred people in the audience. Those were great gigs! And of course, a 1995 performance at the French Quarter Festival in New Orleans was also very special. The organisers were about to cancel the gig because of torrential rain, but suddenly the sun broke through and we were able to play anyway. The audience was overjoyed. Even the mayor was watching and said afterwards that he regretted that we lived in the Netherlands and not in New Orleans. After this gig, we (Jaap, Piet and Hans Peter) went back to the hotel while we played. In one of the streets, a group of local boys joined us and one of them started tap dancing. Soon a circle formed around us and the procession got longer and bigger. A woman, presumably the mother of the tap-dancing boy, had placed a shoebox in the

middle, into which onlookers threw money. When we arrived at the hotel, the box was full and the money was immediately confiscated by the mother."

"Between 1975 and 1995, we traditionally gave a New Year's concert in the Nieuwe Doelen on two evenings, with an average of five hundred visitors each evening. We then often invited guest musicians from our favourite orchestras like Max Collie, but Monty Sunshine, Pat Halcox and Ian Wheeler of the Chris Barber Jazz Band also joined us on stage. Recently Jaap found a recording of one of these concerts with Pat Halcox, and we have now decided to release these recordings. When this will happen is not yet known."

Jaap, Piet De Wit and Rob Vlam were jointly responsible for organising and running the first editions of the Enkhuizen Jazz Festival from 1974. Piet: "We had all been to Breda, where we had participated in the pub crawl. Sitting at home in our regular pub Jan Boks, we said, 'Surely we can organise a pub crawl?' Can't you take care of five pubs 'Then I'll take care of five orchestras.' Jan said: 'I'll see if we can do that.' While pub landlords were not eager to hire a band, I soon had five orchestras arranged, including the Animal Crackers and the Dixie Disciples. Eventually, the pubs caved in. Jan Bok made the leaflets with one of the regulars and the audience poured in.



*2018 gig: Jazzsquare Oisterwijk (photo by Cor Dekker)*

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*Freetime Old Dixie Jass Band, Over the Waves*

September 2022, the whole family is present under their own name at the jazz festival in Bude. At the time of writing this story, a trumpet player was still being sought.

Author: René van Kalken

Over the years, more and more pubs joined; the largest number was 24. Moreover, the festival expanded with performances by domestic and foreign acts in the Paktuinen and the Nieuwe Doelen. The Enkhuizen streets were temporarily renamed Bourbon Street, Canal Street and Burgundy Street. Audiences walked through the streets following the music of various brass bands; in short, a typical New Orleans atmosphere."



*Jaap and Piet de Wit, 2022  
(Picture René van Kalken)*

Dorine, Piet de Wit's daughter plays the banjo like her father and also sings. She lives in Bude, England, where a festival takes place every year. When Dorine is in the Netherlands, she sometimes sings with her father's band. YouTube has some videos of her English band and a snippet of a 2016 performance with the Freetime ODJB. Jaap ( jr.), Jaap's son, plays drums in the Hot Revival Stompers and reeds – including soprano sax - in other combinations. Moreover, he participates on occasion in the Freetime ODJB. In

#### Discografie:

- 1 *Live In Enkhuizen* (lp) Cat Records CAT LP-14, 1976
- 2 *Doctor Jazz Magazine 25th Reunion, FTODJB + George Probert (ss) (lp)* CAT LP-19, 1977 (een nummer)
- 3 *Live In Enkhuizen Vol. 2* (lp) CAT LP-25, 1978
- 4 *Twelve Tracks Of Free Time* (lp en cd) Cat LP-36, 1980
- 5 *Ten Years Freetime* (lp) CAT LP-44, 1981
- 6 *Naughty Eyes* (lp en cd) CAT LP-61, 1987
- 7 *Pennies From Heaven* (lp en cd) CAT CD-6302, 1990
- 8 *Dans Les Rues D'Antibes* CAT CD-6403, 1991
- 9 *Song Of The Night* CAT CD-6606
- 10 *Live In Grimwald* (cd) Disky SP 905611, 2003
- 11 *Various – Amersham Jazz Club - Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration*, 2014

Jaap de Wit (bassax, contrabas) op:

- 12 *Fried Potatoes - Take Me Gently*, CAT LP-23, 1977
- 13 *Fried Potatoes - Unknown Lady* CAT LP-56, 1986

Bezettingen:

Ruud Peerdeman (trompet) op 1 en 2,  
Hans Peter Pluim (trompet en cornet) op 3 t/m 9,  
Jos Reijnhout (trompet) op 10  
Jan Jaap Kroep (altsax, klarinet) op alles,  
behalve 11  
Rob Vlam (trombone) op alles, behalve 3  
Piet de Wit (banjo) op alles  
Jan Jaap de Wit (contrabas, sousafoon,  
bassax) op alles, (trombone) op 3,  
Edward Visser (contrabas) op 2 en 3  
Cor van der Horst (drums) 1 t/m 8,  
John Lippe (drums) 10 en 11,  
Kees Steltpool (drums) op 9  
Jonny Boston (tenorsax) op 11  
Jan Sutherland (vocal) op 5

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