

Tour Yuri Honing Trio South America 2004

we waited long for this tour. Finally we travel to South America. It is the last continent where we didn't play yet. Except for Antarctica. The rich musical culture of South America always attracted us but we never had the opportunity to play there. So I am excited to leave. We will travel to Bolivia, Argentina and Brazil. I especially look forward to Brazil. During my study in the Hague I met many Brazilians and had a relationship with a Brazilian flutist. I always kept a weak spot for the music, language and people of Brazil.

We start the tour with a 24 hour delay. Just after we enter the plane they find out that there is a technical problem with the hydraulic system of one of the wings. It's 11 at night and the spare part has to come from Paris. We leave the plane and spend the night in Holland in a hotel. The next midday we leave and of course miss our connection from Sao Paulo, Brazil to La Paz, Bolivia. So we spend the night in Sao Paulo and leave the next day. Luckily we had planned an extra day in La Paz to get used to the altitude of 3500 meters. So we will not miss our concert but will not be able to get acclimatized. People warned us for fatigue, headaches and short of breath. The only medicine that is supposed to help is chewing coca leaves. Although not a fan of drugs in general I am willing to try it.

One of the things that I like about travelling is the fact that you spend a lot of time in twilight zones. Sitting in a bus, plane or car with your mind in a freeflow of thoughts. Sometimes I try to read a book but most of the time I'm in this state between sleeping and being awake. Where your mind starts to freely associate different thoughts and memories. Quite therapeutic I must say. It puts life in perspective again and gives your mind some time to process all the recent events. In my case an ending of a relationship. Since some weeks I am on my own again. A mixture of feelings, a sense of freedom and space but also failure and loneliness. I always seem to get caught between two opposites. Freedom and independence versus connection and sharing. Touring and staying at home. Being an artist and being a family man. These extremes seem to attract me like tides. Summer and winter. Movement and quietness. I slowly learn to accept this character but in the same time I wonder if I always want to be caught in the middle and that I don't seem to enjoy either of the options. I am learning myself to embrace the moment and make the best of each opportunity. I am here now and this is the best place where I could be in this moment instead of just longing to get to the other side.

Bolivia

La Paz is one of the most exiting flying experiences I had. La Paz is at an altitude of 3500 meters, the airport is on 4000 meters. The mountains and planes are spectacular.

When we came off the plane we felt it straight away. We were short of breath, dizzy and our hands and legs were shaky. You feel that the air pressure is much less. When you wave your hands you feel less resistance. But later that day we would also experience the less pleasant sides of altitude sickness.

Bolivia is beautiful, the country but definitely also the people. They are amongst the friendliest and most beautiful people I met. La Paz, being on the Inca route is largely inhabited by "Indians" the local inhabitants of South America. Beautiful brown skin, big dark eyes, high cheekbones and beautiful thick straight black hair. Many women still wear the traditional clothes, many layers of skirts, a poncho and a Bowler's Hat. Everybody is friendly, open and helpful, even the taxidrivers! No hustling, no bargaining.

After we arrived we had little time to visit the city. The first concert was that night in the Teatro Municipal. Gonneke, our contact at the Dutch embassy who arranged

everything for us, warned with many scary stories about the altitude disease. We still felt fine but we straight away started to drink coca tea and ordered a bag of coca leaves with a cab driver. Coca leaves are for sale everywhere on markets and street corners. These leaves are actually used to produce cocaine but you need 5 kg of leaves to produce 3 grams of coke. It seems to do the job, the increasing headaches and dizziness seem to fade a little.

When we arrive in the theatre my headache is taking migrain-like proportions. Yuri is trying to play his saxophone but feels like he is blowing a hollow tube. The less dense air asks for much more power to build up sufficient air pressure to play. It must be an exhausting experience. When we get to the dressing room they just wheel in a huge oxygen tank with mask. It seems a bit exaggerated at first but they convince us that most non-local musicians need it. Even in the hotels they have oxygen handy for those guests suffering altitude disease. The concert goes quite well considering but after the concert we do use the oxygen. My head feels like it is going to explode any moment now. Back in the hotel I take a special local medicine, sorochi pills, provided by the hotel and I try to sleep. I wake up every hour but the next morning my headache is gone.

The second day we do a workshop and a concert. In a local conservatory we talk about our music and play some tunes. A man from the Dutch embassy translates to Spanish. Later we split up and we each work with a group of musicians.

That night we play in the local jazz club Thelonius which is packed, many people that saw the concert last night showed up again. Also many people from the embassy attend the concert. We have a great concert we all seemed to have adapted amazingly well. After the concert we have many animated conversations with Bolivians and Dutch expats. We receive presents from a lovely girl who plays saxophone and spontaneously falls in love with Yuri. We get back to the hotel around 2 am and have to leave at 5 am to Buenos Aires. I pack my bags and bass and feel great. On top of the world in the highest city of the world.

Argentina

Argentina is very different from Bolivia. Buenos Aires is a modern lively city with many contrasts. In Palermo, a modern soho-like quarter, with many art galleries, design shops you find the young successful people. Nearby are the slums where people live in self-built sheds. San Telmo is the classic tango quarter with a pleasant old colonial feel with little markets and many antique shops. It's a huge city and I don't seem to be able to pinpoint a certain identity that is really Argentinian. It is an international city like New York and Amsterdam.

At the airport we meet Jannie our Dutch organiser. She organised the Argentinian part of the tour. She is pretty nervous since this is the first tour she organises in Argentina but everything goes really well. The concerts are all sold out and we are well received by Marnix from our sponsor ING. He is a very friendly Dutch-speaking Argentinian who attends all our concerts. A true music lover. Also the people from the Dutch embassy where we play our final concerts are heartwarming and friendly.

The main concert we play is in Notorius Gandhi. A nice club where people eat during the concert. The concert is sold out and we play 2 great sets. After the concert it takes me an hour to get to myself again. Music can be so intense. After the high altitude concerts in La Paz it is great to have our breath and energy back. To me this was one of the best concerts ever. It seems that we still develop a lot. We keep on pushing each other to greater heights.

Brazil

Sometimes you have to put all your assumptions aside.

I looked forward to go to brasil ever since i was 19. I studied at the royal conservatory in The Hague where i lived in an international student house with people from all over the world. Some of them from brasil. One of the, Fernanda, became my girlfriend and another, giomar who played viola da gamba, became a very close friend. Through them i met many other brazilians and learned about the culture, food and music. I loved all of it. It was so new for me. It was opposite of everything in my dutch culture. It was warm, passionate, intense, friendly and cheerful. I spent many nighths with there friends not understanding a word of the language, just absorbing the atmosphere, energy and music. To me it was like a warm bath.

Joelke, our Dutch organiser in Brasil, showed us around Sao Paolo. Being an architect she was so passionate about the architecture of Sao Paolo that we finally shared her opinion that Sao Paolo was one of the most beautiful cities of the world. Even though everybody else we met told us the opposite. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Being in Brasil was very special but much to short. I can't wait to go back there and travel around.