

# Yuri Honing, a fearless composer

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Cue student reporter

**Y**uri Honing has the same approach to music that he has to life: he tries everything at least once. Honing started playing at the age of five and has experimented with every musical instrument he could find. "There was a time I was obsessed with skill," says Honing, who is performing at the Festival for the first time. "I absolutely had to play everything well."

The saxophonist comes from a classical background as you might have guessed. He used to be a piano player who initially loved music by Bach, Rousseau and composers from the Renaissance period. Later on he fell in love with Arabic, Indian, Brazilian, and pop music. "I don't believe in genres and discriminating. I am a lover of everything that is good."

Honing describes his move to the saxophone as a gamble.

"My father gave me a record of Vladimir Ashkenazy when I was 13 and I put it on and I listened to it once and that was the moment I decided to quit piano because I could hear that it was impossible for me to reach that level," he says, shaking his shaggy head.

He loved the freedom the saxophone offered him

because no one in his family played it.

"I grew up in a musical family and they knew the classical repertoire. You would be playing downstairs, and somebody would shout, 'that's a B flat not B,' so I chose the saxophone because it was a fairly unknown instrument in those days and nobody in my family knew the repertoire."

"The first six months after I started playing, my father said to me, 'You know son, you sound like you're raping a sheep,' but he thinks I sound better these days."

He switched from alto to tenor saxophone when he was 18 – for reasons that seem superficial. The Dutch man was so tall that a friend told him he looked ridiculous playing the alto, a smaller saxophone, so he made the switch and has been successful ever since.

His myriad of musical influences is also reflected in the kind of music he plays now. A decade ago, he had what he describes as a very loud band, Wired Paradise.

"It used to have electric guitars and bass guitars. It was like a mixture of rock, punk, heavy metal, all kinds of electronics but it was impossible to tour with. It was bloody explosive. I had to check into the hospital every time I came home after tour,"

he chuckles.

"Now I am in an acoustic quartet. It's not that we have no amplification; it's just that we play rather softly nowadays in comparison to the stuff I used to play in Wired Paradise."

Being a musician has allowed him to tour the world, but Honing says he has seen enough.

"We've been doing this for 25 years and I don't want to sound spoilt but I've been everywhere and nothing surprises me anymore. I've seen everything at least five times. I have some friends all over the world, which is nice because then I don't enter any country as a tourist. This makes me very lucky, a very privileged man."

But this is his first visit to Grahamstown and tonight's show is sure to shine the spotlight on his eclectic tastes and ignite his audience's imaginations.

"I hope they will be touched, that's the main thing and get some inspiration from it, that would be great too and that they don't just listen, but also that they see something while they listen."

*Yuri Honing Acoustic Quartet, DSG Auditorium, today, 9.30pm.*



Yuri Honing Acoustic Quartet draws influence from a range of music styles, from old pop to Arabic music. They have just released their 2nd album as a group, called 'Desire'. Photo: Greg Roxburgh.