

# Start the cultural season with black champagne: nothing to celebrate with Shell

*Amsterdam, September 13, 2019* - Today the Concertgebouw celebrates the Opening Night of their orchestra's new season. On the same day, Fossil Free Culture NL makes clear that there is little to celebrate on a dying planet. Solemn, near motionless performers carrying trays with glasses of black champagne, demonstrate the dissonance between the Concertgebouw's public image and its complicity in the global crimes by Royal Dutch Shell through its acceptance of their dirty money. As concert-goers inside the famous concert hall immerse themselves in the mesmerising sounds of Tsjajkovski's Swan Lake, outside, the public call for Shell's Swan Song reaches a crescendo. With so little time left to avert climate disaster, let this be the Fossil Free Culture Season Opening!



Fossil Free Culture NL, which successfully campaigned for the Van Gogh museum to drop Shell as a sponsor in 2018 and began its campaign at the Concertgebouw in January, reveals in this performance the strings attached in the Concertgebouw's toxic relationship

with the fossil fuel behemoth. On the first day of the beginning of the Dutch cultural year, FFC-NL warn that society cannot allow the arts to be infected by immoral corporations that threaten our very existence. They call for the Museumplein to be freed from the influence of the fossil fuel industry.

“It is time for Het Concertgebouw to realise that their behaviour is dissonant with the state our planet is in: accepting Shell’s money means it is playing a role in the destruction of our planet. And it is accepting that Fossil Free Culture will visit them until the entire Museumplein is fossil-free,” says Maria Rietberg. Royal Dutch Shell poses as a patron of the arts, sponsoring cultural institutions all over the Netherlands to buy a veneer of legitimacy for its harmful practices.

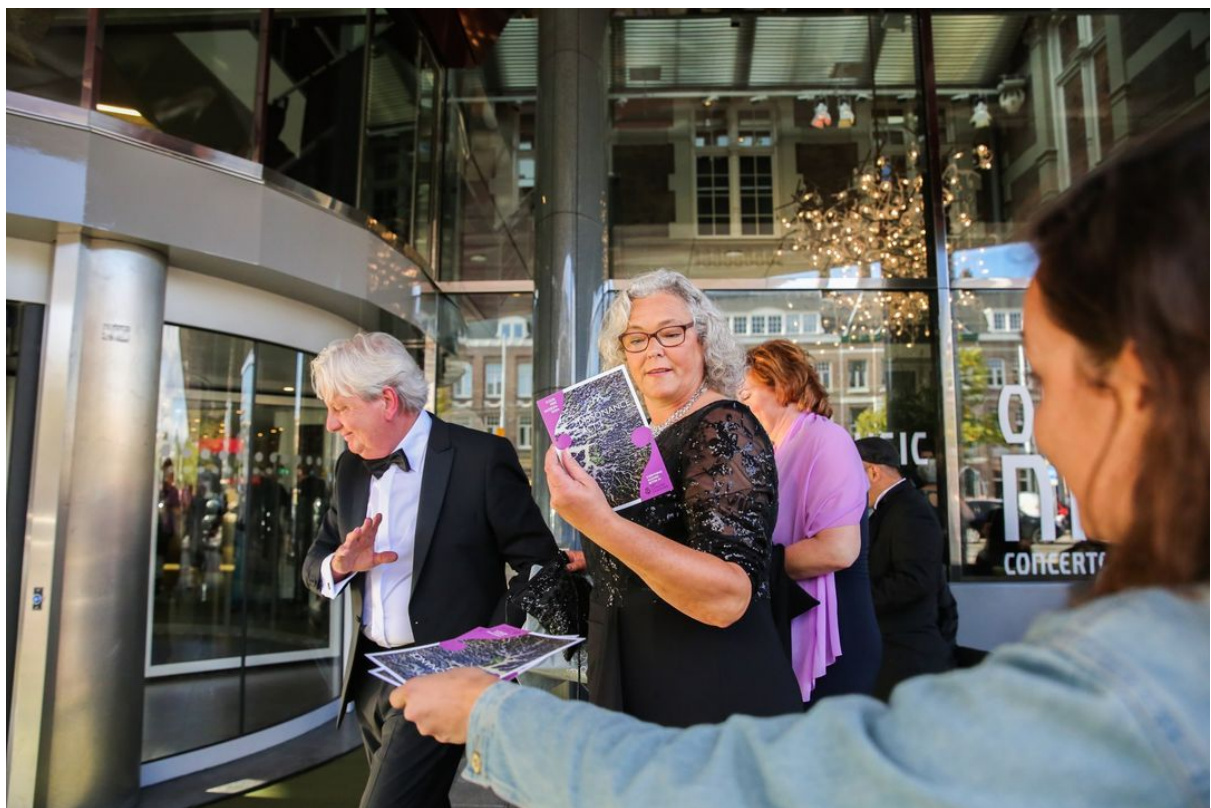
The Concertgebouw receives only a nominal fee from this fossil fuel behemoth for entry to its business club, but gives the company ample opportunity to use its facilities, allowing the intermingling of fossil fuel power-brokers and the Dutch elite. As a member of the business club, Shell executives are invited to exclusive dinners, can rent the space for their events, and can attend private concerts where they mingle with other members. “It’s outrageous that former Shell vice-chairman Hans Wijers can keep rubbing shoulders with his old colleagues from Shell,” says Rietberg. Wijers has been a member of the Concertgebouw’s board since [June 2015](#), and served as deputy chairman at Shell until [May 2018](#). Fossil Free Culture NL laments the way the Concertgebouw grants Shell the chance to lobby with government, other companies, and the royal family.

The Van Gogh museum dropped Shell in September 2018 after Fossil Free Culture’s art storm, with Museon and the Mauritshuis swiftly following suit. The Rijksmuseum dropped Saudi Arabian oil company Aramco of its own accord in January 2017. That leaves the Concertgebouw as the only cultural institution on the Museumplein that still accepts fossil fuel money. In January 2019, FFC-NL began its campaign to liberate the Museumplein from the fossil fuel industry with a performance in which bodies drenched in oil were pressed against its glass facade.

The Concertgebouw claims to be working towards sustainability. It has a ‘green mission’, which is generously funded to the tune of €500,000 per year by the BankGiro Loterij, one of

the Netherlands's biggest charities. But its ties to the fossil fuel industry undermines this supposed commitment. Dropping Shell as a member is the only way for it to make an honest claim to being green.

Ben van Beurden, the CEO of Shell, says one of his company's three major goals is to secure a "social license to operate", which he recognises is fast being eroded as people wake up to the reality of climate change. To FFC-NL, it doesn't matter how this licence is taken away, as long as it disappears. With the climate crisis staining its conscience, Amsterdam's next logical step is to have an unspoiled Museumplein, so that the city's cultural scene is no longer complicit in climate change.



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