

## Rotterdam is a city with a history of ships, sailors and seadogs. Today it is a thriving, multicultural hub, with much to offer its visitors. Stan Rijven shows us around the music scene of one of the world's largest port towns

From one perspective, Rotterdam is the gateway to Europe; from another, it's a window on the world. Its seafaring history has left its mark on a vibrant cultural scene, harbouring leading festivals in film, poetry and music.

"Rotterdam is now home to more than 189 different nationalities. This metropolis is transforming constantly because it is young, dynamic and international," says Guus Dutrieux. He is the driving force behind Dunya, the oldest world music festival in Europe, and Zomercarnaval, a huge Caribbean festival. In June Dutrieux launches Rotterdam Unlimited, which will merge the two festivals.

During World War II, bomb attacks destroyed the heart of Rotterdam; soon afterwards, urban renewal brought with it innovative architecture. Now the Maas River flows along a hyper-modern waterfront with a Manhattan-like skyline. The Wilhelmina Pier has futuristic skyscrapers, alongside the nostalgic Hotel New York and many other nightlife hotspots.

Situated on the North Sea and being the delta of Europe, the Netherlands has had, like the Jimmy Cliff song, many rivers to cross. The cradles of its two main cities were situated on the banks of a river. In the Middle Ages a dam in the Amstel gave birth to Amsterdam; another dam in the Rotte to Rotterdam. One found prosperity in the 17th century; the other at the turn of the 19th century. Rotterdam was – like Antwerp, Hamburg and Liverpool – a major junction for emigrants leaving the Old World and hoping for a better life

elsewhere, much like the Pilgrim Fathers, who headed for the US from Delfshaven, now part of Rotterdam.

Still, many of these emigrants decided to stay in Rotterdam. During the first half of the 20th century, their cultural heritage fused with the music of sailors from all over the globe and produced new hybrids of tango, Hawaiian music, jazz, music hall and Ashkenazi music. Some musicians hit the big time, such as the Jewish singer Leo Fuld who conquered Broadway, or tango king Arie Malando with his evergreen 'Ole Guapa.' The post-war influx of migrant workers from Cape Verde, the Mediterranean, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles created new dynamics. One community in particular stands out – Cape Verdean. Rotterdam has been a home to Lusophone artists like Bonga, Suzanna Lubrano and Gil Semedo, the pioneering Morabeza record label and Cape Verdean football stars Guy Ramos and Toni Varela.

Today, almost half of Rotterdam's population is of non-Dutch origin, and it's governed by a lord mayor of Moroccan descent. Rotterdam's multicultural mix can be experienced in the Binnenweg neighbourhood, a cosmopolitan mecca of record shops, fashion boutiques, bars and restaurants. It is the breeding ground of gabber (punishingly fast techno), home to the Cape Verdean music scene and host of several festivals such as Chinese New Year and Surinamese Ketji Koti. Visiting Rotterdam is like taking a world trip; it's a city where old shipping lines turn into new songs. »

# ROTTERDAM

