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LIFE IN HOLLAND

From Happy Hooker to drama queen



There's more to Xaviera Hollander than sex, sex and more sex. As we discover, the woman known as the Happy Hooker is on a mission: to bring English-language drama to Amsterdam.

Perhaps there's not such a big difference between being a hooker, staging plays and running a [bed and breakfast](#).

Or so Xaviera Hollander says. The woman who wrote Happy Hooker and helped millions learn how to be good in bed now has guests stay in her home, and stages English-language drama in Amsterdam.

"Eroticism in Holland doesn't exist. It's like cheap wine."

There are a few similarities between bedroom and auditorium. "As a hooker I was an actress too sometimes," she says. "Sometimes I would fake it, you know, to speed the job up."

And as the owner of a [bed and breakfast](#), Hollander says she is getting good at recognising her visitors in various states of undress. "You recognise your guests with their clothes on and their clothes off. It's like a whorehouse, although now I get the money without having to get laid."

Sex, sex, sex. It seems that's all people want to talk about with Hollander, even though the Happy Hooker was published nearly 30 years ago. It's not surprising: she's good at chatting about it. Direct and delightfully frank, Hollander has a talent for making the most uptight companion reveal their sexual secrets.

Xaviera's brainy side

But Hollander says sex is not the most important thing to her now. "People know I am very open and honest, but I am also highly intellectually stimulated by some brainy subjects."

Which is where the plays come in. Hollander is on a mission: to bring the best English-language drama to the Netherlands.

"Amsterdam needs some good English theatre," she says. "Now all you get are stand-up comedians and [Boom Chicago](#). I find it a bit boring."

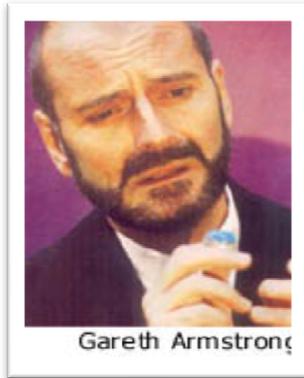
Hollander's theatrical endeavours have developed over the years, from hosting parties at her home in Stadionweg, Amsterdam, to "happy cooker" themed dinner parties ("I charged NLG 75 for the evening and gave out free wine. Now I know they drink you poor.")

"The British are pale and enigmatic. They have flowers in the bathtub but they don't wash themselves in it."

And about four years ago - when the evenings became "like a singles' club" and guests started stealing little, but sometimes expensive, ornaments as souvenirs - Hollander decided to run a "happy booker" theatre event in her house. "Someone offered me a black curtain and a podium, and another

friend gave me 60 theatre chairs and a light system," she says.

She also stages plays outside her home. Hollander's latest show, *Shylock*, is on at the Het Vindingrijk theatre in Utrechtsedwardsstraat 13, from 25-28 October. The monodrama, written and performed in English by Gareth Armstrong was a sell-out at the [Edinburgh Festival](#) two years ago. She has been visiting the festival for 20 years to find talent to bring to Amsterdam.



Gareth Armstrong

Guests at the show, in which Armstrong speaks not in the voice of *Shylock* himself but of Tubal, a character who passes virtually unnoticed in Shakespeare's play, are given a three-course sit-down dinner, a drink and get a chance to meet the actor.

Coming up next month is *A Night in November*, a one-man play featuring Irishman Fintan McDonagh, followed in December by *Xaviera's Cabaret in the Casbah*.

"Theatre is in my blood," she says. "I love to be creative and to bring the best to Holland."

"Young people are not as promiscuous as they were. They are into their pills, their Ecstasy and DJ and VJ music."

Happy Hooker makes good

Hollander burst onto the world's stage with the publication in 1971 of *The Happy Hooker*. The book's expose of her adventures as a

madam in New York is credited with bringing sex out of the closet for its 16 million readers. The [guestbook](#) on Hollander's website is full of gleeful reviews from grateful readers.

Since then she has written 17 other books, and has just finished work on another, *Child No More*, which tells her life story, with focus on her relationship with her parents. The book marked the end of 12 years of writer's block, brought about by an English boyfriend who repeatedly told her she "couldn't write her way out of a shoebox".

Hollander splits her time between Marbella, on Spain's Costa del Sol, and Amsterdam, where she is a famous face.

"It's so nice to be a bekende Nederlander (a well-known Dutch person)," she says. "They don't really know the *Happy Hooker* any more, but they do know me from newspapers and TV appearances."

"And they always recognise my eyes."

This notoriety has no doubt helped her business endeavours.

Hollander set up her bed and breakfast after she found herself rattling around her house (although she has two butlers) - and because she was a "tight" Dutch person.

Visitors can stay in the "David" or "Goliath" rooms for upwards of \$150 a night. Hollander has had some famous guests (Dennis Hopper is coming soon) - and some stories to tell, such as the time a Finnish guest was locked in the bathroom for an hour and had to be let out by a Christian Scientist - of all people - at five in the morning. "I didn't hear a thing," she says.

Looks like she is doing good business for the Amsterdam tourist office. But the city is not what it was, she says. "Amsterdam is getting like an old hippie."

"It's still romantic, but it's getting tatty and sleazy."

"Humour is the most important thing in my life. You have to have a laugh at least five times a day."

For information and bookings, call 020 673 3934 or [email](#). Or check this website.