Feast on Six Strings!

Five Years of Guitar Festival Nordhorn

By

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Feast on six strings, the report page on the DOS Amigos Homepage

Feast on Six Strings, five years of Guitar Festival Nordhorn. GFN, as it is called in the corridor chat, following its larger American brother GFA.

2011 saw the first Guitar Festival Nordhorn and the festival will have its sixth edition in 2016. A lustrum indeed and high time to linger a bit over the past years of GFN. That implies history, so we will make a start in the past.

In 1977 I arrived in Enschede, eager to leave my adolescent years in Amsterdam behind and to start a study in electronics at the Technische Hogeschool Twente (THT), the technical campus university in the eastern part of Holland that was established there to boost the area. The great advantage of the THT was the campus, unique in Holland in those days, that offered a room in a student flat for every student. That was hardly possible in the other locations in Holland with a technical university -Delft and Eindhoven- that traditionally suffered from a shortage in student accommodation.

My baggage included books, a home-built stereo set, a small rack of LPs, clothing, a bicycle (you cannot go without as a student) and a classical guitar. Two years before I had fallen in love with the instrument and made my first unaccustomed hand movements. I did not start guitar lessons, my parents would not afford them, so I made my first steps as an autodicact, working from a chord book.

Enschede is located in the eastern part of Holland in a region called Twente, quite near to the border of the German states Lower Saxony and North Rhine Westphalia. Many people from the west of Holland consider this area to be the middle of nowhere. The Dutch poet and songwriter Willem Wilmink (who was born in Enschede himself) emphasized this, writing the following lines about his home town that he nevertheless kept loving his whole life long:

It is the terminus of the train/No one likes this destination/No soul travels down this line/Enschede..

Before I went there, Enschede used to be a thriving industrial town full of textile industry, with well-known names of 'textile barons' like Van Heek, Ten Cate, Jannink and Blijdenstein. After the decline of the textile industry in Holland in the sixties and seventies of the last century, however, most textile factories in Enschede were closed and the city and surroundings suffered from high

unemployment and the view of large industry complexes in decline and impoverishing residential areas. That was the situation when I came to this part of the country from Amsterdam and started my study at the THT.

Yet against all odds, in the seventies Enschede established the Twente Conservatory that achieved some international fame and featured education for both classical and jazz musicians, the latter being a rarity in those days. At this conservatory Fred Rootveld, Bobby's father, professional pop musician, and entrepreneur of the Ivory Tower record label, passed the entry tests and completed his study of classical guitar with Louis Ignatius Gall. A pop musician that was admitted to the conservatory, that was a kind of revolution in the then stronghold of classical music! Fred met this challenge valiantly and successfully!

As a student in electronics, I decided to adopt the classical guitar as a serious hobby, so I took my first guitar lessons at the Enschede Musical School with Thea van der Meer who just graduated at the Twente Conservatory. In that way I got acquainted with guitar concerts and later events like the Segovia Guitar Festival in the early nineties. In those days the guitar scene was quite alive and even drew the attention of the organizers of the Guitar Series concerts from Amsterdam. In this way I attended concerts by amongst others the Assad Brothers (that was great!), Manuel Barrueco, Sharon Isbin and David Russell. Unfortunately at the beginning of the nineties the scene declined and the visits of classical guitar icons became rare.

Classical guitar festivals were not common in Twente. The nearest festival was the *Zwolse Gitaarweken*, the famous festival of the Zwolle Conservatory that had been established by the guitar professor Pieter van der Staak in 1969, but that was more than an hour's drive to the west from were I live. Possibly it would have remained that way forever if Bobby Rootveld had not studied classical guitar at the successor of the then Twente Conservatory in Enschede, the ArtEZ Conservatory.

Knowing the previous history, it was no surprise that Bobby would pick up the classical guitar and study at the Conservatory like his father. Some things you learn at your father's knee! Bobby, however, did not want to study guitar to become a performing classical guitarist or music teacher at a music school alone. Having a background in entertainment, cabaret and vaudeville theatre from his family business, he developed a broader view on performance with the classical guitar and took the extra course *Classical Guitar and Theatre* at the Messiaen Academy.

He realized this approach in two ways. First he met the recorder player and currently his wife Sanna van Elst and formed the Duo Niet In Het Zwart (NIHZ) in 2001. NIHZ translates as *Not Dressed In Black*, black being the standard outfit during performances of many of their classical compatriots. This *nomen* is an *omen* indeed, but for the better! Their performances connected with other art forms (such as paintings, light shows and recitations by a poet or narrator) and included clear elements of theatre and cabaret, so both ear and eye are pleased. That was how I met Bobby (and Sanna of course) in the town of Borne in the old Synagogue at the end of 2004. My wife and I liked their music and started to follow their recitals.

The third field was an initiative for a guitar festival. He enthused a number of friends from the conservatory to establish a festival for the classical guitar and the first Twente Guitar Festival was born in 2006. When I heard from this festival, being an amateur guitarist I overcame my diffidence towards master classes and subscribed. Since then I have been present to witness the history of the guitar festivals in my region.

I liked the festival that much that I started a blog-like report on my web site, the DOS Amigos Homepage. I had established this website in 1998, just to have a practical implementation of my HTML training course with the intention to share the scores of my guitar music world-wide, of course within the confines of copyright, so my collection basically is a *(More than 50 years) Dead Composers Society.*

For me, however, the DOS Amigos Homepage was more than a music sharing site. For me it was also a writer's medium besides the fantasy books that I had authored (with even one published for real). I wrote about the composers and their pieces and added *Guitarities* on various guitar-related subjects like stage fright, ensemble quirks and competition playing.

I had not tried my mettle in journalism yet, so the first Twente Guitar Festival was the start of writing about the guitar and their players. And I have done that ever since until the last Twente Guitar Festival that I attended: during festivals my notepad and pencil are my companions. No, no tablet or laptop, the light from their screens would disturb the concerts, let alone the tapping or keystrokes.

In every history there are developments. Bobby Rootveld had a clear view of what he wanted to do after his graduation. His dream was a cultural centre for music where he could organize festivals, courses, master classes etcetera for a living, a meeting place for guitarists all over the world. To this end he roamed the region and beyond (in Germany) and finally found a suitable place in Nordhorn in the German state of Lower Saxony just over the border.

In fact Nordhorn is a city much like Enschede. It had become relatively wealthy because of the textile industry with well-known names like Povel, Rawe and Niehues Nordhorn (famous for the NINO-Flex product). Unfortunately in the end the textile crisis stroke here too and all textile factories were closed, leaving the city in relative poverty. However, also here things got slightly better and Bobby found a nice place in the vicinity of the old *NINO Hochbau* that now houses all kinds of small companies. That place became Kulturhaus NIHZ, Kulturhaus being German for House of Culture.

Unfortunately Bobby's dream appeared to interfere with the plans of the rest of the board of the Twente Guitar Festival, with a painful separation as a result. The birth of the Guitar Festival Nordhorn was not without labour pains!

I have participated in the Nordhorn Guitar Festival from its first edition in 2011 and wrote impressions of these festivals on the DOS Amigos Homepage just like I did for the Twente Guitar Festival.

I got the idea to write an anniversary book on the occasion of five years GFN with some more information than the reports than I already wrote on the DOS Amigos Homepage. A large part is dedicated to the *people* that made the festivals.

The book contains a section about Duo NIHZ and Kulturhaus NIHZ, Bobby and Sanna Rootveld, the organizers of the festival. Other chapters are reserved for interviews with the volunteers and supporters, artists that have appeared at the festivals, participants of the professional-student and amateur events of the festivals. Additionally there is some information about the luthiers that crafted the prizes of the professional competition.

In its existence the festival achieved a lot of partnerships with companies and cultural foundations. A special chapter pays attention to these contributors of the festivals.

After the five chapters with the festival history you will find some statistics concerning artists, participants and the most popular pieces at the festival competitions. These statistics conclude the book.

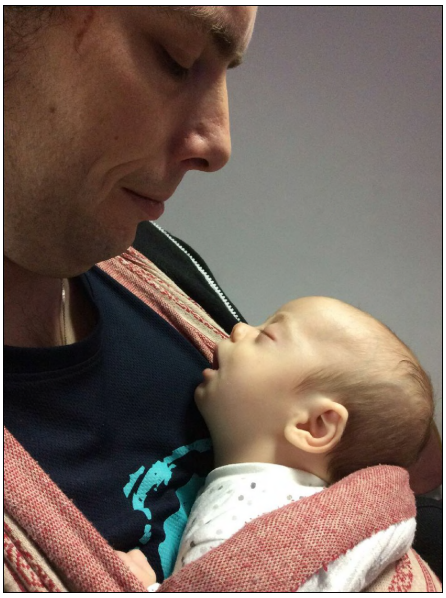
As a tribute to Louis Ignatius Gall, the principal guitar teacher of Bobby and his father, you will find an impression of the festival that was held in Kulturhaus NIHZ in 2014. In a certain way Louis Gall has contributed to the establishment GFN.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this book as much as I did with the writing and last but not least enjoying my participation in these festivals.

Happy Reading and Happy Playing

Mark de Gooijer/DOS Amigos Homepage

NIHZ: Duo and Kulturhaus



Bobby and Sanna, with their son Levi, the organizers of the festival

Kulturhaus NIHZ, that's Bobby Rootveld and Sanna Rootveld-Van Elst. Please tell us something about yourself. What's your name, where do you live, what's your current occupation?

Sanna: Yes, Kulturhaus NIHZ, who could have foretold that we would start it! Bobby and I have now know each other for sixteen years, almost, and we have been together for fifteen years. We first met at the conservatory, first year, first lesson. What was the subject?

Bobby: Music History, Contemporary Music, in the first lesson they played Stockhausen with the eight helicopters (*Helicopter Streichquartett*).

Sanna: That was a lesson by David Rowland. Well, we started to make music together right away, so we created a duo. We were supposed to have a name for the ensemble. (Laughing) I remember, I was ill, so Bobby made up the name. We had to think of the name for the subject of Musiconomy, but I was too sick with a fever to think of one. I found it a good idea, *Niet In Het Zwart* (Not Dressed In Black).

Bobby: We just got a roasting because we were not dressed in black during a lunch concert just before.

Sanna: And because we did not have a name yet. So that made for a nice combination of motivations!

You are both musicians. At what age did you start playing an instrument? Which instrument was the first?

Sanna: I was eleven when I started my first recorder lessons at school, at the age of 13, I entered the school of music, also for the recorder.

Bobby: When I was four I started to hit the sticks on the drum set in my father's studio, which actually developed into drumming. At times my father would show me some tricks, keeping me going on the drums until I was 14. Sometimes I picked up a guitar, but I dropped it a few times too. Once I became 14, my guitar playing became serious. When I was almost sixteen, I entered the preliminary education for the conservatory.

Which person or event made you decide to dedicate yourself to your current main instrument?

Sanna: I remember that at school you could already get recorder lessons at the age of eight. I did not like the idea at all, it seemed horrifying to me. Then I entered a school where everybody played the recorder, so I felt stupid that I could not, I just had to give it a go and consequently I started to like playing above everything else! In the end I just continued.

Bobby: I grew up with music. However, actually there was a person that almost caused me to leave music, I would like to grant this person a honorable mention. That was Mr. Bokhove, the teacher of the fifth class of primary education. He said that I sang so terribly out of tune that I was not allowed to sing together with the class, and that I should be ashamed of myself, because my parents had a recording studio while I could not even sing in tune. I still do not understand the link between the fact that my parents had a recording studio and my presumed quality of singing. Consequently I have been very afraid to sing for quite some time.

Fortunately I liked the music of the Beatles so much, that I wanted to play it in a band. Then Han Wellerdieck, a singer who was under contract with my father, became quite important for my musical development. This guy had a few hits and appeared on TV in programs like *Koffietijd* and *Op Volle Toeren*. In those days my father composed Gipsy-Kings like songs for him with Dutch lyrics. To me it looked cool to accompany him on guitar on TV. Han said: 'As soon as you can play all my songs on the guitar, you may join me on my next TV show.

With Han's old guitar I started practicing like crazy, I learnt all his hit songs including the tricky bar chords within a month. Wellerdieck was completely surprised but nevertheless broke his promise: 'I am not going to play on the TV with a kid,' he said. Anyway, it was a good start on the guitar and I continued practicing all the Beatles songs.

Please tell us something about your musical training. Where and with which teachers did you study?

Sanna: I have had a great time at the Conservatory of Enschede, I learnt a lot and had many projects. I am glad that I studied there, and of course it was there that we have gotten to know each other ;-).

Bobby: I studied with the same teacher as my father did, and graduated with, Louis Ignatius Gall. Louis was very motivating. Officially you had one hour of private lesson per week and most teachers quit exactly after that hour, more time was only allowed under special circumstances. Louis, by contrast, often used to say 'make sure that you take bread and a thermos of coffee with you next week, because you will have seven hours of guitar lessons.' In that case we started at two p.m. and continued until 9 p.m. In special cases we had two of these sessions in one week. Well, he did not do this with all students, but I was lucky that he did it with me, we worked for many hours which was very good for practice.

My conservatory time was great fun, although it was hard work too. You sometimes got a sense of *Ten little fishes swimming in the sea*. We started our study with a group of about forty students, when we did our Bachelor exam we were on stage with only five and later only three more from the initial group of forty graduated in the end.

Sanna and I had an unforgettable experience with the Baroque semester under Jan Wilbers. The exam results were so poor that out of anger Wilbers decided to publish the marks as a kind of shaming for all to see. One of the lowest marks was scored by a guy with the family name Bach!

Which teacher influenced you most? Which aspect of your play benefited from this?

Sanna: I have two. Marjolein van Roon, my main teacher and later Bert Honig, I studied with him during my post-graduation as well. Marjolein taught me the basics and lots of technique during all the years that I studied with her, Bert showed me how to play in a relaxed manner and to breathe in the music, ;-)) which is quite important when playing the recorder!

Bobby: My first very important teacher was my father. He showed me all the basics of guitar playing and learnt me to combine classical and pop music.

Louis Ignatius Gall taught me to not give a damn about what others think of me and continuously develop my own style. While at some conservatories it was customary that everyone played the same pieces, he urged me to select my own repertoire that appealed to me. That would distinguish me from other guitarists.

At the conservatory another teacher Jim ten Boske elaborated the combination of classical music, pop music and even jazz with some great lessons.

During my Master's I got the opportunity to take lessons with other teachers next to my principal teacher Louis Ignatius Gall. In this way Yves Storms and Richard Pilkington became important teachers for me as well.

Yves Storms taught me musicality. Richard Pilkington, then teacher at the Münster conservatory and currently retired, made another very significant contribution to my development as a musician. I studied with him during my Master and have had many hours of breathing exercises during (guitar) playing. Often the guitar remained in the case and we practiced breathing using the scores of guitar pieces. These exercises provided me with better phrasing and more security in my play and decreased the effect of nerves.

But in the end Louis Ignatius Gall has been the most influential teacher. I know that some of his students are quite negative about Louis Ignatius when they bring back their years of study, but he really tried to enable you to develop your own musical personality. Louis Ignatius' lived for his students, breathed for his students and thought about his students 24/7. I am eternally thankful to Louis Ignatius Gall for giving me the courage not to be a copycat but let me develop my own style and repertoire.

Who are your favourite concert musicians?

Sanna: The Beatles.

Bobby: (Laughs) The Beatles.

Sanna: And what about the Argentine player who is coming to the next festival?

Bobby: Yes, already in my study years I listened to the CDs by Victor Villandangos. He will appear at the next festival and I find him a fantastic guitarist, I especially love the way he plays the tango. In fact, he was the only one I was listening to during my studies. After my graduation, however, this changed dramatically and I became more or less a fan of Pavel Steidl, Roland Dyens, Denis Azabagic and Marcin Dylla. All these players have a personal interpretation and do not rattle off standard repertoire in likewise standard ways.

Sanna: I find it difficult to mention a favorite player for the recorder. There are players, however, that do a lot of good things for the instrument. For instance the Danish player Michala Petri, who is a true ambassador of the recorder towards other disciplines of music, which is really

great. When I told people in Denmark that I was a recorder player, they were enthusiastic and knew what it was, while if you tell people here in Holland, you get a reaction like: 'is there really a conservatory study for the recorder? Thought it was only stuff for kindergarten teachers.'

Bobby: I would like to add someone to my list of favorite guitarists whom I came across after my study: Alberto Mesirca. He plays with an intensity and a drive that I have not seen with many guitarists, and he already did it that way in his twenties when we met him in Hungary. That's special!

Who is your favourite composer? Who is your favourite composer for your instrument?

Sanna: Bach and others of the 'old' music.

Bobby: For me it's Paul McCartney. And if it concerns classical guitar: Mario Castelnuovo Tedesco.

What is your favourite classical piece for your instrument?

Bobby: My favorite piece is *Una limosnita por el amor de Dios* by Barrios. No, it's not a piece by my favourite composer Tedesco. I deliberately do not play this piece myself, I only want to listen to it. I find it such a beautiful piece that I am afraid that I will spoil it by playing it and get annoyed with the result. Denis Azabagic is my favourite interpreter of this piece, every time I hear him playing it, tears come to my eyes. So beautiful!

Sanna: For me it is a contemporary piece *Offrenda* by the Mexican composer Mario Lavista For old music, well, definitely the solo partitas by Bach, there is one for the flute, but also the ones for cello can be played on the recorder. It's inexhaustible repertoire, you can spend a lifetime with it!

At what age did you perform for an audience for the first time? What was the occasion?

Bobby: I was about six years old and I performed with my family at the Santa Claus conference in the fun-fair of Bakken near Copenhagen in Denmark. We have some photographs of us performing together with the famous Russian clown Popov. We were dressed up as Zwarte Piet, the companion of Sinterklaas (if you dress up like that now, you are considered a racist, but in those days, Zwarte Piet was just a bugaboo for kids…)

Sanna: I was singing in choirs before I started playing the recorder, my first performance was when I was about ten years old. My maiden performance with the recorder was at the age of thirteen, in a church..

You have made quite a number of recordings and CDs. How did you experience recording and listening to the result?

Bobby: I see it simple. Most musicians think that a recording must be completely perfect, a kind of statue for all eternity, that every detail must be a highlight. I do not agree. I think that a recording is the same as a photograph. If I make a photo of you now, maybe your hairstyle is not optimal or your glasses are crooked, but it is how you are at the moment. If you make a recording you do your best and may edit things, but that's it, the musical photograph of the person and musician you are at that moment. If you are confident, you can finish the mix and publish it on CD if you like.

If for instance I listen now to our first CD from 2005… I recorded pieces like *Cappricio* and *Rumores de la Caleta,* pieces that I kept playing after all these years. At the moment, however, I play them with a quite different approach and if I recorded these pieces in ten years, I would play them differently again. Over time I am changing myself, my interpretation is changing, so indeed recordings are only snapshots of myself as a musician. If you think that a single recording must be

perfect because it is intended that it represents your whole musical life, well that's in vain, you won't make it. It's just a photograph of the musician you are at that moment. So, if you have had a good feeling during a recording, just publish it, that's who you are at that moment. It's not complicated at all.

I notice that many musicians make such a problem of recordings because of this *once in a lifetime* perfectionism. You can edit your recordings in hundreds of places to get the result that you have in mind, but you are fooling yourself and you are fooling the listener too, because this patched up music is not who you are, it's a product of what you would like to be, it does not represent the musician that you are at that moment.

I only want to make CDs that represent what we are at a certain time and not a wishful image of what should be or has not even developed yet.

The famous Kulturhaus NIHZ Memorial guitar, made by Sarah Rootveld.

What was the most challenging CD you ever recorded, and which one do you consider a monument?

Bobby: Normally we have little 'challenge' in recording in the sense of awkward or toilsome, because we know exactly what we want to record and how we want to do it. We just do our best with the recording and make a suitable mix-down if we are satisfied.

We did, however, make one CD entitled *Was haben wir verloren in diesem Land?* with Benjamin Staedler, which took quite some effort, it was challenging in a way. The CD covers the era of 1918 – 1945 of the German history, including National Socialism and the Holocaust, using texts and matching music.

We recorded the texts in two days and left them alone for nine months to think about the way to integrate the music with them. Then we recorded all the music with the intention to interleave it with the texts. In the end mix, however, we decided to mix narratives and music in a number of cases, because they made a perfect atmosphere *together*. This mix was quite a job, because the effects had to match the atmosphere. Thus on this CD the ambience (reverb, room) is not the same throughout, but it is made to serve the atmosphere of the individual tracks. In fact this was not a challenge in the sense of overcoming problems, on the contrary, it was an interesting odyssey of opportunities to create an atmosphere.

We hardly have any challenges (problems) with our own CDs, however, the 'challenge' may appear if you make a recording with others. For instance if opinions start clashing.

Sanna: I remember that making the DVD in the Synagogue in Enschede was a challenge. We had to repeat a number of tracks quite a few times and then songs like *Amsterdam Huilt* (about the Holocaust in Amsterdam) become a challenge because of the emotional charge involved.

Bobby: Yes, we had to repeat *Amsterdam Huilt* six times and every time when we started playing again, my mother, who accompanied us for moral support and was sitting behind the guys that operated the video camera, started crying, remembering what had happened to our family during WW2. Then things got emotionally tough.

Sanna: You asked about the best CD, we consider *Was haben wir verloren in diesem Land?* the best one.

Bobby: Yes, this CD has a consistent and well performed story, a message, from beginning to end. We usually have a leitmotiv in our performances and on this CD it more or less haunts you throughout.

Bobby, your father is manager, musician and studio technician of the private record label Ivory Tower Records. In this way you had access to studio equipment and recording experience. How did it influence the recordings you make of yourself and others?

Bobby: Well, I learned some tricks from my father, but technology made some of them more or less useless. I know how to cut a tape and make edits on physical tape, but that's of little use with the computers of today. What I did learn though was the attitude towards recording: aim for a natural sound and edit as little as possible. However, the other things that he taught me, such as microphone positioning and methods for sound balancing, are independent of technology and are of good use the present day.

What I definitely learned from my father: recording other musicians is bound to get bogged down in discussions. I do like to record very much, and my latest recording session with a large ensemble was a great success. Recording inexperienced guitarists sometimes proved much more difficult.

If you ask renowned and experienced guitarists about their strategy, they often have the same method, playing (and recording) the piece three times, picking the best and analysing that track for possible issues that must be repaired. The young and inexperienced guitarists, however, keep repeating (and recording) the piece time after time in search of a perfection that's hardly achievable until they have completely lost their energy and expression in the piece.

Sanna: So in that case it often shows that the first recording was the best!

Bobby: I once recorded a CD with a young guitarist, seemingly it sounds well, it looks like a finished product, but I totally dislike it, because (as a recording engineer) I know that there is an edit once in every five seconds, in all tracks of the CD. All pieces are patched-up. Horrible!

Apart from the fact that you organise them yourself: what is your opinion about competitions? Do they have a positive influence on the player or are they a distraction from the essence of music?

Bobby: I do not think that competitions are good for music, but they are a necessary evil for the organisation of festivals. We have organised festivals with top players *without* competition and we only saw two men and a dog as participants. When you integrate a competition in a festival, however, a crowd of participants appears at your gates. Apparently, unfortunately, presently you cannot go without competitions. Festivals that are well-visited without a competition are a rarity in this part of the world.

OK, so we are more or less compelled to organise a competition. To reflect our opinion on competitions and to put them into perspective, this year we are organising a parody on competitions too: *The Asturias Vodka Competition*.

Anyway, I do think that competitions do spoil things at the moment, because many people play the same (show)pieces: if one guitarist wins the GFA with the Ginastera Sonata, the complete crowd starts to play this piece too. Or they all try to speed up a particular Villa-Lobos study far beyond musicality. Consequently competitions are often battles of technique rather than contests in musicality.

Did you participate in professional competitions for your instrument? If so, what are your impressions about the competition stress and interaction with the jury and other competitors? Did it for instance resemble a situation like "in war and love everything is permitted?"

Sanna: Yes, we did, both in solo and ensemble setting.

Bobby: Most occasions were not that competition-like. However there was one where we played on request of the conservatory. It was an admission competition for the Grachtenfestival in Amsterdam. After our performance we were called to the jury and they rejected us because our repertoire was not suitable for the setting of the festival. One of the jury members, however, did not agree, he was enthusiastic about our music. This was Hans van de Boom of the AVRO radio and TV channel. He recommended us to various concert organisers, which yielded us quite a number of recitals. Most importantly he invited us to play live in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, in the famous Spiegelzaal, for the classical channel Radio 4. This was much more fun that a small mini concert as a prize of the Grachtenfestival competition.

On another occasion we tried to subscribe for the competition of the Jewish Music Festival in Amsterdam. We had to submit a tape or CD and at that moment we had just finished our first CD with Jewish music. Unfortunately the jury did not consider us good enough for the competition.

Later, however, we were invited for an unexpected fill-in at this festival (on very short notice) and that performance yielded us an award of recognition for our interpretation of *Amsterdam Huilt*. As a consequence the organisation invited us to their competition a few times, we could enter even without preliminaries, but we decided that it was not proper to play a competition with songs about the Holocaust. So we are not going to do any more competitions.

You attended the same conservatory. I always had the impression that Guitar and Recorder were worlds apart.

Bobby: It was not that bad. They are both classical branches of the conservatory, with very few students.

Sanna: We play instruments that do not fit in a symphony orchestra, we are chamber musicians.

Bobby: Yes, so we joined up in particular with the guitarists, recorder players, pianists and organists. All musicians that are no member of a symphony orchestra.

Bobby, you are involved in the dialect cabaret group *Twente Plat*, an enterprise of your parents. How did this line of work influence your musicianship?

I learnt from the performances of *Twente Plat* that it is not indelicate to entertain an audience, to touch it with your play, to talk to it, and to bridge the distance that often exists between the player and the audience in the classical setting. I like to do humour and theatre and I thought it a good idea to integrate it in musical performances as well, just to add something extra to just sitting on stage and playing your music. It gives me confidence and support, I often see other musicians struggle with their stage presentation and announcements, but I am just used to communicating with the audience thanks to my *Twente Plat* background.

This theatre aspect is very important for me, I never want to stop playing the guitar, but I also never want to stop the humour and theatre of *Twente Plat*. These are really the things that I want to do all my life.

Bobby, after the Conservatory you decided to follow your Master's at the Messiaen Academy. Please tell us about it. How did it influence your current ensemble?

Bobby: When I started my Master's degree, I had to design a study programme and I decided to combine classical guitar music and theatre. My teacher Louis Ignatius Gall fully agreed and I got permission from the conservatory to extend my studies. So I visited courses at the Dramatic Arts branch of ArtEZ in Arnhem, which was sometimes a drama indeed!

At that time I was already quite active with *Twente Plat* and I must say that I learned a lot more of their live performances before an audience than from the sessions of music students under supervision of a drama professor in a deserted gym. I remember that we had to play a scene in a jailhouse where riots broke out. I played a rioting prisoner and completely let myself loose in that role. That shocked the teacher, he wanted me to back down, it was too much. So in the end this course was not what I was looking for, but it was interesting to go through.

During the projects of my Master's degree I had the idea of making classical guitar music more accessible to a broad audience, using theatrical elements. A number of teachers at the conservatory in the exam committee, however, were supporters of promoting the 'higher art forms', so we clashed, and at times it became a fight during exams. In some way, however, my recalcitrance was appreciated, as I noticed during my graduation talk.

Sanna, I guess that Bobby has brought in many aspects from his stage experience with the cabaret group and the things he learned at the Messiaen. How did that influence your playing style and stage presentation? Were you reluctant at first? Or were you enthusiastic too?

Sanna: This aspect of musicianship has appealed to me a long time before, I liked to be on stage with other performing arts, such as dance and theatre. For me it was not new or strange, but it actually was for my teachers, who were very reluctant towards this subject. Maybe in some cases they were right, but I think that you have to give it a try first before drawing conclusions.

Bobby: Many teachers at for instance conservatories operate within a certain pattern. But as a teacher you must be careful not to project these patterns on your students, that you do not attempt to create clones of yourself. Particularly in one-to-one education, like with musicians, this pitfall is looming. For instance if you listen carefully to the participants of guitar competitions, you can sometimes hear who the teacher of a particular student is based on his interpretation. In that case I am curious how this guitarist will play ten years after his graduation. Will he be a clone of his teacher or will he have found his own style?

As Duo NIHZ you have a repertoire of shows for children. What is the appeal of playing for children for you as musicians?

Bobby: Children enter open minded and initially accept what you give them, but in the mean time they are the most honest audience you can think of. If they don't like your performance, they will make that loud and clear, if they do like it, they are open about it too. That's the fun of it.

With children's shows we usually bring musical theatre with a theme that is instructive for the children and that allows a lot of participation from the audience. Every show is different because children react in an original way, which at its turn invokes original interactions with the artists. That requires a lot of improvisation and that's super!

Sanna: Yes, it's really great that the children are completely occupied by the show. That's the fun of it for us, seeing how they share in the experience.

You started Duo NIHZ as a more or less generic duo that connected various art forms, yet gradually you specialised in Jewish music. What is the background of this development?

Bobby: The main background is my family history, a lot of family members were murdered in the Holocaust, and I went on an odyssey to find out all about what happened to them.

I think it is very important to play music that is very dear to you. True, with Sanna I can be the umpteenth ensemble consisting of a guitar and a wind instrument that plays Piazzolla or Ibert. It's beautiful repertoire, we like to play it, but many, many people do so as well. Why should we be better with it than other people, or play it with more motivation than others?

I think that the Jewish repertoire, as a consequence of this family history, is very close to us and we are able to play it purely and naturally. I love to play it because I feel connected, maybe even bound to it.

For instance, I like Argentine, it is a beautiful country. We were in Buenos Aires and I enjoy the tango music on the streets, but that does not mean that I am connected to the Argentine Tango and the emotion that it carries. However, if I hear Klezmer music, I feel connected, it has been in my family and a part of their lives for hundreds of years. I think that every musician must search for the music that he or she feels connected to. That is why we play Jewish music, I guess.

Yet wo do not stick to Jewish music alone, it is not our only specialism. The combination of music and performing arts is an important activity for us as well and we will continue it indefinitely. Our thematic performances for children are clear examples. We recently arranged Carlo Domeniconi's *Circus Music* for guitar, recorder and acting for this purpose.

Bobby, how did you get involved in the organisation of guitar festivals? Please tell us something about how the idea emerged and grew into a festival in the end.

Bobby: At the Messiaen Academy, during my Master's, we had a project week in 2005. I went there with two other guitarists, Jaap Majoor and Niels Ottink and to be honest, we were a bit reluctant to go. Jaap and I are football maniacs, so to have some fun I took Football Triviant with me. Jaap and I played it deep into the night while Niels went to sleep. During playing we discussed all kinds of things and 'things of life', amongst others guitar festivals.

During that night with Footbal Triviant we decided to organise a festival ourselves. The next morning we enthused Niels and asked the Polish guitarist Robert Horna, another friend of ours, if he would join in, then we would have an organising committee of four. Robert had some contacts in the guitar world, enabling us to invite well-known guitarists for concerts and master classes.

The idea was there, but the execution was not yet decided upon. The first discussion was: would the first edition be in 2006, 2007 or 2008? I said: 'No, it must be in 2006. If we want to do it then we must start organising it now and get it all done. No point in waiting and letting it die out'.

The first step was establishing a foundation with the help of notary Hofsteenge. This enabled us to request sponsorships and subsidies according to the rules. During this first phase my parents played a very important role as financiers and supporters, without their aid the festival would not have been possible. We also got invaluable help from Hans Smies, the then boyfriend of Sanna's mother who worked with the council of Enschede and knew the channels for allowances and subsidies. Further we were lucky to meet Jeroen Hatenboer of restaurant Sam-Sam who contributed with money and catering for the festival in the Concordia Theatre, just next door to this restaurant.

Kulturhaus NIHZ, Mittelstrasse 13, Nordhorn, Germany

The dream to establish a Kulturhaus did not emerge out of thin air, I guess. Which one of you got the dream first? Did you agree on chasing it right away, or did it take some growing into it together?

Bobby: I found that I liked organising events. The guitar series that we played in Borne is one example (where we met you), the Valais Guitar week in Switzerland together with Sanna and the Twente Guitar Festival are other examples. Organising the Twente Guitar Festival, however, provided less opportunities for growth and development because of the divergence of views within the board that emerged over the years. At a certain moment you grow apart, that's not a fatal issue, but I wanted something different in terms of atmosphere.

In Hungary we visited a festival, the one where we met Alberto Mesirca, and there we found out that it's not necessary for a festival to bask in luxury or status to have a good time with each other, in fact the atmosphere was much more pleasant than at the Twente Guitar Festival. It was more like a large family, there was much more contact between participants and artists. This family-like friendly and informal atmosphere, that's what I wanted.

Additionally I sensed a bit of a stagnation with the Twente Guitar Festival, and stagnation means decline. For instance the competition prizes stayed behind compared to competing festivals. But you have to go along, else you will draw less and less participants. I had other ideas concerning attractive prizes, such as a hand-built guitar and concerts, but that didn't seem to be acceptable. I had the feeling that we were growing apart.

People may grow apart, and if that happens all must go their own way. Of course separations are painful, but at the same time I am very thankful of the great time I had with the other guys of the Twente Guitar Festival and I really only look back with gratitude.

Further Sanna and I were looking for a better place to live. In Enschede we lived in a very bad neighbourhood, we witnessed a few occasions of shootings where the bullets literally whizzed by, so we were very motivated to move.

In Holland the houses are awfully expensive, but in Germany the prices were much lower, large houses and even farmhouses and estates were offered for (comparatively) very little money. So the idea came up to buy a large place where people could stay overnight, where you have room for a small concert hall and lesson rooms and where you can live yourself. It is cheaper than an ordinary house in Holland and we would not have to worry about renting space for a festival or events.

When Sanna came home I showed her the premises in Germany that looked suitable to me and told her what we could do with a bit of space and her eyes started glittering with enthusiasm. That was the birth of the idea of Kulturhaus NIHZ, and we got to work. Out of practical considerations we bought the premises in the Mittelstrasse in Nordhorn, although we also saw an offer of a kind of Bed and Breakfast house with 3000 square meters of land in the countryside. It had the disadvantage that it was in the middle of nowhere and poorly reachable, for instance by public transport. That would prevent participants and audiences from entering in numbers.

A dream stays a dream if there is no expectation that it can be realised. Such a realisation is an enterprise. An enterprise requires skills of an entrepreneur. Where did you acquire them? Do you have an important example?

Bobby: My parents have their own independent business and I have seen how they managed it from a very young age. I wanted an independent business too. I learnt that you have to persevere to achieve things. If you think that you have a good concept, you should not fret for two months on whether the idea might possibly have some potential for success. You have a good concept and should practice it as soon as possible. You'll notice soon enough if it's successful or not.

I love it that I am independent together with Sanna. Organising multiple festivals and events in Nordhorn together with Sanna actually proceeds faster and is less stressful than organizing one festival in Enschede. So I guess from that point of view Nordhorn made my life easier. Sanna and I are on the same wave length and I like to realise ideas on short notice. It's a bit of entrepreneurship that lives in the family, my parents have it, my grandparents had it and from studying some family history I found that it goes back a few generations.

You have organised six editions of the Guitar Festival Nordhorn by now. What was your best festival experience in the last five years? And what event was the most stressful?

Bobby: I do not remember a best festival experience, they were all rewarding. I have heard many excellent concerts and I cannot say that one was the absolute highlight. For instance I found the concert by Pavel Steidl likewise delightful as the performance of Klaus Renzel, the guitar clown, although you cannot compare them in absolute terms.

I did like the nights in the Lounge very much, when everybody starts making music together. In the future there will be a slight difference, however, we'll skip the amplified instruments, people should play acoustic only! In that way people who are not playing are still able to chat without having to scream to make themselves heard over the musical background noise.

About the stressful situations: we had an artist who brought his girlfriend with him. The guy would rather stay in bed late for some fun with his girlfriend than appearing in time for his master classes, so quite a few students were waiting in the classroom. We will never invite this guy again!

Last year (2015) I got very nervous during the concert of Pavel Steidl, because I was hearing funny noises in the background. I asked everyone, but nobody had noticed anything. I heard bass tones that clashed with Pavel's play. Somebody suggested that somebody was having a party outside, or that somebody was warming up a truck. After twenty minutes of feeling annoyed I suddenly got an idea. I ran to the Lounge and found one of the participants (who did not care to listen to Pavel's concert) fiddling with a bass guitar and its amplifier on full power. So again, acoustic only in the Lounge! The strange thing was that nobody in the audience noticed!

Last year we were almost glad that no stressful situations have emerged, until the Monday morning-after came up. We had forgotten to set the alarm, so we could not buy bread before breakfast. During the breakfast Thomas Peperkamp's chair collapsed. Then we got a phone call from an apartment keeper that the rooms should be vacated before ten while we thought it was twelve, so we had to awake the artists that were staying there and evacuate the apartment within ten minutes while the cleaning lady was swearing like a fishwife outside.

Sanna: One of the highlights for me was the concert by Roland Dyens, we also had a Brava TV recording it.

Bobby: I remember another highlight, the announcement by Zoran Dukic. He said that he had played the guitar in many large concert halls, knowing that the guitar is a salon instrument. Here in Kulturhaus NIHZ, however, the guitar is brought back to its basics, the salon instrument that the audience can listen to at a close and intimate range. That's why he considered this place an important location for the guitar. His words felt as a confirmation of what we are trying to achieve here.

Many enterprises have a roadmap that dictates growth in assets, turnover and profit. What is your roadmap? What do you consider the most important aspect of growth for Kulturhaus NIHZ? In numbers or in quality?

Bobby: That's a continuous development. We abandoned some events like the Open Guitar Night and the Accordion festival and in the mean time we continuously think about new ones.

Concerning the guitar festival: We have plans for extensions and improvements, but we do it in small steps. For instance we started the festival as a three day event. Then we extended it with an unofficial Thursday night. Well, that night is now officially part of the festival and we have master classes on the Thursday too, so we are heading for a four day event. Maybe in an ideal world we will end up with a week or so, but all in small steps.

We aim for a few novelties during each edition of the festival. If you keep things the same, you are subject to *stagnation meaning decline*. So we'll try something new each year.

For instance this year we cooperate with other podia in the neighbourhood, we have the *Asturias Vodka Competition*, and we increased the competition prize. We aim for a growth in prizes each year, not in spectacular amounts, but nevertheless, and we also try to achieve an extra concert opportunity for the winner, a podium that cooperates with the prize. Additionally we have night runs of our Guitar Movies. Last year we started with the late night Lounge Concerts, in this way we try to add something new every year. If it proves unsuccessful, we just discard it.

For the Kulturhaus as a whole we continuously try out event ideas, if they turn out unsuccessful we discard them again. Some events are stayers, others disappear and some we continue at a lower rate.

I did like the Open Guitar Nights very much. We started them as an opportunity for people to play the guitar for each other, and for would-be concert visitors to enable them to take a look and get a taste of guitar music in the Kulturhaus. The result, however, was a group of visitors that only came to the (free) Guitar Nights and nothing else, and in the end the group of players stagnated,

the same players appeared time and time again. Of course we were pleased that they wanted to play, but we had hoped that there would be more new players, unfortunately they did not come. We had hoped to achieve such a turnout that everybody had time for just a few pieces.

Turnout is very important, also to make ends meet. It was my dream to organise guitar master class weekends, but because of failing turnout it did not come true. Even when we organized events with well-known players such as Marcin Dylla or Denis Azabagic, the conservatory students stayed away, because there was no competition involved. Notifying conservatories and individual students did not work out. So I stopped these 'competition-less' courses.

What I am thinking and dreaming of, but I do not know how to realise it yet, is organising a kind of certified part-time conservatory for the guitar: a course with one week per month of intensive in-house guitar lessons, so the student stays in Kulturhaus NIHZ for a week. The course would be given by a permanent teacher and every month there would be a guest-teacher too. One of the target groups could be guitarists that are busy with teaching or performing, but want to extend their skills and vision. That's what I always wanted, but at the moment I cannot foresee the pitfalls. So at the moment it remains a dream. Possibly I should look for a partner like a school of music or conservatory in this endeavour. Anyway, it's still in the future.

Sanna: What we always have dreamt of, and what is actually happening during the festivals, is that Kulturhaus NIHZ becomes a meeting place for all involved in music, both professionals and amateurs, both beginners and advanced players. It is a great satisfaction to watch this happen!

Bobby: An example of such a developing meeting place is our competition *Beste Gitarrist von Nordhorn*.

Sanna: It will be much bigger this year, now children come from all over Germany.

Bobby: Yes, the direct environment of Nordhorn has extended a bit. We have had some considerations if this did not extend the scope too much, we definitely do not aim for ten year old super talents from China or Korea!

If circumstances permit, will you aim for a twenty-fifth Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

Bobby: Minimum!

Sanna: Sure!

Bobby: After twenty years we will be only just 55! We can make that!

Last year your first son Levi was born. What are your hopes concerning his involvement with Kulturhaus NIHZ?

Bobby: With respect to Levi and Kulturhaus NIHZ we don't have hopes. He can do what he likes, he can develop himself as he likes, he is not obliged to play an instrument, he does not have to like guitar music, he does not have to be a recorder music enthusiast, he does not have to enjoy Twente Plat. He must find his own way. My parents permitted and encouraged me to find my own way myself. I happened to like what my parents did, but it could have been quite different, and in that case they would have agreed and supported too.

As a conclusion to the interview, I would like to pay some tributes to a number of other people that played a major role in the festival, particularly in the beginning when the breakup with the Twente Guitar Festival was still fresh.

The most significant people are Annette and Arlette, they have done so much for us. They were the first who said: "We're in, it does not matter what the result will be." They have been with us ever since, both participating in the jury of the guitar and recorder festivals, teaching master classes, playing concerts, and helping with the everyday chores -like dish washing- that have to be done at every festival. That's fantastic!

I also want to thank Alberto Mesirca, Samuel Klemke and Thomas Peperkamp, they do a lot for the festival. For instance if Samuel is there at a festival, he comes a week in advance to help with all preparations, including cleaning and shopping and he is available for supporting of the guests that are already there.

Pallavi Sudhir from India provided lots of help during the festival too. Accompanying her daughter Nandini who participates in the festival, she helped with cooking and cleaning. Thank you!

The last is the best: Our family, our parents are indispensable for the flow of the festival: They cook, clean, sell food, manage the bar, drive students up and down, make photographs and bring a good laugh and some spicy humour if necessary. Whatever we ask them, they will do it. We are so thankful for their help.

We may organize and plan a festival in all the details, but without help nothing would work out in the end… I am grateful that there are people like them around.

Levi shows what is necessary to organise guitar festivals!