Frankpop 2012

This time I'll write a *Guitarity* about an event and the man behind it. That's FrankPop, a guitar happening in Hengelo (my residence, a medium size town in the east of Holland, close to Germany), with the guitarist annex guitar teacher Frank Meijer as the organizer plus many relatives, friends and acquaintances as the volunteers who facilitate the organization of the event.

I met Frank for the first time back in 1990. He had just graduated from the then Enschede Conservatory (now it is the Artez Conservatory) and started a guitar lesson practice in the Hasseler Es, a district in the town of Hengelo. Meanwhile he played solo concerts and was a member of the illustrious Segovia Guitar Quartet, the only classical guitar ensemble in the east of Holland with a real fan club! Later on, he organized two Segovia Festivals for guitar in Hengelo in the beginning of the nineties. On one of these festivals a very young Denis Azabagic made his debut in this region!

Frank has a quite personal approach to instruct and motivate his pupils, if necessary, he brings in chips and snacks on the table to get the music going! That approach caught on (not merely because of the snacks, of course) and he established a flourishing guitar lesson centre with the motto **Guitar Playing is Fun!**

He used the same approach with public performances: *Performance is Fun!* Which also applied to playing together at those occasions.

When I still attended the school of music, a public performance was a yearly happening that caused a sense of being caught between hope and fear, the stage looked like a threatening place. The recital was a compulsory subject and was a perfect opportunity for the music

school management to assess the progress of the student. That was even laid down in the school regulations. Brrrr!

On the one hand, I did like it to show my moderate skills to the audience, on the other hand I suffered from quite some nerves. That was not the worst thing indeed. I still remember my sticky fingers that seemed to be glued to the strings, leading a life of their own and refusing to make contact with the music. All this effort before an audience that included people who did not have the respect to stay to the break or the end, but left the hall with some stumbling as soon as their "icon" - the reason they were there - had left the stage.

Frank has his personal view on these recital exercises, he is averse from overly formal happenings. Starting with the location. In the beginning Frank, organised performances in living rooms. With a drink and the inevitable snacks on the table, all contributing to a relaxed atmosphere. OK, the performance stress was still there, but it felt much better. That's what I remember from the occasion that I played as the less capable half of the Granados Duo to bring *Cavatina* by Myers and *Minuet* and *Oriental* by Enrique Granados himself.

Gradually Frank turned the recital exercises of his students into motivating *events*. His campfire nights on the then camping site *De Hoch* near the town of Rijssen were famous. Lyrics and chords on a photo copy and everyone was set to join in. Every guitarist could brave the evening cold with nice and warm fingers! A great event on less than *Fourty-four Miles from Home!* (This Golden Earring song became a kind of anthem for these nights).

When *De Hoch* was sacrificed to the infrastructural planning of the region, Frank had to search for new locations for his events. Fortunately, this was no problem, he found nice open-air spots to continue the tradition. Additionally, he started to organize happenings in small theatres and the only historical pub in Hengelo.

Finally, in 2004 the *FrankPop* event was born. A happening with a much wider scope than guitar alone. For a little bit of professional pop music, a single guitarist is not sufficient, you need vocals, backing and a band. Frank made sure that this became part of the event.

A few years ago, I visited some of Frank's guitar nights, but I never made it to *FrankPop*. This year, however, the announcements on Youtube were so promising, that my wife and I bought tickets.

This year was a special edition of *FrankPop*, the *Singer/Songwriter Edition*. The participants would play self-composed songs.

Also, this time Metropool, the Hengelo pop stage, was the crime scene for *FrankPop*. It's an attractive small hall with a spacious stage. A complete band, including keyboards, percussion, drums, bass and e-guitar, was waiting, eager to provide the swinging support.

As customary in the pop tradition, *FrankPop* had a support act. Two singers/guitarists played their own compositions and lyrics. One had a jazzy/bluesy style that appealed to me most, the other sang in a ballad style that will be appreciated by the younger generation.

Things got nice and cosy and the hall filled up completely, all chairs were occupied and most of the standing room back in the hall and on the balcony, was full. Frank opened the evening with an introducing song and the artists appeared on stage.

I do not have much to talk about the pop music. Myself, I stopped buying pop records back in 1980, so I do not know about styles and better do not ask me about the names of famous

bands of these days. It did, however, appear to me that the lyrics of love songs had grown a bit darker and more pessimistic than the sweet "love you babe" of the old days.

The great atmosphere was quite apparent indeed, it was everywhere, on stage and with the audience! With Frank who crossed the stage discreetly with his Taylor, lending a hand (that is a string) everywhere where needed, stirring up the enthusiasm and supporting the singers with backing vocals. It was quite apparent that he enjoyed things as much as his players on stage!

A stage full of all those young and older players and singers who swept along the audience in their enthusiasm and dedication. With all the backstage assistance and people who roamed the stage to plug and unplug the guitars, and the technical staff that made a great and dazzling show of the lighting.

Events like this cheer me up and make me happy. Just the things that Frank intends to accomplish with his lessons: **Guitar Playing is Fun!**

FrankPop was a clear example of this intention. Frank, players and volunteers, good show!

If you want to see some movies and photos of the FrankPop events, just visit Youtube (search for Frankpop) or http://www.frankmeijer.nl/ (in Dutch).