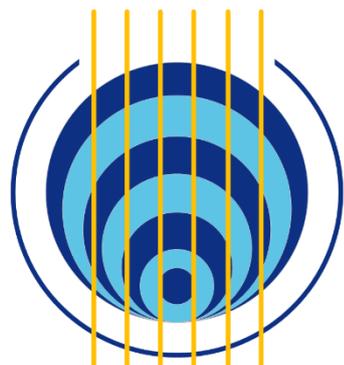


Amateur Competition 2013

Amateurconcours



Gitaarfestival Nordhorn 2013

Last year's competition results were sufficiently promising to give another go to subscription to the Amateur Competition in Nordhorn. One should try to implement *Lessons Learned*, isn't it?

This time my preparations were much more intensive. Public performance became a part of my exercises, which was quite beneficiary to get used to performance stress.

Obviously, I will not give away the results. What I can say is that they were much better than last year.

Select the chapters in the menu to find out more...

6 March: Subscribed

I had made up my mind to participate in the amateur competition for guitar at the Guitar Festival Nordhorn again. At first, I did not plan to write a story about this, but I changed my mind, because every year you have new and different experiences. As a consequence, I now start my "diary" two months before the competition date, the 27th of April.

This year I started my preparations much earlier than the last time. I already subscribed in December and made up my mind about the programme early January. Initially I wanted to play two pieces, *Capriccio Nr. 2* by Legnani and *Opal*, a *Klangstudie* (Study) by Marlo Strauss. Later it appeared that these pieces were too short to fill 8 minutes of playing time. That's why I added two pieces, *Valse from Op. 32* by Sor and *Ommagio a Caturla*, an *Estudio Sencillo Nuevo* by Brouwer.

The sequence of the programme will be 1. *Valse*, 2. *Capriccio Nr. 2*, 3. *Opal* and finally *Ommagio a Caturla*.

The first piece is relatively slow and romantic, the second one is slightly brisker, the third piece is slow and atmospheric and the last one ends the programme with a swing. Additionally, this sequence shows a development from Classical to Contemporary era.

Valse is a nice entry piece. It is not a fast piece but it requires elegance. It's built up from two corner sections in E major and an E minor middle section. The last section is just a Da Capo al Fine. The E major sections require a warm sound, a bit of controlled elegance and maybe slight staccatos for the effect. The E minor section invites a bit more speed but should remain elegant nevertheless.

Personally, I find the second piece *Capriccio Nr. 2* the most challenging. That's caused by the fact that some passages cause a hurry, while other passages like the cadenza require non-hurried preparation and some freedom in execution.

The third piece *Opal* provides a clear contrast between the melodious corner sections with a soft melody in harmonics and a relatively fast arpeggio section in the middle section. In order to keep the player awake, this arpeggio section has a changing thumb pattern that requires careful attention.

Ommagio a Caturla is an interesting rhythmical piece that permits some fun with dynamics and sound. Because the piece is mighty short, I extend the piece by mean of a DC al fine ad libitum. Because the piece is reasonably fast. I consider it a nice finale, just like the *Samba Cordao* by Wanders last year.

If all is well, this mini-recital fits within 8 minutes, but I still have to measure the exact time. If I exceed time limits, I can leave some repeats in *Valse* and *Ommagio a Caturla*.

7 March: The Pieces

Valse from Op. 32, Fernando Sor

All pieces from my competition programme have a specific challenge, particularly if you realize that there are professional specialists in the jury. I will present some characteristics, starting with the first piece.

Valse is one of the six pieces from *Six Petites Pieces Op. 32* by Fernando Sor (1778 - 1839). In fact, it is one of the easier pieces from this opus. Sor's music is often melodious by nature and it has less emphasis on virtuosity like with Giuliani. That does not mean that virtuosity is absent indeed, but with Sor virtuosity and complexity are in service of the melody rather than a goal in themselves. Consequentially for instance his *Etudes* are more attractive to play than the ones by Carcassi or Giuliani.

I found the *Valse* many years ago in a mixed collection of pieces by Sor. It was noted down in 3/4 time, consequently the score looked more restful than the 3/8 notation of the original. In this form, it became part of my collection and it now is available on the DOS Amigos Homepage.

The title *Valse* immediately calls for a consideration: At what tempo am I going to play it? Like a comfortable English Waltz or a dazzling Viennese Waltz?

When I tried the piece for the first time, I choose the Viennese Waltz option, because I liked to play it elegantly and light-heartedly. The immediate drawback was the speed required for the sixteenth note runs. To cope with this I for instance played the run-in measure 6 with a trick, a kind of controlled strum in order to achieve the speed. It appeared quite tricky to play things accurately in this way. More or less the same problems arose with the slurred runs in measures 37 and 38.

My mistake in this matter was that I considered elegance a direct consequence of speed. Well, it is not, it's quite possible to achieve elegance at lower speeds with the right emphasis and smart use of e.g. staccato.

A slower tempo is most effective in the E major corner sections. In these sections I can play the melody nicely with bound notes and play a little with dynamics. For contrast I choose the tempo in the E minor section a tad higher, yet not so high that I stumble upon the sixteenth note runs.

Capriccio Nr.2 Luigi Legnani

Capriccio Nr. 2 by Luigi Legnani (1790 - 1877) comes from *32 Capriccios Op. 20*, a work that Legnani doubtlessly composed following the example of the *24 Capriccios for Violin* by his friend and musical partner Niccolò Paganini. The *Capriccios* form a musical exploration of all keys, including the ones that are a pain to play on the guitar.

The key of *Capriccio Nr. 2* is E minor, so that's pretty usual for the guitar. I encountered the piece many years ago in *The Classical Guitar* by Noad, but in those days it looked too difficult for me because of the high positions and the syncopated melody. My impression was confirmed by the ultra-high-speed performance by Eduardo Fernandez on one of my first guitar CDs. I bought this CD at the moment I purchased my first CD player, the start of the decline of my vinyl record collection.

After listening to a nice and detailed performance of Legnani's *Capriccios* by Raphaella Smits, I nevertheless got attracted to a few *Capriccios*, amongst others this Nr. 2. The hesitation of many years ago, however, still remained a little.

Capriccio Nr. 2 is in 2/4 time. With many pieces the bass line is a clear indication of the measure, but in this piece Legnani diverts from this idea. Particularly under the tied notes in the melody the "guidance" of the bass line is absent. A real point of attention.

The measures 11-17 and 25-28 form a treacherous pitfall for the tempo. They present an arpeggio pattern that lures you into acceleration, a thing that is most dangerous in this piece. In the measures 34 – 36 you get the impression that you racing down a ski jump with the movement from the twelfth to the first fret. Do take care for Newton's Second Law (acceleration!) here!

Summarizing, this piece has sufficient technical challenge to use it as a competition piece. Technically I can handle things in this *Capriccio*, I will need to work on flow and calm indeed!

Opal, Marlon Strauss

Opal from *Halbedelsteine, vier Klangstudien* by Marlon Strauss brings me in the contemporary music era. I seldom play contemporary music, but this piece has a nice story attached.

I perform regularly at the Open Guitar Stages of Kulturhaus NIHZ in Nordhorn, playing little theme recitals in music from Renaissance to Romantic. I always skip contemporary music.

Bobby Rootveld, the director of Kulturhaus NIHZ, considered that a pity because contemporary music can be very enjoyable indeed. That's why he gave me the Halbedelsteine as a present, contemporary piece but not too extreme. I studied the pieces and I found three of four pieces motivating to play.

Opal thrives on atmosphere. The corner movements are built up around passages in harmonics and a fragile melody. This requires subtle sound variation and moderate dynamics. The middle section is a mix between swing and rocking arpeggio. This section requires strong contrast with a higher tempo and more dynamics.

The middle section requires attention because the arpeggio pattern switches between a single and a double thumb stroke. Some emphasis on the double stroke helps to keep on track. Another point of interest is the final measure in which the E and B in harmonics must be much stronger than the low E bass.

I have the impression that for me as a player this piece presents a nice moment of peace after the excitement of *Capriccio Nr. 2*.

Ommaggio a Caturla, Leo Brouwer

The last piece is a (small) composition of one of the most famous contemporary composers for guitar, that is Leo Brouwer. Many years ago, his first set of five *Estudios Sencillos* presented my first acquaintance with contemporary classical music. I was enchanted with the slightly modern sound even though I am no enthusiast for contemporary classical guitar music.

Many years later Brouwer has grown more and more avant-gardist (or maybe it is so that the avant-gardism in general is declining) and consequentially he did not draw my attention to play his compositions myself. So, when I came across his *Estudios Sencillos Nuevos*, I was in for a surprise.

These pieces are ten atmospheric sketches in the form of homages to various composers like Debussy, Barrios, Villa-Lobos and Tarrega. The names do not say that much because in most cases the pieces are just Hommagios a Leo Brouwer and include many kind of quotations from his larger works. I must admit that it is fun to play them. Maybe he was in a smart mood for copy and paste? Anyway, I liked this excursion into mild contemporary.

His *Ommaggio a Caturla* (the Cuban composer Alejandro Garcia Caturla) appeared quite suitable as final piece in my competition programme. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Caturla integrated afro-cuban rhythms in his "classical compositions" and Brouwer does the same in this *Estudio*.

The piece has three sections in 4/4 time and two in 5/8 time. The 4/4 sections have a different rhythmic pattern each that provides a swing to the piece. This *Estudio* enables the player to experiment with dynamics and sound, particularly the 5/8 section gives opportunity for a fortissimo. Because the piece is pretty short, I sometimes add a *Da Capo*.

Technically this piece is straightforward, the effort goes to the atmosphere and the subtle emphasis of the rhythm pattern.

20 March: Dry Run

Despite my eagerness to explore new pieces without finishing the current ones, I succeeded to stick to the competition pieces. Consequently, on the long run my guitar lessons seemed to become a bit boring. On the other hand, a thorough preparation is quite beneficial, as stated on the first page of Pumping Nylon: *Failing to Prepare is Preparing to Fail*.

This time my guitar class included a dry run, announcement, playing the pieces and inserting concentration moments, using the stopwatch for time measurement.

It is funny, once you are aware of a ticking clock, even though it is in your mind, you feel something breathing down your neck that affects your play. *Valse* went too fast with little slips, *Capriccio* became a stumbling block in the run-in to the last phrase, in *Opal* the peace returned and *Ommagio a Caturla* was OK, even though the tempo was a bit lower than I originally intended.

This timed exercise took more effort than a nice and easy home rehearsal. The effort was comparable to recording the whole lot with my Tascam.

It was a useful exercise, but not too hopeful at this point. The first two pieces are not competition-proof yet! Additionally, I found out that the programme was too long for 8 minutes. I will have to skip or shorten a piece to avoid the risk of disqualification because of exceeding the time. I will omit *Ommagio a Caturla* because this piece has the least musical expressiveness.

24 March: Public Performance

Today we had a session of the Guitar Circle, a group of guitarists that play solo for each other and rehearse ensemble pieces together in a friendly meeting with coffee and cakes.

This session was a perfect opportunity for a live test of my competition pieces, particularly in public performance you get a clue about the things that require attention. On the other hand, it is a bit of a self-confrontation: Do you consider your performance sufficiently mature to be able to participate in the competition with success?

We do not have a particular playing sequence at the Guitar Circle, everyone who wants to play at a certain time can do so. In most cases the player that wants to be done with it as soon as possible starts first, it's all part of coping with performance nerves. The moment you choose to play is a deliberate choice that affects your focus on the pieces.

Today I was a little bit too hesitant. Because I "waited for my turn" too long, the performance stress increased more than I considered comfortable. OK, waiting is realistic, because on competitions the sequence of the players is decided by the throw of a dice, so if you draw lots and have to play last, you have to wait any way. Yet I should have played sooner.

My sequence of pieces was fixed, so I started with *Valse*. Well, I write "start", but in fact it was a bit of a false start. The listeners felt relieved in some way that a little bit of my nerves showed up. Apparently, I have the reputation that I am not bothered by performance stress

and play under all circumstances. Today it showed otherwise. I guess they did not mean harm, yet I felt a tiny little bit irritated by their relief.

The irritation affected the performance of the piece, at last in my perception. I played the piece neatly to the end, but not more than that. Particularly in the sixteenth note runs I was a bit careless and the tempo was not up to the mark. Dynamics were OK.

I started the *Capriccio Nr. 2* a bit too optimistic in tempo. That caused some trouble in the free style cadenza and the consecutive run of shifting chords from the twelfth to the first fret. Particularly in this section it is quite tricky to prevent rolling off the mountain without heavy braking. In this piece, my irritation increased because I could not play it as planned. Because the piece is so short, a bit of a foul mood stayed with me.

As a consequence of my internal anger, *Opal* started not as quiet as it should. Yet I mastered the piece better than I thought. The tempo remained OK and at the end of the piece I felt calmed down again.

Thus, the last piece, *Ommagio a Caturla* became the best piece of all. Tempo, swing and dynamics were on the right spot. Just a pity that I just skipped this piece for the competition!

So, I ended up with mixed feelings about this try-out. I was a little disappointed about the results and got a negative deadline feeling about the fact that the competition was a month away. There is a clear emotional difference between *I still have a month to go* and *there is only one month left*. Anyway, I will have to improve things and particularly need to brush up *Capriccio*.

25 March: Recovering

After the slightly failed try-out of my competition repertoire at the Guitar Circle, the next day an opportunity showed up to boost morale.

On this day, Fred Rootveld celebrated his sixty-fifth birthday (and his retirement). To this end he served a lovely meal together with his wife Angie in Kulturhaus NIHZ in Nordhorn, Germany. Yes, that's the place to go for numerous guitar concerts and the Open Guitar Stages. Here the competition will be held that I am preparing for.

I did not have a guitar with me, just the guitar book with texts and pictures that I had made to celebrate Fred's retirement, a nice collection from Renaissance to Rock with a little biography and a small description of the pieces.

His son Bobby Rootveld does have guitars indeed! He had just purchased a Stoss from 1809 that was in perfect condition. It was a piece of good luck that he had found in Viertmann's Guitar Shop in Cologne.

He handed it to me to try, so I got a nice opportunity to play *Valse* by Fernando Sor on an original instrument of the day! It was a strange idea that this guitar already existed in Sor's life time! The performance was quite nice, even though I had to get used a bit to the small finger board. I can imagine that some pieces of those days are hardly playable on modern instruments because of the large stretches, the distance between bridge and nut is shorter on the old instruments.

Toon Faulhaber, one of the merrymakers of the party, had a steelstring with him and played some nice live background music. His play encouraged many to sing along. At a certain moment, he hands his guitar over to me with the announcement "time for a break" and left the stage.

So, I took the opportunity for a little performance *Classics on the Steelstring*. Fred's retirement book contained the suitable pieces to make a little show. I took the chance to play some lovely pieces and regain a bit of the self-confidence that I lost yesterday!

31 March: Things are not quite OK

Time for a few practice recordings, I just got a new set of rechargeable batteries for my Tascam recorder.

Valse was OK, *Opal* was fine, but *Capriccio* was a disaster. That blasted piece!

I have two spots that bother me. First the cadenza from measures 29 – 31, followed by the ski jump down the finger board in measures 34 – 36. After a few attempts that made me drop into the same pitfall each time I decided to quit for today, because it drove me nuts.

I need some advice how to cope with these spots. I want to know in particular how you prevent these pieces from being stored as stumbling blocks in my mind. Particularly this cadenza should be a point of relaxation in this crowded piece.

2 April: Crisis Conference

Time for crisis deliberations at the guitar class, what should I do with the stumbling block in *Capriccio* 2?

Just like in many other cases this section is a matter of preparation. You cannot wait with that, at the moment that you strike a string, the command from your brain for the next movement is already on its way and cannot be stopped nor prevented. Your brains gave the signal and if you try to change it, you are in confusion.

The trick is examining with every stroke what movement should have been made to complete the next stroke successfully. That consideration makes you aware of what is needed and might result in a better preparation. This worked for the stumbling block, the main challenge is to maintain this "preparing" mind set, so that the next movement is deliberate and does not come as a surprise. Bearing this in mind I could practice more effectively.

Time for the next problem: I started to get bored, focusing my attention to just these four pieces. I like to play many things. Boredom causes lack of concentration and introduces errors by negligence. Solution for this is the same as last year: Just pick up some other material for some time. Next time I will play a *Nocturne* by Mertz and this week I will only practice the trouble spots of the competition pieces.

15 April: Back to Stage

I slipped the collar completely last week, because I wanted to complete the upgrade of the DOS Amigos Homepage. It included an improvement of the navigation by breadcrumbs and a change in the menu structure so that I have less effort implementing large multi-page documents like the reports of the Guitar Festivals and ... ;-)) a blog like this about my competitions.

I prepared for my performance at the Open Guitar Night, today in Nordhorn. I found it tricky to find some extra repertoire, being so focused on the competition pieces. Yet I found some extra pieces: *L' Amusement Op. 10* by Carcassi and the piece I prepared before, *Nocturne 1* by Mertz.

Amusement Op. 10 by Carcassi is a nice little collection of pieces of moderate difficulty (in my opinion, anyway) , with a little bit more challenge for the last piece. I found them a nice change for the usual *Etudes Progressives Op. 60* that is by far his best-known work. Additionally, I took two competition pieces with me: *Valse* by Sor and *Opal* by Marlon Strauss

An open guitar stage like this is a perfect opportunity for a nerve test. The audience is larger than with the Guitar Circle sessions and you perform in a real stage setting with lighting and things like that. I had to wait with my performance till after the break and I noticed a sense of increased alertness in my body and mind. That looked like a preparatory background stress for the performance. It is positive to be alert, but too much stress becomes restrictive.

In the break, I could tune my guitar and practice a few passages. Nobody notices you and that's noticeable. Anyway, you'll find out as soon as you are the focus of attention of the audience!

I had forgotten my notes for the announcements in German, so I had to improvise. I am quite glad that I can make my announcements for the competition in English! My voice seemed to waver a bit, for me this is a symptom of a bit of performance stress.

Valse went OK. I succeeded to take no notice of little slips and inaccuracies and just play on. I concentrated on rests and breathing where I could.

I had never played the pieces from *Amusement Op. 10* by Carcassi –*Allegretto*, *Rondo* and *Valse*- and the preparation time had been short. In this case I noticed the fact that your heartbeat is a kind of reference clock for your tempo, higher heartbeat, higher tempo. At a certain moment, I noticed that the tempo approached a critical value and I had to slow down a bit. Apparently, this effect is stronger with pieces that are not instilled yet.

Opal was OK except for the first measure of the *mosso* section, I just missed the B-flat bass in the arpeggio pattern. I did not hesitate, however and just kept going and the repeat was OK. In the end this piece was the best one.

Most tricky in this little recital was the announcement in German. Looking for words in your mind is distracting. Fortunately, I took some time to concentrate on the pieces.

The reactions from the audience were positive. It appeared that breathing in the music and the dynamics were noticeable by the audience and people liked that. Reaction of the specialists: The first and the last piece were most suitable for the competition. Bingo!

I liked the reactions, because I find it difficult to assess the effect of my play myself. I tend to remain modest in my self-assessment and the reactions of the audience indicate that I should be a little more optimistic. So, in the end it was a nice exercise for the competition indeed!

17 April: What to do during Playing-in

On the guitar lesson, today we discussed what to do during playing in just prior to the competition performance. What should one do there in order to perform well? For my completion, the playing-in time is just slightly longer than the performance time.

A number of options:

- Rehearsal of all pieces.
- Only rehearse the tricky passages.
- Just pick up loose fragments from the pieces.
- Play all pieces that require careful attention at half tempo.
- Using a study or practice pattern to exercise your fingers and get warm...
- Eat 7 kilos of bananas.
- Devour a few chocolate bars or a package of dextrose tablets.

At an earlier competition, I found out that option 1 has the risk that you spend your energy for rehearsal rather than for the competition recital itself. If the rehearsal fails, you are demoralized or over-motivated. If it goes very well, you should be watchful for complacency or demotivation because the actual competition performance is worse than you expected. I found that effect the last time I played on stage.

Rehearsing the tricky passages only might be effective if it really reassures you. The question is whether this is true. If tricky passages still fail on the day of the competition, it's better to accept it, try to do your best and not to create extra failures with a last-minute rehearsal.

If you pick the loose fragments, the immediate question will be: which? Not the tricky passages, we just argued against that. If I were to select loose fragments, I would choose the begin of the piece, fragments that change mood and the moments of rest in the music. Particularly the beginning of a piece is a clear step to rehearse in terms of relaxation, breathing and start. Rehearsing the moments of rest makes you aware of the breathing of the piece and allows you to breathe deliberately. That would really suit me, because I take little rest during playing.

Playing one of the pieces very slowly and deliberately looked a nice solution to me for *Capriccio 2* by Legnani. This is the fastest piece and requires most effort and I consider the piece the least mature. It might be quite advantageous to practice it that way, even though it might be a challenge indeed. I remember from last year that I was already stressed during playing-in! ;-) Of course, you should remember to revert to the original tempo during the competition!

Just play an *Etude* or practice pattern to get warm a little is a good idea to concentrate on playing as an activity. I tried so last year, but I found out that the Study that I wanted to play

was the competition piece of another player. Thus, I put it away and made the error of a (too) quick rehearsal of the competition pieces.

7 kilos of bananas look quite much to me. Rumour states that there is scientific proof for this amount to enjoy the advantageous effect on your performance. Maybe I'll take one, and I will not forget to wash my hands afterwards.

Chocolate or dextrose activate the muscles. A bit of candy is nice, but don't drive it too far!

I guess I'll practice a few options in a dry run at home, that is the loose fragments, the study and playing very slowly and deliberately.

23 April: The last Guitar Class before the Show

We arrived in the week of the festival. It's weird, the longer I am concentrating on these few competition pieces, the more they start to irritate me. I found it difficult to concentrate. I start making failures on spots that used to be OK. Bad for my morale!

I would almost say that the competition falls one week late. Or is it just usual that you don't know what to improve in the last minute?

I guess I am ready preparing, this is it, I can add nothing. All I need to do is consolidate, just play well what I can do now. I have polished my guitar, put new strings on and now it's ready to go.

By the way, there is little time left for practicing, the festival starts Thursday night, Friday it's festival time too and Saturday is the big day. I guess there is no opportunity to practice at Kulturhaus NIHZ, because by then the place is crowded with the professional and student contestants for Category 1.

So I guess that's it, I thought before I went to the guitar lesson.

Over there I did play the full repertoire again on request. "Just steady on", was my teacher's comment, "if you slip the collar now, you'll throw away part of your preparation." I guess he was right. So, I found some more spots for improvement, some more point to take it easy and some sections where a little vibrato adds to the atmosphere.

Just a matter of memorizing!

25 April: I really got the Blues!

There are those days that you get up with a feeling: "I'd rather stay in bed today!" I was so stressed without knowing the exact cause.

Has it anything to do with the competition? Am I already nervous? Could be, because my "final rehearsal" yesterday evening was a disaster. I completely lost concentration and I was almost afraid to memorize all the failures I made. That's a bad prospect for a performance under stress that might cause involuntary reactions on the finger board.

I really felt the blues. I was considering to withdraw from the competition, the question "what am I doing this for?" jumped on me, immediately followed with a gloomy thought that was

caused by my mood: "why am I doing this to myself?". My motivation was extremely low and a headache was coming up. Summarizing, my morale was pretty down.

So it was time to repeat the goal of this exercise: "I want to play these pieces under competition circumstances, I want to play them as good as I can and I want to finish the complete programme. Results and prizes are secondary at this point, they are not my decision anyway."

OK, that will prevent some disappointment, even though this realism did not prevent me from being overoptimistic last year.

As usual I cycled to my work. It was a nice and quiet morning with little traffic, so I grabbed the opportunity to hum the pieces for myself without guitar and visualize the score in the progress. It made me very aware of the breathing in the piece. *Valse* was no problem, *Opal* likewise. Humming *Capriccio*, I got the impression that my melody in my mind was different from the one on the score. That surprised me at first.

On later inspection, it appeared that there was a remarkable asymmetry in the composition. The first phrase for instance was longer than the second one, while I expected some logical similarity. So, I will have to take care a bit.

Yet after this exercise in the open air I calmed down a bit, the music seemed to be under control again. I hoped that my mood would improve.

Still the day was not quite successful. The blues remained in my body and mind. On the job the atmosphere became a bit stressful when one of my colleagues fell ill and the company doctor had to come to take him away to the sickbay. It seemed that the stress of my colleague jumped over to the group.

I went home a little earlier because I would go to Nordhorn that night. This year there was a welcome party and the draw for the first round of the competition. Fortunately, my wife could balance my energy a bit with her crystal therapy, because I felt like my solar plexus was bound to explode. There was a blockade indeed!

So, it was a good thing that this welcome party became a pleasant reunion with a few friends and acquaintances and turned into a relaxed happening afterwards!

26 April: Let's get to Work!

26 April: The guitar case remains shut today

The first day of the Nordhorn Guitar Festival I had my guitar with me. Opportunities to play might arise. Yet she did not leave her case. There was enough to do, particularly the preliminaries for the competition of the professionals and a lot of work behind the scenes. Breakfast and dinner for 35 guests and some more visitors is quite an endeavour with preparation of the food and the dishes afterwards. I made quite a number of walks between the kitchen on the first floor and the dining room in the cellar.

So today other people –in particular the contestants- were much more nervous than me! Thus, I lost yesterday's blues and the tremendous concert by Zoran Dukic in the evening made me relaxed again. Fortunately!

27 April: The Competition

There it is, the very day of the amateur competition on guitar. This awareness hangs around my midriff all morning. Well, just live with it. I pack my guitar, sheet music and nail care equipment in the back of my car and drive to Nordhorn.

The preliminaries of the professional competition had been completed yesterday, 5 out of 26 players went to the finals, so now there is ample opportunity to pick up the guitar. In the concert hall, I can tune my guitar in peace and I have some warming-up with just easy fragments.

I am done pretty quickly so I guess it's time for a cup of coffee. At the bar, I peek into the demonstration room of the luthier Frederieke Lindscheid and I think: "let's try some!" I see a number of guitars, some with cedar some with spruce top, well built, nice design and surprisingly lightweight!

I ask if I can try some and I play for about twenty minutes. I play the competition repertoire and play some other pieces that stick in my head somehow. The string distance is different, so it takes a little bit getting used to. One of the guitars has a custom-built fingerboard that is pretty narrow. The guitars are friendly and respond nicely to my play. Fun to play on!

Suddenly I hear the announcement of the stage workshop by Klaus Rentzel. Workshop? Sounds fun to me, stage presentation is quite important for a recital and the first contact with the audience is vital for the way that you dwell on the stage.

With a few basic exercises, he shows how you can re-enter your body for relaxation and easy breathing. It's surprising how focused you are on your head and hands during playing. Consequently, he shows how to make contact with the audience and create a nice atmosphere for playing.

The exercises are effective, I feel quite a bit more relaxed. Until it shows that it is two before twelve! I had another time in my head for the competition, but things actually start at twelve! That is quite a surprise for me! I panic for a moment! No time for panic anyway, I get my guitar, and perform a quick tuning. Then I just wait for the playing-in period. I am the third candidate, so there is some time left.

At one side this is a perfect start, I have not had time for worries and nerves in the last hours. On the other hand, now the adrenaline courses through my body and I am almost trembling.

During playing-in I resist the temptation to rehearse only the trouble spots. I guess that is not helpful any way if you are five minutes away from the event! Instead I execute the exercises of the workshop, try to get my body back to earth, take some easy and deep breaths, play a few beautiful tones and that's it. I have not touched any of the competition pieces! Yet I do not feel completely relaxed.

Playing-in time flies by. At the moment that the competition leader comes in to guide me to the stages I feel my heart in my throat. NOW!

I make the same walk as yesterday's competitors. Along the fireplace and the gong for the concerts I walk to the stage. I mind the step and face the audience and jury and introduce myself. Good, my voice is operating loud and clear (I have not had logopaedics for nothing last year). My announcement is effective, only my joke about Paganini and Legnani does not come out very well. Next year I will rehearse my spontaneous fun as well!

I sit down and tune the guitar. I take my time and check the consonants. It's a quite simple mechanism, I play a few chords (C, G, Am, G (low strings), F and E) and check their sound. After a few corrections, I take a breath and visualize the tempo of the first piece.

Valse by Fernando Sor. I have the impression that my playing slows down to a crawl, but the sixteenth note runs are OK. I play the middle section slightly more briskly. Now the sixteenth note runs are riskier than I thought. Dynamics and the variation of sound are effective.

Time for today's challenge: *Capriccio Nr. 2* by Legnani. I claim another moment of quiet concentration because I have to choose my tempo well! I visualize a moderate tempo, because too much speed will cause me trouble indeed!

I play through the first phrase and meet my first left hand fingering conflict. Apparently, I did not sufficiently resolve this situation and now it comes up under pressure. It causes hesitation, but I succeed in recovering. Onward to the slow start of the cadenza. The start is not that relaxed, but fortunately my fingers know the way up on the fingerboard. It is so weird, it feels like I am behind myself. Now that we are up we have the ski jump down the fingerboard. I slow down my tempo, yet I feel like I am zipping down. Fortunately, I succeed to slow down in the end and take a breath. The last measures are a tempo primo again.

I am not completely satisfied even though I survived. The inertia of my fingers and arms seems to increase even further. Relax, boy!

No time for grizzling, the last piece *Opal* is up. I strike the harmonics very well. This piece calms me down. It looks like I get some remote crystal therapy for balancing (well, the work is titled *Halbedelsteine* - semiprecious stones- and my wife uses them a lot for her therapy) The middle section *piu mosso* is slightly faster than I visualised. Never mind, it is rocking nicely. Good, the B-flat and the double thumb stroke work out in both repeats. After the slightly rocking section I succeed in relaxation. As a consequence, the harmonics are clear, the melody is atmospheric and the final chord with the natural harmonics and the low E is perfectly balanced.

There is a surprising peaceful silence before the audience starts the applause. A very good sign indeed for this last piece. I even hear someone sigh: "what a beautiful piece!" I stand up and bow my thanks. I feel a combination of relief and satisfaction that I reached the finish without terrible failures. Yet I have no idea about the musical quality of my performance. I am not very optimistic in my assessment, because some things went wrong. Anyway, the race is run and now there is time to relax.

Time passes by and I stay uncertain about the result. "I heard that you played a nice competition recital" is the casual remark of my master class teacher Stefan Grasse. I am glad to hear this, but the value of this remark in the context of the final result remains to be seen.

Half past seven in the evening, the moment of truth. I refrain from thoughts about my placement. Last year I was wrong, so I guess that an expectation of a placing is useless. I have run the race and the jury decides if my jumps were worth a prize.

Bobby Rootveld climbs the stage and announces the result. "Fourth place for Mrs. Cuvee!" The audience applauds and Bobby hands over the prize after the congratulations. CDs, two

packages of Savarez strings. That's practical indeed! The jury reads the report with useful tips to improve the performance.

"OK," I think, "my placement is at least the same as last year."

Bobby continues. "The third place is for Agnes Mika!" Last year Agnes was the winner, but now her (much more difficult) piece became a hurdle (just guess, Bach again, a Prelude this time), as she told me after the competition this afternoon.

"Great, at least a second place" I think in good spirits.

"The second place is for Nandini Sudhir!" She's our international candidate and a promise for the future. Being sixteen years of age, she was just entitled for this competition. She played *Romanze* from the *Sonata in A* by Paganini and during the festival she showed herself as a very kind girl with a passion for the guitar.

Little by little an understanding starts dawning with me. "Me, a first place? How is that possible?"

It is actually true! Under enthusiastic applause I come forward in a haze of surprise and joy. This was the last thing I expected! I accept the congratulations and the prize. The jury report is a nice piece of reward too: all notes were on the right spot!

People reacted enthusiastically towards all candidates, a clear sign of the enjoyable atmosphere of the Guitar Festival Nordhorn. That was most pleasant to me, the guitarists sympathize with each other, whether you get the first or the last place. Of course I am very glad with the first!

Next year I will participate again!