

Louis Ignatius Gall Festival



On the 18th January 2014 the Louis Ignatius Gall Festival took place in Kulturhaus NIHZ in Nordhorn, Germany.

The first question that many people will ask: “Who is Louis Ignatius Gall, and what’s the reason that a festival is dedicated to him?”

Frankly said, when I started playing the guitar I had not the faintest idea who Louis Ignatius Gall was. In fact, that was true for any classical guitar hero that roamed the world in those days. I just started recognising names after I started buying classical guitar records...

I started playing the guitar as an autodidact. To help me with self-teaching I had bought a few issues of Ilja Kroon’s guitar method, but these books did not help me progress. So, I decided to take lessons when I became a student and thus I landed with Thea van der Meer at the Enschede School of Music.

During the lessons, it became clear to me who Gall was, his name adorned the cover of a guitar method together with the name of his colleague Rob Koenders, both teachers at the Twente Conservatory. By the cover design one could see that the book was published by the Van Teeseling music publishing house. The name Louis Ignatius Gall sounded quite Spanish to me, fitting to an instruction book for the classical Spanish guitar!

When I moved to Enschede as a student, the Twente Conservatory was pretty young, it was established in 1972 as an evolution of the local School of Music, while I arrived there in 1977. The Conservatory started its existence in the monumental residence at the Boddenkampsingel. Later on, the Conservatory moved to the old Capuchin Convent in Dolphia at the eastern side of Enschede and the Boddenkampsingel location became School

of Music again. At that location, I used to climb the stairs to attend my guitar lessons on the attic floor, until I was expelled from this school by the Enschede city council because I impudently had moved to the neighbour town of Hengelo.

Stories from former students at the Conservatory were a clear indication that the Capuchine Convent was a nice location to study music, much better than the ill-famous Artez bunker in the centre of Enschede that is the current residence of the Conservatory, at least the section that survived the budget cuts by means of which the Dutch Government expected to overcome the financial crisis.

The Koenders/Gall method appeared to be quite extensive with the parts 1, 1A, 2 and 3. I was allowed to start in part 2 because in some way I had learned myself the right things on the guitar before. Hoping that this method would serve me better than the Kroon method, I purchased the book.

The Koenders/Gall method taught me that a method was no good for me. Fortunately, Thea anticipated this very well with an alternative learning strategy, so in the years that followed I missed further links with Gall's work, but did learn to play the guitar.

Things changed when I met Duo Niet in het Zwart (NIHZ). Bobby Rootveld, the guitarist of the duo and Fred Rootveld, his father both had studied with Louis Ignatius Gall and were quite positive about him, despite some minor remarks they had on his teachings. The latter is quite normal, it's called Post-academic progress!

Even more important than their stories was the fact that they played his music. That was a clear confirmation of their appreciation.

Internet helped me to investigate the role of Louis Ignatius Gall in the Dutch guitar world. The fact that many trained classical guitarists mention him on their CV is an indication that he is appreciated.

Who was Louis Ignatius Gall? To my surprise he is a Dutchman, despite his exotic name that made me think that he came from Spain, the land of the guitar.

He was born in the Dutch East Indies before World War 2. His childhood and teenage years were clearly affected by the Japanese occupation and the struggle for freedom that followed and led to the Republic of Indonesia. It was a time in which he, according to what he says himself, literally was face to face with death a number of times.

The guitar became his passion and his life at a very young age and it remained so. This attitude brought him to the individual lessons by Andrés Segovia in Santiago de Compostela. It says something about his qualities because Segovia was extremely critical accepting and teaching students, many were rejected or sent home on the run.

After his studies, he dedicated himself to an adventurous international concert career. Unfortunately, a hand injury terminated his options as a roaming concert musician, but it did not discourage him. Finally, he settled down as a professor at the Twente Conservatory, a position he held until his retirement.

Besides teaching, Gall was quite active in composing for solo guitar and guitar ensembles. Many of his compositions were published by Van Teeseling in Nijmegen, and by his own publishing house Elgo Productions in Enschede.

The Louis Ignatius Gall Festival became a pleasant reunion of a host of alumni. They came from all around over Europe, even from Wales. The ones present were not all people that ever studied with him indeed, for thirty years of students you would need a football stadium.

Maybe some did not want to go. That has a clear relation with how you look back upon your college years and your teachers. For one person, his or her teacher has been someone inspiring to learn the skills and extend them in your own way. For others, a teacher is someone that forces you to revolt and look for your own ways to master the profession. Both modes have their results, but I guess that the memories of the college years are less positive in the second case.

The Louis Ignatius Gall Festival included an ensemble workshop, a guitar competition, a documentary about the life of Gall and an evening concert that enables the ad-hoc ensemble and various guests to present compositions by Gall.

The special thing about the Louis Ignatius Gall Festival was, that it was no posthumous event, the maestro was present himself. Last year at the Pieter van der Staak Festival, the dedicatee had passed away a few years before, so the character of the event became a bit more of a memorial.

This was certainly not the case with the Louis Ignatius Gall Festival, the dedicatee was there and got the opportunity to hear performances of his own compositions. I think that will please every right-minded composer. The paper is patient, but the ear likes to listen too, even though at occasions it might be slightly confronting that the player chooses his or her own interpretation.

I entered the Kulturhaus NIHZ for the evening concert just after dinner. Everyone was in good mood, it had been a nice meal (thanks to all the volunteers!) and talking and laughing was all around. Quite a number of people had made the journey to Germany and I have never seen the Kulturhaus NIHZ sooo crowded. The concert hall was full and only standing room was scarcely available.

To my great surprise, I met the current owner of the publishing house Van Teeseling that took over the management after the death of her father. I have had the opportunity and pleasure to publish three books with music for flute and guitar. She recognized me by the photographs of their web site ;-). Despite the fact that I did get a bit older since! A pleasant meeting!

The evening opened with a word of welcome and the results of the diligent work of the ensemble. Just like the Pieter van der Staak Festival, the ensemble had various directors and it was fun to hear how they stamped the performance with their own personality. By the music, it was quite clear that Louis Ignatius Gall and Pieter van der Staak were contemporaries.

Following were the contributions of a number of alumni on the guitar, with the Anido Guitar Duo of Annette Kruisbrink and Arlette Ruelens as representatives of the "Zwolle Conservatory branch". A pleasant addition formed the homage of Gall's old friend, the guitarist Reinbert Evers from Münster, Germany.

Louis Ignatius Gall often integrated Spanish sounds and manners in his compositions, he was certainly no advocate of atonal experiments like we hear from composers like Nicolas Maw. The music was get-at-able but by no means easy. The movements of the players showed the technical challenge of many of his pieces.

It must have been a delightful experience for Louis Ignatius Gall who had settled modestly on the second rank. There were so many players that brought his music with bright enthusiasm!

After all players had played their pieces, it was the turn of the maestro himself. It was a special experience to hear someone play that had lived passionately with music for so long and had reached a high age in his profession. It is very true, you become older and grey, your voice loses some of its power and the muscles become a bit stiff. The effect of age was obvious from the volume of Gall's performance. Yet in a very silent concert hall it became quite clear that his music had remained young and alive, after all these years as well!

A standing ovation followed his last notes and the maestro accepted the cheers with perceptible emotion. I guess that this festival has made him very happy, it is a token of recognition that not every teacher will receive. Most will have to be satisfied with the knowledge that they enabled their students to pick up the musical heritage and to surpass their teacher in the end and maybe become teachers themselves.

The Louis Ignatius Gall Festival was the occasion for the release of the CD Louis Ignatius Gall, Guitar. Gall has recorded quite some material over the years, but no recording was ever released. Fortunately, the tapes were well-kept, so the material for an anthology of Gall's music on the silver disc was available. The CD is released by Samsung Productions under number SAMCD027.

The CD contains a nice palette of musical styles. The music starts with an unbelievably intimate recording of a set of Renaissance pieces by Dowland, Sweelinck and Vallet. The way of recording is quite beneficial to the clarity of the voicing of the music.

The Baroque era is represented by *Gavotte in E* by Bach. The playing style reminded me of the young John Williams.

The Romantic era appears in the form of two charming tangos by Jose Ferrer, followed in time by a few pieces by Federico Moreno Torroba that include a beautifully played *Torija*.

The *Prelude* by Nakabayashi brings us to the contemporary with an atmosphere that resembles *Sakura* by Yokoh

The remainder of the CD is dedicated to compositions by Gall himself. In his *Suite Opus 1* he ventures a bit in the contemporary sound, but does not forget to return to his beloved Spanish ground. In that aspect, the last piece *Malagueña* was a worthy final of the CD. With this very *Malagueña* he concluded his own performance at the Louis Ignatius Gall Festival.

For me the CD was a pleasant meeting with the guitarist and composer Louis Ignatius Gall!

Summarizing, it was a nice evening with a likewise souvenir!