A Trip to Guitar Festival Enkhuizen

Father's Day, early in the morning

It was just eight o'clock on the early Sunday morning of the fifteenth June 2014, it happened to be Father's Day, when a Renault Kangoo with passenger accommodation and a German number plate stopped in front of my door. It was Duo Niet In Het Zwart (NIHZ) (Not Dressed in Black) from Nordhorn on tour.

This time their destination was the Dutch town of Enkhuizen, the place of the guitar festival today. Bobby and Sanna respectively playing guitar/voice/effects and recorders/voice/melodica/effects had asked me to go with them.

Well, I liked the idea, so I got out of bed long before I could get a Father's Day Breakfast (I would not have gotten it anyway, because both my daughters live on their own). Hearing the word guitar festival, I became alert right away and decided to pick up my little notebook. That's the reason that you can read my report now.

On the road we went with a quick pace: Hengelo – Deventer – Apeldoorn – gas station/sandwiches - Epe – Harderwijk – Lelystad – the dike towards Enkhuizen. It was bright weather (fine weather for sailing too) and the visibility was excellent, so travelling along the 27 kilometres' causeway through the IJsselmeer we could see the Herring Town Enkhuizen from afar.

Yesterday, Duo NIHZ had travelled quite a distance to play a concert in Germany and today the car had to make its miles too. With the travelling distances they cover, they have become pretty smart in doing things on the road. No time for breakfast? Sandwich on the dashboard!

Our destination of today was the Zuiderzeemuseum, the planned crime-scene of the Enkhuizen Guitar Festival.

The Location: The Zuiderzeemuseum

Long ago, when I was living in a Student Flat, we used to have a kind of club song. Don't ask how we got that, it already was a tradition when I came along. The song was called *Zuiderzee Ballad*, a Dutch song about the inland sea that's separated the provinces of North Holland and Gelderland from the northern provinces Overijssel and Friesland. It used to be a dangerous place for shipping. As with every shanty like song, it had a refrain that sung very well with lots of beer and gin.

Zuiderzee… What many guitarists don't know is that the French guitarist and composer Napoleon Coste (1805 - 1883) dedicated his composition *Op. 20: Le Zuyderzée* to this inland sea as well. He did so on his trip to Holland and he travelled quite far, witness the fact that he dedicated another one of his compositions *Op. 19: Delfzil* to the town of Delfzijl near the German border of the province of Groningen.

The Zuiderzee, with old fishermen's towns like Enkhuizen used to be, with the harbour and the old handicrafts like mending the nets. Subjects enough for a fine museum. The town of Arnhem (one of the objectives of Operation Market Garden in the second world war) has its Open-Air Museum, that's for the landlubbers. Enkhuizen has got its Zuiderzeemuseum, the place to go for people with sea legs that want to catch the stiff breeze of the IJsselmeer on the dikes.

In 1932, the Zuiderzee became IJsselmeer because of the construction of the Afsluitdijk, the dam that connected the provinces of Noord Holland and Friesland and cut off the sea. There were major consequences for the industry of the towns and villages on the previous inland sea, because the connection with the open sea was lost. The fisheries and their related industries plus their culture were doomed to disappear. A number of people felt sorry and established the Society of Friends of the Zuiderzeemuseum with the objective to build a museum and a museum village to preserve some of the culture of the Zuiderzee of the past. A large number of municipalities at the coast of the old Zuiderzee donated buildings and objects. The result was a nice open-air museum that consisted of a little town that was reconstructed on a piece of land outside the seawall of the harbour of Enkhuizen.

On this Father's Day, the picturesque museum town was the scene of various podia for guitar music. There was music for everyone, bands and ensembles, classical solo, singer/songwriter, cabaret, pop, world music, finger-style and sing-along, as long as there were guitars in it.

A nice overview map of the museum with the locations and the schedule for the concerts guided me without problems to a sampling of guitaristic musical styles.

The Organizer: De Gitaarsalon

The most important initiator of this festival is the Gitaarsalon, an intimate stage (up to fifty listeners) for the serious (I do not mean sombre) small-scale guitar music from classical to flamenco, traditional, jazz and finger style. As a consequence of their contacts with the classical cable channel Brava TV and the jazz channel DjazzTV they serve the listeners in the concert hall and far beyond. Just take a look with Youtube and you will hear the exceptional quality of the well-recorded musicians and you will notice the well-filmed entourage that they perform in.

The guitar festival is the final event of the Festival Week, a week with concerts and events like the open stage for guitar students. In this week the guitar really plays the first fiddle! An interesting mix of instruments, one could say.

Thanks to an extensive network of sponsors and an enthusiast group of volunteers behind (and sometimes up on) the stage, this undertaking is quite an event. Bright initiative!

Duo NIHZ in the Wierschuur

We entered the Zuiderzeemuseum via the rear entrance, close to the restaurant. That was suitable, because after a long journey you need a sanitary stop and a cup of coffee to wake up. On the opposite side of the canal near the school there was some activity, the mandolin ensemble Entre Nous was setting up. We already met some participants on the way from the parking lot with their characteristic instrument cases.

Their saxophone player practiced *Hit the Road, Jack*, but it was not the time yet for Duo NIHZ to perform themselves, so we could make a start with enjoying this ensemble. They started with baroque music and a few Contradances by Mozart. The music sounded well in this mixed setting, because the mandolin players were not the only musicians. A double bass, guitars and a few wind instruments joined the party too.

A block away I heard the bass notes that made the swing of some jazz music. No problem for the mandolins, this literally and figuratively mixed musical atmosphere was part of the deal on this feast.

In the meantime, a hustle and bustle emerged in the museum, caused by the musicians that went to their stages. Hand-drawn carts full of instruments rolled through the cobble paved streets and sometimes the musicians needed to stop and inspect the map to find their way in the museum village.

Indeed, for Duo NIHZ it became high time to leave for the stage too. With instruments and stage outfit we went to the Wierschuur, a historical building that was originally used to dry the sea weed that was used to fill cushions and mattresses. The map showed us that we had a little walk to make, the Wierschuur was located at the far end, even beyond the lime-kiln at the waters of the Compagnieshaven.

The very first concert at that place was still under way, with Paco and Albert Distelbrink on Kora (a kind of harp with spherical sound box) and percussion. They made West African music with almost meditative and minimal music elements.

I took a seat and noticed that the Wierschuur was also used as an exhibition room. This time you could see a few modern stained glass windows, of which one stood out in particular. I guess that window was intended for a church, a real contemporary one indeed, because the crucified Jesus with Holy Heart was in the middle of a large number of technological objects and the angels in heaven had to share the firmament with jet planes and all kinds of rockets. It was a nice an colourful composition that would be nice to look at and to dream away if the sermon gets too complicated.

There was no dressing room in the Wierschuur, so Duo NIHZ got the most spacious dressing room they had had in many years, the open air behind the back wall.

Many years ago, Duo NIHZ started as a classical guitar/recorder duo, but gradually they specialized in Yiddish music and themes concerning the Jewish people in Europe. Their repertoire includes Klezmer music, songs from the thirties and music by Jewish composers for various genres like classical and cabaret. Additionally, they have special programmes for commemoration of the events concerning the Holocaust. Whatever the genre, in every programme they have an original approach that includes theatre effects.

The approach was pretty evident in the medley *Veronika, die Klezmorim sind da*, in which Bobby Rootveld interpreted with inimitable facial expressions the angry neighbour that complained because the cactus (*Eine Kleine Grüne Kaktus*) from the balcony of the upstairs neighbour had landed on his head. The same applied to their original of the million-dollar hit *Bei mir bist du schön* by the Andrew Sisters from the thirties of the last century, besides the theatre, Duo NIHZ added the original Yiddish lyrics.

The public interest was variable (it was still early on this Sunday), but the audience that entered remained in place and moved with the contagious music. With the humoristic Dutch song *Mijnheer Dinges weet niet wat swing is* (Mr. Dinges does not know what swing is) by the pre-war Jewish duo Johnny and Jones, the audience picked up a refrain too.

Duo NIHZ would play two times, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. In the afternoon, the sun shone brightly and consequently a lot more visitors made it to the Wierschuur. It was really crowded that time, and even a few visitors from the morning sessions re-appeared.

In the Chapel

The Chapel of the Zuiderzeemuseum was the domain of the classical guitarist, it is a little church with extraordinary acoustics. When I first entered, I thought that the players used amplification, but it was just the space that enhanced the sound.

The first player I heard was Manus Noble, who just played the last measures of the beautiful *Sakura* by Satoh. Then he started his own composition *Inishowen*, the story of an Irish family manor. I sounded like an Irish ballad, that soon changed character after a delicate intro towards a more quick and lively atmosphere.

Manus Noble stayed and got company of van Gary Ryan. For me Ryan was an unknown guitarist until I got *Birds flew over the Spire* on my music stand, and Youtube did the rest. He is a guitarist that mixes classical and popular styles, like finger style.

Together they played a contemporary piece with a casual Arabic sound and lots of percussion. The music was extended with all kinds of effects, using a tea spoon, ping-pong balls and a pencil to obtain a bottleneck effect. After a while some of the music was re-injected, using a digital sampler.

The Chapel was filled to capacity –I just remained in the portal- and the audience was walking in and out. That's a professional challenge for the players, because the festival formula (walking around and take a look wherever you like) causes more unrest than starting a concert up to schedule and only take fixed breaks. Well, this unrest was not noticeable in the player's performance.

A Stroll

After the performance of Duo NIHZ, I decided to take a walk in order to take a look in the museum and to get a breath of fresh air. The fresh air was no problem, because with the stiff northeast breeze that came from the Ijsselmeer (the waves had white crests) it was almost cold in the shadow. Later on this appeared the cause of the cold I caught and that would trouble me the next week.

Thus, I arrived at the *Leugenbank* (Bank of Lies) just besides the restaurant. By tradtion a Leugenbank is a place, for instance near the harbour, where people were gossiping, so in fact you could buy and sell lies for free. In Dutch, a bank has also the meaning of bench, so additionally it was a place to sit down (and to gossip).

Gossiping about football is a popular activity in this world cup season, so the Leugenbank appeared a suitable place for that. The poet Matthijs Laan sang football-lyrics on the match Spain-Holland in Brazil and accompanied that skilfully on the Irish Harp. Tactical changes and harmonic attacks made the match.

Near the band stand on the canal I stayed for a while to listen to the ballads sung by Robert Pfeiffer, he accompanied the songs with effective steel string patterns. A fine atmosphere in the bright sunshine. Near the sidewalk café of Café Restaurant Hindeloopen I heard a nice cover of the Beatles song *Here comes the Sun* from the legendary *Abbey Road* album. Good job, guys! The sun had arrived abundantly!

On the way, I saw all kinds of guitar enthusiasts, some were improvising in occasional ensembles, others were lying on their back in the grass with the guitar and practiced their riffs. After a brief walk along the dike I arrived at the Wierschuur again and I met Duo NIHZ that was still waiting to begin their concert. Paco and Albert Distelbrink had just started a looooong encore that would thwart any schedule.

I decided to stay there for a while and to open up my bread bin. In the back of the shed I found a nice place for my lunch and some music to help the appetite.

In the Chapel again

After the afternoon performance of Duo NIHZ we made a stroll together. So we landed in the Chapel again. We heard Frank Lamm play two *Preludes* by Heitor Villa-Lobos. The well-

known *Prelude Nr. 1* again appealed the imagination. The next *Prelude* had a very nice middle section with the melody in the base and a quick arpeggio as the accompaniment. At a distance, from the portal, it sounded well despite the noise of the audience entering and leaving, the traditional Dutch metal hoops on the cobbles and the swinging jazz ensemble in the other street.

Yannis Giagourtas (I remember him from the Nordhorn Guitar Festival) was a little bit late, but before the Duo NIHZ could be asked to replace him, he came running in with his guitar case. After unpacking and tuning he started a very contemporary piece with a nice sound, but some wild dissonant caprioles too. Not all listeners recognized this as an artistic performance. “Sounds nice, but the piece is beyond me!” was the dry comment of one of the spectators.

Running around and hearing all this music, one tends to forget the inner man. We made up for that at the stand for fish and chips in the neighbourhood. Thus, the afternoon passed and the time went to 16:30, the final whistle for the concerts. Too bad, but also good things come to an end. Consequentially a movement emerged towards the exit of the museum with all those carts full of instruments. Duo NIHZ and me decided to leave too.

Finally

As a token of appreciation, the Gitaarsalon had invited volunteers and artists for a bite and a social gathering. For me it presented a nice occasion to take a look at the Gitaarsalon, cause I had never been there before.

Such a beautiful location! I observed a living room en suite that could be converted into a concert hall in no time. There was a well-equipped set of stage lights on the ceiling that could be used to create a suitable atmosphere with a control panel on the wall. The room had a nice view on the garden, but if desired you could use stylish curtains to take care that the attention of the audience was not distracted by the view. The arrangement of the room was now adapted for dinner, the separate sections of the stage came in handy as dining tables.

Large bookshelves on the wall were loaded with CDs, LPs and literature about the guitar. It reminded me of the interior of the house of my former teacher Latin, Mr. Weyland, who had his house filled to the brim with classical LPs, every free spot on the wall was occupied. I remember it as a curious experience, my re-examination Latin soon became a cultural guided tour through ages of music. Much more influential for me than testing my conjugations in Latin!

After a short time, the room was cramped with volunteers and artists that had joined the festival. The ladies in the kitchen made an impressive performance with the dinner, I got a nice beet salad and a beautiful tomato soup before we had to leave. It was time to leave indeed, because the travel back would last about two and a half hours and tomorrow the alarm clock would ring early, both for me and Duo NIHZ.

In that way, a very enjoyable Father’s Day came to an end!