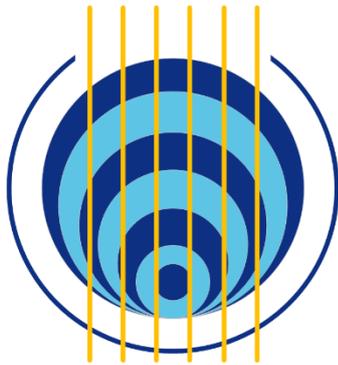


# Lustrum Competition?

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## Amateurconcours



# Gitaarfestival Nordhorn 2016

A bit reluctantly this year, I subscribed to the amateur competition of the Nordhorn Guitar Festival 2016. My fifth appearance, a kind of lustrum.

### October 2015: Subscribed

This year I was early with my subscription for Guitar Festival Nordhorn 2016. However, I was quite reluctant concerning participation in the amateur competition. Eventually the 2015 competition appeared quite stressful and I was not sure if I wanted to go through such a situation again.

The actual reason was a little loss of self-confidence that I suffered this year and that was already bothering me with the 2015 edition of the amateur competition. I was in a mood that recognized pitfalls rather than challenges.

This situation had emerged from my work. Sometimes you get involved with people that suck so much of your energy that it becomes unhealthy, while it is very hard to back out because you feel responsible for the job. This happened to me with a new colleague that I would work up. In the end, he failed contract renewal because of dysfunction. This whole period, from good hope to annoyance that nothing got completed, irrespective of all help that I offered, it sucked energy with me, particularly because the colleague involved put up a smoke screen towards others, pretending nothing was happening. At the moment, I am still busy clearing the mess that was left behind, unfortunately the mess is for the heirs.

I took the matter that (and maybe too) seriously that it yielded quite a lot of stress and a bit of a problem with self-confidence. I was wondering if I should have been more rigorous instead of offering help against better judgement. In a way that gnaws at you.

In short, at the moment I am fairly less adventurous, which applied to my guitar endeavours as well.

When I subscribed, and expressed my doubts, Bobby Rootveld of the GFN was much more optimistic. "As a player, you are quite capable of performance. You just started your preparations for the last time too late", he said, "If you start studying your competition pieces now, they will be firm and fixed by the time of the competition."

Well, he has a point, I must admit. So, I made a conditional subscription to the amateur competition.

## November 2015: The Pieces

Just like every year before, the selection of the competition pieces is a puzzle. They must be representative and representable and may not exceed the regulatory 8 minutes. Additionally, they should be neither too easy, nor too difficult.

Ditmaal wilde ik een compleet werk spelen dat uit kleine stukjes bestaat, voor verschillende stemmingen. Nu was ik ook voor opnamen al een tijd bezig met het werk van Jose Ferrer.

This time I wanted to play a complete work that consists of movements that catch various moods. I had an idea that arose from my Jose Ferrer recording project.

Jose Ferrer (1835 - 1916) was a Catalan guitarist and composer who taught guitar in Paris and Barcelona. Most of his compositions are in the style of the then popular *Musique de Salon*. This style is romantic and quite accessible for an audience. Ferrer's compositions often are strictly according to the "rules" and likewise structured. At times his compositions are predictable but that is compensated for by the nice melodies, even in the very short pieces.

As a small yet complete piece, I found *Veladas Intimas –Intimate Evenings-* that consists of four small movements: *Allegretto*, *Minué*, *Valse* and *Nocturne*. Nocturne is the longest piece. This little suite appeared to me a nice combination of joyfulness, elegance and romance.

This piece does not take 8 minutes to play. So, I needed another piece, preferably one with a little virtuosity. I browsed my music and found material by Napoleon Coste.

The Frenchman Napoleon Coste (1806 - 1883) started playing as a kid with his mother as teacher. In his teens, he became a popular concert guitarist and a well-sought teacher. Unfortunately, his career suffered from the decline of the guitar mania which took place in Paris during Sor's life time. A broken arm became the end of his career.

Much of Coste's compositions are forgotten, but many years ago I found a little collection titled *Recreation du Guitariste* with quite a few rewarding yet not too difficult pieces. I decided to select a Waltz in A major as a starter for the competition.

Two pieces from the Romantic era, yet with a different temperature. These will be the pieces that I will be working on for the competition.

## December 2015: Some more detail about the pieces

I choose my competition pieces, *Valse* from *Recreation du Guitariste* by Napoleon Coste and *Veladas Intimas* by Jose Ferrer. On this page, you have the option to take a look at their scores.

The *Valse* has a traditional setup, a theme in A major that also serves as a *Da Capo* and a middle section in D major. The first phrase contains the little bit of virtuosity with a firm slide to the ninth position and back. It requires a bit of control to prevent a slip or a slide to the wrong fret. The second phrase contains a fun effect that switches the rhythm of three to a rhythm of two. That requires attention to the fingering. The middle section in D major has the waltz feeling, here the ballroom dresses can follow the elegant movements.

*Veladas Intimas* has four pieces, the joyful *Allegretto*, the elegant *Minué*, the straight *Valse* and the romantic *Nocturne*.

*Allegretto* is nice for a playful approach. A repeated theme arrives at a final version of this theme in a different atmosphere via a broader middle section. I feel tempted to play some jokes in the transition to the last theme. Finally, it appeared to be fun to repeat the last phrase in a slightly slower tempo with a resolute end.

*Minué* is still a bit under development. The piece itself is a simple construction, two repeated themes. I want to play it elegantly, but not too fast. The piece is so short that I am thinking about a *Da Capo* that is not in the original.

I will play *Valse* straight and to the point with differences in dynamics. Also in this piece, I am tempted to a *Da Capo*.

I must admit that the first three pieces are short indeed! Before you notice, they are gone. I might make them a bit longer, but have to take care that I do not overstretch their eloquence.

*Nocturne* is the most extensive piece in the two pages of score that is *Veladas Intimas*. The piece starts with a firm introduction in E minor, that enables to play up and build some tension towards the first theme. The first theme is slightly sad and offers a voicing that you can play with.

The romance of the *Nocturne* appears in the E major section: A melody with arpeggio accompaniment that provides the possibility to make it sing. Ornaments and triplets offer some challenge here. A nice turn in the last theme finishes the main melody. There is some temptation to conclude the quiet last chord with an E major chord in harmonics.

So, this is the material that I will attempt to play with some fantasy. Dependent on the time it takes, maybe I will add another piece, but only for emergency.

## December 2015: Unsubscribed

After a period of heavy stress on the job and the backaches that emerged from it (which made it quite difficult to play the guitar) I was forced to think about the cause of stress effects like this. Almost automatically the question arose whether stressful events like an (amateur) guitar competition add something to the satisfaction that I gain from guitar playing.

Four years ago, a competition was a challenge. I just wanted to try one to find out how it felt. It was fun to work on music with an apparently clear goal in preparation for the best possible performance. That it did not work out at my first time in front of a jury, I did not mind somehow. I achieved a third prize, not bad for the outsiders (that do not know the number of participants), but effectively the last place because there were no more participants.

I had learned from my experiences and improved my preparations: The next year I won the competition. The number of competitors was larger, so I had a nice bit of a sense of achievement.

It is said, however, that once you have won a competition, you should not return for another attempt. Now, after two editions, I found out that there is truth in this statement. A victory keeps chasing you, causing the player to make higher demands to him/herself that is good for him/her. At Nordhorn 2014 I achieved a third prize after a stressful performance. At Nordhorn 2015, this year's edition, I failed to reach the podium.

I refused to believe it, but it appeared true: a competition demands results, demands a winner. I was thinking that I was there just for a useful experience. Deep in my heart, however, I went for the victory or at least a place on the podium. Consequently, I was quite fed up with myself when in my opinion I did not perform well enough. That's a sharp edge that spoils your satisfaction in playing the guitar.

That immediately raises the question what effect competition has on yourself. Competition implies a fight! There are many beautiful and somewhat high-flown stories about how (a sense of) competition would inspire someone to great deeds and many managers thus hope to push their teams to top performance. Is competition really that positive? As I notice it around me, competition forces people into a survival strategy, a game of "us versus them". In some cases, this may lead to a great stimulation for a top performance, but it may also lead to a lot of stress and a negative energy that causes you to fail to hit the (musical) mark.

I sensed this clearly for the first time in 2014. I participated in two competitions, one at the Guitar Festival Nordhorn, one at the Twente Guitar Festival. Looking back, that was too much. At the Twente Guitar Festival, the competition atmosphere appeared quite different, managers would characterize it as "healthy(??) competitive and performance oriented". That did not resemble what I was used in Nordhorn.

Apparently, the jury of TGF had an own agenda that gave preference to young running-up talents. Elderly amateurs were not in focus, what became quite clear from the results, the two oldies (including myself) were on the last places. I could have known it, looking back at nine years of Twente Guitar Festival it has never been different. OK, that's a policy. In that case, of course the question is if this is the right place for an "ordinary" amateur like me.

For me it was an instructive and slightly frustrating experience that I (as usual) became aware of after some time. This amateur competition had the same mind set as the professional competition, a kind of simulation of what awaits you when you decide to be a professional guitarist. Performance-minded indeed, and a first step appeared to be a kind of certification of the pieces played by the participants. Technical difficulty of the pieces was clearly considered and even offered some lenience with slips that normally speaking would have been unacceptable during a concert performance.

“Do I want to be assessed this way?” I asked myself after a while, “what does it yield in terms of positive energy that I am considered a better player than someone else? Is this the essence of sharing your music?”

My answer became “No, I don’t think so!”. Thus, my doubts concerning the use of competitions was born. My results of the 2015 competition were more or less a confirmation.

“Ah, you are just a bad loser!” someone might notice, “in every contest you have a winner and losers. If you cannot stand to lose, you are on the wrong place.”

In a certain sense, they are right: I cannot stand the loss of satisfaction playing my instrument, in particular not to a useless aim, for me anyway, that is called “*being better than*”. Perfection does not exist and that is what it should be, because there is no improvement in a perfect world. That is why we invented the term *better than* to be able to make a ranking despite the imperfection. To be “*Better than*” often is the subject of competition.

A few months ago, I thought that a better preparation would yield a better result, so I had started studying my competition pieces thoroughly. The effects of the stress on the job, however, made me think again. If those effects remained, I would not be able to play a competition anyway, so why bother myself with extra stress for that occasion?

So, I will refrain from competition in music in the future. From now on I will run my own race. Sharing (=performances) YES, playing matches in music NO.

Thus, this blog will be a bit shorter than the previous ones that I wrote on my on competitions.

Anyway, my effort in preparing my competition pieces is not in vain, now I have nice material for recording.