

Anniversary concert Bert Kwakkel

Anniversary concert 50 years of Bert Kwakkel Guitars

Sean Shibe Amanda Cook Bert Kwakkel Rosalind Beall Redmond O'Toole

UNIQUE ONLINE GUITAR CONCERT
Hosted by www.onlineguitarconcerts.com

30 October 2021 | 8:00 pm | at Zoom **There are no more tickets available**

To my pleasant surprise, at the end of September 2021 I received an invitation for an anniversary concert on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Bert Kwakkel's guitar building career. I have the privilege and pleasure of owning one of his guitars, playing it daily and even taking it with me on vacation.

Amazing, a career of 50 years, I thought at that time. This year I have just reached my fortieth work anniversary and am planning to retire briefly after that milestone. 50 professional years is a milestone that you don't see often, even though increasing the retirement age has made the chance a bit larger.

In view of the corona restrictions, the anniversary concert would be given via Zoom, a well-known online meeting tool that enables to set up fairly large-scale meetings as long as the Internet bandwidth lasts. My Zoom account was quickly resuscitated, I still had a webcam somewhere, so I was good to go.

October 30 is the day of the anniversary concert with contributions from Amanda Cook, Redmond O' Toole, Rosalind Beall and Sean Shibe, all professionals who are playing or have played on one or more Kwakkel guitars in their career. The intermission would provide room for an interview with Bert Kwakkel by Diana Belfor, a member of the Dutch guitar association Pro Guitarra.

I hadn't experienced a live streaming guitar concert until now, so I'm curious how it will proceed. To me, it seems to be quite difficult for a performing artist to play in front of a camera in his own home or studio without visual and sensible contact with the audience.

Logging in goes well, in a support act a slideshow comes along with some information and I gradually get a view of the audience, at least if they have turned on their webcam. Funny to view people with normally impossible aspect angles. Microphones are muted, which is quite

understandable when I remember the noise during my own online business meetings. There is only one exception to turn on the microphone for a moment: The applause. Rightly so, because otherwise there would be no contact with the audience at all.

Bert's family has been quite busy with the organization. His wife Jacqueline does the presentation and his son Arjan quickly translates the English spoken stories in the chat in Dutch and mentions which pieces are played. Ideal for the audience and my journalistic notes.

Right at eight o'clock Jacqueline starts with the announcements. She immediately points out what makes Bert Kwakkel's guitars unique and personal. That is the builder's devotion. I was able to experience that myself, his expertise and dedication to perfecting every instrument. What he emanated in his workshop when he talks about his instruments and materials after my first impression of his guitars, was the deciding factor for me to order a guitar.



The English guitarist Amanda Cook starts the first performance. She has been playing on a Kwakkel for 25 years and talks about it animatedly. Her guitar teacher John Mills, who plays Kwakkel guitars himself, had passed on the good experiences to her and the click came.

I let myself be misled by the first piece. *Ständchen* by Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828), arranged by... I think Mertz, but it turns out to be Mermikedes. 😊 Google helps me on my way, but it wasn't clear to me if the arrangement was by Bridget or Milton.

Cook captured the mood of the song very well, especially in the exciting and dramatic passage in the last part. It is a pity that Zoom imposes limitations on the sound quality, the program is aimed at speech transmission rather than music. In addition, the Internet behaves like a river with a variable flow rate and you certainly notice dropouts when streaming music.

This does not detract from the intention of the music, by the way. Beautiful performance.

Two pieces from *Castillos de España* by Federico Torroba (1891 – 1982) are the next ones, the romantic *Alba de Tormes* and the spooky *Zafra*. An interesting contrast between a warm melody and a wry and eery tremolo driven melody.

Incantation 6 by the contemporary composer William Lovelady brings her performance to a sparkling end.

The lack of Internet bandwidth for good sound transfer has been noticed by now, so everyone is asked to turn off the webcam. It turns out that it doesn't really help. Obviously, there is a lot of technology between guitarist and listener plus an Internet with varying upload and download speeds. A lot is possible, but nevertheless I think we need to get back to normal live-performances as soon as possible without restrictions with Corona access codes.

A number of invited guests cannot attend this occasion. A video message is the solution. The guitarist John Mills, well known in the Netherlands and also a fan of Kwakkel's guitars, conveys congratulations together with his wife.



Irish guitarist Redmond O'Toole enters the stage. He plays a Brahms guitar, a special eight-stringed instrument that you play in a position like a cello. A truly ingenious piece of guitar building technology for which Bert had to make a lot of calculations. On this instrument, the tonal range of the guitar has been extended both at the top and bottom by an extra string. This makes the instrument suitable, for example, for playing pieces without octaves in the bass, something you regularly encounter in arrangements of Bach's music.

O' Toole begins with *Sonata K213* by Domenico Scarlatti (1685 - 1757). A quiet mysterious piece with a distinct change of mood between the movements. Here you can clearly hear the advantage of the extended range in the bass.

Fugue BWV 1001 by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750) once again demonstrates the suitability of the Brahms guitar for performing this music. O' Toole keeps the voices very transparent, making the piece very clear.

We jump to Romanticism: *Asturias* by Isaac Albéniz (1860 - 1909). The Brahms guitar brings the piece much closer to the piano original and the sound colours nicely due to the wider range. Unfortunately, with the rasgueados the limited dynamic range of the Internet audio causes clipping distortion of the sound.

Listening to the last piece, the Irish folk song *Cape Clear*, I notice another advantage of an extra high string. The player can remain in the lower positions despite the high melody notes. The compelling melody is beautifully presented.

A video congratulation from Swiss guitarist Stefan Schmidt follows. This shows that a bond develops between the builder and the player of his instrument.

In the intermission, we see a double screen for the interview of Bert Kwakkel by Diana Belfor. From the interview it becomes clear that Bert already started building in high school when he noticed that he could not master the instrument as well as his brothers. He chose guitar building instead of guitar playing and that was the beginning of 50 years of evolution in his building style. His first guitar is fun to see. Fearing that the guitar would collapse under the string tension, he used pins and screws rather than glued bonds. He then developed a unique building style with his massive necks. The combination of neck and fingerboard in a solid piece of wood works great for the expressiveness of the guitar.

Kwakkel points to the O'Toole's Brahms guitar as one of his most difficult pieces of work. Indeed, that's in a league of its own with the angled fretboard and specially designed bridge and saddle.

A video congratulation from Vincent Lindsey-Clark first brings a small serenade. Then he talks about his experiences with Kwakkels guitars and the excellent service when he dropped the guitar and its top broke.

I remember that story. When I went to pick up my guitar in 2010, Bert encouraged me with this story as an example to have the guitar properly insured, because damage to the top already costs you almost the price of the guitar if it needs to be replaced. I've taken that seriously and still faithfully pay my insurance premium at the end of the year.



Number three on this evening, the American guitarist Rosalind Beall. The first thing that strikes me is her vivid description of the pieces. Very informative.

She starts with three *Canciones populares Catalanas* by Miguel Llobet (1878 - 1938), namely *El testament d'Amèlia*, *Cançó del lladre* and *El noi de la Mare*. In *Testament* she plays a nice clear melody with ditto flageolets, *Cançó* gets a tender peaceful atmosphere and in the last piece I hear the waves of a calm sea in the background, a *Mare* slightly different from the *Virgin* in the piece.

Blackwater by Jisse Vink is the next piece. A melody with a strong folk song atmosphere. With the background story of *Blackwater* being about a ferry, in my mind the mood of the piece gives me an image of Charon the ferryman, sailing souls across the Styx. Yes, that's a one-way street. The sadness of parting is clearly in the composition.

Two pieces by Francisco Tárrega conclude Beall's performance. *Marieta* gets a lyrical melody and a good contrast between corner and middle section. *Gran Vals* lets the well-known Nokia ringtone come along at a fast and lively pace. Yes, you have to pay attention, the piece is much longer than the ringtone passage alone.

At the change of artists there is a special video message from Bert's mother. We all know that the support and acknowledgment from our parents is very important, it happens so often that that acknowledgment does not come, can no longer be given or is not understood.

Bert's mother starts with the anecdote that she didn't like his guitar building ambitions in the beginning. A common theme, when a child says he wants to be an artist or a writer, parents often cry out with concern: "Wouldn't it be better to learn a trade?" However, Bert was sufficiently ambitious and tenacious to persevere.

She comes up with a very good point after many years. In those fifty years he has built hundreds of guitars that give players the opportunity to develop and showcase their musical ideas with an instrument that, metaphorically speaking, understands and facilitates them. That goes beyond just building and she is proud of that. A beautiful realization and therefore a beautiful moment!



Scottish guitarist Sean Shibe closes the row of this evening's artists.

He starts with the *Prelude* from the *Suite Compostela* by Federico Mompou (1893 - 1987), a piece inspired by the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. He plays the *Prelude* as an exciting story with colourful dynamics, an excellent appetizer for the rest of the suite. Interesting music.

He concludes his contribution with five Scottish lute pieces. It's very nice to hear how Scottish folk music already resounded in those days as a unique sound. *Swit Sant Nicola* is a sensitive ballad with a warm sound. *Mervill's Sarabande* is surprisingly fast and lively for a Sarabande we are used to from the Baroque, even though the story says that the Spanish version of this dance form was once banned because of its cheerful and, above all, sensual appearance. *A Scotts Tune* is clearly a folk song. *Canaries* originally is a dance form of the Canary Islands. However, the composer has turned it into a swinging Jig, a nice piece! The last piece, *Ladie lie near me*, in terms of atmosphere brings me to the folk song settings of Robert Burns from the nineteenth century. Very characteristic and beautifully played.

Well, after the last applause as far as the music is concerned, the concert is over. Bert Kwakkel gives a word of thanks and finally some questions are answered by Bert and the artists. That concludes a beautiful evening of music.