Feast on Six Strings!

Five Years of Guitar Festival Nordhorn

By

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Interviews Competitors Amateurs

Nandini Sudhir

The Indian guitarist Nandini Sudhir first visited the Guitar Festival Nordhorn in 2013 and has not missed a single edition since. When I first met her and her mother who accompanies her, she told me that the her impression of the atmosphere from the reports of the festival on the DOS Amigos Homepage had made her curious. Good to hear that the stories have some promotional value as well!

She has participated in the Cat. 2 competitions of GFN in 2013, 2014 and 2015. Additionally she visited the Cat. 2 competition of the Twente Guitar Festival in 2014, in which she had the first prize, an excellent result.

Nandini Sudhir enjoying herself at GFN 2013

Please tell us something about yourself. What's your name, where do you live, what's your current occupation?

My name is Nandini Sudhir. I live in Bangalore, India. I am a student at the Mount Carmel College. I am pursuing my Bachelor's Degree in Arts. My three majors are Psychology, Economics and Sociology. I am also a student of the Bangalore School of Music, which is a a school dedicated to western classical music. Right now, I am taking lessons with Annette Kruisbrink, the famous composer and guitarist of The Netherlands. Besides this, I also teach the classical guitar at the school during weekends.

Which person or event made you decide to dedicate yourself to the guitar?

When I was very young, I watched a concert by my teacher, Dinesh Khundrakpam. His rendition of the piece, *Prelude no.1* by Heitor Villa-Lobos moved me to tears. It touched my soul; and it was this that made me make up my mind that the guitar is going to be my life.

Please tell us something about your musical training. Where and with what teachers did you study?

At the age of 9, I started guitar lessons with Pearl Mukadam. After a year, she guided me to The Bangalore School of Music, where I started learning the classical guitar under Dinesh Khundrakpam. I have the highest regard for him. He has been there, guiding me at every step. My love for the instrument has grown because of him. He cultivated my dreams. He laid the foundation along with my school.

The founder of The Bangalore School of Music, Mrs. Aruna Sunderlal is another person who has nurtured me by giving me the most wonderful opportunities. I remain indebted to her. I cannot forget Avik Saha of the Calcutta Classical Guitar Society. He has been responsible for a classical guitar revolution in India. The gigantic festivals that he organizes in India every year changed my life completely. I met innumerable international artistes and fellow students, and participated in master classes and competitions.

I was part of the Denis Azabagic Summer Academy too. I was inspired and influenced. Further doors opened.

I met Bobby Rootveld and Sanna van Elst at the Thailand International Guitar Festival, and there has been no looking back ever since. I share a deep and divine bond with them. They are the wind beneath my wings. They have played the role of my mentors, paving the way for me, and guiding me to my present teacher, Annette Kruisbrink. Annette has been a great teacher. She instructs, encourages, praises, influences, shares, guides and inspires. I am deeply grateful to her.

Which teacher influenced you most? Which aspect of your play benefited from this?

Both my teachers have had a very strong influence over me. They have influenced my musicality and technique to a great deal. Both have shown me where to look, but have never told me what to see.

You originate from India, where the education system covers primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Now you are at an age that you can choose a university for tertiary education. What are your plans for the future?

Right now, I am already pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree. I plan to join music conservatory in Europe once I am done. This has been a big dream for me.

"Converting your hobby into your job" is sometimes considered an ideal situation. However, sometimes a hobby does not provide sufficient options for a job. Do you have this dilemma in the decision what to study in the coming years? Please tell us some more.

I have never been in a predicament regarding my choice of career. Both my heart and soul tell me that I should take up music professionally. I believe that a hobby is a mirror which reflects all that you love and value the most, and this I consider important components of a career. I have weighed both the advantages and disadvantages of my career choice. I know that I may not always be able to bring home the bacon. Nevertheless, I will work hard, honestly and sincerely as it is music that nourishes and motivates me and gives me expression.

Who are your favourite concert musicians? Are there guitarists amongst them?

I have many favourite musicians. Of them, Marcin Dylla and Pavel Steidl stand out.

What is your favourite classical piece? What is your favourite classical guitar piece?

I have many favourite classical guitar pieces. One of them is- *Prelude no.1* by Heitor Villa-Lobos.

Who is your favourite guitar composer?

I like all of the composers that I play, but Mauro Giuliani and Joaquín Rodrigo are worth mentioning.

At what age did you perform for an audience the first time? What was the occasion for that performance?

I was 11 when I performed on stage for the first time. It was for the monthly concert organized by the Bangalore School of Music.

Did you ever make recordings and CDs? If so, how did you experience recording and listening to the result?

Yes. Bobby Rootveld of Kulturhaus NIHZ did record a single with me. It was a very interesting experience. I always make many self-recordings as it is the best way to appraise my work. It has definitely heightened efficiency in practice as I can review and take notes.

What is your opinion about competitions? Do they have a positive influence on the player or do they distract the players from the essence of music?

Participating in competitions can be a rewarding experience if it is done for betterment and enrichment, and not for boosting one's ego or displaying envy and jealousy. One should be there for the right reason and actually enjoy the experience; otherwise the essence of music is lost. Competitions help me to practise harder so that I can showcase my talent regardless of the results.

What do you like best: Playing before an audience, or playing before a jury in a competition setting?

I would prefer to play to an audience because the communicative power is greater. Even with a few errors, music magically connects to the audience. There is an ability to transcend. Whereas, a competition just showcases a snapshot of one's talents and skills. I am not against competitions, and they are subjective. The stress levels are definitely greater in competitions. We have to push ourselves hard, try to manage the time limit and perform under adverse conditions.

You participated in competitions for the guitar. What are your impressions about the competition stress and interaction with the jury and other competitors? Did it for instance resemble a situation like "in war and love everything is permitted?"

Yes, I have participated in several festivals and competitions, both in India and abroad. Competitions can be stressful, but it is the way one looks at it. Competitions which simply mean that one can be successful if another person fails is destructive. I do not want competitions to breed envy and hostility in me. I would not like to be anxious about the cash prize either. I would prefer to develop a healthy self-esteem and achieve the excellence that I am capable of. I would like to regard the jury and fellow competitors as potential friends. Above all, I try to enjoy myself. Competitions are not battlefields.

How did you find out about the Guitar Festival Nordhorn ?

In 2012, I was a prize winner at the national competition held in Calcutta, India. The Calcutta Classical Guitar Society sent me to participate in the Thailand International Guitar Festival where Bobby Rootveld and Sanna van Elst were in the jury. I learnt about their festival and wished to go there. To my luck, I won in Thailand and was again sent by the magnanimous Avik Saha of CCGS to Nordhorn. Now I have become a regular participant.

What are your experiences with the atmosphere on the festivals, in particular the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

The Gitarren Festival Nordhorn has all the ingredients necessary to turn the participants into regulars. It is the only festival that I have been to which has such a homely, warm and welcoming atmosphere. All the days ooze with informality, friendliness and camaraderie. It is very conducive to making friends of all nationalities. In spite of the hustle, bustle and frenzy, peace and tranquility prevails. The dining room and after-party experience is excellent- lively and cheerful.

You met a lot of professional guitarists at the festival. Do you remember some anecdotes? Please describe the funniest one.

I have met a lot of professional guitarists at the festivals in Nordhorn. Every moment has been filled with fun and laughter. I cannot remember any specific anecdote, but the after-parties have always been a great source of cheer and enjoyment.

You met a lot of students at the festival. Do you remember some anecdotes? Please describe the funniest one.

The students have a lot of fun and enjoy their stay at the Kulturhaus NIHZ. One funny incident I can remember is when a few of the European students got together and did a Bollywood jig for me, just to impress me.

Which professional player impressed you the most with his/her recital?

The quality of performances is very high at the Gitarrenfestival Nordhorn. Pavel Steidl's concert is worth remembering. The concerts of Zoran Dukic, and Alberto Mesirca with Daniel Rowland were unforgettable.

Which Cat. 1 finalist impressed you the most with his/her recital?

Justyna Sobczak impressed me the most with her recital in 2013.

What were your impressions of the amateur competition?

The amateur competition at the GFN is a great source of performance experience. The participants belong to different professions and age groups. Great credit goes to the organizers for including the amateur category in the competition. It gives an opportunity for amateur guitarists who usually do not get a chance to perform on stage. It surely is an invaluable experience. Everybody gets inspired, motivated and improves. It encourages the amateurs to think about their playing and learn a new repertoire. The organizers and the jury take this category rather seriously. They see it as a platform for emerging talents. This is very encouraging.

What is your opinion about the organisation?

The GFN has been attracting an impressive array of acclaimed artistes. The organization has bettered itself with each passing year. They have maintained their reputation year after year by providing guitar enthusiasts a festival which is 'real value-for-money'. The credit goes to the organizers who are ever polite, pleasant, helpful, kind and courteous.

What is your opinion about the facilities in Kulturhaus NIHZ (food, drink, lodging?)

Kulturhaus NIHZ provides excellent boarding and lodging facilities. The ambience is homely, and this is complemented by the hospitable organizers. A sumptuous breakfast and dinner buffet is served. One can also buy drinks and snacks at the snack bar. The organizers are always ready to help. It is a perfect blend of warmth and comfort.

Would you recommend the festival to your friends and relatives?

I would confidently recommend this festival to friends all over the world, for I know it is impossible to ignore the GFN. It is certainly going to grow not only in numbers but in terms of global recognition.

Agnes Mika

Agnes Mika attending master class with Samuel Klemke

The Romanian born guitarist Agnes Mika was present at the Nordhorn Guitar Festivals in 2011, 2012 and 2013. In 2012 and 2013 she participated in the Cat. 2 competition and won it in 2011. Besides that she was an active participant in the workshops *Stage Presentation* and *Theatre Sports for Guitarists.*

Please tell us something about yourself. What's your name, where do you live, what's your current occupation?

I am Agnes Mika, I live in The Netherlands and work as a project manager at a research institute.

At what age did you start to play the guitar?

I started playing the guitar when I was about ten years old, but I stopped after two years of lessons. When I moved to The Netherlands, at the age of 30, it just started to bug me that I'd like to play the guitar again. I looked around a bit and when I found Annette Kruisbrink's webpage I was convinced. I phoned her up immediately and started following her lessons shortly thereafter.

Please tell us something about your musical training. Where and with what teachers did you study?

When I was a child, I took recorder and later guitar lessons with Emoke Elekes in my home town in Romania. Ever since I started playing the guitar again I have been a student of Annette Kruisbrink (who is a fantastic teacher, by the way).

Which teacher influenced you most? Which aspect of your play benefited from this?

This is an easy one to answer: all aspects of my playing have profited greatly from Annette's lessons.

What is your favourite classical guitar piece?

My knowledge in this area is still fairly limited (that's one aspect I love about the Nordhorn guitar festival: I get to hear lots of new (for me) guitar compositions). My current big favourites are *Prelude 1* by Villa-Lobos, *La Catedral* by Barrios and *Tarantella* by Mertz.

At what age did you perform for an audience for the first time? What was the occasion?

When I was a child (7 to 11 years old) I used to play the recorder in a renaissance ensemble. We were touring the country a lot. At the time (during the communism) there weren't many music performances people could listen to so we were always greeted by very enthusiastic crowds.

After I started playing the guitar again, my first performance was at the age of 31, playing for friends and family together with other students of the Anido guitar school.

Did you ever make recordings and CDs? If so, how did you experience recording and listening to the result?

I do this regularly when preparing for the amateur competition which is part of the Nordhorn guitar festival. I find that knowing that my playing is being recorded already makes me feel slightly nervous (which is good preparation for playing for an audience).

I am almost always disappointed by the result, my playing always sounds much worse when I listen to the recording than how I hear it while playing. On the other hand, while it is time consuming, this is a fantastic aid in achieving the sound that I really want.

What is your opinion about competitions? Do they have a positive influence on the player or do they distract the players from the essence of music?

When preparing for a competition I spend much more time on perfecting a piece than I would do otherwise. I enjoy a lot delving into all the small details and trying to get the best out of myself.

What do you like best: Playing before an audience, or playing before a jury in a competition setting?

It doesn't make much difference to me, I am nervous in both cases. As an amateur, winning or losing in a competition doesn't have any significant consequence. If I manage to play as well as I do in the solitary confinement of my attic room then I am satisfied.

How did you find out about the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

I heard about the festival from my teacher. I found the programme so interesting that I did not hesitate long before registering.

How did you experience your participation in the competition?

The first time was a fantastic experience. I was competing against people who have been playing for much longer and to my surprise I still won! On the second occasion I took part in the EGTA competition the week before the festival which has really drained me so I didn't play well at Nordhorn.

Please tell something about your preparations for the competition.

I doubled my practice time during the last months of the preparation. During my lessons with Annette we focused on improving my interpretation of the pieces.

What are your experiences with the atmosphere on the festivals, in particular the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

The extremely relaxed, friendly and fun atmosphere is one of the main attractions of the festival. I love to experience the mix of world-renowned artists, conservatory students and amateurs. Each year I make new acquaintances and even some friends.

Did you have a nice contact with the professional guitarists at the festival?

Absolutely. Most of them are very approachable and sharing meals during the day and a few drinks in the evening help erode the dividing line between 'us' (amateurs) and 'them' (professionals).

How did you experience the master classes? Which teacher impressed you most?

I attended some fantastic master classes but I also had a few where I really did not agree with the way the teacher wanted me to interpret the piece or with some technical details he was adamant about.

I was the most impressed by my master class with Alberto Mesirca. He has really helped me take the piece I was working on at the time to a next level.

How was your contact with the other participants of the competition?

In the amateur competition we are very supportive of each other. We share our anxieties, listen to each other's playing and congratulate each other.

How did you experience the audience during your competition performance?

Unfortunately the amateur competition is not attended by many people, most conservatory students don't find it interesting enough. However, the people who are there always give us their full attention and always have some kind words afterwards. I do enjoy playing for them and appreciate their presence.

Would you recommend the festival to your friends and relatives?

Absolutely! I managed to make a friend sufficiently enthusiast that she has already registered for the next festival. :-)

Tanja Vermeeren

Tanja Vermeeren has become a regular visitor of the guitar festivals in this region, twice the Twente Guitar Festival and twice the Guitar Festival Nordhorn. As a guitar teacher with a private school she wanted to gain experience with competitions and meet other people that are involved with the guitar.

Please tell us something about yourself. What's your name, where do you live, what's your current occupation?

I am Tanja and I am living in Houten near the city of Utrecht in the central part of Holland. I am married and have three daughters. I started my musical training at the Rotterdam Conservatory (presently Codarts) for the certificate of Music Education, the teacher branch, with minors in recorder. I did not finish this study, but became a bookseller and publisher instead. I completed courses for entrepreneurship and publishing for this purpose.

Tanja Vermeeren with a few well-known stickers on hetr guitar case

When my youngest daughter took guitar lessons, my interest in music as a profession emerged again, so I decided to continue my Conservatory training., but now for the classical guitar. Since my conservatory time I had taken some guitar lessons and kept the guitar playing alive, it was a useful addition for Musical Education, particularly for song accompaniment for children. Now I am studying the Master for classical guitar at the Schumann Academy, one of the main institutions for part-time musical studies in Holland. In the process I started my own enterprise as a guitar teacher and of course I am busy with home management!

At which age did you start playing the guitar?

I started guitar playing at the age of twelve.

Which person or event made you decide to dedicate yourself to the guitar?

I do not remember that clearly. As a kid, I wanted to learn to play the violin, but my parents did not agree. They just had bought a piano, so piano lessons it was going to be. After two years I wanted to play the guitar. However, I could not find a teacher that motivated me during the lessons, so I decided to switch to recorder. Yet I did not forget my first love the violin completely, I followed lessons during my preliminary education for the Conservatory.

Please tell us something about your guitar training. Where and with what teachers did you study?

I started at the School of Music in Schiedam and studied with Romario (;-) No. not the Brasilian football player). Mr. Romario was replaced by Mr. Lobo and after his term I got some lessons of Harry Pothof, another guitar teacher on this school.

At the Rotterdam Conservatory I studied with Dik van der Kaaden, when I moved to Houten I found Ben Leenheer as a teacher.

The moment I decided to teach guitar professionally, I contacted Dik van der Kaaden and took another three years of lessons with him. At the moment I study with Ludwig Rondon, follow contract lessons with Enno Voorhorst at the Conservatory of The Hague and have a casual lesson with Dik.

Which teacher influenced you most? Which aspect of your play benefited from this?

Dik van der Kaaden influenced me most. He was teacher at the Rotterdam Conservatory in the subject of Music Education but also participated in courses that combined music and dance as an instructor. He provides me with an integrated approach concerning know-how, guitar technique and performance. Particularly concerning performance his method includes instructions for specific study of the piece and keeping focus during the performance.

At the moment you are following the study of the classical guitar at the Conservatory as a follow-up for your previous musical training. How do you experience the combination of a daytime job with demanding schooling?

Converting your hobby into your profession is fun! At times it does not feel like studying because you really like it. Yet it's no easy practice combining the three, family, daytime job and the musical study. I have a step-by-step plan that enables me to strike off the subjects that I completed and passed, that's a sense of achievement that enables you to proceed with new subjects.

The last two years are the most demanding. This year I have to finish all essays, design a curriculum, write and finish my paper, make a repertoire plan for the practical subjects and complete five teaching modules. Everything that I finish this year, relieves next year's work.

Thus next year I will have the opportunity to focus completely on my practical main subject: a fifty minutes guitar recital with appropriate repertoire.

You have a guitar lesson practice in the town of Houten. Do you have a lot of students for the classical style? Or does the majority choose for popular music?

Many of my students are complete beginners and they benefit most from a structured guitar method, we have quite a few here in Holland. Besides these methods I discuss performance pieces, for the beginner level there is a lot of nice material for instance by Joep Wanders.

After a few years of guitar lessons, most of the students increase their skills and start making their own choices of repertoire.

A few young students like playing classical pieces as long as you do not emphasize the term 'classical' in the sense of old-fashioned or elderly. I started with the studies by Leo Brouwer for a few students and one of them is practicing a tremolo study. Other students scan Youtube and want to play the pop songs that they find there. The grown-ups amongst my students do like classical as well as popular music.

Main point is that I try to find material -classical or popular, whatever, that students like to learn to play, that make them enjoy playing. Concerning that search and the connection with the interest of the students I want to develop myself some more, to make constructive choices of repertoire.

In the process of guitar lessons you definitely are using a method as a guideline. Did you develop your own method or are you using methods written by others for various styles?

At the moment I am using methods of others for various styles, but I do not stick to single methods. I use non-method material and often combine the most useful aspects of different methods. I am slowly progressing top the point that I will write my own method, because none of the methods that you can buy is completely satisfactory to me. My ambition is to finish this before I pass my final examinations, but that might be postponed by the busy study program that I have to complete the next two years. At times I revert to the study material that Dik van der Kaaden made himself.

The main subject of your paper is a study of the use of modern (social) media and technology for guitar lessons. At the moment I notice Internet courses like *Play Guitar in a Month* shooting up like mushrooms. These courses are often based in video fragments with comments in order to enable you to imitate. Do you think that methods like this and the advanced application of multimedia eventually will enable learning the guitar completely on-line? Or do you think that the direct contact between teacher and student is essential for a good development?

An interesting question indeed! I still have to do more research on this matter that actually forms the subject of my thesis. I do understand that Internet courses are shooting up like mushrooms. The present day kids are completely familiar with the phenomenon.

Sometimes I get students that started to learn to play with an Internet course. In the process of the lessons, however, I for instance notice that they think the fingering of chords just the opposite way because they consider string 6 to be string 1. In that case I am pleased that they decided to start guitar lessons so that I can show them the good way around. So yes, my opinion is that the direct contact between teacher and student is essential.

On the other hand at study meetings of the European Guitar Teachers Association I notice that some teachers are quite inflexible concerning their teaching methods and counteract innovations. Quite a few times you recognize that in their student material. Many pieces in the standard methods are downright corny, they do not appeal to the student of today. If you want music to be learned and made and want people to invest the effort to learn to play an instrument, I think that you will have to keep up with the times and anticipate on the tools and possibilities of today.

For instance think of make a recording with your mobile phone for instruction purposes, or play a score on your tablet with music software. Or using apps for guitar tuning and chord finding, or skyping your lessons. I do not counteract these facilities, I'd rather exploit them. I did not experiment with all possibilities, obviously, but I am ready to give it a try in the process of the research for my thesis.

So don't be surprised if I skype you in the near future for an on-line guitar lesson!

Who are your favourite classical guitarists?

Enno Voorhorst, John WIlliams, N. Yepes, Oman Kaminsky, Sabrina Vlaskalic, Johan Fostier, Viicente Amigo, Paco Pena.

What is your favourite guitar piece?

I am aware that it sounds funny, but I have no favourite. I like a lot of pieces and in the meantime my taste changes with time. On the other hand I know two pieces that I passionately dislike, and funny enough, no taste change for my part changes this. These pieces are *Lagrima* by Tárrega (even Enno Voorhorst's version during our lessons cannot entice me) and the widely known *Romance d'Amor*.

At what age did you perform for an audience for the first time? What was the occasion?

At the age of 10, not on the guitar but on the piano. It was the usual yearly performance practice for students of the School of Music.

Did you ever make recordings and CDs? If so, how did you experience recording and listening to the result?

When I had my fiftieth birthday, I organised a performance on guitar in a church. My husband made a recording with a little digital Zoom recorder. Initially I could not find the courage to play back. In the end I ventured it, and I felt confident about the result.

Last year I visited a private studio in my residence that was run by an individual that liked to produce studio recordings besides his daytime job. In his home he had a special room built for this purpose. I like the atmosphere and liked to play there. Right after the recording I heard the result so that I could record extra sections for the edits. I took the raw material home and playe dit back in the living and in my ears it sounded as nice and pleasant background music.

What is your opinion about competitions? Do they have a positive influence on the player or do they distract the players from the essence of music?

I play competitions to practice for the recital in front of the examination committee that will assess my final recital for the conservatory study. In this way I get experience with the performance stress under these circumstances. It does somehow have a positive effect on my musical growth, yet the best effect is that I can help my students prepare for these stressful events, because I know what they go through. In this way I helped a young student of mine to prepare for participation in a competition, and he performed well and relaxed.

What I learned by playing competitions: Do not choose the pieces too difficult and prepare all the details that you want to play. Think about the tale that you want to tell with the music and keep enjoying yourself.

What do you like best: Playing before an audience, or playing before a jury in a competition setting?

I prefer playing before an audience, the competition is not my favourite pastime.

How did you get the idea to subscribe to the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

I met Mark de Gooijer at the Twente Guitar Festival in Enschede. He was enthusiast about Nordhorn, so I became curious.

What were your first expectations of the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

None, I try to join in as open and unbiased as possible.

How did you experience your participation in the competition?

I enjoyed the atmosphere. Unfortunately there was not a lot of space for practicing and I found the time for playing-in a bit short. Martin's support (the competition manager) was effective and enjoyable. The jury was very friendly. I would appreciate some feedback from the jury afterwards.

Please tell us something about your preparation for the competition.

At a certain moment I am certain which pieces I want to play for the competition. I make up my mind about the sequence of the pieces and get to work. At times I rehearse the pieces with metronome a few times in a row to improve my playing condition and to practice concentration over time. I play everything by heart, that's no big deal for me.

I take some opportunities for 'public' performance of the pieces, with my teacher or with other people. I make recordings to assess my progress with the pieces. During playing you often think that you are actually *performing* them, and a recording is a means to assess how well you actually did. Sometimes it does not go beyond *playing*.

In the mean time I attempt some variation in performance, try to think about the story behind the music and pick up the scores to check if I did not change little things.

As soon as the competition date draws near, I catch myself having a little fear of failure. That affects the fun I have from playing the competition, it seems to decrease more and more. That's a definite point of attention for me while preparing for the next competition.

What are your experiences with the atmosphere on the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

The atmosphere is marvellous, you so get the impression that you are very welcome. The sense of family is strong and everyone is so welcoming. It feels like a warm bath. Everyone has a part in that, the organisation and the master class teachers alike. Top class!

You met a lot of professional guitarists at the festival. What are your experiences?

Positive indeed! It is so enjoyable that you meet these people under normal (i.e. 'off-stage') circumstances like a dinner at the table, that they greet you friendly and are always ready for a chat. A great added value for this event.

How did you experience the master classes? Which teacher impressed you most?

I really like taking master classes. Often their remarks provide a different and refreshing view on things that you think you know. At times I experience funny or even strange situations, but an open-minded attitude helps me to learn the best from them.

Sabrina Vlaskalic impressed me most, but I also have fond memories of Christian Lavernier and Annette Kruisbrink. Additionally I experienced Hubert Käppel as a very sympathetic teacher.

What are your impressions concerning the contact with the other participants?

I have a good contact with them, some of them I have known for a long time. I see some people each year, that's nice to meet them again, and I encourage other people to participate here via my contacts and network. One of my students participates this year for the second time. Other participants I know from my musical classes and the Gitaarcirkel, a national society of amateur guitarists.

How was your impressions of the audience during your competition performance?

I do like the presence of an audience in the hall, I need an audience for interaction. At times something strange happens, I remember that during my play the mobile phone of one of the jury members started to ring. I was not very amused. Of course, you have to go on playing, but these interruptions are not *comme il faut*.

What is your opinion about the organisation?

Hats off for the organisation. Bobby, Sanna and the crew have everyhing under control and are very flexible, solving problems.

What is your opinion about the facilities of Kulturhaus NIHZ (food, drink, lodging)

Food and drink and the pricing of the meals is excellent. Angie and crew, great cooking! Fred as the bar man at daytime, very helpful and entertaining.

The first time that I visited the festival, I have used the dormitory, but that was not the guarantee for a good night's rest. The stay is quite inexpensive, but the unrest, a bit lack of oxygen and the mainly young guests make it less attractive for the older people in the company. A little bit more facilities for washing would greatly improve things. It's a good thing that there is a shower

for the guests, but it is less optimal if you have to wash yourself and brush your teeth on the toilet because the bathroom is occupied while there is a queue outside of people that want to practice nature's call.

I think that the youngsters do not have so many problems with it, and of course it's enjoyable together.

Because we come with a little group of people, we rented a holiday home in the *Ferienpark* five minutes walking from here. That's nice because you can settle a bit and you have room for some playing-in. The drawback is that you get less intensive contact with the other participants, for instance because we do not join in for breakfast.

Which workshops did you attend? What were your experiences?

I attended one workshop, the Stage Presentation. It was a useful and instructive experience for one thing: I have trouble speaking English and that presented an obstacle for effective participation. I did not attend others.

Would you recommend the festival to your friends and relatives?

As you know, I am recommending it here, there and everywhere with the result that I usually come in with a group of people.

Mark de Gooijer

Mark de Gooijer is long-time amateur guitarist and the web master of the DOS Amigos Homepage. He has been a supporter of the Duo NIHZ from 2004. In this role he got involved with the Twente Guitar Festival and the Guitar Festival Nordhorn as a listener, master class visitor, amateur competitor and journalist.

Mark de Gooijer in action at the competition GFN 2013

Please tell us something about yourself. What's your name, where do you live, what's your current occupation?

My name is Mark de Gooijer and I live in Hengelo in the eastern province of Overijssel, close to the German border. I am married with Erna and have two daughters. In the meantime I am the granddad of my eldest daughters' daughter Iris. I earn my living (and the necessary coin for guitar activities) as a technical author with Thales, writing manuals for the operation, diagnosis and maintenance of radar systems.

Which person or event made you decide to dedicate yourself to the guitar?

When I attended Grammar School, I had a few classmates who played the classical guitar during the breaks at school. One of the guys lived close-by and had a great room for music sessions. I really liked that, so I decided to give it a go myself, starting playing a Spanish souvenir guitar that I bought from one of my sister's boyfriends. Despite the fact that the family at home was not quite interested in my classical noise, I made a start as an autodidact.

Please tell us something about your musical training. Where and with what teachers did you study?

I could not convince my parents of the use and fun of guitar lessons. When I started studying Electronics at the Twente University in Enschede, however, I got the opportunity to take lessons for a moderate fee that I could afford. I started with Thea van der Meer at the School of Music in Enschede. After I was sent away from that school (subsidy matters, the council of Enschede would not subsidise an inhabitant of the nearby Hengelo) I had a number of private teachers: Rob Wagenvoort, Ed Westerik of the then Segovia Guitar Quartet, Robert Horna from Poland and Jaap Majoor.

Which teacher influenced you most? Which aspect of your play benefited from this?

They all taught me something useful: Thea van der Meer taught me to select ambitious repertoire myself rather than following a standard method and tuned her technical exercises to the pieces that I was playing. Rob Wagenvoort taught me the fun of duo and ensemble playing. Ed Westerik was an advocate of an own style (*One John Williams in the world is sufficient, being an imitation does not add anything*). Robert Horna showed me how to be adventurous with music. Jaap Majoor appeared an advocate of technique and ambition in the repertoire. Counting all up, I guess that Ed had the most influence, simply because I have had lessons with him for quite some time, much longer than the others.

Who are your favourite concert musicians? Are there guitarists amongst them?

I frankly admit that the first musician that stimulated my interest in classical music was not a classical musician but a (classically trained) pop musician, the Dutch keyboard player Rick van der Linden of the pop groups Ekseption and Trace. He used classical material that made me curious about the music behind it.

Once I was hooked on classical music I particularly liked the play of Alicia De Larrocha with as highlights the piano music by Albéniz, Granados and Mompou.

Of course I had my classical guitar favourites too. For some time they were (obviously) John Williams and Julian Bream. Later on I discovered players like the Assad brothers, David Russell, Manuel Barrueco and Sharon Isbin. And now with the generation of skilled guitarists that followed, a choice of favourites becomes more and more difficult because there are so many good

players. I have some, however, after I heard their Naxos releases, such as Victor Villandangos, Graham Anthony Devine and Marco Tamayo. You see, if the quantity of good guitarists is large, it becomes difficult to have a few favourites only!

What is your favourite classical piece? What is your favourite classical guitar piece?

My favourite classical piece is the *Peer Gynt Suite* by Edvard Grieg. This piece has been haunting me from childhood with the stories my father used to tell about the movements. One of my favourite guitar pieces is the (16 minutes) *Chaconne* by Johann Sebastian Bach. And I particularly like the oeuvre by Johann Kaspar Mertz.

Who is your favourite guitar composer?

At the moment? Johann Kaspar Mertz! And some other rather unknown guys from the 19th century like José Ferrer and Alfred Cottin.

At what age did you perform for an audience for the first time? What was the occasion?

I had my first public performance at the age of 19. The occasion was the performance practice of the School of Music. I played a few Renaissance pieces by heart, because at the time I could not yet play from sheet music.

Did you ever make recordings and CDs? If so, how did you experience recording and listening to the result?

I have made recordings from the time that I had a tape recorder with reels. Not many, because recording with tape and cassette was quite tedious. That changed a bit when I bought a digital recorder. I made some collections of my recordings on CD, but only for private use, I consider them not good enough for a professional publication. You can listen to a few of them on the DOS Amigos Homepage.

My experiences with recording and playing back were sometimes confronting, recording causes performance stress and I am quite good in hearing (during recording and playback) were things went wrong (even things a listener won't notice), which amplifies the performance stress. On the other hand it provides practice for stress conditions and an exercise in hearing the things you do right! I hope to develop the recording skill sufficiently to be able to play freely. As a positive experience I can mention that it becomes easier to value your own interpretation once you have achieved that freedom.

What is your opinion about competitions? Do they have a positive influence on the player or do they distract the players from the essence of music?

I am in two minds about this. I have never seen music as a medium in which you compete with other musicians. Nowadays competitions are a necessary evil, I guess, a way of getting to know yourself as a player, particularly under stress conditions, and a way of making yourself known in the world. As I see it now, competition does not bring out the most positive, particularly if money or fame (that in fact is money too) is involved. I think it does distract from the music if you are not immune to the negative aspects of competition. On the other hand, if you are able to stay yourself, the result can be breath-taking, as I heard in many preliminaries and finals.

What do you like best: Playing before an audience, or playing before a jury in a competition setting?

Playing before an audience. I tried competition a number of times, and looking back I play more comfortably and freely in front of an audience of music lovers.

How did you find out about the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

Having regular contact with Bobby Rootveld, I knew about his plans to establish a festival in Nordhorn. I was curious, so I subscribed and kept on visiting it the years after.

Which expectations did you have of the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

My expectations were high. Kulturhaus NIHZ is a nice place and Bobby and Sanna have a lot of contacts in the guitar world and they succeeded in engaging famous players for master classes and concerts. I was not disappointed!

How did you experience the amateur competitions?

I did not subscribe for the first edition, but did participate in the next four competitions. It was stressful playing in front of a jury, it's quite different than playing before an audience, but over the years it went better. Meanwhile, however, I started questioning the concept of competition for an amateur like me, so now I have become a bit reluctant in participating.

Please tell us something about your preparations for the competitions.

Well, it's important to select the right (not too difficult) piece and start preparing in time, a week in advance is not enough even for a relatively easy piece. Preparation involved more detailed study of the pieces than I was used to: the piece has to be really ready for a competition, there must be a clear and reproducible musical idea to it. Additionally I practice the presentation, i.e. coming up and announcing the pieces. I simulate the stress conditions by means of recording (and playback) and playing before small audiences. That has worked out reasonably well in the past although the competition stress is a mean one. The first time was the worst and the last time was weird, I was over-concentrated and consequently lost the match.

What is your experience with the atmosphere at the festival?

I like the relaxed atmosphere amongst artists and participants. The competition stress amongst the competitors is not very obvious. I did not see it myself (I go home relatively early), but sometimes the atmosphere even becomes student-like. That has positive and negative side-effects, so I heard.

Have you had a good contact with the artists?

The contact with the artists that were my master class teachers was good. For the others, well I listened to them and I greeted them on the go, but with all those new people at the festival it is hardly possible to get acquainted with everyone.

How were your master class experiences? Which teacher impressed you most?

I have had quite a number of positive experiences both at the Guitar Festival Nordhorn and the Twente Guitar Festival, I remember one occasion when I was quite depressed after a master class, but that did not happen at the GFN. I was impressed by Pavel Steidl (his expression and fluent

style is great), and I liked the relaxed and to the point style of Annette Kruisbrink and Arlette Ruelens. A fun experience was with Gaëlle Solal, we had a good laugh and have been shaping nails for an hour with everybody making pictures of my nails. I still use her 'just follow the tip' approach.

How was the contact with your fellow-competitors?

Well, I do not see the participants of the competition as rivals, at least not right away. At most a bit of rivalry creeps in for me when I start comparing performances afterwards. So I do not talk to them "with my hand on the trigger". As far as I met them, the contact was good, particularly afterwards when everybody was relieved that the job was done and could relax. It's great to enjoy that together, having fought the good fight like Paulo Coelho states it.

How did you experience the audience during your competition performance?

I was glad that there was an audience, it adds to the atmosphere that is necessary to play, but surprisingly during playing I did not notice them. I remember that at one occasion I noticed children on the street that were peeping through the window to look at me, but the audience in the hall was quiet and did not distract me at all.

Which workshops did you participate in? How were your experiences?

As a rule, I participate in every workshop the festival has to offer because it's fun. Doing so, I met other people in the same setting and that makes having a chat more easy. In many cases there are two workshops at the festival: Stage Presence and Theatre Sports for Guitarists. Stage Presence makes you aware of how you look on the stage and what you can do to connect with the audience and to achieve the right presentation attitude, for instance with body language. Theatre Sports for Guitarists makes you aware that the stage is no place to be afraid of and that you can improvise if something unexpected happens.

After a few times participating, of course, I know what is coming. What makes it very interesting and useful is the fact that every participant brings in his or her own surprises and unique reactions. That is very instructive.

What is your opinion about the organisation?

My opinion is that they are doing a wonderful job. Organising is not just making plans, managing invitations and issuing schedules. It includes a lot of improvisation to deal with the daily matters from catering to people that are stuck somewhere because they missed the bus. And sometimes conflicts have to be resolved too.

What is your opinion about the facilities in Kulturhaus NIHZ (food, drink, lodging?)

Food and drink is well organised, there is a collective breakfast and dinner, sandwiches, soup and meatballs can be purchased for lunch at the bar, just like the coffee, tea, soda and sweets. Dinners are suitable for vegetarians too. In most cases there is cake with the concerts! So nobody leaves hungry!

Would you recommend the festival to your guitar friends and relatives?

Definitely. It is a unique festival in Germany!

Jannette Couvée

Jannette Couvée at the announcements of the results at GFN 2013

Jannette Couvée has been a regular guest and competitor of the Guitar Festival Nordhorn. She played in the Cat. 2 competitions of 2013, 2014 and 2015 and showed a clear progress in performance over these years.

Please tell us something about yourself. What's your name, where do you live, what's your current occupation?

I am Jannette Couvée. I have been living in the Dutch village of Ommen for fourteen years now. Alongside my job, I like to run, take a walk in the open, listen to music and enjoy nature.

At what age did you start playing the guitar?

I started taking guitar lessons in 1991, I was 23 at that time. At an earlier age I have attended music lessons for the recorder and organ.

Which person or event made you decide to dedicate yourself to music?

My brother played the guitar, which made a big impression on me.

Please tell something about your musical training. Where and with what teachers did you study?

In the period from 1991 to 2005 I followed lessons with Rene Overdick. In 2006 and 2007 Marleen Fernandez was my guitar teacher. I continued my guitar study with Mathijs van der Kolk since 2010.

Which teacher influenced you most? Which aspect of your play benefited from this?

Rene provided me with a solid foundation in technique, he had lots of study material for me. Marleen's lessons were focused on playing together as an ensemble. Matthijs coaches me with performances and helps me study the music in sufficient depth for a successful performance.

Who are your favourite classical guitarists?

Amongst others Stefano Grondona and Thomas Heimstad.

At what age did you perform for an audience for the first time? What was the occasion?

On the guitar? During a performance practice on the 8th of July 1992, I was 24.

Did you ever make recordings and CDs? If so, how did you experience recording and listening to the result?

Last year I was recorded during the final guitar lesson session of the season. I learnt a great deal from this experience. Aspects like taking time to play-in and prepare, making sure that a quiet room is available for playing-in. Not forgetting being well-rested before the start of the recording and paying attention to techniques that optimise the musical output, such as posture and presentation.

What is your opinion about competitions? Do they have a positive influence on the player or are they a distraction from the essence of music?

The competitions were a positive experience for me, they gave me self-confidence, added to my personal and social development and helped me to counterbalance blockades.

What do you like best: playing before an audience, or playing before a jury in a competition setting?

I prefer playing in a competition setting in front of a jury. It gives me a sense of being taken seriously.

How did you get the idea to subscribe for the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

My guitar teacher Mathijs van der Kolk brought it up and motivated me to subscribe.

What were your expectations of the Festival?

I was expecting a pleasant and instructive festival.

How did you experience your participation in the competition?

It was a great experience to be taken seriously as a player and a person. I experienced a warm welcome and of course excitement too!

Please tell us something about your preparations for the competition.

I began by selecting a few suitable pieces. Then the real work started, in-depth study, finding the important details, and solving technical and musical problems by diligent rehearsal. And then preparing for the stage performance: playing the pieces for family and friends.

What are your experiences with the atmosphere at the festivals, in particular the Guitar Festival Nordhorn?

I experienced a positive and constructive atmosphere.

Did you have a nice contact with the professional guitarists at the festival?

Yes, the professional players were very communicative and approachable.

How did you experience the master classes? Which teacher impressed you most?

The master classes were very helpful and instructive, they boosted my play, showed that I am able to grow musically on the guitar and gave me a positive impulse for my personal life.

How was your contact with the other participants of the competition?

I liked the interaction, it was a positive experience, I learnt from them and felt really motivated.

How did you experience the audience during your competition performance?

It was great to sense intent attention from the audience and jury.

What is your opinion about the organisation?

The organisation is transparent and offers a lot of convenience. Consequently a potentially stressful event like a competition acquires an inherent calmness. For instance there was excellent support before the start of the competition. That made me feel at ease.

What is your opinion about the facilities in Kulturhaus NIHZ (food, drink, lodging?)

They were neat!

Would you recommend the festival to your friends and relatives?

I am enthusiastic about it and I am recommending it on to friends and relatives.

Kevin Wiesner

Kevin Wiesner (13) was one of the participants of the competition *Beste Gitarrist/Gitarristin von Nordhorn*. This competition is specifically aimed at guitarists from Nordhorn and the direct environment. It encourages young players from the Schools of Music around Nordhorn to hit the stage and to find out that it can be a fun experience.

Kevin's selection of music for the competition surprised me, *Prelude Nr. 1* by Villa-Lobos is not a piece that you expect to appear on the music stand of players of his age. But the piece appealed to him and with a firm dose of youthful energy he played it much better than me! The jury (and me) considered him the rightful winner of the 2015 competition edition.

Please tell us something about yourself. What's your name, where do you live, what's your current occupation?

I am Kevin Wiesner and I live in Nordhorn. In my leisure time I play tennis and the guitar, or I hang out a bit with my friends. Sometimes I do other things.

Kevin Wiesner, der beste Gitarrist von Nordhorn 2015, with the guitars of his peers from the ensemble

At what age did you start playing the guitar?

I was ten years old when I started playing the guitar.

With what teachers did you study?

I started to play with Helmut Borchers, my current teacher is Bobby Rootveld.

Who is your favourite classical guitarist?

My favourite is my teacher, Bobby Rootveld!

At what age did you perform for an audience for the first time? What was the occasion?

My first time on stage before an audience was in 2013 with *Acoustic meets Electric* in the Bauhaus. At that time I was eleven years old.

What is your opinion about competitions? Do they have a positive influence on the player or do they distract the players from the essence of music?

Yes, I like competitions because I can always prove my worth. I find them exciting, yet every time I learn a bit more.

You played Prelude 1 by Villa-Lobos at the competition. Are you planning to play all of them, or will you be starting with another piece?

Yes, I have started to study *Prelude 2*.

How did you experience your participation in the competition?

I have really enjoyed it!

How was the contact with your fellow competitors?

Good! I am playing in an ensemble with some of them.

What is your opinion about the organisation?

The organisation was Super!

Would you recommend the festival to your friends and relatives?

Definitely Yes!