Guitar Festival Nordhorn 2014

Meeting Again...

Thursday night 24 April 2014. At a moderate speed, I am rushing the long straight road between Oldenzaal and Denekamp, two townlets in the eastern part of Holland. In days long ago the tracks of a local railway were located here, and now the road that replaces them is remarkably straight for this part of the country. The spring is in full bloom, the trees alongside the road wear their fresh green outfit and the fields are full of life.

I have worked all day and I am a bit tired. Under normal circumstances at this time I take a little nap on the couch at home, just relaxing with suitable music on my headphones, just closing my eyes for a while. But not today, I have better things to do than dozing off in the dusk...

I am on my way to Nordhorn, a town in the Lower Saxony district in Germany, just over the border. I used to go there for cheap petrol at the *Kaufhalle*, for a sandwich at Restaurant Vechte, or to go to the personnel shop of the Nino spinning mill for some textile goods, usually together with my wife, kids and mother in law. That's a long time ago, even now the petrol is cheap again, you cannot go to the *Kaufhalle* any more, it's been closed and the building is a ruin. Restaurant Vechte is more or less devoured by a shopping mall, and the

Nino spinning mill has been closed down in the last century, only its *Hochbau*, the old office building, is still there, but all its personnel has been laid off.

Now I have got another destination. Kulturhaus Niet In Het Zwart (NIHZ) (freely translated Music House Not Dressed in Black) at the Mittelstrasse. The enterprise of Bobby and Sanna Rootveld. It is the place where they organize the Guitar Festival Nordhorn (GFN) for the fourth time in a row.

I pass the bridge over the Dinkel river, a beautiful meandering stream that was formed after the last Ice Age in this region. Officially I am leaving the district of Twente as it is described in the *Twente Anthem* by the poet Jacobus Joannes van Deinse (1867 - 1947), because in his famous poem he writes *There is a land between the banks of the Regge and Dinkel*. In front of me lies the Scandinavia Route, a bit premature name for the ring-road that keeps passers-by out of the centre of the village of Denekamp. Here the countryside wears spring adornment too.

My car radio plays *Platero y Yo* by Eduardo Sainz de la Maza in a nice performance by Alex Garrobé.

My thoughts linger back to 2006, the year that Bobby Rootveld and his friends organised the first Twente Guitar Festival in the town of Enschede. During the final concert in a chock-full Concordia Theatre the Belgian guitarist Yves Storms at that time played the full *Platero y Yo* suite and told the story of the little donkey Platero in a wondrous combination of music and fairy tale. Ah, those lingering thoughts, they make me look forward to a pleasant reunion! That's exactly where I am bound for at this moment, meeting again, a pleasant reunion. I'll meet again the friends of the three previous Guitar Festivals in Nordhorn.

Onwards goes the drive. The border crossing is busier at night. Many truck drivers come here to spend the night off-the-road and meet each other. The border supermarket Tensundern likes to receive some late customers!

I take a slightly shorter route through Nordhorn, I take a turn right near the old *Kaufhalle* (it's a ruin now) and drive along the church that carries solar cells on its bell tower (yes, also for solar energy all good things come from above). Then I take a left turn, cross the railway track of the *Bentheimer Eisenbahn*, pass an old ramshackle industrial estate and finally reach the neighbourhood where Kulturhaus NIHZ is located.

I carry a rucksack with some prizes for the amateur competition. I participate in it too! I have a few books of the *DOS Amigos Homepage Collection* including the newest book *A Night at the Opera* with opera arrangements by Johann Kaspar Mertz.

This Thursday night is the *Welcome Party* that includes the draw of the professional and amateur competitions. When I enter the building, I notice that it is pretty crowded already, a lot of participants have arrived in the afternoon. That's good for the atmosphere and makes sure that we are less busy with intakes the next morning.

I make a start saying hello to all people that I got acquainted with on the previous festivals. The core team: Bobby and Sanna van Elst, Fred and Angie Rootveld, Martin and Henk

Olden. Some of the musicians of this weekend: Annette Kruisbrink and Arlette Ruelens of the Anido Guitar Duo, and Carlé Costa with his girl-friend. I see well-known faces: Nandini Sudhir and her mother Pallavi from India. And so I say hello to many more people that I ever saw here, and it's a pleasure to meet them again.

The *Welcome Party* starts in style! Duo NIHZ (Bobby and Sanna) and the Anido Guitar Duo (Annette and Arlette) give a taste of what will be most important the coming days: Music!

The concert hall is packed. An attentive spectator will notice immediately that the stage is not the only place of interest. The walls that used to be bare show an exposition now. Arlette Ruelens exhibits an extensive collection of tempera paintings. She works with abstract motives in a characteristic colour palette that appears in various spectra on the canvas. In her work she experiments with symmetry, quasi-symmetry, different colour distribution and contrast in materials. One of the examples is a painting in which the waves of the sea embrace the dawn in the *vertical* plane, which is an interesting variation on the usual sunset at the coast.

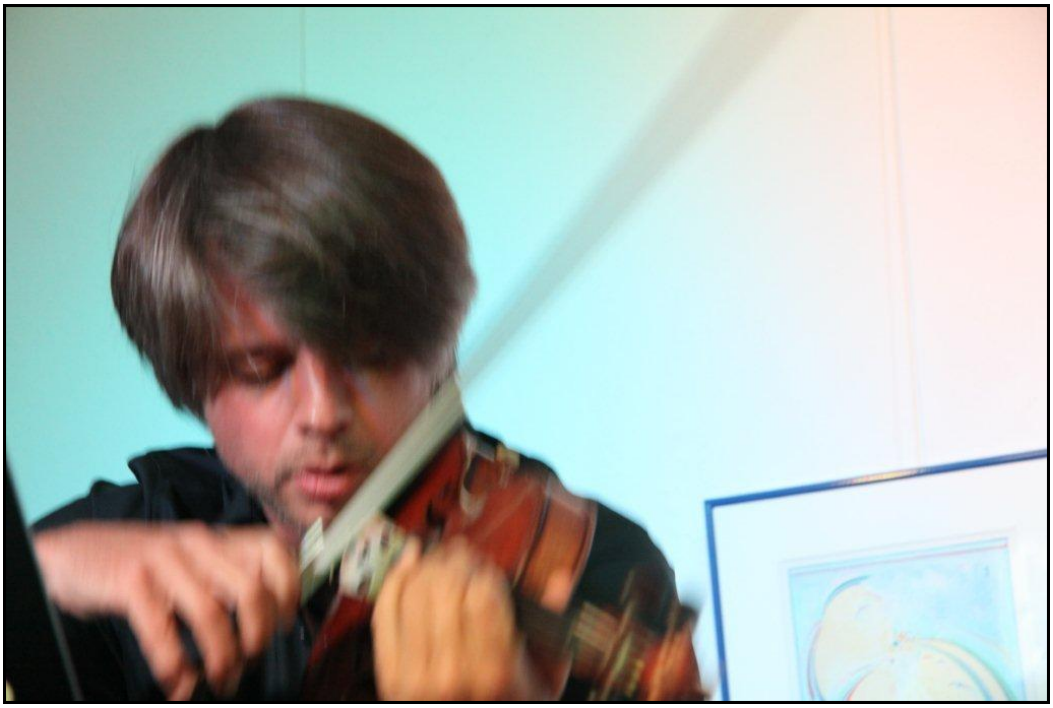
It is funny that a poem by the ancient Roman poet Ovidius Naso comes to my mind while I am observing the painting with the sea/dawn symmetry. When I was attending Grammar School as a kid, we were quite busy with the translation from the Latin language of the works by this poet.

The poem that I was thinking about was the *Phaëton* from the *Metamorfosis*, the Roman myth that recounts that it is quite dangerous to take a ride in your father's Porsche without a driver's licence. In the story, this Porsche is the chariot of the sun god that carries the light of day between dawn and dusk. A further moral from this story is that as a parent you should not promise things that you cannot fulfil. In the poem Ovidius' description of the dawn Aurora in fact describes Arlette's painting. Anyway, if you want to know more about this Latin work, take a look on Internet where you can find translations of most classics.

The draw for the amateur competition emerges from a bucket with Ping-Pong balls. I am the first to play on Saturday. That gives me the opportunity to listen to the others!

After the official opening, we have a good time at the bar while Henk Olden plays a nice piece of Flamenco on the "open guitar" on the open stage.

Day One



David Rowland

Paperwork

More than 50 participants subscribed to the Guitar Festival Nordhorn this year, amongst them more than 42 conservatory students and professionals. An absolute record in the four years existence of this event. Every year some people do not show up despite their subscription, yet the list of the preliminaries for the professional competition included *forty two* entries!

I observed a bit of humour. Didn't the answer to the *ultimate question about Life, the Universe and Everything* (from the *Hitchhiker's Guide*) happen to be **42**?

One thing was quite clear, this great number of participants caused quite a pile of music papers. At subscription, every candidate had to submit a copy of his or her passport and two copies of the music for the preliminaries and the finals. Most had sent it by mail in all kind of packages, from properly bound and delivered with table of contents up to chaotic heaps of paper with hardly readable names.

Many of the mailings contained quite extensive pieces. After collection, the total appeared to be a pile of about 20 centimetres. All the pieces had to be ordered in sequence of the appearance of the participants before the preliminaries started, to enable the jury to take a look at the music.

This heap was the cause of my early arrival in Nordhorn on the first official day of the festival, because the job had to be completed before the start of the preliminaries at eleven o' clock. Thus, I arrived at nine.

There was the music in all kinds of envelopes with a great variation in quality of the copies. Short pieces, complete suites, both chaotic and well-ordered.

How do you start a job like this? Bobby and I first made a start with the complete pile, but that led to chaos in a short time, the number of participants was too high. What to do now? Panic? Slightly, until I observed the schedule of the preliminaries. It was organised in sequence in blocks with breaks. Seven blocks in all.

So first we made seven piles, one for each block and then we put the sheet music for each block in sequence of appearance of the candidates. This two-stage approach appeared quite effective, it could even stand the fact that Bobby was interrupted often by questions of the guests. We were ready about half past ten! Not bad!

The preliminaries could start!

Preliminaries Cat. 1 Competition Professionals

The competition for professionals has become a great attraction for the young guitarists in Europe and beyond. The level of competition is high and there are very interesting prizes.

The guitarist that wins the first prize in the first place obtains a beautiful hand-made guitar. This year it is a beautifully built and well-sounding example of craftsmanship of the Italian luthier Roberto Pozzi who is present himself to demonstrate his instruments and hand over the prize. Second the winner gets some useful exposure: a CD recording with the Samsong label and four concerts, one at Kulturhaus NIHZ in Nordhorn, one at ZOMIAC in Lonneker, Holland, one in the Gitaarsalon in Enkhuizen, Holland and one at the Guitar Festival Oberhausen in Germany.

For your information, the Samsong label is an initiative of Bobby Rootveld in which he masters, produces and distributes CD recordings of Duo NIHZ and a collection of selected guitarists. Kulturhaus NIHZ is the place where this festival takes place and a popular site for guitar concerts and chamber music. ZOMIAC is a foundation that manages a small concert hall that is quite suitable for chamber music in the romantic rural village of Lonneker in the east of Holland. The Gitaarsalon is a renowned guitar concert podium for all genres in the Dutch town of Enkhuizen. The Gitaarsalon has connections with Brava TV, a classical TV channel. And finally, the Guitar Festival Oberhausen is the enterprise of Gitarissimo Oberhausen.

A guitar, CD recording and concert opportunities, that's not all. Part of the deal is an introduction to completely new repertoire, because the famous Dutch composer Annette Kruisbrink composes a work that is explicitly written for and dedicated to the winner, forming an interesting and also challenging personal portrait of the player.

The additional prize money is 1000 Euros, a nice amount of money to cover things like travel costs and the hotel room.

For the second and third prize winners, there is prize money too and a package of guitar accessories that is provided by the various sponsors.

As I already noticed, there were 42 players for the preliminaries. Instead of the regular six minutes, each player was granted eight, two minutes for unexpected expression! 42x8/60=5.6, more than five hours! Added to his we have entrance, leaving the stage and the breaks, so I guess that we were settled for six and a half hours. I was glad that I brought my bread box and a water bottle!

I had a list with surnames of the players (thanks, organisation), unfortunately the first names were missing, so in this section I will use the rather formal abbreviation *Mr.* and *Mrs.* I was very glad that the announcements were compulsory for the players, because in my hurry with the sheet music I had not been able to write down all pieces. I have to admit that even an announcement is no guarantee that you are able to understand the name of the pieces, so it might be that I have missed some pieces.

The jury lined up and I took my good old journalist position near the video camera and the fireplace.

Martin Schäfer played two dances by Manuel de Falla (1876 - 1946). To me it was unknown repertoire and it sounded well. With the first dance Schäfer needed some time to get going. He made up for this hesitation in the second dance with nice lyrical intermezzos and more attention for dynamics.

Peter Bacsi performed with two *Sonatas* by Domenico Scarlatti (1685 - 1757). To save time he omitted the repeats. The first *Sonata* was a very modest piece that sounded almost drawn back. The second *Sonata* had more body, yet the player restrained himself a bit despite the exiting development in the middle section.

Necj Kuhar showed his skills with *Sevilliana* by Joaquín Turina (1882 - 1949). He made a brisk start and soon his drive struggles with the accuracy of performance in some fast passages. In the quiet passages, however, he retrieved his composure.

Rafael Silva had selected a *Sonata* by Scarlatti too for his preliminary, it happened to be the same that Mr. Bacsi played. He made a much more convincing start but also in this case drive and accuracy clashed. It appeared to be a very looong *Sonata* with all repeats played, so the span of concentration was a challenge for the player and likewise for me as a listener.

Jelena Ratkovic strove for the finals with *Tarantella* by Mario Castelnuovo Tedesco (1895 - 1986). Gradually I hear the technically awkward yet enjoyable music by Tedesco more and more often on competitions. Ratkovic made a good run in this difficult piece with her clear chord passages. By the sound of it, however, *Tarantella* is the music to an exciting movie, and that aspect I missed a little in her interpretation.

Peter Powell put his effort in *Etudes* today. An *Etude* by Fernando Sor (1778 - 1839) and *Etude 7* by Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887 - 1959). With Sor’s Etude I enjoyed a clear melody line

on top of a pianistic accompaniment. In the study by Villa-Lobos, Powell had to work hard in the fast runs and he took maximum advantage from the slower middle section to regroup and recover. I did notice some tension between technique and music in this piece.

Jacob Bangsø turned out well with two movements from *Aquarelles* by Sergio Assad (*1952). The *Valseana* appeared to be a nice warm bath. I found it the best performance up till now. In *Divertimento*, Bangsø kept a good swing and made a nice transparent performance of this tricky movement. He played with fervour and I had the feeling that he would reach the final in this way. A nice thought to enter the first break.

After the tea, Vadim Fissenko kicked off with *Valse Nr. 3* by Augustin Barrios (1885 - 1944). His slow start formed an original beginning of the piece. Then he started waltzing even though he disturbed the dance feeling at times with non-functional *ritenutos*. He did not step into the trap of a drive that pushes up the tempo. Relaxed performance.

Jorrit Douwes continued the story by Augustin Barrios with *Sueno en la Floresta*. The tender and sad tone of his introduction touched my heart. Later on he continued a bit too modest until he picked up the drive to turn the piece into an interesting display of atmosphere.

For his presentation, Maatta Ollipekka selected a piece by a contemporary Finnish composer and the *Fugue* from the *Folia Variations* by Manuel Ponce (1882 - 1948). The contemporary piece did not become clear to me. I could follow the *Fugue* far better, Olipekka played it with a clear intention and a solid sound, an approach that provided ample compensation for the small inaccuracies. I considered him a potential finalist.

Younho Kim put his cards on *Etude 2* by Villa-Lobos and the fourth movement of the *Sonate* by Antonio José (1902 - 1936). He played both pieces dazzling, a faultless track. But, particularly in the *Sonate* by José, where was the musical expression? Kim played technically perfect, but I missed the musical finishing.

Yan Kok chose the *Fandango* from *Tres Piezas Espanolas* by Joaquín Rodrigo (1901 - 1999). The *Tres Piezas* are often heard on competitions because of the challenge and difficulty of the music. She had a personal approach with some very well-timed rests. Unfortunately, there were some points where the calm was not quite there. Particularly in the beginning she had to settle down a bit.

With this performance, we entered the break. A sandwich and a sip of water helped a lot to regain some concentration.

Marcin Chilinsky went back to the classical and early romantic era with *Soirées d'Auteuil* by Napoleon Coste (1805 - 1883). A piece with a long introduction, much virtuosity in various themes and a very long last phrase. Chilinsky emphasized virtuosity so much that the music suffered and even the slow sections were much faster than I liked.

The clock ticked, but the next player remained absent. A break again? No, an Italian rushed inside, Andrea Ferrario in full marching order with guitar case and stuff. He unpacked in a flash and jumped on the podium.

He played two pieces that were composed by fellow-Italians, *Capricho de Goya Nr.1* (Francisco Goya himself) by Castelnuovo Tedesco and a *Sonata* by Niccolò Paganini (1782 - 1840). Ferrario started the *Capricho* with conviction and kept playing that way, apart from the little drive-induced inaccuracies. He played the *Sonata* by Paganini the same way, very virtuoso and a little bit hasty at times. The musical lines, however, stood like a brick wall, so I found him a favourite for the last round!

Jiho Ban showed a clear preference for Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750) with a few movements from the *Sonata BWV1003*. He presented *Grave* with a beautiful tone and a transparent performance. In the virtuoso *Double,* it seemed that he fell back a bit, but he ran the race without fail.

Thomas Beer continued the Bach tradition for a while with *Prelude* from the *Second Lute Suite BWV997*, followed by a piece of romantic music, a *Prelude* by Francisco Tárrega (1852 - 1909). The player held back with Bach and showed a peculiar articulation in the melody. With Tárrega the emphasis on the melody was even more prominent, causing the accompaniment to stay behind in volume. In that way, the harmonic texture became unclear.

Gillian Omalyev appeared with a contemporary piece titled *Theme and Variations*. Her technique was excellent and particularly in the variations she exhibited the atmosphere of the piece. Favourite for the finals!

Jan Kudelka resumed the Bach tradition with his performance of a few movements from the *Cello Suite BWV1007*, to be specific the *Prelude*, *Courante* and *Gigue.* He played with a firm technique and a lively phrasing. I found his contribution a ticket to the finals!

Kristina Vårlid played a special combination with *Preludios Americanos Nr. 3* by Abel Carlevaro (1916 - 2001) and *Sir John Smith, his Almaine* by John Dowland (1563 - 1626). In the Preludio she presented well and played with expression and a nice vibrato. In the *Almaine* she continued this trend and added clarity to the divisions although her interpretation was a little bit fierce for a Renaissance piece.

After a well-deserved break (it is quite a long session for the jury and likewise for the audience) Illja Tosic entered the stage with a few movements from the *Balkan Miniatures* by Dusan Bogdanovic (*1955). The piece has a special dedication*, to world peace*. Tosic played his pieces in succession exuberantly, melancholically with atmosphere, with a clear Slavic atmosphere and in the end as a joyful folk dance. He had a well-polished tone with surprisingly little noise. Candidate for the finals!

Robbert Vermeulen presented a collection of the classics, *Tarantella* by Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806 - 1856) and *Cappriccio Nr. 2* by Luigi Legnani (1790 - 1877). *Tarantella* became a fantastic and very accurately performed dance, the *Cappriccio* was spectacular at more than twice the tempo that I could reach with that piece myself. Candidate-finalist!

Henrique Almeida accepted the challenge with the complex *Passacalle* from *Tres Piezas* by Joaquín Rodrigo. He kept the bass line throughout the piece and made no errors with the tricky fast passages. I found his performance interesting and got a slight feeling that he was one for the finals.

Christopher Boston played music from the last century with *Prelude* from the *Cavatina* by Alexandre Tansman (1897 - 1986) and *Maria*, a *Gavota* by Francisco Tárrega. A neat performance.

What becomes obvious to me is that the players become better and sharper. Does it actually make a difference if you play later on in the row of candidates? What is the role of fate in this sequence?

Jinsae Kim prepared his road to the finals with a *Sonata* by Domenico Scarlatti and the *Fandango* from *Tres Piezas* by Joaquín Rodrigo. I remembered the *Sonata* in a duo version and I immediately noticed the advantage of ensemble playing in this piece. In the solo version, it appeared to be quite difficult to let the bass line sing. The *Fandango* appeared a piece of fireworks with excellent technique. After a few measures Mr. Kim raced off with quite a drive.

Rafael Carpena appeared with a piece of contemporary music, but from his announcement I could decipher neither the name of the piece nor the composer. He played the piece in an extraordinary playing position with his right leg supported by a foot stool. The first section of the piece had a sultry tone in an atmosphere of *mellow melancholy*. The second part became fierier and sounded better to me.

Time for another break with sandwich and water. Quite a marathon session indeed! I had noted down a significant number of entries in my notebook.

Xianji Liu stepped forward with *Etude 2* by Heitor Villa-Lobos and a *Sonata* by Domenico Scarlatti. I had the opportunity to compare versions, Liu played the rat race with a fine technique. He played the *Sonata* with extensive phrasing (the breaths almost became holes in the music), but his technique was quite good and his approach sounded original. Some scales were so fast that the notes melted.

Cem Celiskirt chose the same combination as Mr. Beer, the ill-famous *Prelude* from BWV1006 by Johann Sebastian Bach, followed by *Marieta*, a *Mazurka* by Francisco Tárrega. I have seen many competition candidates struggling and stumbling with this *Prelude* by Bach and unfortunately this happened again. The rush of the player led to an inevitable crash. Playing *Marieta*, he was much more relaxed, he played it in a nice romantic way. It struck me that he omitted the glissandos at the start of the second section.

Illka *Turta mixed a number of styles, Prelude Nr. 3* by Heitor Villa-Lobos (according to the original manuscript that had not been (over)edited by the publisher) and the contemporary *Hommage a Alonso Mudarra* by Georges Auric (1899 – 1983). *Prelude Nr. 3* is one of the most atmospheric preludes by Villa-Lobos and the player expressed the mood of the piece well. Auric's composition appeared awkward and resembled a sequence of loose phrases. Yet I recognized an occasional sound of Mudarra's *Fantasia que contrahaze la Harpa en la Manera de Ludovico.* Apparently Mudarra, being a Renaissance composer, was far ahead of his time!

Tobias Juchem was the first with a piece by the Argentine tango master Astor Piazzola (1921 - 1992), he played *Invierno Porteno,* one of his "four seasons". Juchem was accurate in all

atmospheres of the piece, particularly in the slow section that is traditional to most of Piazzolla's tangos.

I could not understand Mr. Wang's announcement. Fortunately, I recognized the piece: *Sevilliana* by Joaquín Turina. He played the dance with a powerful and versatile approach.

Andrea Gonzalez Caballero took a chance for the finals with *Homenaje pour Le tombeau de Claude Debussy* by Manuel De Falla and *Etude 12* by Heitor Villa-Lobos. She played the famous epitaph for the famous impressionistic composer with feeling and a sense of melancholy. Well done! The notorious squeak and screech study got strikingly little noise. Well finished! I would give her a place in the finals!

Federico Spina played music by Vicente Asencio (1908 - 1979), two movements from the *Collectici Intimi*. His first piece had a Bolero-like rhythm and I heard a beautiful tone and a well-expressed atmosphere. The last piece resembled a *Tarantella*, he played as well as his first piece but a tad faster. I would give him a place in the finals too!

Markus Lomeijer played a pretty unknown *Sonata* by Domenico Scarlatti. That's not surprising on a total of 550! The voicing of this *Sonata* was interesting and was made quite clear by the player. Unfortunately, the player sometimes slowed down on spots of tricky transitions, which was not that functional in the music itself.

Haruki Noda came up with a contemporary work, *3 Tientos* by Hans Werner Henze (1926 - 2012). For me this music was difficult to understand, so I could hardly judge the merits of the player behind it. To be fair, I did not get it at all. Yet Noda's technique looked and sounded OK.

Sergio Bermudes went back to the classics with a *Sonata* by Johann Sebastian Bach, followed by a *Romance* by Federico Moreno Torroba. Bach sounded fuzzy, I did not hear a musical line, only virtuosity. Lack of clarity is lethal with Bach! Playing Torroba, Bermudes appeared much more at home. The *Romance* sounded interesting, even though it was affected by haste. That's a shame indeed, because haste makes the virtuosity sound unnatural.

A colourful personality with rasta locks hit the stage: Junior Cesar. He played *Guitarresca* by Joaquín Clerch (*1965). The piece had a classical architecture with a contemporary sound. The tone was good, the finishing too, but the music did not tell a story to me. That would have increased its expression considerably.

Mr. Heideck paid a tribute to Mozart by means of the arrangements by Fernando Sor, a few *Arias* from the *Zauberflöte*, to be precise Nrs. 1, 3 and 5. The first one had a nice voicing, the second danced along light-heartedly and the last one repeated this pattern.

Tal Botnivik played two movements from the *Sonata Meridional* by Manuel Ponce. The first piece featured a dark sound with a lot of warmth. In the second piece, Botnivik showed virtuosity and haste, causing the piece to be less transparent.

Break again! I started to notice that this was a very looong session indeed! At certain moments, I got a bit drowsy. I am certain that this is not the case with the jury! Three players left at this moment.

Dmitro Omelchak brought two studies by Heitor Villa-Lobos in front of the footlight, the numbers 1 and 7. The way he played *Etude 1* surprised me a little, it was very lively yet more restless than I had heard on recordings. I missed the clear contrast between melody and accompaniment. *Etude 7* became a bold venture in the faster passages and a pleasant atmosphere in the slower passages.

Andrija Lazarevic played a piece that was unknown to me and unfortunately his announcement did not help me either. It was an incredibly virtuoso piece in which the player succeeded in making the right accents to find a way through this musical race track. In spite of the hurry at some places he succeeded to reach the finish without damage!

The last candidate of this afternoon Damiano Fineschi. He made a conclusion in style with *Prelude* from BWV995 by Johann Sebastian Bach. The prelude offered Fineschi the freedom to improvise until the fugue at the end pulled him back into strictly timed voicing. He played a bit too introvert and he found out that Bach hides some little technical surprises in every piece.

We had reached the finish! Man, what a marathon! The jury got the awkward task to convert all impressions of the players into a decision concerning the finalists.

What about me? Well, I went to work, rolling up my sleeves to get all pans and dishes on the right spot for dinner. A real wake-up activity for me!

Concert Daniel Rowland and Alberto Mesirca

After the intensive competition afternoon and a nice dinner for all participants, family and friends, the atmosphere was right for a beautiful evening concert. Starting with the performance of Alberto Mesirca on guitar as the accompaniment for David Rowland on violin.

For many years, Alberto Mesirca has been a good friend and welcomed guest at Kulturhaus NIHZ. That’s why he is the official house musician of the Kulturhaus. I have experienced him as a very inspired musician that makes every effort to bring the music in such a way that the audience picks up the emotions of the pieces. From experience, I know that his play can touch your heart. In order to achieve that, he inevitably is quite busy with lots of practice and detailed study of the music and its composers. The notes to his CDs bear witness of the latter.

Daniel Rowland is a British/Dutch musical celebrity on the violin with an impressing curriculum vitae. He works mainly abroad, amongst others as a concert master and a *Professor of Violin* in London.

In the past, I had heard the combination Rowland/Mesirca during a concert in Het Stift, a convent community in the vicinity of the village of Weerselo in the east of Holland (in the

neighbourhood of where I live) and my expectations were high. The programme looked good and amongst others showed the *Siete Canciones Populares* by Manuel De Falla.

Unfortunately, it appeared that the programme had to be shortened. Why? As a consequence of booking two concerts on a single evening. That would not be a problem if you don't have to travel far in between. In this case, however, the distance between Nordhorn and the next location Osnabrück was more than eighty kilometres. That takes time to travel even if you have a Porsche. So unfortunately again…

Before the concert started, we noticed a special surprise. Louis Ignatius Gall, the renowned guitar professor from Enschede apparently had enjoyed the festival that Kulturhaus NIHZ had organized in his honour very much. So he appeared again this evening and took his favourite spot on the second row.

Shortened or not, the performance became phenomenal. First, we heard Paganini, the perfect combination of violin and guitar, because he was skilled on both instruments. Paganini composed a great number of duos for these instruments in his *Centone di Sonate*. The first Sonata from this opus became a feast of passion and romanticism.

Mauro Giuliani (1781 - 1829) wrote a number of duos for the flute and guitar. From an arranger's point of view the step towards a violin-guitar duo is not that big. We heard the result with the violin-guitar version of *Grand Duo Concertante*. Fast passages, attractive lyricism and a large number of tricks that are impossible on a flute. Both musicians played on the edge of their skills and paid tribute to the music.

Today we had a world premiere, CYAM by the prolific Dutch composer Annette Kruisbrink (*1958). It appeared an avant-garde composition with considerable technical challenge for both players. The composer Annette, who was present herself, got a well-deserved applause.

The conclusion of the concert consisted of three movements from *Histoire du Tango* by Astor Piazzola. Originally composed for flute and guitar, the violin-guitar version of this piece became a delicacy for the ears like the Giuliani piece before. After the well-known knock on the door of the brothel we got a nice and lively performance of *Bordel 1900*, *Cafe 1930* and *Nightclub 1960*.

A special word of recognition for the guitarist and accompanist Alberto Mesirca. During all Rowland's improvisations and spontaneous ideas, he stayed sharp as a razor blade and formed a solid accompaniment's foundation for the music. It was great to see how well they played together. That requires a great deal of concentration and attentiveness and illustrates Mesirca's versatility as a musician both in the solo and accompaniment role.

After the last tones of the Nightclub, unfortunately the party was over, and after a thundering applause Daniel Rowland quickly took off to the next little concert room in Osnabrück.

In the mean time, we heard the results of the preliminaries. In order of appearance the finalists would be the gentlemen Almeida, Bangsø, Kim, Vermeulen en Lazarevic.

Unfortunately, there were no ladies amongst the finalists, this competition was a man's business with only five out of 42 subscriptions for the ladies. It is time that the golden years of 2006 – 2009 return! Come on, ladies!

Concert Carlé Costa

The concerts by the born Argentine Carlé Costa are special because of their combination of music and spirituality. Many of his compositions have a deeper background that goes back to a spiritual tradition, for instance of the Argentine Indians. His complete programme was built up from own compositions.

En la Luz del Templo (In the light of the Temple) was a very meditative piece in which the deliberately composed silence helped to activate the fantasy and to provide room for understanding of the piece. The piece was dedicated to Arvo Pärt (*1935), a composer of classical and spiritual music from Estonia who composes *minimal music* based on amongst other the Gregorian tradition.

The *11 Valses Extaticos* are based on Sufi dances, a kind of *Valses Poeticos* but now in the spiritual sense. It is music that makes me switch to "image-listening", just to get the impressions rather than the musical sound. If I listen to contemporary music this mode works well for me, I allow the music to form a story in my head independently from the musical form. This story, however, is hard to summarize in a single paragraph. I utilized the same "image-listening" with the next piece, *3 Aires del Noroeste Argentino en el Suroeste del Berlin*, a world premiere.

Inipi was a musical report of a cleansing ritual with the Indians in which you return to the womb in order to be born again. Finally, Costa paid homage to the female energy (that is often neglected or discredited in classical spiritual traditions) by means of *Mares Estrellas.*

Deeper backgrounds require explanations else the reflection of it in the music will not be understood either. Carlé Costa was extensive in these explanations. On one hand that was quite clarifying, at the other it provided a view on complex matters. For me the explanation shed light on the matter, others did not see that point and therefore quietly took off between pieces, to the bar and the beer, I guess.

For me it was a nice concert with fine play, much emotion and a multitude of interesting sounds.

Day Two

Gaëlle Solal

Competition Cat. 2 Amateurs

The Cat. 2 competition is the amateur counterpart of the professional competition. This year there were nine subscriptions including mine, so this competition is growing too. I had drawn as first player so I had the opportunity to write the report myself for most of the players. Only the description of my own performance and of the player right after me is missing, so I hope that Bobby scribbles something on that subject.

I was quite satisfied with my performance of *Onder een Linde Groen* by Nicolas Vallet (1583 -1645), three *Minutova Sola* by Stephan Rak and *Vaterlandsblüthe Nr. 2* by Johann Kaspar Mertz. More about my competition adventures this year can be found in the *Guitarities* section of this site.

I missed the second candidate Filip Optolowicz, because I had to leave the hall when he came in. The third candidate did not show up. Fortunately for this occasion I was assisted by Bobby Rootveld who wrote the following report to fill the gap:

Mark, the winner of last year's competition, was the first player of this year's event. It is never easy to play first in a competition, because in fact you are a trend setter and encouragement for the players that follow. Mark started with a clear announcement. For me as a jury member

this is a plus, because I value a good announcement and presentation. It brings player and audience closer together.

Mark made a good performance, he played his pieces even better than on the Open Guitar Stage a few weeks ago. Yet an issue of criticism is that Mark tends to haste a bit too much to start a new piece, before even breathing to start the piece, he took off already. ;-) A hint for him is to use the (silent) "count to ten" rule for pauses between pieces. Apart from that his performance was excellent, which set the trend for the competition.

Because Mark was not present at that moment, I will cover the performance of the second player too. Filip Optolowicz, the second participant, originates from Poland. When he hit the stage, he appeared elegantly and showily dressed. A smart suit with shining black shoes with bright red shoelaces as 'personal touch'. His socks were really original, they were black and adorned with white musical notes. That's what I call 'Dressed for the Occasion'!

It might sound weird, but as a jury member I tend to make a quick glance at the socks of the participants. I remember an occasion many years ago that a well-dressed participant hit the stage, in a black suit, white shirt, tie and shiny black shoes. However, as soon as he sat down I was in for a surprise, he appeared to wear bright yellow socks with large purple polka-dots.

Since then I am just curious if participants consider their socks too. Of course, I do not take it into account in my judgement, but I am just curious. Anyway, the socks of Optolowicz added to the impression of stylish musicality.

Obviously, stylish musicality has to reach the ears first. It did! Optolowicz started playing and I was blown away. An excellent tone, a balanced technique and above all a smooth approach. He was one with his instrument and showed a musicality that I had not seen before with guitarists of his age. Even better, I think that Optolowicz would have made a fair chance in the professional competition. Quite a talent! I really hope that we will hear more of him in the future.

While listening, in some way I was reminiscent of Marcin Dylla, a famous guitarist from Poland. It appeared that Dylla and Optolowicz have a regular contact, and his influence is clear from Optolowicz's play. A very positive influence indeed!

Bobby, thank you! A nice detail that Not Dressed In Black applies to socks too!

When I returned in the concert hall, Nandini Sudhir from India hit the stage, she had been the second prize winner of last year. Loud and clearly, she announced that she would play *Frog Galliard* by John Dowland and the *Tarantella* by Johann Kaspar Mertz. She played these pieces completely by heart!

The tricky thing with *Frog Galliard* is keeping the tempo and the pulse of the piece despite the fact that the divisions become more complex. Nandini was accurate in this and in the end her play even gained extra strength. After the Dowland piece she started the *Tarantella* with an energetic tempo. She kept the pace and stayed on track, also with the tricky transitions.

The same applied for the 6/8 swing of the piece. A spectacular end section concluded her performance.

The competition seems to attract young guitarists too. Eda Acilar announced that she would play *Valse* by Bartolomé Calatuyud (1882 - 1973), an *Etude* by Matteo Carcassi (1792 - 1853) and an *Andante* by Ferdinando Carulli (1770 - 1841).

The *Valse* waltzed to the end in a pleasant tempo. The *Etude* by Carcassi appeared a greater challenge, it would have been nice if the melody had gotten slightly more emphasis above the accompaniment. The *Andante* appeared to be the well-known *Andante* by Carulli with the Mozartian middle section. I remember that this piece was my first two-page piece, at least in the setting of Noad in *The Classical Guitar*.

She played it as it was written in the score, with the rests between the chords in eights. Personally, I like it better to extend the bass notes a bit so that the piece becomes more smoothly. Nevertheless, she played the complete piece with intermezzo and da capo and reached the finish in the correct way.

Manuel de Roo played popular music for a change, an instrumental arrangement of a popsong, a piece by Yngwie Malmsteen who uses many classical motives in his electric guitar music and an arrangement of the folk song *Amazing Grace*.

Getting started is awkward under stress conditions, but on the run, he got into the music. In the end, *Amazing Grace* appeared the best piece.

Ivor Bos played a Tango and a piece titled *Merci Arthur*, that sounded like a composition by Piazzolla.

The *Tango* was quite a long piece. Bos succeeded in keeping the dance feeling throughout the piece. *Merci Arthur* had specific Piazzolla elements, like the lyrical middle section. It appeared a challenge for the guitarist, but he kept the tempo and integrated the ornamentation neatly in the music.

Tanja Vermeeren had two pieces on her programme, *Registro* by Antonio Lauro (1917 – 1986) and the ambitious *Barricades Mystérieuses* by François Couperin (1668 - 1733).

Registro is a prelude-like piece in a relatively moderate tempo. That does not imply that it’s an easy piece, because the composer programs arpeggios that extend over the complete fingerboard up and down vice versa. In the beginning this looked awkward, but when she proceeded she found her way and recovered.

Barricades Mystérieuses originally is a harpsichord piece with a characteristic swinging bass line and a strongly syncopated melody. These aspects require all attention to perform them at the same time. The bass line swing was OK, the syncopation was less convincing. It was a pity that in the end of the piece a bit of haste jumped in.

The last candidate was Jeanette Couvée. She stayed in the Spanish/Latin mood with *Granadina* by Daniel Fortea (1878 - 1953) and a piece of which I unfortunately could understand neither title nor composer.

Granadina brought a clearly Spanish atmosphere, a sad melody with accompaniment by *Rasgueado* chords in a rhythm that resembled a *Bulerías*. It sounded well. Her second piece resembled a *Milonga*. We heard an emotional melody that was well supported by the tango-like rhythm section.

The amateur competition was over. Of course, being a participant as well, I was curious about the results.

Concert Simon Cheong

Before dinner we got a nice piece of music to get hungry!

The guitarists from the Far East are *terra incognita* for me, so it was a lucky coincidence that this afternoon we were introduced to Simon Cheong, a fine guitarist from Malaysia. When he hit the stage I noticed that he paid tribute to the ensemble of the owners of Kulturhaus NIHZ, he appeared *Not Dressed in Black*, but in a nicely coloured silk blouse.

His colourful outfit was representative for his programme, we did not get heavy and gloomy contemporaries, but pleasant guitar music for enjoyment.

He started with three works by the Argentine Maximo Diego Pujol (*1957). *Preludio Tristan* brought a musical reverie with a passionate climax, two local dance forms pictured a joyful party in sunny Buenos Aires.

Cheong did not forget the music from his own country. *Tanah Pusaka* and *Putera Puteri* appeared interesting melodies that you do not hear often in Europe. The next piece fooled me, although it sounded Eastern, it was no Malaysian melody but an impression by Cheong's guitar teacher John Duarte (1919-2004), called *Variations on an Indonesian Song*. Well composed and played likewise!

Time for the Spanish sound in the form of an arrangement of the joyful piano piece *Serenata Españ*

ola by Joaquín Malats (1872-1912). Malats took care for the Spanish idiom, Simon Cheong took care for a swinging performance of this piece.

Playing the *English Suite* by John Duarte, Cheong made a tribute to his master. I really enjoyed hearing this piece in a live performance again, because after Duarte's death his music virtually disappeared from the programmes. With *Prelude*, *Folk Song* and *Round Dance* the guitarist showed that Duarte made a nice contribution to the guitar repertoire. I got inspired to look for *16 English Folk Songs* and *40 Community Songs* –all arrangements by Duarte- on my Attic!

The Argentine composer José Luis Merlin (*1952) does not appear often on programmes either, so I was glad that Simon Cheong played *Suite del Recuerdo* this afternoon. Many guitarists know the first movement *Evocación*, but Simon Cheong made with his skilful play the clear statement that the rest of the suite is beautiful too!

Nice and enjoyable concert!

Concert Duo SoloNeo

According to tradition the prize giving of the amateur competition is just before the evening concert of the second day. Undersigned was surprised to get a prize again! Final result 1. Filip Optolowicz, 2. Nandini Sudhir en 3. Myself. Winners congratulations! Mr. Cactus, a well-known children's TV personality in Holland in the past would have said*: "Applause for yourself!"*

Duo SoloNeo is a flute/guitar ensemble consisting of Ekaterina Matiushenkova (flute) en Alexei Belousov (guitar). Besides guitar playing, Belousov is also occupied with composing, we could hear a few examples tonight.

I have been in a flute/guitar ensemble myself for some time, so I have a tender spot for this combination. With regards to playing volume a flute can be quite loud, so that's hard work for the guitarist.

The programme started with Johann Sebastian Bach, an ingeniously ornamented *Largo* from *Triosonate BWV529*. After playing this, the players were nicely warmed up for the flute/guitar version of the violin/guitar piece *Sonata Concertata* by Niccolò Paganini. With joyful and well-polished teamwork Duo SoloNeo paid tribute to the famous Italian.

Time for arrangements of the rich collection of Russian folk songs, made by Belousov himself. *Misty Morning* was an enjoyable flute solo with a modest supportive role for the guitar. The well-known *Coachman, do not rush your horses* became a joyful song with complex melodic caprioles.

The Mexican Ernesto Garcia de Leon signed for *Rumba El Viejo*. After a quiet start, Duo SoloNeo turned the piece into an exuberant and speedy dance that was hard to keep up even by the carnival dancers from Rio de Janeiro!

Yesterday I missed them in the concert by Rowland/Mesirca, the *Siete Canciones Populares* by Manuel de Falla, but today a few of them were programmed by SoloNeo. *Nana* keeps touching me with its deeply sad melody. The performance by SoloNeo had that effect indeed!

The *Suite for Flute and Guitar* was a tribute to Belousov's teacher Victor Kozlov. It appeared a contemporary piece with a catchy melody and a dazzling finale. The arrangement of Oleg Kiselev's *Tango Etude* actually became a piece of tango that would have made Piazzolla proud. Right after the tango, SoloNeo played two compositions by Belousov, the sad but beautiful *Tombeau* and the melancholic waltz *Valse-Hommage.*

It took the audience a little while to get used to the flute/guitar sound, but soon the atmosphere became joyful and fruitful. This had a positive effect on the artists, they got really inspired. The famous *Le Coucou* by Louis-Claude Daquin (1694-1772) brought a very energetic little bird on stage! Two Japanese Songs by Kosaku Yamada formed a worthy end of the recital.

Well, the audience did not want to see them leave yet. With enthusiast applause it coaxed two encores, amongst them the well-known *Humoreske* by Antonin Dvorak (1841 – 1904) that obviously was a favourite of the flautist.

Concert Gaëlle Solal

Some concerts do not merely stand out as a consequence of fine play and a well-chosen repertoire, but also shine in playing fun and atmosphere. Al these qualifications concerned the concert by the French guitarist Gaëlle Solal.

She walked into the hall as a *Steh-gitarristin* (translates as stand-up guitarist), playing a *Largo* by Johann Sebastian Bach. When she passed my place I immediately noticed the beautiful sound of her guitar.

Her next piece became a daring exploit by Bach, the *Chaconne* from the *Violin Partita BWV1004*. Before she started playing, she told about the circumstances that Bach experienced when he composed this piece. He had been on the road and on his return, he heard that his wife Maria Barbara had passed away and had already been buried. He loved her dearly, so it was a terrible shock. From this story, I finally understood the pain and grief that I use to hear from the start of the middle section of the *Chaconne*. This *Chaconne* is a *Tombeau*!

Gaëlle Solal played the piece with keen virtuosity in a beautiful natural wave motion. At the same time she made ample room for the emotion of the middle section. It touched me, now that I know something about the background maybe even more.

For the remaining pieces, Gaëlle Solal showed herself as an artist with her announcements too. She had a story or anecdote with every piece, which I really liked.

With the traditional Turkish theme *Drama Köprüsü* for instance, she told the story about the Turkish Robin Hood with his adventures. The story illustrated the piece with its Arabic sound beautifully.

The piece *20 Abril* by Maurice Ohana (1913-1992) had a background story too, about its subject that is one of the *Caprichos* of the Spanish painter Francisco Goya, titled *The sleep of Reason creates monsters*. This painting shows what happens if people stop thinking and for instance follow a mad ideology. Gaëlle Solal played a violent piece with exciting accents and deadly silences.

As a contrast to his sharply committed music, Solal played *Torre Bermeja* by *Isaac Albéniz* (1860 – 1909). A piece of warm passion with a view of a sunrise that illuminates the gates of the Alhambra in Granada with its first light.

With a hasty “excuse me” she dashed out of the hall. Time passed for quite a while, at least too long for a quick bathroom visit, but then she dashed back to the stage in a nicely coloured dress that had replaced her statelier outfit. The bright colours of her dress would reflect in the music that followed.

The music by Egberto Gismonti, Ernesto Nazareth and Garoto, three represenatives of the Latin sound in guitar music, would fill the remainder of the programme. *Palcao* by Gismonti appeared to be a tender serenade that was bound to tell a love story. *Breijero* by Nazareth was a piece of mischievous humour on a swing with a touch of jazz, and *Agua e Vinho* by Gismonti became a meditative *recitativo* of a great secret. Finally, the *Lamento do morro* by Garoto appeared a bit of sunshine despite its title.

Why can I describe this music in images? Well, the guitarist played them in her own personality, with a tremendous performance joy, a warm smile, a mischievous wink, or an expression of introvert tenderness with her eyes closed. A wonderful woman in service of wonderful music!

It was quite clear that the others of the audience had sensed this intense joy too, because everyone did his and her best to blow the roof off the place. A perfect atmosphere for encores, Gaëlle Solal returned three times to play another jewel. I heard a Brazilian dance like I have heard on a CD by Badi Assad, she played an emotional piece in memory of a French poet that died in the trenches of World War One and she concluded the feast with a little polka and a large smile!

A bright and pleasant concert that will remain in my memories for a long time!

Day Three

Lorenzo Micheli

Master Class Simon Cheong

This morning I had a pleasant meeting with Simon Cheong, one of the prominent representatives of the guitar world in Malaysia.

As a subject of the master class I had the idea to do something with the finish of *Vaterlandsblüthen Nr. 2* by Mertz. In the end, I did not reach the final measure, the first line already offered sufficient material to fill the hour. Improvements came down to accuracy, patience and emphasis.

Accuracy and patience are brother and sister, patience is the basis for accuracy. Yet how do you counter the pressure to perform that urges you to finish the piece as quickly as possible? A weak spot indeed!

The right emphasis, that implies the right effort at the right time. So, no heavy accents on ornaments or upbeats, just stay on the beat. At times, I do have the inclination to apply too much pressure on less important things!

Homework will be a never-ending struggle against my impatience.

Stairway to Heaven

Why did I include the title of this smash-hit from 1971 (the year that I was listening to Radio Veronica, a well-known offshore radio station, being a teenager) in this report of a guitar festival?

OK, Led Zeppelin had guitarists in the band, like so many other rock bands, and the chord progression of *Stairway to Heaven* rapidly developed into a plucking classic for song festivals at school and meetings at the camp fire. The song did not sound only in the open, by the way, it was a much-played track at smoky and hardly lit class parties, with girls that were very interesting and intriguing, but very scary if they became cloooose!

The lyrics of the song are quite cryptic, and many people have puzzled about their meaning. A little investigation on the Internet showed me all kinds of spectacular explanations ranging between vague spiritual concepts, an accusation against the glitter of the music industry and satanic rituals! ;-) I did not try to play the song in reverse order yet! Well, in this section I will not deal with the lyrics of the piece, even though I can utilize a few lines.

The title came to my mind while I was busy helping to carry the ingredients for dinner from the kitchen to the dining room.

During this festival, the *Stairway* was a number of stairs that you had to climb or descend in Kulturhaus NIHZ between kitchen and dining room. It is a real stairway, because the stairwell extends from ground floor to attic, if you close your eyes a little it almost becomes a spiral staircase. During the festival, music was Heaven, nothing more and nothing less. So in this case *Stairway to Heaven* is *Walking the Stairs towards Music*.

The *Stairway* of Kulturhaus NIHZ was the main route for all volunteers that contributed considerably to all activities behind the screens of this festival. The faithful team that amongst others takes care for wine and dine and the processing of the dishes of fifty guests.

This year, the members of the team of volunteers were Fred Rootveld (photographer, barkeeper and guardsman for the cashbox), Angie Rootveld (specialist soup, meatballs and pasta, plus cooking management), Pallavi Sudhir from India (for the spicy spices), Evelyn Cheong from Malaysia (for the special treats of the Malaysian kitchen and, let us not forget, the curry), Henk Olden (the handyman for the cook and active Spanish background musician at the bar), Martin Olden (same function as his twin brother and very active for the competition management) and myself (main function stairway transport manager with food and tableware kitchen-dining room vice versa). And I will not forget all people that gave a hand spontaneously.

I have made frequent use of the stairway in the three days of the festival. On this pilgrimage along the stairs I heard music everywhere. Every ascent and descent was accompanied by guitar sounds and a casual tone of another instrument. If it was silent, I used to whistle a tune myself to keep the pans and crates with tableware in balance.

In this way, I overheard fragments of Alberto Mesirca's practice for the concert with David Rowland. While I was labouring to get a heavy and hot pan of soup downstairs, I heard the bright sound of *Centone di Sonate* by Paganini. Taking a walk around the house with a pile of plates in my crate, I noticed the sound of an enthusiast flautist. At a certain moment, I slowed down a bit with my box with tinkling glassware and listened quietly as soon as I heard Gaëlle Solal practicing her *Chaconne* by Bach, just at the moment this music reached an emotional apex. With all this music, I did not even mention the finalists that were practicing all over the building in order to achieve top performance next Sunday.

The music accompanied me with every ascent and descent of the stairs in all kinds of keys and atmospheres. Consequentially I did not notice the sweat on my back and the stiff muscles in my arms. I just pricked-up my ears. *Stairway to Heaven!*

Still a lot of readers will wonder what this Led Zeppelin hit is doing in this story. I will quote the relevant lines of the lyrics.

And if you listen very hard
The tune will come to you at last
When all are one and one is all

Listening is a major activity in this festival, without listeners there will be no players. If you listen carefully, you will notice that the good atmosphere amongst participants and volunteers make the tone of the music, that's the tune, that's the teamwork we all are doing here. This beautiful atmosphere causes us as individual persons to feel one and connected for a while.

That really rocks!!

Theatre Sport

A sense of freedom on stage is an important tool for a guitarist and for the musician in general. Nothing is as stressful and annoying to see an abyss gaping between you on stage and the audience in the hall, particularly if the performance is awkward.

The Workshop Theatre Sport learns you to cope with the unexpected and to react adequately and foremost in a creative way. Because the workshop concerns freedom on stage, the stage is the setting of this workshop.

Subjects in the workshop were a group concentration exercise, a vocal role play and a musical role play. The first exercise helped to react spontaneously, the second subject was improvisation practice in a spoken dialogue, including a mind dialogue and the third exercise learned to react on situations with music.

The exercises were fun and instructive and maybe a bit confronting too if you don't know what to do or say. The constructive and encouraging atmosphere made up for that. Of course, the same applies for Theatre Sport as for physical sport: You have to build condition and skills to get better.

Master Class Gaëlle Solal

The master class with Gaëlle Solal had elements of the same fun as last night's concert. I had *Onder een Linde Groen* on the stand and wondered how you implement the atmosphere in the mood of the style period. I asked, because she did some very interesting things in the *Chaconne* the night before. This subject appeared a bit too extensive for the hour, so I just played the piece for further comment.

Her first remark concerned the sound of my finger nails. So, I got an instruction in manicure! Concerning manicure, I have a kind of history with master classes…

On the Twente Guitar Festival 2010 the German guitarist Frank Bungarten made an attempt to bring my nails to a professional level. This went wrong and also filed off something from my playing fun and motivation on that day.

The next year Zoran Dukic proposed a remarkable method to achieve a correct nail shape and he did so with a bit of humour. He used a lighter to heat a teaspoon, and the hot teaspoon would form my nail. He suggested to abstain from this method in public places. I guess you know why!

The next year after the next (so in 2012) the Canadian guitarist Laura Young enthusiastically came up with a strong simplification of my nail form that I still use today because it is easy to memorize: just follow the tips of the fingers. Today Gaëlle Solal made the finishing touch with some Micro-Mesh sandpaper with a fine result. After you give the nail the shape of the fingertip a small levelling of the nail shape at the top at the right place prevents the string from snapping.

Nails are a hot item amongst guitarists, so the audience flocked in, took a good look and made all kinds of photographs to support their own nail care rituals. I made some photos myself, to memorize the result, because the sound was much better.

The last hint concerned a calculation trick for the optimal alternating stroke. The hour was gone before I knew. She's a wonderful person!

Finals Competition Cat.1

According to tradition, the finals of the professional's competition is on the Sunday afternoon, the third day of the festival. A lot of audience had shown up!

In accordance with the draw, Henrique Almeida set the ball rolling with *Fandango* from *Tres Piezas* by Joaquín Rodrigo and *Sonate* by Leo Brouwer

Almeida played the *Fandango* slightly too hasty, but had a strong sonorous tone in the melody passages. It became an exultant performance. In my personal opinion the tempo of *Fandango y Boleros* was a bit too high. Yet he succeeded in keeping the tension in the music, so its story became clear. With *Sarabande de Scriabin* he played what the music dictated, mysteriously and solemn. *La Toccata de Pasquini* got a dazzling tempo with exciting contrast in the arpeggios. Not a bad start of the finals!

Jacob Bangsø closed up seamlessly to the previous player with two movements from *Tres Piezas* by Joaqin Rodrigo, again the *Fandango*, but now supplemented with the last movement, the *Zapateado*. Maybe playing the same piece is risky, but it is possible that you win the comparison! His second piece was an old acquaintance, the *Sonata Op. 47* by Alberto Ginastera (1916 - 1983).

Concerning speed, Bangsø surpassed Almeida with the *Fandango.* Additionally, he distinguished himself with a fresh approach and some calculated risk in the runs. A cycler's risk, for instance on the descent of the Tourmalet you have to cycle close to the abyss to gain maximal speed.

Right away he played a likewise dazzling *Zapateado*. I was thinking: "Wow, as an audience you want to catch your breath too!" This piece sounded fresh and energetic too and the risky descent of the Tourmalet just went on, but it did yield the player a head start.

The *Sonata Op. 47* is an old acquaintance for me since 2006. I have heard finalists winning the race with this piece, so I was curious. The *Escordio* was powerful and full of contrast. In the *Scherzo* Bangsø added some extra spice to the piece, wide dynamic range, convincing effects and a speed with the effective risk we already heard before. He did not pull his punches on the guitar! In the *Canto* Bangsø took a breath and played a pleasant quiet impression that was abruptly interrupted by the acid end. The *Finale* became the fiery conclusion with an original interpretation of some sections. The audience reacted with an enthusiastic applause, somebody had played and excellent final round!

I have heard Jacob Bangsø a few times before on the competitions in Nordhorn and Enschede. So, I did notice that his play has remarkably grown in all these years. I guess that he will be a stayer in the guitar scene.

Jinsae Kim had three pieces on his programme. With some effort, I heard that he would play a *Sonate* by Domenico Scarlatti, something that sounded like *Piece en Forme de Fantasia* and as a conclusion the often played *Zapateado* from *Tres Piezas* by Joaquín Rodrigo. My conclusion was a bit, that you should include your announcements in your rehearsals too, because an audience that knows where it is all about, will listen better.

Jinsae Kim already had played the *Sonata* in the preliminaries. His somewhat hasty interpretation did not convince me. The second piece turned out to be a romantic piece with a warm tone that reminded me of Mertz. The tender prelude soon evolved in a final section in Bolero rhythm. Fun piece!

Jinsae Kim made all efforts to surpass the *Zapateado* by Bangsø and took off even faster than the Danish guitarist. Unfortunately, this caused haste to step in and some passages completely lost their clarity because of the excessive speed.

Robbert Vermeulen paid homage to the music from the past ages, *Sir John Smith his Almain* and the famous *Fantasia* by John Dowland and the *Fantasia Op. 9* by Luigi Legnani.

He played the Renaissance piece with capo on the second fret and the G string tuned to F sharp. In the *Almain*, Vermeulen added a number of original *ritenutos* and made a pleasant wave movement with his phrasing. In the *Fantasia,* he made a perfect start with the theme and played the elaborations with a clear voicing and interesting phrasing.

Legnani, well, that's Opera! Vermeulen expressed the drama in the composition with all effects in an exemplary manner and made maximal use of the rests in the piece to stress the tension in the piece.

I had met Robbert Vermeulen in competitions in this region too, and also in this case I noticed that there is a clear progression in his play and musical eloquence.

There was the last candidate, Andrija Lazarevic. He provided interesting material for comparison with the repeat of *Fantasia Op. 9* by Luigi Legnani. He added an unknown piece, a nice tango by Astor Piazzolla.

Lazarevic put more of the spirit of the opera in the *Fantasia* than Vermeulen had done, particularly in the lyrical passages his play was more "vocal" and singing. His tempo in the runs and bridges was dazzling, yet the individual notes remained clear. In comparison, I also found that Lazarevic's performance was more transparent and it was breathing more, particularly in the *Arias* between the virtuoso sections

The Piazzolla piece had the passion that you expect from compositions like this. Exultant dynamics and a nice quiet atmosphere with effective vibrato made a tasteful alternation.

The finals were completed. My thoughts about the winner? Well, I was indecisive about Bangsø en Lazarevic. With the first player I was enthusiastic about the interpretation and the

technique. The second player enticed me with his musical depth. To be fair I had a preference for the latter.

Tough job for the jury!

Concert Lorenzo Micheli

After a bit of a puzzle, the jury had decided. The differences in points were extremely small, so the second and third prize winners got some extra prize money. The sequence became 1) Jakob Bangsø, 2) Andrija Lazarevic, 3) Robbert Vermeulen, 4) Jinsae Kim and 5) Henrique Almeida. Gentlemen, congratulations!

On the last evening, the stage was the domain for Lorenzo Micheli. I had heard him play in the past, as a soloist and as a partner in a guitar duo together with Matteo Mela. At both occasions, I had enjoyed the concert immensely, so I had some expectations tonight. I would not be disappointed.

Lorenzo Micheli perfectly satisfied my need for background stories, with every piece he had a fact or anecdote without being long-winded, the major section of his performance was dedicated to music.

The *Hommage a Chopin* by Alexandre Tansman was the first piece of the evening. I remembered that Justyna Sobzcak, last year's winner, had played the same piece. Micheli started with a solemn and sonorous *Prelude* and played it with emotion. The following *Nocturne* did not merely give voice to dark and nightly sentiments, but contained a joyful note too. The *Valse Romantique* made clear why the piece was dedicated to Chopin, the waltz sounded very Chopinesque.

Lorenzo Micheli is a renowned performer of the music by Mario Castelnuovo Tedesco, so a large part of the programme was dedicated to this composer. As a start, the *Rondo Op. 129* joyfully danced along with a catchy refrain and complex couplets.

The *Sonata Op. 77* had a story around the guitar master Andrés Segovia. Segovia wanted Tedesco to compose a *Sonata* for him, to be specific an homage to Tedesco's fellow Italian Luigi Boccherini. Tedesco did not like the idea and composed a *Sonatina* without dedication. Slightly arrogantly, Segovia refused the piece without looking at its contents, because a *Sonatina* was a piece for musical amateurs and not for the great master that he felt himself to be. Tedesco made a little trick, he renamed the piece *Sonata, Hommage a Boccherini*. Segovia was pulled the wool over his eyes and he had quite a job rehearsing the piece!

The Sonata was more extended than the classical three movement form. With *Allegro con Spirito*, Micheli treated us to an accurately played joyful introduction. *Andantino quasi canzone* did credit to its name, I heard a ballad with a beautiful sonorous sound. *Tempo di Minuetto* was the only movement that had a remote relation to Boccherini because of its short and elegant form. The fanfare passed by in the *Vivo ed Energico*.

Particularly in this Sonata, Lorenzo Micheli stood out with his perfectly finished and pleasant playing style, a guitarist and musician optima forma.

After the break Micheli stepped up with a few movements from one of Tedesco's extended works, the *Caprichos de Goya*. The 24 pieces of this opus are inspired by the etches of the painter Francisco Goya (1746 - 1828) that exhibit quite some social criticism on the Spanish society in his days.

First Tedesco introduces the painter in the first scetch *Capricho 1: Francisco Goya y Lucientes, pintor*. Micheli played the portrait broad and defiantly. Capricho 12 is a charge against the cruel policies of the Inquisition, the sketch *No hubo remedio* pictures a woman that is tied on the back of a donkey to be carried away to the stake, and the people are just spectators. Micheli played the main theme of this *Capricho –Dies irae*, the *Day of Wrath*, the ill-famous theme form masses for the dead- in a really sinister way. *Capricho 24 Suena de mentira y de la inconstancia* pictures cheating and lies. This last *Capricho* of the 24 formed an impressing finale.

Lorenzo Micheli left Tedesco behind for a moment and played an intermezzo, *Piece en Forme de Fantaisie* by Pierre de Breville (1861-1949). A véééry virtuosi piece, but I found it way less interesting than the *Caprichos* and the other works by Tedesco on this evening.

Fortunately, Micheli came back with a trio of dansant Caprichos, *Nr. 13 Quién más rendido,* depicting a clumsy lover, *Nr. 20 Obsequio a el maestro*, that represents a tart submission to a teacher and the famous *Nr. 28 El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*, an image of fear for what happens if people stop thinking reasonably. Again, Micheli came up with tremendous play in which he showed himself a master of this repertoire.

Standing Ovation! This enthusiasm cause Michel to play two encores, *Cancion del Lladre* by Miguel Llobet and a charming arrangement of a pop ballad.

Recreation

The last notes of the evening concerts usually were not the end of the festivities. That is caused by the fact that Kulturhaus NIHZ has a recreation room with a genuine Activity Centre for Guitarists, to be specific an electro-acoustic guitar with worn strings (so you don't have to feel guilty if you make smashing chords), a Cajon for the rhythm section and a little amplifier setup in order to adapt the sound level to the one of the audience.

Henk Olden used to present the example with some Flamenco music in which the song *La Espera* was a sign to the other players to apply for the open stage. I took it for a while to practice my competition pieces by heart and other players brought their own pieces and pop songs. Even though we missed a pop- and jazz guitar tiger like Thu Le last year, it was pleasant!

Cosiness does not watch the clock, so most nights went on till the early morning, Bobby withstood this assault on his night's rest with pride! In this way Kulturhaus NIHZ offered a nice piece of *Apres Musique* on the Guitar Festival Nordhorn!

Yet on the Sunday, the festival was almost history again. After a hearty goodbye from all people that made the festival into a feast, I walked through the dark Rasenstrasse to the spot where I had parked my car.

It was over again, but next year we will return. GFN 2015!