

# Kruisbrink 65

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Long ago, the age of sixty-five was a milestone, or rather the end of a working life. At that age, old-age social security and pension often started at the same time.

When you just start working, 65 seems like an ocean of time away. That is why the personnel officer of my company said reassuringly when I applied: "Our retirement age is 60 (that was at Philips when I started, ed.), but most of us practice early retirement at 55." In other words, you could grow old quite young and enjoy your rest sprightly.

Times have changed, due to the increase of retirement age, in the Netherlands 65 is no longer a milestone. The French protest *en masse* against the fact that 65 threatens to become their retirement milestone. Still, no matter how you look at it: 65 remains a milestone since the Dutch politician "Father" Drees initiated the General Old Age Pensions Act (AOW) of 1957.

The music collective Muzinder had that 65-milestone in mind when they organized a festival for guitarist and composer Annette Kruisbrink, one of their members. With more than 400 compositions she became one of the most prominent guitar composers in the world with a wide and varied repertoire that is not limited to guitar alone. All this in addition to her career as a skilled and passionate guitarist and teacher.

The festival consists of four events, a youth competition for instrumentalists and three concerts, featuring her compositions in the programme.

I decide to visit the day program. I know Annette personally and I think it would be nice to visit an event again after years of corona silence. It is also a great opportunity to write

another festival report. So I keep my notebook with me. My site, the DOS Amigos Homepage, is currently under construction, so you can find it in my blog.

Fortunately, the public transport strike had just ended, so that I was able to travel the Hengelo-Zwolle route by train in good time. A nice test for my alarm clock that, now that I'm retired, doesn't get that much training anymore.

## Concours

After a walk from the station I can join the competition audience (a little too late). The room is festively decorated and the guidance is excellent, including the sympathetic "ring master" who introduces the candidates and puts them at ease with a touch of humour.

I am surprised about the large number of flautists participating. The guitarists are in the minority.

The youngest candidate Lisanne kicks off with *Barcarola a Due* for flute and piano. She performs the piece with its easy rippling corner movements and a middle section with more wave action surprisingly well. Well finished playing and a good performance with the faster passages. All this with good support from the piano accompaniment.

The young pianist Sofia performs the piece *Moppie*, a composition from the time Annette started composing for piano. I myself know this piece from her guitar collection *Access Permitted*. The play is about the death of a cat. Sofia creates a nice contrast between the sad part and the more cheerful memory of the pet.

Fem also plays the *Barcarola a Due*. Involuntarily I will compare. She plays the piece a little faster, making it technically more difficult. However, she knows how to capture the essence of the piece very well.

Sanne and Evita would play as a guitar duo. However, an unfortunate fall from the bike caused a broken thumb, so Arlette Ruelens had to fill in. Of course I hope that the thumb heals well and will not interfere with playing the guitar any further.

The program features four pieces from the collection *20 Progressive Duets for Classical Guitar*. From experience I know that this is a great bundle to practice playing together. There are all kinds of useful matters for ensemble playing, such as playing a tie, playing exactly against each other, taking over each other, etc. One of the pieces, *Like the Mountain King* is a nod to Grieg. The pieces are easy to follow, a casual note that chooses a different direction does little to change that.

To play the last pieces before the break, a whole ensemble of candidates under 13 years of age shows up. Fifteen guitarists strong is the guitar orchestra led by van Malena Ludwig. I listen to two pieces with a Latin American atmosphere: *Danza Maya* and *Tango Argentino*. It is nice to hear how broad the sound of the pieces becomes when there is a large ensemble playing it. The conductor herself participates as *Stehgitarristin*.

After a short break, it is time for the candidates of the category 13 years and older. I am surprised about the popularity of the *Rootveld Klezmer Suite* for guitar and melody instrument, a personal homage to the organizers of the Nordhorn Guitar Festival.

Hilde plays the cheerful *Bobby's Freylekh* and the rhythmically difficult *Levi's Hora*. Technically it sounds well. Just add a little bit of swing and then the audience will clap along. I think there are difficult time signatures, especially in the *Hora*.

Eline continues with *Sanna's Chassene* and *Sarah's Nigh*. The first piece is virtuoso, the technique is demanding. The second piece demands depth in the sad melody and the *cappella* passages. It is nice to hear that the performer takes the liberty to explore those passages in depth.

Bob plays *Filiae Filiae*, one of Annette Kruisbrink's early compositions. Involuntarily I think of the grammar exercises of Latin at the Gramma School. The piece includes a number of atmospheric sketches, each with their own challenges. This makes the piece exciting for the player. It strikes me how beautifully Bob can play softly, because that is an art indeed! The ringmaster wittily remarks that the player turns pages right on time, yet does not take a look at the paper. I understand that very well from experience: Safety First!

*Barcarola a Due* also returns to the 13 and older category as a consequence of the teamwork of Anne and Eline. You can clearly hear that they are attuned to each other as a duo, yet they also play their own individual game. That makes the result compelling. Anne whips up Eline on the piano, creating an active interplay that is interesting for an audience. You can tell from their playing how much you can learn in a few years. Well done!

Marieke is the last and oldest candidate of the competition. She has composed her own songs based on pieces by Annette Kruisbrink. The result is a remarkable mix of a guitar solo piece and voice. The pieces *Bird Song* and *Magic Trix* both come from the *Access Permitted* collection.

What strikes me in particular is that she makes contact with the audience. The remarkable combination of voice and music, at least for me, clearly conveys an emotion to which I respond. Annette's music takes on an added dimension that touches me. Well, that is actually the role and intention of a musician, making contact with the audience and touching it.

I am very curious how Marieke will develop further!

In the end, the winners of the competition will be Lianne (category under 13 years old) and Marieke (category 13 -25 years old). I do note that the differences with the other prize winners are small.

## Lunch Concert

The break after the competition brings me a pleasant surprise. I meet some old acquaintances from past guitar festivals from years ago. The meeting adds immediate fun to the event.

I had already noticed that the lunchtime concert was sold out when I attempted to buy a ticket at the venue. I had already reconciled myself to a long lunch break when one of those acquaintances told me that there might be some cards left. So we position ourselves at the card table and, sure enough, we can enter.

The performers are the Turkish guitarist Serhat Bulut and the mandolin chamber orchestra Het Consort conducted by Alex Timmerman with Jan Bartlema as soloist.

Serhat Bulut plays three pieces. The theme/variations piece *Variations, Zilla*, the homage to the pianist and composer Clara Wieck and the clearly contemporary *Toccata*. He shows a clear and solid style of play that reaches well into the back row (where I sit). Personally, *Zilla* appeals to me the most with its combination of classic and contemporary structure. *Toccata* is also interesting with its use of techniques such as tapping and attributes such as a bottleneck.

The Consort plays two pieces, *Dreamtime* and *Alamanda*. To be honest, I had never heard the combination guitar-mandolin orchestra live. I'm used to soloists, I find it surprising to hear how the sounds now get breadth and depth as well, if only because of the positioning of the musicians. In collaboration with Jan Bartlema, the Consort succeeds excellently in unifying the musical idea together.

*Dreamtime* expresses the cultural tension between Western culture and Australian Aboriginal beliefs about dreams. Gradually the conflict disappears and the dream remains.

*Alamanda* is named after an Occitan female troubadour from the 13th century: Alamanda de Castelnau. It was the time when courtly art was in its heyday. The piece consists of a number of *jeu partis*. A *Jeu-parti* is a tightly defined interplay between two troubadours around a dilemma and the ensuing discussion. In this case, the parties are the solo guitarist and the orchestra.

*Alamanda* has its Dutch premiere today. In the piece I hear an interesting combination of medieval and contemporary elements. This way I get associations with a theme such as the medieval *Lamento di Tristano*, but also with pieces such as *Classical Gas* by Mason Williams and *Sunburst* by Andrew York. All of this excellently and attractively played by soloist Jan Bartlema and Het Consort.

Glad I was able to buy a ticket!

## Lais, a Song Cycle

The afternoon program consists of the *Lais, a Song Cycle*, an extensive work for mezzo-soprano, cello, flute and guitar. This is played by the Lais Quartet, which consists of Franka van Essen, vocals, Mirjam Altena, flute, Rivke Toyne – Van der Staak, cello and (on her own anniversary) Annette Kruisbrink, guitar.

The location of the concert requires a short walk through the lively town of Zwolle to the Baptist Church. A special location on Saturday afternoon. I hear that in Zwolle, under the auspices of the Kerken als Podium (A Church as a Stage) foundation, concerts are invariably performed on Saturday afternoons in one of Zwolle's churches in the city centre. A nice initiative.

It takes some juggling with a navigation program on my Smartphone to find the way. In the end, it turns out that my built-in sense of direction works better, partly because it is quite difficult to estimate distances on such a small on-screen map. And sure enough, there too I meet a good acquaintance from the festival time.

I was once present at a try-out of the *Song Cycle Lais*, years ago, that must have been sometime in 2018. I thought it was a very interesting piece at the time, which was inspired by twelfth-century short stories in rhyme by a certain Marie de France. She briefly comes to the fore at the beginning (and at the end) of the piece, just as the painter Francisco Goya briefly comes to the fore in *Caprichos de Goya* by Castelnuovo-Tedesco.

Annette has given a contemporary twist to the lyrics about love, betrayal, affairs and other matters that are not only rampant in the Middle Ages with sharpness and humor. The performance is in English, but the excellent program booklet offers a Dutch translation.

I wonder how the piece has developed over the years. That's why I leave the textbook closed and concentrate on the music. It is nice to see that there is an attentive and focused audience in the church. This way I can also hear the silences that are part of the music.

What is attractive about this composition is that all members of the ensemble are given space in ensemble playing and, from time to time, in solo passages. The mezzo-soprano tells the stories and combines sound with expression, so that the text also gets a background. The other three members form all combinations of ensemble playing for her accompaniment. That makes the whole varied and attractive, so time flies with the piece that lasts more than an hour. I enjoyed it.

After the concert, Annette is rightly put in the spotlight.

Afterwards, we former festival-visitors have a chat in a cafe and then it is time for the return journey.

At the station it turns out that the cancel culture is not limited to opinions, the train to Hengelo that I would have just caught turns out to be cancelled too. Well, then you don't have much use for timetables on the wall. Fortunately, another one goes later in the hour. And so I return home after a nice day of music and meeting.

## Finally

65 was once the milestone to stop working and, according to some, settle behind the geraniums. 😊 In Belgium these plants seem to be *Sanseverias*. Of course I hope Annette doesn't take it literally and just perseveres. That is why I now say: On to the five hundredth composition!

Annette, congratulations!