

Day of the Composer



At the beginning of May I heard about Dag van de Componist (Day of the Composer), which would fall on June 17th this year. I received an invitation from the composer Annette Kruisbrink for a home concert in the context of this event.

That stirred my curiosity. Dag van de Componist is an initiative of the New Music Now foundation, an organization that promotes work by contemporary Dutch composers.

Dag van de Componist includes a large number of concerts and events in various cities. There is even a special train service in an antique commuter train that allows you to enjoy music by contemporary Dutch composers on track. That is very different from the usual earphones and smartphone ballet that you normally encounter between the rails.

In addition, concerts are streamed and the national classical radio station Radio 4 devotes attention to this day and the associated contemporary repertoire throughout the day.

With more than 400 compositions, Annette Kruisbrink has become one of the most prominent contemporary 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.

As a composer, she celebrates Composer's Day in the intimate atmosphere of a home recital.

Travel-to

June 17 turns out to be a beautiful day. Way too beautiful to be stuck in a traffic jam somewhere along the way. That's why my love brings me to Hengelo station on time. There, after purchasing a cup of take-away coffee, I take the train to Zwolle.

Hengelo station always evokes nostalgia in me. I first arrived here in 1976. Eager to study at the then Technische Hogeschool Twente, the technical university in the east of Holland. Motivated to build a life outside the home, but also clearly aware of what I left behind and didn't really want to lose yet. Searching for traces and leaving traces behind, the train played an important role in this. Well, that shunting of tracks is long over, I definitely don't want to leave Twente anymore.

The ride is quiet, the view of Twente and Salland is green and summery and time flies with an e-book on my lap. Before I know it we come to a halt at Zwolle station. A nice walk along the city canal and the parks on the former fortifications takes me to the concert location.

There I wait with a nice cup of tea for the things to come. It is a great opportunity to view the exhibition of paintings by Arlette Ruelens. It is interesting to see how an artist develops over time, playing with colours, seeking new avenues of expression and refining old concepts. Art that lives because the artist does so. A number of works dating between 2020 and 2022 are striking. Fortunately, expression cannot be limited by an imposed lockdown.

Annette Kruisbrink plays own compositions



With her enormous collection of compositions, Annette has plenty of choice. Her programme is called *Short Tracks*, a clear indication that she will be playing short pieces.

The first piece *Fantaisie pour mon Luth* is 40 years old. At that time, she bought an old lute for a dollar at the flea market and started experimenting with it. The result is her composition *Trois Pièces de Style Ancien*. Indeed, the piece shows clear Renaissance characteristics, yet in a contemporary sound.

The counterpart to the *Fantaisie* is *Cube*, a piece from 2023. This tightly played piece consists of six (I hope I counted correctly) fragments repeated four times. Together they form, as it were, a musical cube. It is interesting to hear how the musical lines envelope a space in this way.

Oda a Pablo Neruda (2021) is a multi-movement work, inspired by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1904 - 1973). He died under suspicious circumstances after the fall of the rule of president Salvador Allende, which started the sad period of Pinochet's tyranny. In his work *Las Odas Elementales* he wrote odes, poems of praise, on the most curious subjects. Kruisbrink took a number of titles and wrote music to those poems.

Oda a la Guitarra -Ode to the Guitar- is a dark piece, full of tense relaxation, the tranquillity is threatening in nature. *Oda al Colibri* -Ode to the Hummingbird- is a cheerful virtuoso arpeggio/tremolo piece that reminds me a bit of *El Colibri* by Sagreras. *Oda a un Reloj en la*

Noche - Ode to a Bell in the Night - clearly imitates the sound of a clock striking the midnight hours. It is remarkable that the impurity that you sometimes hear with a bell is also reflected in the piece.

Oda a una Estrella -Ode to a Star- gives a light-hearted and beautiful image of the firmament. *Oda a la Tristeza* - Ode to Sadness - hides the detail in a broad harmony with covert melody and thus expresses the sadness. *Oda al Atomo* -Ode to the Atom- strikes me as a cheerful movement of electrons around the core, with regular energy jumps.

Oda a las Cosas Rotas - Ode to broken things – gets a direct expression by means of broken chords, with dissonances reinforcing the cracks. After all, *Oda al Presente* -Ode to the Present- comes across as hectic and dazzling as I sometimes experience the current time of life.

A Day in May is dedicated to the birth of a girl who came into the world last May. The piece starts expectantly, takes shape in Oriental sounds and ends with a special interval, the tone in which a baby says mama for the first time in almost every language.

Jimnastics (2017) was dedicated to the composer and guitarist Jim ten Boske. At the time he taught popular music and jazz at the conservatory in Enschede. The piece is structured as a solid workout. This is clearly visible in the hand positions. Pumping Nylon in a nutshell.

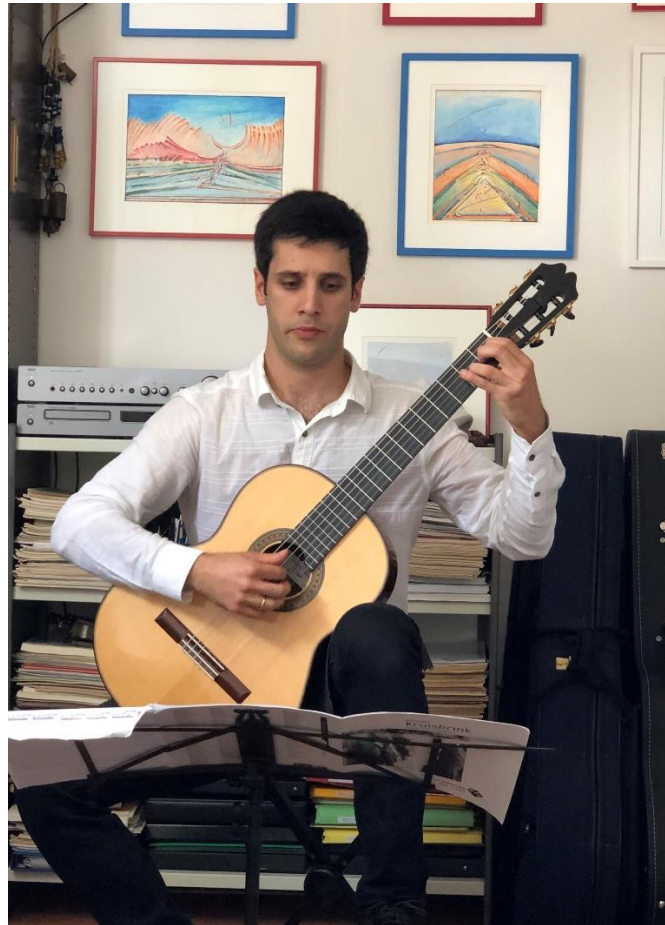
Oración Sefardi (2019) is a musical impression of life in the time of the Sephardic Jews in Spain. They lived there in relative peace until they were expelled in the *Reconquista*. The music clearly has Spanish-Arabic roots and for a moment I hear a theme that seems to come straight from that time. An attractive piece.

Left Hand Interlude (2020) is a piece for a graduating student guitar who injured his right hand at the time of the examination. With a capo, the fingerboard is split into two parts, enabling all kinds of interesting effects. With tapping, legatos, bowing and percussion, the left hand gets a lot to do. The candidate passed with this piece...

Homenaje a Paco de Lucía, the name says it all, is dedicated to the innovative flamenco guitarist Paco de Lucía (1947 - 2014). It is one of Kruisbrink's early compositions (1983) that was created during a stay in a student flat in Delft where you could make yourself more comfortable on the floor than on the furniture. She uses the five-note flamenco tremolo, so the little finger is added to the game. Technically advanced! The piece nicely indicates where De Lucía was innovative, with some jazzy chords here and there and surprising twists that you don't encounter in traditional flamenco.

In addition to the regular program, Annette plays *The Bat Cave* from 2021, an interesting programmatic piece about an exciting journey through a cave full of bats. Despite the attempts to pass the cave unnoticed, the bats wake up anyway. A stick with a rubber ball helps to give voice to the screeching and squeaking of the bats. An imaginative piece.

Serhat Bulut plays Kruisbrink, Domeniconi and Balkanski



After a delicious lunch with home-made sandwiches, it is time for the next part of the program. Guitarist Serhat Bulut plays works by Annette Kruisbrink, Carlo Domeniconi and Rossen Balkanski. I had already become acquainted with his playing at the Kruisbrink65 festival.

Striking about his playing is his tone, the excellent finish and his dynamics. He knows how to dose tension and relaxation in the music in such a way that you as a listener become curious about what is coming and draws your full attention.

The first four pieces are composed by Annette Kruisbrink. He starts with *Variations*, a piece from 1989. A true showcase of complex techniques and sounds. Bulut's play during this piece is exciting and compelling.

Zilia is subtitled *In memoriam Clara Schumann*, after the pianist and composer Clara Schumann-Wieck (1819 - 1896) who was called Zilia by intimates. The 2018 piece is based on use of the letters of names to compose motifs. In this way almost traditionally classical passages alternate with more contemporary idioms. That makes the piece interesting.

Bulut plays *The Bat Cave* in his own way. I like to compare the interpretations, they both appeal to me. The rubber ball looked a little different, but the bats squeak just as well nevertheless.

Toccata (2014) is a particularly virtuoso piece in which the special effects with a glass that functions as a bottleneck provide interesting additions in sound. A piece with a considerable technical challenge!

Variations on an Anatolian Folk Song by Carlo Domeniconi is a piece in which I also hear some characteristics of his famous *Koyunbaba*. In order to keep hearing the original theme in the variations, you have to stay on your toes with all that complexity! Nevertheless, an interesting excursion through a varied soundscape.

I have already become acquainted with many contemporary composers, attending various competitions and festivals, but I had never heard anything from the Bulgarian Rossen Balkanski. Learned something again! His piece *Rachenitza* once again shows how complex Balkan dance rhythms can be. I wouldn't be able to count along that fast myself. A very nice feature of this piece is the swinging bass lines that dance enthusiastically under the melodies.

Travel-back

Everything must come to an end, including the program for the Dag van de Componist. It was a great day with interesting music and a good dose of fun. Nice to be there.

When I walk back to the station, the town of Zwolle has come to life in a mostly summer outfit. Boats on the canal, sunbathing on the sides. Cheerfulness everywhere.

I'm lucky with the train (I remember that last spring at Kruisbrink65 my train suddenly appeared to be cancelled) and I half-absently listen to the chat of a couple in which they remember their tumultuous love-life. 😊 Well, stories enough if you have an eye and an ear for them.

In this case, too, my e-book and a glimpse of the summer outside from time to time make the journey fly by. In Hengelo, a party at the station location turns out to be a California Street Style festival. Looks pleasant, with rock and roll, flashy skateboards and big off-road vehicles on show. That will be hullaballo until deep into the night.

My love is already waiting. Well, she drives in circles for lack of parking space. I jump in the car cheerfully: On to dinner and writing this report!